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CURLERS CHASE DREAMS WITH NEW TEAMS

Free-agent frenzy is one of the most interesting days for fans of the National Hockey League, but the shinny game has nothing on curling.

You might actually need a program listing team personnel next season if you want to keep track of who's throwing stones for whom as teams target the next Olympic Games cycle. Hardly a single team has remained intact, other than Colton Flasch in Saskatchewan, whose rink is in the second tier of talent on the men's side.

Let's start at the top of the men: Brad Gushue's Brier championship team is losing Brett Gallant, who moves to Alberta and will curl with Brendan Bottcher, whose front end of Karrick Martin and Brad Thiessen jumped ship to join Kevin Koe. The veteran Koe has picked up promising B.C. youngster Tyler Tardi to throw third stones. Gone from Koe's 2022 rink are third B.J. Neufeld, who is teaming up with Matt Dunstone in a return-to-Manitoba adventure, second John Morris (retired to concentrate on mixed doubles) and Ben Hebert, who will curl with Bottcher.

Got all that? Well, there's more. Plenty more.

Brad Jacobs of Sault Ste. Marie is taking the year off, and his second, E.J. Harndon, is rumoured to be the replacement for Gallant on the Gushue rink. Harndon's brother, Ryan, will throw lead stones for Dunstone (along with Neufeld and Colton Lott). Marc Kennedy, the third for Jacobs last year, will fill that role on the Bottcher rink. Mike McEwen and long-time third Reid Carruthers have split, with Carruthers wanting to skip his own rink and McEwen rumoured to be considering joining John Epping's Toronto foursome. Joining Carruthers are longtime skip Jason Gunnlaugson at third, Derek Samalgaski at second and Connor Njegovan at lead.

There were almost as many significant changes among Canadian women's teams as there were with the men. Rachel Homan and Tracy Fleury, two of the top skips in Canada, have joined forces. Who will skip remains to be seen. Leaving the team was Joanne Courtney while the front end will consist of Sarah Wilkes and former third Emma Miskew, who moves down to allow for the addition of Fleury. Veteran Winnipeg skip Jennifer Jones and her third, Kaitlyn Lawes, have parted ways, with Jones taking over the youthful Mackenzie Zacharias foursome, which won the Manitoba Scotties' title this year. Lawes will skip her own rink with ex-Jones' second Jocelyn Peterman at second, and two former members of the Fleury team, Kristin McCuish and Selena Njegovan, filling out the squad. Chelsea Carey has juggled her Saskatchewan-based team, adding Liz Fyfe, daughter of the late Brier champ, Vic Peters, at second. Casey Scheidegger of Lethbridge keeps her sister, Jessie Haughian, and adds two members of Laura Walker's team, Kate Cameron at third and Taylor McDonald at second.

"Programs, programs, get your lucky programs., You can't tell the players without a program."

- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "LSU outfielder **Gavin Dugas** has been hit by a pitch 13 times in his first 103 plate appearances this season. Twins scouts love him, saying he'd be a perfect fit for Target Field."
 - Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** of Omaha: "The world's oldest woman has died at 119. She went out happy doing the things she loved — posting on Facebook and playing pickleball."
 - **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "A Chinese dad made headlines for outfitting his son in pants and a hat made from watermelons. Lucky the kid wasn't dressed like that in Regina on Labour Day — no one would notice."
 - Headline at theonion.com: "Washington Commanders let Make-A-Wish kid announce pick, become new team president, take fall for financial irregularities"
 - Here's another one from theonion.com: "Yankees attribute offensive slump to terrified hitters closing eyes during swing."
 - **Steve Simmons** of SunMedia: "I'm keeping a list of memorable quotes from Toronto general managers **Bobby Webster** (Raptors) and **Ross Atkins** (Blue Jays). To date, I have none."
 - **Janice Hough** of leftcoastsportsbabe.com, on why immediately evaluating NFL draft picks is like a great Tinder first date: "Some do result in long-term relationships. Some in short-term relationships. And some ... well, maybe it was a great night."
 - **Charles Barkley**, to the **Dan Patrick Show**, on what fellow TNT host **Shaquille O'Neal**'s weight: "If he gets on the scale it's gonna be saying, 'One person at a time, please.'"
 - **Scott Ostler** of the San Francisco Chronicle, on trying to box off Nuggets centre **Nikola Jokic** from the offensive boards: "I've seen grizzly bears who are more polite when barging into a cabin full of snacks."
 - **Jay Busbee** of Yahoo!Sports, with an observation from the opening night of the NFL draft: "**Derek Carr** showed up with a haircut that looked like he'd made his stylist very angry."
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