

= Sandra Schmirler =

Sandra Marie Schmirler , SOM (June 11 , 1963 ? March 2 , 2000) was a Canadian curler who captured three Canadian Curling Championships (Scott Tournament of Hearts) and three World Curling Championships . Schmirler also skipped (captained) her Canadian team to a gold medal at the 1998 Winter Olympics , the first year women 's curling was a medal sport . At tournaments where she was not competing , Schmirler sometimes worked as a commentator for CBC Sports , which popularized her nickname " Schmirler the Curler " and claimed she was the only person who had a name that rhymed with the sport she played . She died in 2000 at 36 of cancer , leaving a legacy that extended outside of curling . Schmirler was honoured posthumously with an induction into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame and was awarded the World Curling Freytag Award , which later led to her induction into the World Curling Federation Hall of Fame .

= = Curling career = =

While attending Biggar Composite School in Biggar , Saskatchewan , Canada , Schmirler started curling in Grade 7 as part of the school 's physical education program . She grew up an athlete , playing volleyball , badminton , and softball . She was also an avid speed swimmer . She continued to curl on the local scene , participating in the Biggar Curling Club ladies ' league in Grade 9 . Playing as third on her high school team , she won a provincial championship in Grade 12 , when her team went undefeated throughout the season . She continued to curl after graduating from high school , while attending the University of Saskatchewan . While in university , Schmirler made her first appearance in Saskatchewan 's provincial playdowns in 1983 . After graduating university , Schmirler moved to Regina to take a job at the North West Leisure Centre . She continued to curl , and was given the nickname " Schmirler the Curler " by a supervisor at the facility . In 1987 , as a member of Kathy Fahlman 's rink , Schmirler won her first provincial championship , sending her to her first national championship , where she and her team finished in fourth place with a 7 ? 5 win @-@ loss record .

Prior to the 1988 ? 89 curling season , Schmirler and Jan Betker found themselves curling with different teammates , attempting to put together a stable squad . After a disappointing season , Schmirler decided to skip for the 1990 ? 91 season , with Betker playing third . They recruited Joan Inglis (McCusker) to play second , and McCusker recommended Marcia Gudereit as a lead . This rink won the provincials in their first year together and finished in fourth place at the Scott Tournament of Hearts . In 1993 , the Schmirler rink again won the provincial title to move on to the Tournament of Hearts . Her rink defeated Maureen Bonar in the finals , giving Saskatchewan its first national women 's curling championship since Marj Mitchell 's win in 1980 . The rink moved on to the World Championship and defeated Janet Clews @-@ Strayer from Germany in the final that year , winning Canada its sixth world women 's title . The next season , she and her rink competed at the Tournament of Hearts as defending champions . The team finished first in the round robin , and defeated Connie Laliberte in the final to clinch a second consecutive Canadian championship . She and her team then represented Canada at the World Women 's Curling Championship , where they finished first in the round robin . She then advanced to the playoffs , and won the semifinal against Josefine Einsle of Germany and the final against Christine Cannon of Scotland . With her win in the final , she and her team clinched their second world championships , equalling their run from the previous season . At the time , no other Canadian rink (men or women) had won consecutive world championships . Schmirler returned to the Tournament of Hearts the next year as the defending champion . She and her team finished with an 8 ? 3 win @-@ loss record and advanced to the playoffs as the second seed . She lost her next two games , however , and failed to advance to the final , losing a chance to win a third consecutive title . In 1997 , Schmirler and her rink returned to the Tournament of Hearts , where they finished with a 9 ? 2 win @-@ loss record in the round robin . They advanced to the playoffs , and defeated Alison Goring of Ontario twice en route to winning her third Canadian championship . They then went to the World Championships , where they again finished first in the round robin and advanced to the playoffs , defeating Helena Blach Lavrsen of

Denmark in the semifinals and Andrea Schöpp of Germany in the final to win a third world title . After each of these three seasons , her rink was named " Team of the Year " by Sask Sport .

