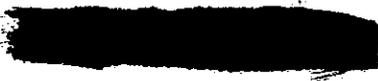


# **Skip's Handbook**

**The How To Bible for new skips**



# Now I'm a Skip – HELP!

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Here it is – Match was short one skip and they gave me a team.  
I'm excited! I'm scared!

## Confidence

The first thing to conquer is lack of confidence. There must be a reason why Match picked you to be a fill-in skip. You've obviously impressed the owners-that-be with your shot making ability. The game is being played at your club so the ice will be familiar to you. You know all the players (your team and opponents) so you have a feel for what shots they can make and those that they have problems with. These are the strengths that you bring to your team.

Your weaknesses centre around the fact that you haven't seen too many rocks from the skip's perspective. What turn do I call? How much ice do I give? When do I call sweeping?

The purpose of this chapter is to give you some basics of what to do in the house. Read it. Skip a game. Read it again remembering what you felt uncomfortable with when you were on the ice.

## Team Support

The second step is to talk to your team (Note that I used *your team* and not *teammates*. The skip is the boss. When on the ice, it is up to you to lead your team throughout the game. The four of you are teammates during the post game socializing and rehashing.) Explain that you are learning the skipping business and you will need their help. You want the sweepers to be the ones who judge the weight of each rock and sweep, if it's needed, to get the draw where you call for it. You'd appreciate it if they didn't second guess the broom and weight that you call. If a team member thinks that you've given too little ice for a take out, (s)he should make a mental note to talk about it after the game but the shot should be thrown at your broom with the player's *normal* take-out weight. Compatibility among the four members of a team is one of the most important winning ingredients. By talking to your team you are already a better leader than 90% of the skips they have played for.

### Opening Moves

OK - you are confident of your personal strengths and you have your team supporting you. The game starts and you are all alone at the far end of the ice with only the opposing skip for company. What to call?

Let's look at the anatomy of an end. There is a generally accepted axiom that with last rock you want to keep the centre clean and play to the sides. The rationale is that with last rock your objective is to take more than one. To get more than one you need the other team to miss. They will miss some shots all on their own - about as many as your team will miss. What you want to accomplish is to make them try hard shots so that they miss more often. One way to try for two, or more, is to put up guards and then to draw around these into the house. This forces your opponent into a difficult take-out around the guard, or to waste a shot getting rid of the guard.

This is a first look at corner guards. We'll spend a great deal of time dissecting the corner game later as we get more sophisticated.

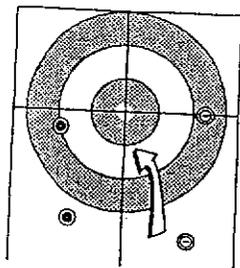
The reason for playing these guarded shot rocks to the sides is twofold: there is an opportunity to separate the counting rocks and have a chance for more than two; and, most importantly, if your strategy backfires and your opponents get their rocks buried behind the guard, you will have the centre clear to calmly draw into the four foot with your last rock to win the end. The clear centre is the defensive side of your strategy - Don't let them steal!

This thinking results in a fairly straightforward strategy when you have last rock. If they clutter up the center - take it out. Play for guarded rocks in the house at the sides of the rings.

The objective, when you do not have last rock, is to steal if you can (offense). The ultimate objective is to prevent your opponents from taking more than the one that last rock should give them (defense).

Play should be forced toward the centre of the sheet. This negates your opponents' efforts to set up the sides, and it provides an opportunity for you to bury a rock in the four foot for the potential steal.

Again, the strategy is fairly straightforward - place rocks in front of the house, on the centre line, guarding the four foot where hopefully you can draw your rock for a steal. If your opponent plays the sides, remove the rocks especially if they are in the rings.



WITH LAST ROCK  
Keep centre clear  
for final end-saving  
draw

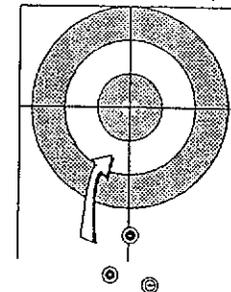
### Defense vs Offense

Whether you have first or last rock you have two objectives. The offensive objective is to score (steal, or take more than one). Defensively you are trying to stop your opponents from scoring big or stealing. Curling is a competitive sport. Balancing between defense and offense is your job as a skip. It is not clear cut but rather depends on how well your opponents are curling, your opponents' strategy, how well your players draw/hit/peel, the end and score, how much the ice is bending, etc.

You will have noticed that there are normally many rocks in play in club league play, less in the ladder and, when you watch the Brier on TV, the game often becomes boring to watch due to the very few rocks they allow to remain in play (emphasis on defense). This is very much influenced by the shot making ability of the players. Peeling (hitting a rock so that both rocks roll out of play) requires good broom, very accurate shooting and good sweeping. Throughout this handbook we will be giving you some ideas on how to achieve the right balance for a variety of situations.

My advice is to favor defense (take-out) in the early ends of the game. Normally the ice is a little heavier at the start of a game and speeds up during the first few ends. With ice where the speed is changing, the take-out is an easier shot. Offense demands that you, the skip, must make a high percentage of your last rock draws - either to the four foot to cut out your opponents' four biters, or around centre guards for the steal. Let draw weight stabilize and give yourself a chance to pick up draw weight before you gamble. If you find that your players aren't hitting well and the opposition is killing you - switch to offense - draw.

If your opponents are playing badly and you have draw weight in your hip pocket you can ignore the above advice and exploit your advantage by playing a draw game (offense).



OPPONENT HAS LAST  
ROCK  
Centre guards for skip  
to draw around for  
steal.

### Where do I put my broom

How much ice do I give? In-turn? Out-turn?

Sounds formidable but let's try to simplify your thinking. In the early ends you and your players are trying to develop a feel for draw weight. You must, at the same time, get a very accurate picture of how the ice is behaving. By the middle ends you should know how much a rock bends on draws from a variety of positions and turns, where you have to put the broom to draw the button from either side, if there are any straight spots, how much a take-out bends, etc. Whatever you decide, always hold the broom straight in a position where the thrower has a clear view. Always indicate the turn by holding the broom in one hand and having the free arm/hand in the direction of the turn (unless you're from New York where they do it backwards).

### Reading the ice

How do you build up this knowledge? You are playing at your own club so you should have a good idea of the general characteristics of the sheet. Your choice of shots should be varied so that you cover as many combinations as possible.

