

A New Curler's Guide to Curling Competitions

Curling in Scotland has a rich tradition, with a variety of competition formats to suit everyone — from social gatherings to high-stakes tactical battles. While the basic game remains the same — delivering stones towards the house to score points — different competition types can change how you play, how you score, and even how you think about strategy.

This guide explains the three main formats you're most likely to encounter in Scottish curling clubs:

- Bonspiels
- Skins Games
- League Play

Bonspiels

What is a Bonspiel?

A bonspiel is a curling tournament — often held over one or more days — where multiple teams compete, usually in a fun and social atmosphere. They can be:

- Open — anyone can enter
- Invitation — only invited teams participate
- Club — restricted to members

Some bonspiels are serious competitive events, but many are social with themed dress, food, and post-game gatherings.

How Scoring Works in Bonspiels

Bonspiel scoring can vary depending on the organiser. The two most common systems in Scotland are:

1. Points for Ends + Shots

- Win an end: 2 points
- Peel (tie an end): 1 point
- Lose an end: 0 points
- Bonus: Total shots scored are added as a tiebreaker.

2. Total Shots Only

- Teams simply play a set number of ends, and the total shots difference decides winners.

Bonspiels often have time-limited games (e.g., 6 ends) to fit in more matches.

Skins Games

What is a Skins Game?

The skins format is less common at club level but is growing in popularity for special events. Instead of scoring by counting stones at the end of each end, each end is worth a “skin” — a set amount of points or prize money.

To win a skin in an end:

- Team with last stone advantage (hammer) must score two or more points.
- Team without hammer can win the skin by stealing at least one point.

If no team meets the requirement, the skin carries over to the next end, increasing its value.

How Scoring Works in Skins

- Each end is assigned a point value (e.g., early ends worth 1 skin, later ends worth more).
- Final score is total skins won, not total shots scored.
- Strategy is aggressive: blank ends rarely happen intentionally, and teams take more risks to claim a skin.



Leagues

What is League Play?

Leagues are the backbone of club curling in Scotland. Teams play each other in a round robin format over a season, earning points for wins and draws. There are:

- Club Leagues (within one club)
- Inter-Club Leagues (between clubs in a region)

League play is generally more structured than bonspiels, with consistent scheduling and rules.

How Scoring Works in Leagues

Typical Scottish club league system:

- Win = 2 points
- Draw = 1 point
- Loss = 0 points

If teams are tied on points at the end of the league:

1. Head-to-head result may be used.
2. Shot difference (shots scored minus shots conceded).
3. In some leagues: Ends won as a further tiebreaker.

Leagues usually play 8-end games, though some may shorten to 6 ends for time constraints.

Tips for New Curlers

- Ask before you play — scoring systems can vary slightly from club to club.
- In bonspiels, every end matters, even if you're behind.
- In skins, play for the end's requirement, not the stone count.
- In leagues, consistency wins — steady play over weeks matters more than one big win.
- Remember: Curling is as much about the spirit of the game as the score — good sportsmanship, handshakes, and post-game socialising are part of the tradition.