

Former world curling champ publishing science-fiction novel

Lukowich finally ready to put opus on the street after starting it in the '90s

By Allen Cameron, Calgary Herald



Photograph by: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

It's only fitting that on the weekend Calgary men's curling teams begin what has become a quest nearly as difficult as putting a man on Mars that the last man to skip a provincial champion from the city is putting the finishing touches on his first science fiction novel.

Former world champ Ed Lukowich, who claimed Calgary's last Brier Purple Heart in 1994, was considered in his prime to be one of the finest curlers and strategists to ever play the game; indeed, some say even now, at age 65, he'd be an asset to a men's team as a skip (if not a last-rock thrower).

But while he's still throwing rocks once a week at the Inglewood club, his focus now is on publishing his first book that has nothing to do with the sport that made him famous (he published three curling-instruction books and a coffee-table book on curling in the 1980s).

And it's only fitting that the man who could always see a game of curling from a slightly different angle than everyone else is working in the genre that focuses most on imagination.

“I’ve been interested in science-fiction since I was a kid, and I really enjoyed the Star Trek stuff, too,” said Lukowich, the 1986 Brier and world champ, who lists Carl Sagan and Arthur C. Clarke among his favourite science-fiction authors. “I just found it all interesting. Some people read romance novels, I liked science fiction.”

Reading and watching it is one thing; writing, though, is entirely another, and the process of getting a book to the stage where it’s now in the final editing process before going to the publisher early next year began 14 years ago, when Lukowich was working as a curling instructor.

“I really can’t remember why I started writing it, but I had a draft completed in 1998,” said Lukowich. “It was quite a bit different than it is now, but I sent little excerpts to three or four U.S. publishers and didn’t get any nice replies back. Then I got busy with Sportsnet (as a colour commentator in the early days of the Grand Slam circuit) and USA Curling (as its athlete development director) and it got shelved. And I would look at it on the bookshelf once a year and think, ‘Oh, I’d like to finish that one day.’ ”

That opportunity came about in 2009 when Lukowich resigned his USA Curling position; he pulled the manuscript off the shelf and started writing, revising and writing some more.

“I’ve had a lot of experiences that kind of prepared me along the way,” said Lukowich. “Reading those science fiction books helped; being on Sportsnet, I had to learn how to be a little more creative. On the other hand, I think it’s been more difficult than I ever imagined, you know? I’ve written the book more times than I thought I ever would. I’ve finished the book four times now; I pick it up a day later, or I talk to someone a day later, and go, ‘Oh, I have to redo all of this.’ But I’m at the point now where I’m not writing any more. At some point in time, you have to say, ‘Hey, time to get your fingers off of that thing.’ ”

Which is where he’s at now; his work is done (he wants to keep the title and plot under wraps until the book is officially introduced next year), and he can get back to curling once a week, and watching the game he loves so much, and that included taking a keen interest in this weekend’s Grand Slam BDO Canadian Open in Kingston, Ont., where the five-rock free-guard-zone rule was unveiled.

“I love it,” said Lukowich. “I thought three or four years ago that curling needed a change, that the top guys were making it predictable again. I think the five-rock rule is a step forward; whether it will be effective enough is hard to say, but I think it would certainly help.”

Predictably, Lukowich has a few ideas of his own on how to improve the game at the highest level.

“If you look at curling and analyze how to make it tougher, there are things that can be done in an arena setting,” he said. “You could have a longer ice sheet, which could make a difference. You can’t do it in clubs, but it would be like hockey, where you have your (wider) European rinks and your North American rinks. But I don’t think a longer sheet would hurt in an arena; the game has become a little bit too easy to hit and make doubles.”

Lukowich laughingly concedes that there's no correlation between curling and science fiction, although it's possible there may be a reference to the sport in the finished product.

"I think there might be," he said with a chuckle. "I think I snuck the word in once, talking about winter sports. I'd love for it to stay in."

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