In the 1998 Winter Olympics , curling became a medal sport for the first time . Olympic trials were held in November 1997 to select Canada 's representatives at the Olympics . The Schmirler rink finished first in the round robin , and defeated Shannon Kleibrink in the final with a score of 9 ? 6 , behind strong shot making from Schmirler and McCusker . Schmirler made a difficult in @-@ off to win and clinch the berth to the Olympics . The 1998 Winter Olympics were held in Nagano , Japan . The Schmirler rink was among the favourites for gold , but there was a strong field in the event . After finishing the round robin in first place with six wins and one loss , Canada played their semifinal game against Great Britain 's Kirsty Hay . The game was tied after regulation play and went to an extra end , where Schmirler barely made a draw with her last rock to win the game . In the final against Denmark 's Helena Blach Lavrsen , Schmirler secured a win in nine ends , winning Canada the gold medal . After winning the gold medal , Sandra appeared on the front page of the New York Times . After the Olympics , the Schmirler rink was named ' Team of the Year ' by the Canadian Press . The team were also inducted into the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame in 1999 . After returning from the Olympics , Schmirler and her rink had to compete almost immediately in the Scott Tournament of Hearts as Team Canada . Schmirler and her team made the playoffs , and won the 3 vs. 4 playoff game before dropping the semifinal to Anne Merklinger . After losing in the semis , Schmirler joined CBC as a colour commentator for the final match .

= = = Teams = = =

= = = Career statistics = = =

Notes

^ Shot percentage . Round robin only , except for career total .

= = Personal life = =

= = = Family and education = = =

Schmirler was born to parents Shirley and Art Schmirler . She was born with a club foot , which required her to wear a cast for two months . She had two older sisters , Carol and Beverley . She attended high school in Biggar , and moved to Saskatoon to attend university . She started out towards a degree in computer science , but transferred after her first year to work for a degree in physical education . She convocated with a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education in 1985 .

In 1993 , teammate Marcia Gudereit introduced Schmirler to Shannon England . On June 22 , 1996 , they were married . In 1997 , Schmirler was pregnant with their first child . When this information was revealed to reporters at the Scott Tournament of Hearts , they jokingly dubbed her " Schmirler the Hurler " . On September 15 , 1997 , their daughter Sara Marion was born . In April 1999 , Sandra 's father Art Schmirler died from esophageal cancer . On June 30 , 1999 , the couple 's second daughter , Jenna Shirley , was born .

= = = Illness and death = = =

After Jenna 's birth , Schmirler experienced many health problems . She had suffered from back pain , which was thought to be pregnancy related , and following Jenna 's birth , she began to suffer from stomach pains . Tests showed that a cancerous node the size of a fist had developed behind her heart . As her condition worsened , she underwent surgery on September 6 , 1999 . During surgery , a dead piece of the tumour broke off and released a blood clot into her lung . Her heart stopped beating , and only emergency heart massage kept her alive . Almost a month after being

diagnosed with cancer , doctors finally provided a specific diagnosis ? metastatic adenocarcinoma , with an unknown primary site . Because no one could pin down where the cancer came from , Sandra referred to it as " the cancer from Mars . " In addition to chemotherapy and radiation , Schmirler explored orthomolecular medicine through the Canadian Cancer Research Group . This form of alternative medicine involves large doses of vitamins and nutrients .

In 2000 , Schmirler worked as colour commentator for CBC during Canada 's national junior curling championships . During her illness , Schmirler had been largely removed from the public eye . While in Moncton for the championships , Schmirler held a press conference to update her situation . In speaking publicly about her ordeal for the first time , Schmirler spared few details about what she had gone through , while also expressing her hope for the future : " There were three goals I had coming out of this thing , and the first one was to look after my family . And the second one ... because I curl so much , I 've never taken a hot vacation , so I 'm going to put my feet in the sand in a warm place . And the last one was to actually be here today , and I thank CBC , I thank Lawrence (Kimber) , and Joan Mead . "

