



## Instructor's Corner

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**I find curling rules so confusing. Can you clarify?**

—Ida Neaux

Curling is really a simple game, except when it comes to interpreting the rules. Then it seems like everyone is confused. I've collected a few of the more commonly confused rules in curling. Of course, if you find yourself unable to remember this article, remember, you can always consult a copy of the USCA rules on the curling club web site, or the rules posted in the locker rooms and on the mixed or bonspiel boards.

### Touched Moving Stones (Rule 8)

Rule 8 is the most asked-about and mis-applied rule in curling. Rule 8, which describes how to deal with "burned" stones, is applied differently depending on *where* the infraction occurs, and *who* commits the infraction. By the way, players should be aware that a stone is considered "touched" if contacted by a player, his or her clothing, equipment, or objects that fall off your person or equipment (e.g., pins, hats, gloves, stopwatches, broom end caps, pocket lint, etc.)

It is simplest to divide the rule by *where* the infraction occurs:

- Between the hog lines: if a moving stone is touched *by the team to which it belongs* between the hog lines, it is removed from play immediately. No ifs, ands, or buts. If a moving stone is touched between the hog lines *by the team to which it does not belong*, then it is placed by the non-offending team where it reasonably would have come to rest (if not the delivered stone) or redelivered if it was the delivered stone
- Beyond the far hog line: if a moving stone is touched *by the team to which it belongs* then the infraction is declared immediately and all stones are allowed to continue until they come to rest. That is, DO NOT STOP THE TOUCHED STONE! Once the stones have come to rest, the *non-offending* team may choose between three options:
  1. The touched stone can be removed from play, and all other stones replaced in their prior positions
  2. Allow the outcome of the stones as they came to rest to stand
  3. Place all stones where they would have reasonably come to rest had the stone not been touched

Players should remember that these are the only choices for remedying the infraction. The non-offending team may not mix and match, but rather choose one and only one of the options. And the offending team has NO SAY in the outcome, and should accept the choice of the non-offending team without question. Having said that, the "Spirit of Curling" which precedes the rules of curling suggests that "...good sportsmanship, kindly feeling, and honorable conduct...should influence both the interpretation and the application of the rules of the game

and also the conduct of all participants.” So, one might choose to consider that if an infraction occurs that did not have a significant impact on the outcome of play, option #2 is the honorable choice. But if a team decides to pull your stone from play, so be it.

If a moving stone is touched beyond the hog line *by the team to which it does not belong*, then the infraction is declared immediately and and all stones are allowed to continue until they come to rest. Again, DO NOT STOP THE TOUCHED STONE! Once the stones have come to rest, the *non-offending* team may choose only one option: to place all stones where they would have reasonably come to rest had the stone not been touched. There is no other option! This rule usually comes into play when a player touches an opposition stone while sweeping behind the tee line or a sweeper trips over a stone set in motion by a takeout.

- The “Shuster” rule. This rule was put into place after the kerfuffle between Team USA (John Shuster) and Team Japan in the 2016 World Championships. If a moving stone is touched by a stone that rebounds off the sheet dividers, the *non-delivering team* gets to place the stone where it would have reasonably come to rest had the moving stone not been touched. At our club, this comes into play on occasion at the sideboards of sheets 1 and 6. The best way to avoid getting caught in a “Shuster rule” infraction is to make sure your sweepers fence stones crashing into the sideboards.

### **Touched Stationary Stones (Rule 9)**

This one is a bit easier to understand than the moving stone rules. The application of the rule depends on whether or not the touched stone had any effect on the outcome of the shot.

- If the touched or moved stone did not affect the outcome of play, the *non-offending* team simply replaces the stone to its prior position. If the stationary stone was moved by an external force (say, by collision with a stone, player, or equipment from another sheet or some other strange circumstance) then *both teams* agree on the placement of the stone to its prior position.
- If the touched or moved stone affected the outcome of the play, then the *non-offending team* may choose from three options:
  1. Allow all stones to remain where they came to rest
  2. Remove from play the stone whose course would have been altered, and replace all other stones in their prior positions
  3. Place all stones in the positions they would have reasonably been expected to come to rest had the infraction not occurred.

Rule 9 usually comes in to play when a guard is accidentally touched or moved during a shot.

### **Sweeping Behind Tee Line (Rule 7)**

This one generates lots of arguments, many of them wrong! There are lots of elements to this aspect of Rule 7. Let’s simplify:

- You can’t sweep a stationary stone until it is sent into motion. No “pre-sweeping!” If it’s not moving, you can’t sweep it.
- You can’t sweep any opposition stone behind tee line until it *touches* the tee line. Where your brush is located is irrelevant. As long as the stone is touching the tee line (or behind it), and

moving, it can be swept. If an opposition stone behind tee line moves in front of the tee line, you must stop sweeping it.

- Only one player from each team may sweep stones (your own or your opponent's) behind tee line. This can be *any* member of the delivering team, but can be *only the skip or vice-skip* of the non-delivering team. This rule is usually interpreted to mean that only one player *at a time* for each team can sweep behind tee line. One does often see two players from the delivering team poised over stones behind tee line, one waiting for the other to finish sweeping a stone out of play before the other stone can be swept. As far as I know, this is a legal tactic.
- Priority must be given to players sweeping *their own stones*, but no player may obstruct another player from sweeping. Note that a player does not have priority to sweep opposition stones.
- In the case of sweeping obstruction, the non-offending team has the option of allowing the play to stand, or of placing stones where they would have reasonably come to rest had the infraction not occurred.

### **Mixed Curling (Rule 14)**

There is a little-known and rarely consulted rule solely for mixed curling. There are two important rules:

- The shooting order must alternate genders (MFMF or FMFM). Most everyone knows this rule.
- The skip and vice-skip must be of opposite genders. This one is not as well-known. Remember, the skip and vice-skip positions are not defined by shooting order, but rather by who has command of the house. The skip is the player who has command of the house (holds the broom) for all shots except his or her own. The vice skip is the player in command of the house when the skip is shooting. The skip and vice skip may play any shooting position on the team subject to these two rules.

### **Removing stones from play (or not)**

These two scenarios seem to confuse players every year:

- A stone just over the hog line is struck by a delivered stone which comes to rest on the hog line. What to do? The delivered stone remains in play even though it did not cross the hog line. Any stone that strikes a stone already in play will remain in play (Rule 6.a)
- A stone comes to rest in the “dead” area between the back line and the back of the house—one of those “trip hazards”. Can it be removed from play before someone gets hurt? NO! While this stone is not likely to become a scoring stone, subsequent stones or stones they strike may jam on this stone, bringing stones into play that might not stay in play otherwise. One of these lucky stones may even score! Unless a stone has completely crossed the back line (Rule 2.g) *do not remove it from play!*

We'll visit some other confusing and little-used curling rules in another Instructor's Corner article.

If you want to know more about these topics and more, check out the Instructor's Corner archive on the [Instruction Page](#) at the Utica Curling Club web site.

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

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