Assume you have first rock. You want a centre line guard. Guess where to put the broom for an in-turn. Always stand in the back part of the rings with your broom on the tee line. Start with your broom on an exact intersection of the tee line with the four foot or eight foot circle. This will make it easier to remember later in the game. Watch where your player is actually aiming when (s)he releases the rock. Don't worry about sweeping (remember you made a deal with your team about judging draw weight sweeping) but watch the path of the rock as it progresses down the ice. How much it bends and where it bends are both important. Normally draws bend more as they slow down. Get a feel for the *shape* of the bend.

Now your opponent plays. Watch this shot as carefully as you watched your own. What broom did the player actually hit? What weight? What was the bend path?

The next time that you get a chance to call a centre line guard, use the other turn to get a reading on the other side of the ice.

Through choice of shots and watching EVERY rock, you should develop an excellent picture of what the ice does.

I find it useful to visualize an exaggerated cross section view of the ice. If the sheet has a *high centre* (which is very common) where it bends much more on inside to outside shots, picture the sheet as a peaked roof. If there is a run where the rocks run straight on one side of centre, picturing a long trough down the roof will help. You will probably need to visualize a separate contour for inside to out and outside to in turns.

Whatever technique you use it should include ice characteristics (amount of bend in/out and out/in), specifics (exactly where to put the broom for a draw to the button) and the shape of the bend (where in its path does a draw bend).

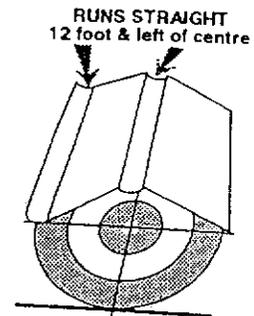
### How do I get guarded shot rocks?

There are two obvious ways to get a guarded shot rock: draw a rock in the rings, have your opponent miss and then you guard it; or put up a guard and draw around it.

If you put your rock in the house, the opposing skip will most likely call a take-out. If they hit and stay, then you are forced to play a hit on their stone. It then comes down to which team misses first on shots of equal difficulty. Remember that you are trying to force misses by your opponents by making them throw more difficult shots.

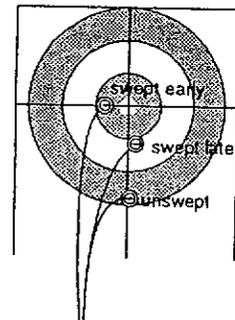
If, on the other hand, you put up a guard there are a few good things that can happen. If your opponents peel, then you can repeat the guard. If they hit and stay, you still have a guard to work with (it doesn't matter what colour rock guards the house). You now have the option of drawing around the guard or putting another guard up. If your opponents draw behind the guard, the game's on and you have a good chance to go on the offense – and a good chance of getting burned. Let's leave this situation until a little later.

Assume that you have your guard up and you decide you want to go behind for shot rock. What broom do you call? If the guard was put there by a draw then you know the broom that the player hit. You should normally call the same turn for the draw behind as for the guard. You know the ice and the shape of the bend. If the ice is bending normally, with most of the bend near the end as it slows down, and you have reasonably good sweepers, you should call the same ice for the draw behind as was thrown for the guard. The eight or ten feet extra weight will usually hold the rock out until it is past the guard and then it will dive behind the guard.



EXAGGERATED  
CONTOUR

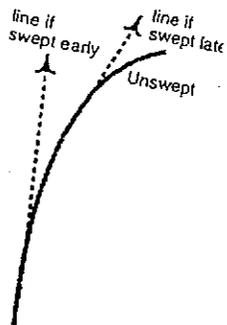
Big bend on inside to outside turns indicates *high centre*. Often runs straight down centre.



SWEEP FOR LINE

Rock swept too early will be deeper in the house and in the open

Sweeping is a very important element in the draw behind shot. Sweeping early can hold a slightly narrow shot straight. It can also drag a rock farther behind the guard. Remember sweeping for line is your responsibility. Sweeping makes a rock travel further and bend less. The resulting path of a swept rock will be on a tangent to the normal path of an unswept rock.



**EFFECT on LINE**  
Sweeping holds a rock straighter. It will tend to follow a line tangential to the normal bend path.

If you know the shape of the path, you will be able to estimate whether the rock will clear the guard or if it needs sweeping to get by. Once the rock is past the guard and has started the biggest part of its bend, you call sweeping to bury it fully behind the guard. Watch out not to oversweep the rock as it enters the house so that it bends too much and is open on the other side.

This aspect of sweeping will take a little time to master. Once you have watched a lot of rocks and made some really awful sweeping calls you will get the feel for what will happen with sweeping and without and start making more right calls than wrong. Whatever happens, **NEVER LEAVE THE HOUSE!** A third sweeper adds very little. Your job is to call line, to watch rocks and to learn about the ice.

Often, the guard that you would like draw around rolled into its current position after a take-out. You do not know exactly where to put the broom for your draw behind. This is where you are going to reap the benefit from reading the ice during the early ends and having a vision of how the ice reacts. Normally you should draw in the direction that has the most bend to allow every opportunity to bury the shot.

Remember you are drawing behind a guard in order to make your opponents' shot tougher. In many instances where there is a high centre, you can hold a draw straight for most of its voyage and have it dive in the last few feet. If you make this draw, your opponents will face an almost impossible take-out. Whenever possible, call a shot that will result in the other team having to make a real toughie.

### The Raise

Where the ice is running very straight it will be impossible to bury a rock completely behind a guard. If you play your guards close to the house (two or three feet in front) then you will be able to play a straight back raise which will result in shot rock behind a guard. The broom for the raise will be slightly tighter (less ice) than the draw. Again, sweeping is the secret to a perfect raise. Visualize the shape of the bend, call the ice appropriately and call sweeping for a nose hit.

### Take-outs

Defense is take-out. There are a number of situations where a take-out becomes an offensive weapon (hit and roll, raise take-out) but at this stage we'll only look at the *get rid of opponents' rocks* aspects.

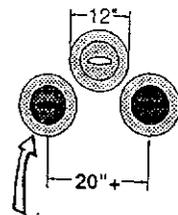
The simplest form of take-out is a wide open rock that you would like to remove and have your rock stay in its place. Again the questions: Which turn? What weight? How much ice?

As a confidence builder, remember that the rocks are each about a foot wide. If you hit one inch of a rock at *firm* take-out weight it will remove it. This is 75% of your objective. You have a margin of error in calling ice, hitting the broom, right weight and sweeping of twenty + inches. Granted, you may not stay but at least the opponents' rock is gone.