After returning from Moncton , Schmirler felt physically well , but suffered a setback when a CAT scan revealed spots around her lungs . The decision was made not to proceed with further chemotherapy , but she continued with the orthomolecular therapy . She had been scheduled to work the 2000 Scott Tournament of Hearts , but was unable to do so . She faxed a statement from the hospital , which was read by TSN 's Vic Rauter . " I 'm still fighting hard and I still hope to make it to the Brier , not playing but talking . For Saskatchewan , I was hoping to be in your green shoes (at the Scott) . But keep things in perspective . There are other things in life besides curling , which I have found . But I hope to be on the curling trail again next year . And I 'll see you all in Sudbury (the next Scott site) in 2001 . Your curling friend , Sandra . " However , the optimism in her statement belied the seriousness of her condition . She had been moved to palliative care . She died in her sleep at the Pasqua Hospital Palliative Care Unit on the morning of March 2 , 2000 at age 36 . She was survived by her husband and her two daughters .

Her death caused reactions not just within Saskatchewan and the curling community , but also across the country . Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said in a statement : " All Canadians have been touched by the untimely death of Sandra Schmirler . Most of us came to know her through her exploits as a champion curler and as an exemplary sports ambassador for Canada . But what really set her apart was her bright , engaging personality and her incredible zest for life , qualities that were so clearly in evidence as she fought so valiantly against her illness . She will be sorely missed . " In honour of Schmirler , flags at provincial office buildings in Saskatchewan were lowered to half @-@ staff .

TSN offered to broadcast her funeral live and to make the signal available to any other stations at no charge . Her husband , Shannon England , agreed to the broadcast on the condition that the family would not be shown during the service . CBC also broadcast the service , marking the first time a Canadian athlete 's funeral had been televised live on two networks . The Brier was just getting underway and games in the afternoon draw were delayed to allow curlers and fans to watch the funeral , which was broadcast on screens at the rink . Regina 's AgriDome and Schmirler 's home Caledonian Curling Club also opened to show the funeral . Nine hundred people attended the service at the Regina Funeral Home , thousands watched at satellite locations around the province , and hundreds of thousands watched on television . The funeral was conducted by the Rev. Don Wells , and Sandra was eulogized by Brian McCusker , teammate Joan McCusker 's husband .

= = Awards and honours = =

In addition to the titles captured by her team on the ice , Schmirler has been recognized in several different ways off the ice as well . In 2000 , Schmirler was awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit , becoming the first posthumous recipient . Along with the other members of her rink , she had been previously awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Regina . In the fall of 2000 , Schmirler was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame . Schmirler and her team were inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame on two separate occasions , once in 1997 for

winning three World Curling Championships and once in 2001 for winning the gold medal at the Olympics . At the annual Scotties Tournament of Hearts , the top player in the playoff round is awarded the Sandra Schmirler Most Valuable Player Award .

After her death , the city of Regina honoured Schmirler in several ways . The South East Leisure Centre where she used to work was renamed the " Sandra Schmirler Leisure Centre , " and the road leading up to the Callie Curling Club , where her team curled out of , was renamed " Sandra Schmirler Way . " Schmirler 's hometown of Biggar also honoured her memory with the construction of " The Sandra Schmirler Olympic Gold Park . "

Scott Paper created the Sandra Schmirler Foundation in January 2001 , with the assistance of the Canadian Curling Association and Scott Paper Limited . The foundation raises funds to help care for babies in crisis through direct donations to benefit neonatal care across Canada . In the charity 's first four years of existence donations were made to the Children 's Miracle Network , Canadian Cystic Fybrois Foundation and Canadian Ronald McDonald Houses . After altering the charity 's mission to focus on neonatal care , donations have been made directly to hospitals in Halifax , Regina , London , Lethbridge , Hamilton and Victoria .

On January 7 , 2009 , Sandra was named the winner of the 2009 World Curling Freytag Award (later incorporated into the WCF Hall of Fame) . The award , named after American Elmer Freytag , who founded the World Curling Federation , honours curlers for championship play , sportsmanship , character and extraordinary achievement . Her husband and daughters accepted the award on her behalf at the 2009 World Men 's Curling Championship .