



The PIC Times

April 17, 2015

The Brazilians are coming – by Mike Hanafin

This year's Pacific International Cup is possibly seeing the genesis of a future curling nation...from an unlikely continent. A team of dedicated Brazilian curlers are turning heads around the Richmond Curling Centre, after a season of learning "the broom sport" first hand by playing in club leagues in B.C.'s Lower Mainland.



Usually Brazil is synonymous with football/soccer, but based on the passion for curling shown by the debut Brazilian women's team, South America could have a repeat representative at the PIC for years to come. Skip Isis Oliveira, and her team of Alessandra Barros, Anne Shibuya, Luciana Barrella, and Sarah Lipi have more than held their own against the international field of far more experienced curlers from the U.S. and Canada. They've also been taught well about the traditions and sportsmanship that are a large part of what makes curling—and the PIC—so special.

Anyone who thought Brazil was just a novelty team (think "Jamaican bobsled team") was quickly corrected when they won their first game 7-2 over Oregon. They also beat the Yukon on Thursday and Colorado on Friday, but have lost to Washington, California and Illinois. At 3 and 3 they remain in playoff contention in the International Pool.

The team was formed with the help of a Facebook page. Oliveira, who has lived in Canada for 11 years, created the page inviting Brazilian citizens to try out for the team. Initial turnouts of 30 people led to more interest and more tryouts, and the current team was selected to train over the 2014-2015 season.

The players have lived in Canada for between 3 and 11 years, but most had never curled before. They have played against women's club teams at North Shore Winter Club and Royal City Curling Club—even hiring a coach, Royal City stalwart Craig Lightbody.

Their goal is lofty: to help grow awareness for the sport in Brazil, encourage more Brazilian curlers to train, and eventually qualify a team for a future World Curling Championship--and the Winter Olympics, as early as 2018. They're also working with a video crew to put together a documentary of their journey.

Ironically, the initial seeds for Brazil's interest in curling were planted during the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver/Richmond. Curling on TV during the Olympics drew a curious but loyal following...to the point that when the Brazilian broadcaster switched away from curling they were hit with a barrage of complaints—and demands to put curling back on TV.