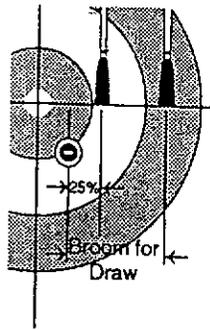
You should make the choice of turn to provide the easiest shot for your player and the easiest sweeping call for you. If you have already seen a take-out in this area of the ice with one turn but have not seen the other, your best choice is to call what you know. It is more important to make the take-out than to learn about the ice. If you have seen both turns, pick the turn that bends most consistently. If there is a good uniform bend in to out, go that way. If the bend is consistent both ways, it is usually better to pick the turn that bends the most (within reason). This will allow more latitude in hitting the broom as sweeping will have a greater effect on direction. Absolutely stay away from known falls or runs. If your sheet has a *high centre*, don't try to cross the centre line.

On an open take-out there should be no question about weight. Each player should have his/her *normal* take-out weight (If you plan to keep the same team together for a few years, each player should attempt to throw the same *normal* take-out weight).

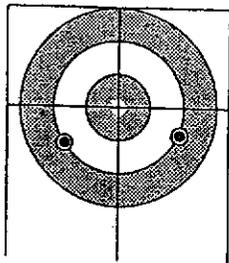
During your initial chat with your team you should ask each player what weight (s)he likes to throw for take-outs. You will be able to judge this better after you've seen a few. Explain to your players that you will adjust the amount of ice that you call for them based on the weight they throw. Each player should try to throw consistent take-out weight. They should NOT adjust their weight to compensate for a previous miss. It is a good idea to establish hand signals that allow you to tell your player what weight you expect.



**HIT ACCURACY**  
You have a 20 inch wide path to remove the stone.



**GUESS at BROOM**  
Take 25% of ice used for a draw as a first guess



**NOT A DOUBLE**  
Do not try doubles that are not possible. Better to hit and stay.

Hand signals that could be used include holding your arm out parallel to the ice for *normal*, up for *heavy* and down for *board*. Whatever you decide on, always use a weight signal. It boosts your confidence and your player's to know you agree on weight.

How much ice? If you've seen a take-out here before, then you know the ice. All you have to do is adjust – a little less if your player throws more weight, a little more if less weight. If you have only seen a draw but have seen both a draw and a take-out in another similar section of the sheet, you'll have a good idea how much less a take-out bends than a draw. If this is the first take-out, you will have to guess based on what you've seen draws do. With firm weight, a good first guess is about 25% of the ice for a draw. With the twenty inch margin of error, you should at least hit the rock giving this ice.

Sweeping calls on take-outs are entirely the responsibility of the person in the house – you.

If the thrower misses your broom, the early sweep call is easy – sweep like crazy if narrow, pray if wide. The bend path of a take out is usually much more uniform than for a draw. The take-out does not slow down as much as a draw so it will bend only slightly more as it approaches the house. On ice with a really big bend this can be quite exaggerated. Calling sweeping on take-outs is a matter of judgement. Judgement improves with experience. What your developed judgement is doing is observing the position and path of the rock as it approaches the house, extrapolating the path and determining if the predicted path is going to bend too much.

As noted above, if the path is going outside the target only prayer will help. In your early days as a new skip I would tend to call sweeping, rather than not sweep, if there is any doubt.

#### Take-outs – Doubles

If your first games are anything like mine were, you will find that you are up to your buttocks in opponents' rocks in quite a few ends. How do I get out of this mess?

If there are two or more opposing rocks in play, there may be an opportunity to take more than one out. Before describing the types of doubles and how to make them, I'd like to give you a few of Bob's rules on doubles:

- Only call a double when there is really a good chance of making it. Don't get sucked into a Pat Ryan, across-the-ice double. You'll probably miss everything.

- Make sure you hit one rock. Better to get one for sure than miss completely.
- Don't call extra weight for a double. Doubles are made by hitting rocks at the right angle. It is better to throw on the broom with weight that can be controlled by sweeping than to try to blast with super heavy weight.
- Play within the ability of your players – including yourself.

The essence of these rules is that it is better to remove one of their rocks and leave yours in its place than to breeze a shot and let them draw another one in or put up a guard.

Enough words of caution. Let's look at some bonafide double situations and how to make them.

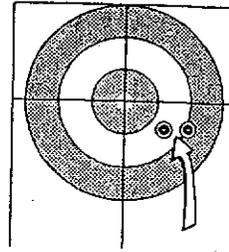
#### Hit and Roll Doubles

The most obvious double situation is when your opponents have two stones side by side less than the width of a rock apart. Hitting either rock on the inside edge will remove both rocks and the shooter will probably stay. The call is *normal weight* take-out with broom to hit in the middle of the pair. Choose the tum as though you were hitting a single rock (ie. the easiest). This is one form of a set of doubles characterized by the shooter hitting both rocks, one after the other – *hit and roll double*.

Normally your opponents will not be so generous. The rocks you are attempting to double will be separated and offset. To make this type of double, you must hit the lead rock first, hit it at an angle that will result in a roll toward the second rock, and have sufficient velocity to remove the second rock.

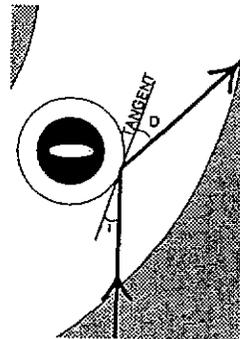
Basic grade 10 physics gave us some rules that help: angle of incidence = angle of deflection; reduction in speed is proportional to the striking angle. Rocks, being made from granite, have very predictable paths and speed after impact with another rock. With a little experience you will be able to judge where the lead rock must be hit to have the shooter roll to hit the second rock; and whether the shooter will have enough inertia (speed) to make the double.

OK, you know where to hit the lead stone – how do you call the hit?

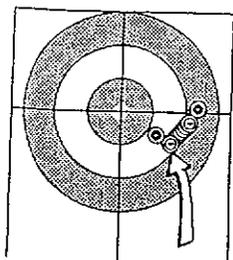


**PAIR of PANTS DOUBLE**

Shooter can hit either rock first, then roll to hit the other rock.

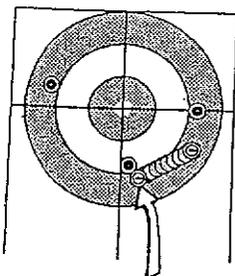


**HIT and ROLL DOUBLE**  
Where to hit lead rock so the shooter rolls to hit the other rock.



HIT and ROLL  
DOUBLE

Shooter hits lead rock first, then rolls to hit the other rock.



HIT and ROLL

Shooter hits lead rock and rolls closer to another rock.

