



Instructor's Corner

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I've been assigned to play third for my team. What do I need to do to be a good third?

Juan B. Skip

So you have been playing a few years and you have been assigned to play third on your team, or maybe your team-mates decided to throw you under the bus and ask you to play third on your 5-and-under team. Now what? Chances are good that you have been playing mostly lead and second, so you have by now learned to throw a variety of shots: guards, draws, come-arounds, various weight hits, and maybe peels. So what's the big deal about playing third?

The third is part of the "back end" of the team, the players that are throwing the critical last rocks of the end, and the "brain trust" of the team responsible for evaluating and planning strategy. It's more than just throwing shots now: there's a whole 'nother, mental aspect of the game to attend to. To be honest, playing third may be the most difficult position on the team. The third has to serve many roles on a curling team:

- *Shotmaker.* A good third has to have all the shots. By the time the thirds get to the hack, ends can be pretty messy. You could be called upon to make an end-saving freeze, a single or double peel, a cross-house double, a runback, a guard, or a draw to the four-foot. Sorry, skips—thirds have to have a broader repertoire of shots than any player on the team. If you have largely mastered playing lead or second, you have already played and practiced the types of shots you will need to throw at third.
- *Strategist.* While it is not the place for a third to call the game, the third can provide valuable input to the skip. Typically, when a third takes the house for the last two rocks, the third may point out options and discuss with the skip how much risk to take with the skip rocks. What you do NOT want to do at third is have strategy discussions up and down the ice. If you and your skip need to have a strategy pow-wow, do it in the far house or behind the boards. A good third is supportive of the skip, but will ensure the skip has not overlooked good alternative options. But whatever your style of back-end play, *the third is not the skip!*
- *Sweeper.* The hybrid nature of the third is that you not only have to help manage strategy and be a part-time "skip" during the last two stones, you are also charged with being a part-time "front-ender" for your team's first four stones. So just because you get to sweep only four rocks, you can't abandon your sweeping and weight-judgment skills. On a club team, you may be the most experienced sweeper, and may be in charge of final decisions about weight and rock placement for the front end stones.
- *Line-caller and ice reader.* This is easily the most difficult challenge for thirds. You don't get to see any stones coming down the ice from the far house, but you are put in charge of perfectly reading curl and calling line for the two most critical stones of the end! (Life is just not fair for thirds.) A good third will circle behind opposition shooters when they have delivered their

stones and observe the path of those stones to learn about the behavior of the ice. When sweeping your own stones, a third will take note, as well as possible, how those stones move on draws, hits, etc., on various spots on the ice. This is a lot harder than watching from the far house!

- *Cheerleader and communicator.* This is role that really defines thirds apart from any other position on the team. First and foremost, the third needs to be supportive of the skip. When players reach the skill level necessary to make shots consistently enough to play back end, the mental aspect of the game becomes much more important than the physical and mechanical aspects of delivery. The third and skip need to be mutually supportive for a team to thrive. In addition to this, the third has to work effectively with both the front-end and the skip, players who are, most of the time, on opposite ends of the rink. The skip knows and implements the strategy for each end and the game, while the front end know more about the ice conditions down each path of the sheet. The third is the conduit of information exchange between these two team “factions.” The third will keep the front end informed of the thought process and game plan implemented by the skip, and will communicate changing ice conditions observed by the front end to the skip. The third also gets to be the diplomat: among the thirds many tasks will be to relay information about why shots were missed from the skip to the shooters, or to relay shot-selection questions from the front end to the skip.

As you can see, the third wears many hats. So how to you prepare to be a third? Quite frankly, the best way to learn many of the aspects of being a third, especially ice-reading, line-calling, and strategy, is to be a skip. Seeing the game through the eyes of a skip will give you insight into how to conduct yourself as a third: be the third you would like to have when you are skipping!

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