

'58 miracle, 50 years later

Turnbull recalls improbable run to the nationals

By Chris Cariou

FIFTY years ago this week, a brash but talented group of teens turned the curling world upside down with a run through the Manitoba playdowns that got them a provincial title and almost ended with a 1958 Brier championship in Victoria.

And Ray Turnbull, a football player who befriended Terry Braunstein at Kelvin High School only a couple of years earlier, credits that remarkable year for starting him on a path that has turned him into one of the Roaring Game's true icons.

"We were young, for sure," Turnbull said Tuesday before he went on air for TSN's coverage of the 2008 Tim Hortons Brier at MTS Centre. Braunstein was the skip and oldest of the bunch at 18. Braunstein's brother Ron, the third, was 17, the same as Turnbull, who played second.

They picked up lead Jack Van Helmond in '58 at age 16, made it to the final 16 of the MCA Bonspiel that year and earned a spot in the British Consol provincial playdowns, a 32-team test of survival featuring a straight knockout format.

They were only junior members of the famed Granite Curling Club, where Turnbull's dad was a member. But they caught fire in what will always be known as one of Manitoba's most amazing provincial playdowns

ever.

"You go back to the first game we played, they were 12-end games of course and the first game we played we were five down playing 10 and we got three in 10 and stole two and stole one, something like that," said Turnbull.

"So we won that game, then we won another tight game, and the next thing you know, the media was going crazy." But they were only junior members at the Granite and rules stated just senior club members could represent Manitoba.

"So overnight, they kind of made us senior members. They had an emergency meeting of the club people and made us full members and away we went to the Brier."

The four teens hopped aboard the Brier train to Victoria with all the other teams but of course they weren't old enough to drink alcohol. Once they got into their rooms in the Victoria Hotel, they were popular fellows.

"All the guys had four bottles of whiskey... and we had 98 bottles of 7-Up in our room," recalls Turnbull. "So we were the suppliers of the mix all week, guys knocked on our door for mix."

The Braunstein foursome faced two-time Brier champ Matt Baldwin of Alberta in their first round-robin game and had him down 7-1, but he came back to win that game. The young Tobans held tough, however, and met him again in the final.

Baldwin beat them again for his third and final Brier title. But Braunstein, the newly added Don Duguid (at third), Ron Braunstein (second) and

Turnbull (moved to lead) won their own Brier championship in 1965.

"It's 50 years ago, of course I remember it," said Turnbull of the 1958 run. "Those things fade a little bit but the thrill of being there... we were just happy to be in the Brier so we never really gave much thought to winning it."

Not bad for two guys — Terry Braunstein and Turnbull — who had met at a football tryout camp at Kelvin High School, both of them new to the school and neither knowing another soul.

"On the way home in the bus we sat together and we've been the closest of friends ever since that day," Turnbull said. "And he said to me, 'Do you curl?' And of course I lied to him. 'Yes, I've curled.'"

Turnbull, as we know, did learn to curl — very well. He went on to become one of the premier curling coaches/teachers in the world, a top international official and, in 1985, was hired by TSN as a colour analyst.

"Seventeen of my students who have gone through my programs went on to win world championships," he pointed out with pride — among them Eigil Ramsfjell, Kristian Soerum, Otto Danieli, Dordy Nordby and Debbie McCormick (who was a student of his from age 13-19).

And it all leads back to that marvellous year 50 years ago this week.

"I was a football player. But what really piqued my interest was meeting Terry and then when we did so well in '58, that's when my love and passion for the sport started. And it's been in my blood since then."

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TSN colour analyst Ray Turnbull was a 17-year-old when he almost won a Brier with his teenage teammates in 1958.

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