First, make sure that both you and the thrower KNOW that this is a *NORMAL weight* take-out. There is no need to increase weight to make most doubles. It is essential that the skip read the amount of bend correctly and for this (s)he needs a reference point - *normal weight*. The thrower will be comfortable with *normal weight* and has a higher probability of hitting your broom.

Give the broom for a nose hit +/- a few inches based on where you want to hit the lead rock. The turn you choose should be based on the same criteria that you used for a simple hit. If both turns are equally good choices, pick the turn that will have the hitting stone come into the edge of the lead rock that you want to hit.

Sweeping is key on hit and roll doubles. Again, knowing that the rock is being thrown at *normal weight*, you know the shape and the amount of bend and can call sweeping to hit at your chosen spot. The size of the curling stone gives you some leeway in accuracy.

On hit and roll take-outs, it is always better to hit more of the lead rock than you wanted rather than less. Hitting more of the rock will result in taking out the lead rock and probably having your shooter stay. Hitting less can result in only grazing the lead rock and having your shooter roll out of the rings leaving both of your opponents' rocks in play. Always make sure that the lead rock is gone.

Another variation on the hit and roll take out is the hit and roll freeze. Where the opponents' rocks are at too flat an angle to make the double (the shooter would not have enough speed to take-out the second rock), you should consider a hit and roll and have your shooter stay.

As a general rule, if there is more than one opposing rock in the house you should hit the lead stone (the one closest to the thrower). If the double is improbable, play to have your shooter roll towards one of the opposing stones and stay. The thought here is that if you are closer to one of their rocks you may get a chance for the double on your next shot or your opponents may hit you on the nose *jamming* your rock into theirs.

Deciding on where to hit the lead stone is now dictated by how much roll you can get and at the same time hit enough of the lead stone to slow the shooter down so that it stays in play. Experience is invaluable in making this call.

Hopefully you have gained a feel for how fast the ice in the house runs and how take-outs at *normal weight* behave after a hit. Again, the priorities are: first hit the lead stone; second have your shooter stay; and third roll toward an opponents' stone. Treat the roll as a bonus. Do not risk either of the other priorities trying for the perfect roll.

#### Cascade Doubles or Raise Take-out

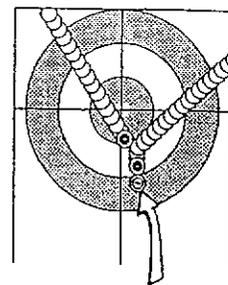
The other form of double is when the lead rock is hit and it in turn takes out a second rock and rolls out.

The cascade double is used when the angle between the two object rocks makes a hit and roll impossible or very risky. This is a very simple double if the two rocks are close together and the angle between them is sufficient to ensure the lead rock rolls out. A nose hit on the lead rock and all of a sudden their two rocks are gone and you are lying one.

When the two rocks are separated the shot depends most on getting the right angle. First you have to determine at what angle you need to have the lead rock strike the second rock; then use this to determine where to hit the lead rock. The angles for a cascade double are easier to determine than the hit and roll. It is also possible to position yourself behind the second rock to be in position to see both rocks when you are calling sweeping.

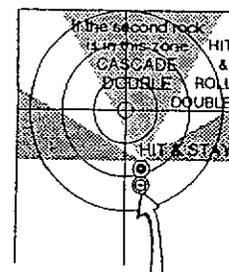
Every curlier has a natural tendency to throw harder for these doubles. Make sure you give a clear signal for *normal weight* and that the thrower understands it. The only time that *BIG weight* is needed is when the two stones are absolutely frozen with little or no angle. The objective is to get the right angle - accuracy.

Again it is important to set your priorities and call sweeping conservatively. First priority is always to hit the lead rock. You will set the second priority based on the angle between the two rocks. If it is impossible to make the double and save your shooter, your second priority is to double out the second rock and roll out (in this situation you should consider a hit and roll or hit and stay as options). If it is possible to stay, your second priority should be to save your shooter and keep the double as an option. The priorities are up to you based on your judgement. What is important, is to have priorities set in your mind and use these to influence your sweeping calls.



CASCADE DOUBLE

Shooter hits lead rock which takes-out the second rock



DOUBLES

When to use Hit & Roll, Cascade, or only hit the lead rock

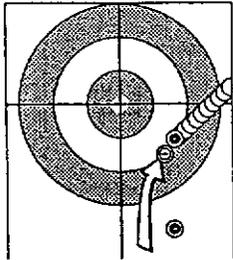
### Finesse Take-outs

All the take-outs that we have looked at so far have presented an unguarded lead rock. Remember our simple strategy for offense was to put up a guard and then draw around it. What is your defensive move when your opponents get a guarded shot? How do I hit a guarded rock?

Your choices are to take-out the shot rock or to peel off the guard so you can make the take-out later. Let us first look at hitting the guarded rock.

It is obvious that you cannot call a *normal weight* take-out. The bend path of the shooter dictates that if it clears the guard then it must also miss the shot rock. Weight is the key component in the finesse take-out. The shooter must have enough weight to remove the shot rock but be light enough so that it will bend around the guard. My advice is to use only two take-out weights – especially at club level curling. For finesse take-outs use *back weight* – the shooter would stop at the hack behind the house if allowed to come to rest. On normal ice, this is sufficient to remove a rock if you hit half a rock or better. It will normally bend almost as much as the draw shot. Make sure that your team members understand what *back weight* is and that they and you have a clear hand signal.

Calling the ice for a *finesse take-out* is usually very straight forward. The shot rock probably got to where it is through a draw. You saw where the rock was released, followed its draw path, noted when it was swept – so you know exactly where to put the broom to duplicate that draw. The same broom less an inch or two is your call. Always err on the tight side. Too much broom will result in the shooter sailing through the house; plus, you've taken the sweepers out of play. Too little broom will result in hitting the guard (which is your alternate shot); plus, your sweepers might be able to hold it for a perfect hit.



FINESSE TAKE-OUT  
Tap out of guarded  
stone

### Peeling Guards

The other option on dealing with a guarded rock is to remove the guard. The objective here is to remove the guard and have your shooter roll away. Your opponents would be delighted to have you hit and stay.

The peel is identical to the hit and roll discussed earlier. You want to hit the rock at an angle so that the shooter will roll away. Call the broom so that the shooter will hit the rock on the broom side (rather than crossing the rock). The rotation of the shooter will give a little more action and it will roll further.

