



## Instructor's Corner

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***I have trouble scoring 2 with the hammer, and can't seem to keep out of trouble without the hammer. My rocks always seem to be in the wrong place. Any suggestions?***

—Skip N. Payne-Diaz

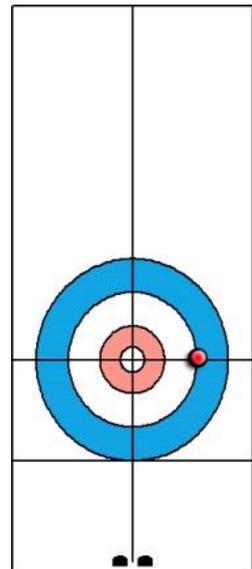
Rock placement is a topic that can generate a lot of discussion during the game, and a lot of second-guessing around the post-game table. New skips, especially, have a hard time sorting through “rules of thumb” like “keep the center open with hammer” and “keep the center blocked without hammer.” If only the game were so simple!

This article features a handful of common scenarios that occur in club curling games, with some suggestions about how these situations can be handled. Of course, there is more than one way to play a curling game, so you can take this advice for what it is worth—it's free, after all. In each scenario, you are shooting the red stones, and your opponent is shooting the yellow stones.

### 1. I got one in!

You have the hammer, and your team got off to a good start. The first opposition stone came into the house, and your lead made a beautiful board-weight hit-and-roll to the 12-foot. The takeout attempt by the opposition lead whiffed, leaving you shot rock with your lead's second shot coming up. Now what?

I'll bet that 9 out of 10 club skips will now attempt to split the house and lie 2, but this is probably not the best way to score 2 or more. Let's run the film forward to the conclusion of the end. To score your two, you “simply” have to draw in for 2<sup>nd</sup> stone, and then exchange hits, which will leave you sitting 2 after the last rock is thrown. Only there are 13 shots to go in the end. To score your deuce, your team will have to successfully make a draw to the house, and then hit-and-stick 6 times. That means shooting 100% the rest of the way. On the other hand your opponent (the non-hammer team) can afford to hit and roll out on any of their takeouts—you (the hammer team) will have to successfully make a draw after a half-shot by the opponent to re-establish your potential deuce. If you (the hammer team) miss any shot or make a half-shot (i.e., a hit and roll out), your opponent can go after your other stone and lie 1 or 2, taking away your deuce opportunity. In other words, your opponent can shoot 50% and you still have to curl 100% to make your deuce stick. The purpose of curling strategy is to ensure that when you out-curl your opponent, you should win the game. If you are using a strategy that requires you to curl twice as good as your opponent, maybe it's not the right strategy!



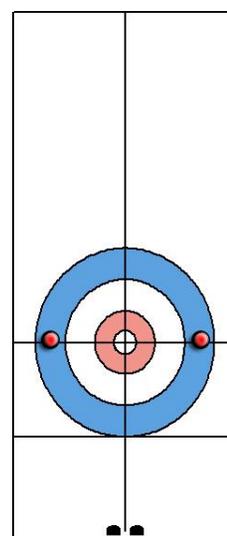
In this situation, you should consider throwing a corner guard over your shot stone. If you successfully throw the guard, the opposition will likely have to attempt a perfect freeze or waste two stones to remove shot rock. While your opponents are attempting to neutralize shot rock, you can elect to split the house. Now when you split the house, a hit and roll out by your team during an exchange of hits is not costly, because your other shot is still guarded. If you get a total miss out of your opponent (say a

freeze attempt which comes up short or goes through) you can think about stuffing another rock around the corner guard, setting up a possible three. Even if your initial guard is not perfect, allowing your opponent to chip your stone out, you can still attempt to come around the corner guard to set up your deuce. So much possibility from a lowly guard!

So when, if ever, should you split the house? This is no universal answer, but thinking about the above discussion, you should probably not split the house until you are reasonably confident that your team is going to make the rest of their shots. For an elite team, maybe that's with your second lead stone. On a club team, you may want to wait to split the house until third's rocks, so you only have to make 3 or 4 consecutive perfect shots to score the deuce. The other reason to split the house is if your shot rock is behind tee line. Guarding a rock behind tee line gives your opponent an easy out by freezing or drawing above yours for shot, setting up a jam if you try to tap it out.

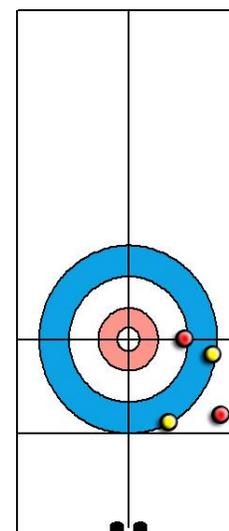
## 2. Embarrassment of riches

Sometimes, even when life is good, it's bad. Your team has managed to split the house with hammer and you got some huge misses from your opposition, leaving you sitting two and shooting. O beautiful day! Now where to put a third rock? You could guard one of your shot stones, but that would leave you scoring only 2 after your opponent takes out the open stone. If you remembered the rule of "keep the middle open with hammer" you would be tempted to draw to one side or the other, but that will likely leave a relatively easy double, or if you slip deep, a nice pocket for your opponent (non-hammer team) to freeze to. In this case, the best place to put your third stone is right on the centerline, near the button and level with your other stones to prevent any cross-house double. Spread 'em out as much as possible. Your opponent will likely try to hit and roll toward one of your stones on the 12-foot, hoping to group stones for a future double, no easy shot to be sure. Alternatively, your opponent may try to freeze to shot stone, another difficult (and gutsy!) choice. If the freeze is not made, things could get really ugly! If you can keep the stones spread out for the rest of the end, you have a good chance of scoring 3. On the other hand, I have seen many teams escape this situation of 3-spread against them by making hits: just as in the first scenario, each half-shot by the hammer team potentially reduces their scoring potential by one stone.



