



## Instructor's Corner

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### Mixed Doubles Strategy

Mixed doubles is the newest Olympic curling discipline, debuting at the 2018 Winter Olympics. Although mixed doubles has been played in some form for more than a decade, you won't find much written about it. With rules changes in 2015 that altered the position of the stationary rocks and added the power play, strategy is still evolving.

In some sense, the strategy of mixed doubles is really simple: "Throw everything to the pin!" But, the more you play, the more you appreciate some strategic subtleties that can make the difference between regularly winning or losing. Here are some strategic thoughts for mixed doubles aficionados that might make you a more consistent mixed doubles team.

#### Neutralize the stationary rock

The first rock delivered each end in mixed doubles is critical (Figure 1). In the diagram, yellow has the option and last rock. The ideal position for the first delivered stone is either frozen to shot stone (position A) or top button (position B). Both positions effectively neutralize the stationary shot rock. Position A is safer, as the frozen rock is difficult to remove. On swingy ice, it may be possible to angle-tap a rock in position B to the back of the four-foot. Position C is a "good" miss, as the stone can be used later for a tap-back or angle runback as needed. The worst possible house positioning for the initial stone is top 12 or top 8 directly behind the guard. Such a rock does not significantly cut down the scoring area for the team with the last rock, and is difficult to use later in the end. It is better to leave stones short and open early in the end so that they can be used later in the end. Remember, your opponents cannot remove any stones, including those in the house, until the fourth delivered rock in the end.

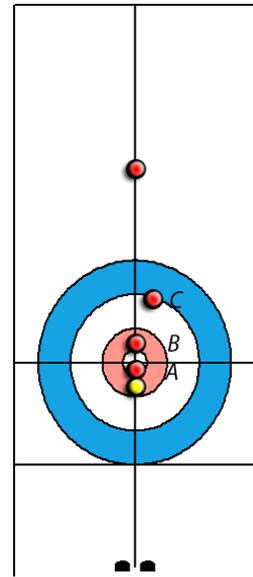


Figure 1

#### Control the path to the four foot

At the beginning of every end, there are two paths to the four-foot. If your opponent comes up short on one side, use this chance to gain control over the approach to the four-foot on the other side by using that path to draw for shot or a controlling position above tee line. Being behind tee line or leaving pockets for your opponent to draw to for shot with backing is a cardinal sin in mixed doubles. Being above tee line on the path to the button gives you potential control to score or limit damage.

#### Tap, not smash

Mixed doubles is not a hitting game. It is a game of angles and rock positioning. (Think "short game" without the alcohol.) Tapping rocks behind tee line is the order of the day. Heavier weight shots are usually reserved for peels, doubles, angle raise takeouts, and jam-ins of frozen rocks, and occasionally, simply limiting damage or eliminating opponents' stones when you have a lead. If you are hitting a lot as

a mixed doubles team, you are probably not taking maximum advantage of your opponents, or you may be getting into trouble frequently early in each end.

### **Limit the Damage**

Mixed doubles can be a high-scoring game, and if you are not careful, you can get on the wrong side of a big end. Giving up two or even three without hammer is acceptable in mixed doubles. Giving up four or five can put you in a big hole that is hard to climb out of. Winning teams are efficient at limiting scores of 3 and 4 against them. Early in the end, before you can remove rocks from play, look to freeze to shot or second rock to shrink the scoring area. If your opponents have gotten the jump on you and have several rocks well-positioned behind the center guard, consider clearing as soon as possible to gain access to stones in the house. In mixed doubles, shot stones are usually grouped tightly behind the guard, so doubles or triples are possible if you can open up a path to them or utilize a runback or angle raise. If you keep your opponents busy replacing the center guard, you may be able to escape the worst when things have gone off the rails.

### **Make sure you score with the last rock advantage**

Because there are so many rocks in play in mixed doubles, stealing is a realistic goal, and multiple-stone steals are very possible. Winning mixed doubles teams are efficient at avoiding steals, especially multiple-stone steals. When things are not going well when you have hammer, and your opponents have well-positioned stones behind the center guard, clear the center to gain access to opponents' stones and open up a path to score with your last shot. The team with the last rock can start clearing stones with their team's second delivered rock. Mixed doubles is not a hitting game, but when you need to score or limit damage, don't hesitate to use peels or doubles to open up the four foot and get out of trouble. A decision to bail out or continue drawing around usually must be made at the first opportunity to begin removing rocks in each end. If you can't see a clear path to a deuce, it might be wise to bail out and wait for a better opportunity for a multiple score rather than give up a potential steal.

### **Don't leave the power play in your pocket**

The power play is not only an offensive weapon, it is also a powerful defensive weapon. If you are behind, make sure you use it early enough to put the game back in reach. If you are ahead and have the choice of rock placement, make sure to use the power play late in the game to burn an end where you limit your opponent's chances to steal. When your opponents are behind and you employ the power play, they will normally have to waste a rock to throw their own center guard, which you will clear at your earliest opportunity, opening up the center of the rings for you to score at least one.

### **How is your mixed doubles strategy?**

If you want to get better at mixed doubles, keep track of your performance. How many steals, multiple-stone steals, and big ends (3 or more) do you give up? Taking note of your team success in these areas might isolate aspects of your game where you can improve your strategic approach.

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.

*Good curling! Have a question or suggestion for Instructor's Corner?  
Send an email to [curlingschool@uticacurlingclub.org](mailto:curlingschool@uticacurlingclub.org)*