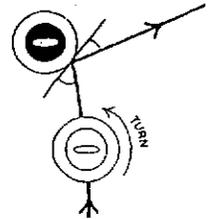
Caution! You and your team have all watched the Brier. You've heard Don and Ray talk about great leads who throw hard and throw spinners (rocks that turn faster than normal) in order to get peels. DO NOT TRY TO DUPLICATE! You as a skip do not have the experience to judge the line of a fast and spinning rock. Your team does not have the ability to hit the broom and throw weight and put on the spin. The odds of missing are close to 100%.

Call *normal weight* and sweep for the angle. This is a simple hit and roll. The downside risk is that you remove their rock but stay to be a guard.

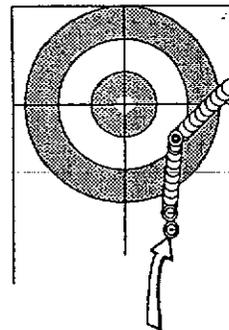
### Raise Take-out

The other option with a guarded rock situation is the raise take-out.

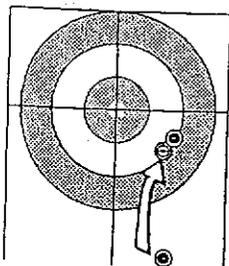
This is a particularly attractive option if the guard is one of your rocks. If the shot rock is too well buried and the guard and shot rock are reasonably close together, try the raise take-out. The downside risk is similar to the peel – you might raise the guard, miss hitting the shot rock and leave your shooter as a replacement guard. The risk is higher if the guard is their stone. A straight back raise will take out the shot rock but it will be replaced by the guard that you raised which results in a guarded shot rock. If the guard is your stone, a straight back hit could leave you with shot rock, guarded. With these risks, you should be very sure that you know the ice and that your player has a good chance of hitting the broom with the right weight before calling the raise hit.



PEEL  
Hit rock on side that  
shooter is bending  
from to get best roll  
action.



RAISE TAKE-OUT  
Raise guard back to  
remove shot stone



### FREEZE

Even if you are not shot, you are now in position to make a raise take-out.

### Freeze

Another option is the freeze to shot rock.

If the take-out, either hack weight or raise, will not work you might consider freezing your shooter to the face of the shot rock. This is a particularly effective call if the shot rock is behind the T-line as you will end up with shot rock, guarded and with backing. If you can not become shot rock with a freeze, you should call the broom to get an angle freeze. This will expose enough of your rock to allow a hack weight tap out on a subsequent shot.

The risks of calling a freeze centre around the difficulty of making the shot. Many curling *experts* regard the freeze as the most difficult shot in curling. If you are too light, your rock is a second guard for their shot. If it is too heavy, it will be behind the shot rock and only useful as backing. If wide, it will be wide open for your opponents to hit; and if narrow, it will wreck on the guard and could result in two guards.

The risks are high – but the perfect freeze can get you out of some awful situations. Call the freeze with discretion.

### Take-out with the Other Turn

When facing a guarded shot stone one normally considers following the same path that the other team used to put it there. Always look at the option of using the other turn.

Quite often, a rock will bend too much at the end and will peek out the other side leaving you a corner to see and hit. There are also occasions when the ice bends more on the other turn. If you've been watching every rock, you might have noticed this bigger bend when your opponents missed it. Don't get locked into only one view of a situation.

### Speedy Play

An essential piece of advice for your first efforts at skipping is to **PLAY QUICKLY!**

An eight end game should be played in less than two hours (14 minutes per end). Club draws are based on this timing. If your game takes more than this you are boring seven other players and you are delaying the teams that follow you. Yes, there is a lot to think about and decisions to make but most shots have very few alternatives: draw or hit, in-turn or out-turn.

Some keys to speedy play from the skip's perspective:

- Always be ready to take charge of the house as soon as your opponents' rock comes to rest.
- Plan what you are going to call while the opponents' rock is travelling down the ice.
- Make your decision on what shot to call and what broom to give quickly.
- Do not routinely consult with your third on shots. There will be a few occasions where there are a lot of options and you want advice. Do this infrequently.
- Give clear signals to your players so there is a clear and immediate understanding of what is called.
- Encourage your players to be ready to deliver and sweep as soon as the opponents' rock comes to rest.

Quicker play keeps the interest and concentration of all players up. You will find that players' percentages are higher and that players enjoy the game more in a fast paced game. You also look more like a real skip.

### **Curling Rules**

It is the Skip's job to defend your team's rights in any disputes. Your team is counting on you to resolve any disputes through discussion and agreement with the other skip. Also, you do not want to look like an ass in your interactions with the opposition. You must be very familiar with sweeping rules as they apply in the house and what to do with moved rocks. Who can sweep behind the T-line, who has rights, what is a running stone, what is a burned stone, what happens when a guard in the path of a running stone is moved, what happens when rocks bounce off the boards and move stationary rocks, etc.? You will have one or more situations involving sweeping and displaced stones in every game that you play.

Make sure that you have a copy of the official rules in your pocket at all times. Read the rules! Understand the rules! Understand your responsibilities as co-umpire!

Curling is assumed to be a gentlemen's sport where each team calls their own infractions. If sweepers bum a rock, they are expected to remove it immediately. What do you do if you see an infraction by the other team that they do not call? You should immediately bring your concerns to the other skip's attention. If it involves other members of their team (eg. your suspicion that they burned a rock) make sure that their skip involves these players in the discussion. Make sure everybody understands that you are not a pushover.

If a decision is going against you, involve your team in discussing what should be done. This should be a private team chat. Do not let umpiring become a war among eight people.

### **Etiquette in the House**

As a player you have learned the basic rules of etiquette. You know that you should stand to the side at the hog line when your opponent is delivering (made a rule in 1991), that you leave rocks undisturbed in the house until the thirds agree on the count, etc.

There is also a code of etiquette for skips. It is hardly ever published, but is rather assumed to be known and respected by all skips. Most of house etiquette is common courtesy. Some general guidelines:

When your team is delivering

- You have complete rights over the house until the delivered rock, or any displaced rock, crosses the T-line.

- You should hold the broom while standing behind the T-line. Do not leap backward on top of the other skip who will be behind you to see the shot.
- If opposing players are blocking your players' view of your broom or blocking the sweeping path, advise them to move ("ICE!") before proceeding.
- When one of your rocks crosses the T-line you have the first right to sweep it. If you intend to sweep, or have one of your sweepers continue sweeping it, indicate this clearly. If you do not want to sweep it, get out of the way to give your opponent the opportunity.
- If your shot displaces one of their stones and you wish to sweep it behind the T-line, indicate your desire. Remember that the other skip has priority here. If (s)he does not sweep, do not hesitate in being a bit forceful (push your way into position) in sweeping.
- If anything unusual occurs (eg. one of your sweepers dislodges a rock), consult the other skip about the situation, and your intentions, before taking any action.