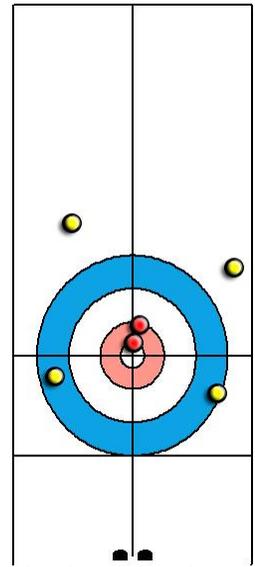
## 3. Run away!

This is a variation on the theme "sometimes the best guard is sitting 1-2". You have played a wild end after your opponent (with hammer) froze to one of your stones on the wing. A freeze-tap-fest ensued with lots of rocks tapped to the back of the house or out, and you have somehow managed to get shot rock. Your shot rock in the wings is not really in a good position to steal, and it's looking pretty lonely in the house. With lonely shot rock without hammer and only one in the rings to your opponent's multiples, a guard here should be out of the question. Clearly, your opponent (with hammer) would like to keep play on the wings, hopefully tapping your stone back or even out of the rings. You need to sit 1-2 to counter the nibblers building up against you. But where to? You need to create a distraction away from the endangered shot rock. So put your next stone on the opposite side of the house to lie shot. Your opponent cannot ignore shot rock and therefore it will draw play away from the cluttered side of the house where your opponent wants to play.



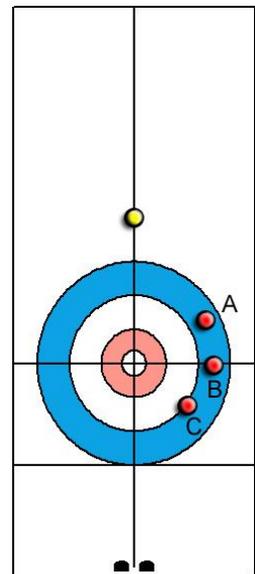
#### 4. When to guard with hammer

One of the golden rules of curling is to keep the center open when you have hammer. Even if you have shot rock in the middle of the rings. There is a good reason for this rule. If you guard your one and only shot rock on the top button with hammer, you just gave the other team the chance to cut down your scoring area by throwing a corner freeze around the guard you just gave them. Now to get your deuce, you will have to almost draw the button on the other side. If you have this situation with hammer, you should almost always direct play to the side of the sheet, especially so if the non-hammer team has no place to hit and roll under cover. Guarding lonely shot rock in the middle with hammer is a good way to turn deuces into singles. However, there are always exceptions to the "rules." In the accompanying diagram, you (with hammer) have managed to freeze two rocks on the four-foot behind your opponents center guard. Having had enough, your (non-hammer) opponent has peeled his guard and opened up the middle to gain access to your stones. If you blindly follow the "rules" you would ignore the stones in the center and draw behind the corner guard. Indeed, if you had only one stone on the four-foot, this would be a good call. But you have *two* stones on the four-foot now, enough to score a deuce already. If you guard, a freeze to the pile does not prevent you from scoring two. Indeed you may be able to score 3 with your last stone even against a successful freeze. Of course, if you go around the corner in the diagram position, you are still odds-on to score 2. But you pose fewer problems for your opponent. With one shot rock in the middle with hammer, spread the house; with 2 good rocks in the middle, consider guarding to lock up at least a deuce.



#### 5. Where to put wing stones with hammer

One of the commonest strategies to score a deuce against a center guard is to play your first lead stone with hammer into the wings. The idea is to peel away the center guard(s) later in the end and either draw or take out the opponent's open shot rock for your second point. But exactly where do you put that first rock? Another one of curling's hoary rules is "keep your rocks above tee line," but here it is not the best choice. If you place your stone at position "A", then it can be used by the opponents for a hit and roll to the four-foot above tee-line and behind the center guard. Choices "B" and "C" are better. "C" cannot be used by the opponents in a hit-and-roll attempt to roll to the four-foot. However, it is an attractive freeze target, and could act as a catcher in the back of the house for takeouts and tap-backs later in the end. Nevertheless, it could be your second counter for a "wing" deuce. Position "B" is a compromise between "A" and "C". A rock at position "B" is not the most attractive freeze opportunity, and is perhaps less likely to act as a catcher for takeouts and tap-backs. However, your opponents can use "B" to roll to the back four if needed. If you are playing the "wing" strategy for your deuce, do yourself a favor and put your stone at or behind tee line.



#### Evaluating your strategy

You are encouraged to track your own performance when selecting alternate strategies for various situations. For example, in scenario 1, how often you score a deuce when splitting the house early? How often when you split the house late in the end? How often when you guard shot rock in the wing early?

How often do you score your deuce with a “wing” stone at tee line? Behind tee line? Keep track and you will know what works for you and your team.

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

*Have a suggestion for an Instructor's Corner article?*

*Seeking an instruction session?*

*Send an email to [curlingschool@uticacurlingclub.org](mailto:curlingschool@uticacurlingclub.org)*