



Instructor's Corner

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I'm "just a lead" on my team. I'm not that important! When will I get "promoted" and play second? How often have you heard folks say something along those lines? Well, as we learned early in our careers, the lead is a very important member of the team. As M.J. was fond of saying, with a wink and a nod to her erratic shot making: "Hey, I determine the strategy for the rest of the end!"

So, from the lead's point of view, here's what we contribute to our teams effort:

- We really **can** set the tone for an entire end! As you all know by now, guards are so important when you're trying to score. But we need to master a variety of shots to contribute to the game: a good center guard, corner guard, come around the guard (center or corner), and the draw to the wings (12 foot on the tee-line). And yes, we even need to be able to hit. Don't be one of those leads that teams test early in a game to see if they can come into the house because you can't hit. Also, become a lead that is proud of never hogging his/her first rock.
- We all know that the lead puts up the skip's rocks. Try putting up the first rock for the second and both rocks for the vice and the skip too. Why? The obvious comes quickly to mind – it keeps the game moving (we don't want to be the last team off the ice). As important, if you put up the vice rocks, then s/he can watch the line of the other team's shots. The vice needs to be able to get as much information as possible about the ice for calling line on the skip shots. For the same reason, stay to the side when you're not shooting or sweeping, and give your vice the best view of competitors' rocks.
- We can provide information about what's happening with the ice to the rest of the team. Do you use a stopwatch? If so, while you're standing at the hog line, time the other team's shots. Not split times, but times from the hog line to where the rocks stop. That time (plus or minus approximately 0.5 seconds for every 6 feet from the tee-line at the other end) eliminates differences in deliveries, and gives you an idea of slow and fast ice, or differences in time of different paths down the ice. A quick reminder to our team mates that a path for a shot is new or that the ice is speeding up may make the difference between a missed and a made shot.
- We, along with the second, sweep what are typically the most important rocks in an end – skip's rocks. While our shots may set the tone, there's a little more leeway in placing that first center guard than there is in placing the skip's rocks. Heck, we sweep all of the rocks for the game, and you never know which might end up being the most important! We must be able to precisely place shots to score, or to make it difficult for the opposition to score, to hold the line for an important hit, or to place a guard is a requirement. Not only does that require good weight judgment, it also requires understanding the shot. Is distance more important than line? What are the consequences of sweeping the rock 12 inches too deep, or sweeping the rock all the way down to get it to the house but leaving the rock you were to guard wide open? Sweeping has become a vital part of the game, and you'll notice elite skips picking savvy, in-shape curlers for their front end to help them out.

So how do you become the lead of choice for a team? The same way you get to Carnegie Hall: practice, practice, practice. Check the calendar on the website to see when ice is available and come practice.

- Slide and throw at cups on the near hog line to be sure that you can throw accurately at the broom (throwing at a cup on the 4 foot line on the near hog is the pretty much the same as throwing at a broom on the outside of the far 12 foot circle!). If you can't hit the cup, ask your club instructors for a session to see what's up, and read Instructor's Corner in the November 2011 Curlogram.
- Try to throw 4 rocks to the same location: 2 out turns and 2 in-turns. Wherever the first rock lands, make the rest follow. Try to vary where that first rock stops!
- When that becomes easy, try throwing successive rocks in patterns: the first a guard, the next, top 12, the third top 4, etc. It's a great exercise in weight control.
- Bring a partner(s) and practice sweeping. First, have your partner(s) check to be sure that you're sweeping in front of the rock. The only way to know for sure is to have someone look from the front. It's amazing how skewed our view is from the sweeping position. One person throws, the other sweeps to a pre-designated place (12 foot, top 8, back 4, etc.). This kind of practice is about developing an eye for distance more than line. Hey, we have to leave our skips something to do, right?

So, in summary, leads rock. We need a full understanding of all aspects of the game, and we need to be fully mentally engaged in every game. Rock on!

*Good curling! Have a question for Instructor's Corner?
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