When they are delivering

- Stand behind the other skip so that you can see the delivery but do not interfere or get in the way.
- It is perfectly acceptable to move to the front of the house to get ready to sweep one of your rocks before their rock displaces it. Be sure to not block their view.
- Exercise your rights and respect their rights on sweeping.
- Make sure that a maximum of two, you and your third, are in the house. Remain still and quiet with your broom behind you while they are delivering.

General

- If you want to talk to your team, wait until it is your turn to throw. Don't distract their concentration while they have the sheet.
- When an end is complete, let your third take over to decide the count. Don't hover around or participate.
- Always be ready to take over the house as soon as their shot is completed.

## Strategy for the New Skip

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Hopefully, the preceding pages have helped you to feel comfortable in the house and you have skipped a few games with mixed results – BUT, you would like to have a little more control over winning.

We touched on strategy in a very simple way. When you have last rock, keep the centre clear and play the sides. When your opponents have last rock, try to steal by playing centre guards and defensively keep the sides clear.

Let's build a strategy base. Strategy is not a set of rules that one can apply based on each situation. Strategy is an understanding of the game; assessing your opponents' strengths and weaknesses relative to your team; and formulating a game plan that shifts the game to favour your team's advantages.

### Understanding the Game

We've spent quite a few pages helping you to understand shots, how to read ice, where to hold your broom, calling sweeping, angles, etc. Let's try to put these together to win games.

Some ridiculous statements: If every player made their shots and the skip called a perfect game then defensive games would be won by the team that won the coin toss by a score of 1 to 0. Offensive games would be won by the same team in an extra end. These statements are ridiculous because players don't make every shot (look at the player percentages at the Brier) and few, if any, skips call a perfect game. Here lies the most important element of strategy – make fewer mistakes than your opponents! If you rephrase this axiom slightly – make fewer and less crucial mistakes than your opponents, then you are almost assured to win the game.

What mistakes and why are they made?

### Percentages

If you've watched curling on television then you have listened to all the statistics on what percentage each player is shooting. These percentages are based on rating each shot and scoring it between 0 and 4 points. As an example: on a called hit and stay – the player gets 0 for a miss, 2 for a hit where both shooter and shootee go out, and the maximum of 4 if the opposing rock is removed and the shooter stays.

You will have noted from watching TV, that over a number of games, the best curlers in the world have percentages in the 75% range. While percentages never tell the whole story, they do illustrate that there are a significant number of shots that are missed, or only partially made, even by the best. These teams have players who concentrate on being the best at their position. The lead, for example, will have skills at draws and peels and will be a superb sweeper with excellent judgement for draw weight. These players play over one hundred competitive games a season plus countless hours of individual and team practice.

Let's relate this to the club level team that you are leading. Whether the team was formed by match committee based on club ratings, or three curlers who agreed to play for you (a rookie skip), you are certain that they are not the best curlers in the club. If you rated your players, you would probably find percentages in the 30% to 60% range. Obviously, you are going to get more misses and half-made shots than perfect shots.

In most club draws the skill level usually increases with the player's position. At a competitive level the lead is chosen for specific abilities. At club level, the lead is often learning the game and has very limited experience. The lead will have many weak areas. The second will typically have more experience and thus will have less weak points. The third will be your best shot maker but will have very limited experience in the house. Remember that the third only sees 25% of the rocks from the skip's perspective and is never called on to decide where to place the broom. You can expect your third to make mistakes in sweeping calls for line. The skip, that's you, is new to the position and you can certainly expect that there will be mistakes made. Luckily you are probably playing against a team that has roughly the same calibre of players.

What this means is that most games are going to be won by the team that makes the fewest mistakes. Many ends are won due to the misses of one team. It may appear that an end was won due to the skip making a brilliant draw through a small port to out count four opposition rocks. The real issue is: how did the house get this screwed up? Misses! It is also very probable that the skip, who is called on to make the perfect draw, will miss it half the time.

Missed shots are usually the result of lack of ability. Every curler can make every shot some of the time. The key phrase is *some of the time*. The odds that the player will make any given shot are based on his/her ability on that particular type of shot. Each player has a set of shots that are high percentage, a set that are low percentage and some in between. We will spend the next few pages discussing how to recognize strengths and weaknesses. We will also examine how you can minimize your team's misses and increase the misses made by the opposition.

### Sizing up the Opposition

There is a generally accepted axiom that if each player on your team outcurls his/her opponent, you will win.

You should attempt to rate each of the opposing players against what you know are the strengths and weaknesses of your players. The ideal is to know which team has the better lead, second, third and skip for draw weight, for hitting the broom at a variety of weights, for take-outs and for sweeping. In the early ends, put rocks in the house or close to the rings. This will encourage the other team to hit. At club level curling, the front end often have problems with take-outs. Very often they favour one turn over the other. Try to give the other team a variety of shots to get a good reading on their weaknesses.

In rating the other skip, you want to not only rate the shot making ability but also get a good feel about the strategy. Does (s)he favour one turn over the other? Is it different for each player? Hit everything in the house? Attempt to freeze to rocks behind T-line? Attempt to draw behind your centre guards with last rock? Play a corner game? etc.? etc.?

"What do I do with this load of information?", you ask.

Read on.

### Unforced Errors

The simple mistakes are categorized by a term frequently used in tennis - *unforced errors*. The player throws the wrong weight, wrong turn, wide of your broom, narrow. You, the skip, call too much ice, or too little, overcall the sweeping, or call a centre guard thinking that you don't have last rock. What causes these types of errors and, what is more important, what can you, as the leader of this team, do to reduce them?

- Curling skill.

The player, or skip, does not have the curling ability to make (call) the shot that you are calling consistently.

In every sport the advice to play within yourself is used. In golf, faced with a 230 yard shot to the green, the high handicap player should use two shots to get there rather than really try to belt his/her three wood. Trying to belt it often results in disaster. Curling is no different. If your lead can only control light weight take-outs, don't call for a heavy peel. It is your job as skip to know what your players are capable of and to call shots that they have a good chance of making.

You must also be aware of your limitations. The first time you are in the house don't expect to be able to call the broom and the sweeping for a perfect draw behind your opponents' guard. Give yourself some room for error - a bit more broom or an easier shot to call.

- Mental errors.

You call a negative ice take-out and your player throws the wrong turn.

You know the ice, know that there is a fall but you forget and call normal ice and the draw wrecks.

Most mental errors are the direct result of lack of concentration. Your mind is wandering to problems at the office or the great party you are going to, or the cute bum on the second on sheet one. Winning requires that every player is focused on what is happening in the game and particularly on making each shot.

As skip, you can help your team focus. The chat that you had with them before the first game should be repeated before every game. Discuss what you know about the other team, the ice, your plans on how to beat them. Encourage each person on your team to join in. The concept of participation increases interest and provides focus. Make the game go quickly. Slow games bore players and give opportunity for thoughts to wander and concentration to lapse. Use your third to communicate to your front end especially on good shots. Praise your sweepers when they bust their backs saving a narrow shot.

Do not criticize your players in public. If a player is consistently wide, catch him/her the next time (s)he sweeps a rock near the house and discuss it.

This all adds up to involving your players in the game.

- Communication

You call a draw and you get a hit. These types of errors are similar to mental lapses but result from a player not understanding what you called.

Ensure that you have prearranged signals for type of shot, weight, turn and sweeping. Ensure that everybody understands them. Ensure that everybody, thrower and sweepers, is looking at you when you call a shot. Be consistent. Don't yell *hurry!* one time and *sweep!* the next.

- Skip gave the wrong broom

You misread the ice, give too little ice for a take-out, and, despite heroic sweeping, the rock sails into the back board.

Skips are human too. Immediately acknowledge that it was your fault. Don't let your player think that (s)he threw narrow or he needs more weight - that will screw up the next shot as well. Also be sure that you know why you made the error. Were you really unsure of the ice or did you have a mental lapse?

- Lack of ability

If this is a team that you are building (rather than one that Match gave you for four games), you will want to develop and improve each player's shot making ability. Your job, as skip, is to recognize which of the faults are causing the worst problems and, if corrected, could result in your team winning more games.

Discuss your observations with your team. Call team practices and use them to work on weak areas. Don't assume that you have all the answers on how to correct problems. Don't be shy to ask outsiders to help. If there are delivery problems, call in someone you know to be a good instructor (eg. Curl Canada). If you are having skipping problems, talk to the most knowledgeable skip who beat you and ask him/her what you did wrong.

The key is to have the team know what each player is trying to improve and to be mutually supportive.

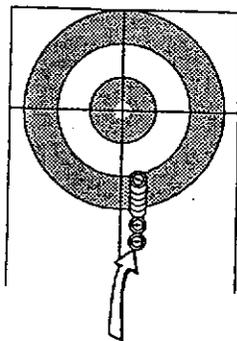
## Forced Errors

Fun time for the skip!

How do I force the other team into making errors?

How do I avoid being trapped into making forced errors?

What is a forced error? When you create situations where your opponents are faced with a difficult shot (or difficult decision) and, because of the degree of difficulty, the shot is missed (or the wrong decision is made). Let's look at an example to illustrate. You bump raise one of your rocks straight back into the house ending up with a perfectly guarded rock. Your opponents have the option of peeling the guard, trying a raise double, finesse tap-weight take-out, or freezing to the shot rock. The skip has at least four options to think about and whichever (s)he chooses, the player delivering the rock will be faced with a hard shot. You have forced a situation where the chance of missing is high.



RAISE

Gives opponents a difficult shot. You are increasing the chance that they make an error or miss.

Another component illustrated by this example – raise a guard into the house – is that not only is the raise easier than the options that your opponents will face, but the effect of missing the raise (be light so you have two guards, raise at an angle so your shot rock is open, be heavy and take the guard out) is not nearly as disastrous as if your opponent misses.

Your job as skip is to create this type of situation. Your player is called to make a shot that is well within his/her ability and that will result in your opponents having to call a shot that is at the limit of their ability.

To force errors, and not end up being forced, you need to have a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses of each player. You should know your players pretty well. We've talked about continually watching the opposing players to help read the ice. You are also looking for weaknesses that, hopefully, you can exploit – little push on out-turn hits that make a rock run straighter, tendency to throw more weight when facing doubles, uncomfortable with take-outs near the edge of the rings, prefers in-turn take-outs, throws spinners (which don't bend much) on take-outs,...

How to use this information?

Your job is to set up shots that force the opposing skip to call a shot that the player is uncomfortable with or is weak at. Put rocks on the corners if that bothers them. If they favour inside

out take-outs, guard to force an outside in. Make the player that throws *spinners* shoot at rocks that are peeking out from behind a guard. Get the player who pushes his out turn to throw down a straight spot or fall.

What is the skip uncomfortable with? Every skip has shots (s)he likes to call and those (s)he avoids. Is the skip reading the ice well, calling sweeping too early or too late, giving too much ice on take-outs, obsessed with always having a clean house, always hits shot rock, is so obsessed with the new stopwatch that (s)he is not looking at the ice characteristics,...

Again, try to play a game that pushes the other skip into mistakes. Force them to try the shots that they've been avoiding.

## Momentum

Momentum is an interesting phenomenon that occurs in all head-to-head sports. We have often seen a team absolutely dominate for four ends building what appears to be an insurmountable lead, then there is a complete reversal and the other team comes back to win. The momentum changed! It is a moot point whether a team loses momentum or the opponents gain momentum.

Let's examine some possible reasons why a team loses momentum.

Very often this is caused by a change in game plan. They got the big lead by drawing well and, now that they have the lead, they are attempting to peel every rock. They have probably increased the take-out weight to ensure the peel and are missing.

Loss of concentration is another big factor. A team starts the game focused and plays at the top of their ability. With a lead, they let down and start missing.

The opponents change their strategy. They started out hitting and gave up a big lead. Now they are playing draws on almost every shot and the team with the lead can't adjust.

If you can recognize how you can lose momentum, you can avoid it. Always have some objective to focus your team's concentration. If you build up a lead – get your team dedicated to total destruction – "Maybe they'll quit and we can have our postgame beer early."

Don't change your style of play dramatically. Yes, you should switch from the offense that built the lead to a defensive game. Call take outs – but keep to *normal weight*.

You can take advantage of the other team's loss of momentum. Talk to your team. Plan what success you need to gain momentum and help it to build. Start the change with a conservative goal ("Let's take two this end."). When that works, set another conservative goal (steal one). With two or three successes, you will have gained the momentum.

Keep your concentration!

### Psychology

There are a few skips who will resort to tactics designed to confuse, distract, upset or otherwise harass the opposing skip. While I would never suggest that you use this tactic, you must appreciate the subtle suggestions that may be used against you. The main purposes of psyching are to destroy concentration and to destroy confidence. As a new skip, you are not exuding confidence and are a perfect target.

The *psych* comes in many forms:

- misleading information

You overhear the time of an opponents' rock, or "It really runs straight there", or "I'd like to blank this end". Beware! Don't believe everything you overhear until you verify it through your own observations. Do not ever change your game plan based on what you hear from the opponents.

- slowing down the game

Your opposing skip takes too much time deciding on shots, discusses every shot with the third, takes an eternity to get set in the hack, etc. Don't let this bother you or your team. Talk to your team and decide how you should combat the problem. You have a couple of choices. You can fight fire with fire and play even slower than they do. You can get a couple of comfortable chairs from the lounge and sit back and relax while they waste time (ridicule). You can ignore the delays completely and just play your game (this is difficult).

The key is to recognize it as a psych and not let it affect the way your team plays or let your opponents know that they are getting to you.

- blabbermouth skip

You will run into opponents who never stop talking to you. Jokes, what's happening in the news, club gossip, anything to distract your concentration on the game.

Ignore the chatter. Be rude if you have to. Next time they have a third/skip chat, interrupt them with a joke or inane comment.

- playing at being professionals

Sweaters with names on the back, winners' crests, stories about how they just lost out to last year's Tankard winner. These can all cause a skip (especially a new skip) into believing that they will lose before the game starts. Do not let credentials (real or made up) get to you. Make them show how good they are on the ice.

The *psych*, whether intentional or not, can destroy your concentration and result in you and your team playing well below your potential. If you treat it as a *psych*, you can use it as another reason to hate your opponents (for two hours) and use that as a focus for your concentration. You will probably never stoop so low as to try to *psych out* your opponents; however, it is good to know what form *psychs* come in and how to use them positively.

## Game Strategy (club level)

Earlier in this book we talked about: with last rock – *play the side/keep the centre open* and with first rock – *play centre guards to steal*. We also talked about playing defense in the early ends waiting for the pebble to wear down and draw weight to stabilize.

Let's turn these generalizations into practical what-to-dos by setting up some game situations.

I'd like to start at the end of a game. The reason is that in the last end your objective will be very clear.

### Steal Last End

Situation: Game is tied, it is the last end and you have first rock.

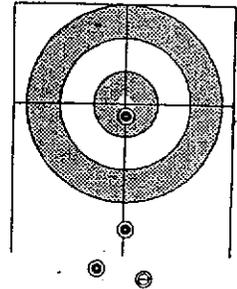
Objective: Steal – you either steal or you lose.

In this situation you can focus all your attention on stealing one point. You do not care if your opponents take one point or many. In either case you lose. It is not important what the final score is – only who wins.

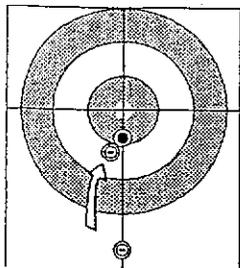
Some simple observations about stealing. Most successful steals are made by having the counting rock in the four foot with guards. Very few ends are stolen with a rock in the twelve foot.

OK, you are ready for the *Kamikaze steal* – 100% offense. First objective is to get guards up. Since your steal is dependent on having your opponents face your shot rock in the four foot, these guards must be near centre line providing cover for the button. They should be fairly close to the rings – between two and five feet – to cut down the angle required to get around them. The plan is to end up with one, or more, of your rocks as guard(s) that you can draw around, or raise (on straight ice), on your last rock.

Your opponents will do one of four things: peel your guard, hit and stay, draw behind or draw to the sides (there is no reason to put up a corner guard as they only need one to win). If they peel your guard, put another one up. Repeat this replacement hoping to get either a nose hit or a miss before your last rock.

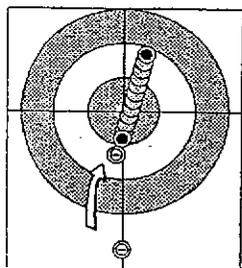


**STEAL in FOUR FOOT**  
Leave their skip looking at a house like this on last rock and you have a good chance of stealing one.



#### CORNER FREEZE

Gives you a better target for a later shot. Keeps rocks in play.



#### TAP BACK

Their stone will provide backing.

If they hit and stay, put up another guard. Where to put the guard depends on the ice and where your opponents' guard is located. If the ice is really bending so that it is impossible to guard a shot with a single guard, you will need to space two or more guards to provide enough protection. If the ice is really straight and you ideally want to raise your guard into the rings on your last rock, then you will need to be able to see all of your guard. In either of these cases put your next shot off set from their guard, close to the rings, and avoid giving them an easy double. On normal ice, call for the guard in front of the existing guard – guard the guard. Do not get them so close together that they have an easy double. Continue this process until you have a wall of guards – of either colour.

If the opponents draw to the side of the house or the back of the house, ignore the stone. Remember that your best chance to steal is in the four foot. These rocks should not be a factor. Continue your objective of guarding the four foot and put up a second guard.

If your opponents pull a perfect draw around your guard in front of the T-line, then the game is on. (S)he has left your guard in play (that's good news) but has taken an offensive initiative. Your options, depending on ice conditions, are to tap their rock back or to corner freeze to their rock. Nobody said stealing was easy. The tap back should attempt to move their rock back to the eight foot behind the T-line. This is potential backing for you later in the end. The corner freeze is your way to move their shot rock back in two stages. The corner freeze allows you to see part of a stone peaking out from behind the guard. Later you can tap the frozen rock and move their shot back. Do NOT consider removing the centre guard to get a clear shot at their stone. That guard is your hope to steal. I would also caution against trying to draw around their stone to the button. It is better to have your rocks in front of theirs so that raises, lucky wicks, take-outs can result in your stone being raised into theirs. Drawing behind gives your opponents the chance to bump or corner freeze to your stone and gain the upper hand.

OK, everything has worked out well and you've built a wall of guards. When do you draw into the house? Do not go in too early. As a general rule – do not draw into the house until third's second rock. If you go in early (say on your team's fourth stone), your opponents have five shots to manipulate you out. What you want, ideally, is to have your last rock draw perfectly to the front of the four foot behind all those nice guards and force their skip, with only one chance, to make an extremely difficult shot. As a safety factor (ie. give you a few chances to make the perfect draw), start the drawing in process with your team's sixth or seventh rock. This gives you three chances to make the shot and, if your third buries it to perfection, you will probably only have to make two perfect guards.

Which way to draw in? In many situations you will have a choice on which direction to draw from. I always prefer to come in from the more difficult side. Remember that you are attempting to get your opponents to lose by forcing them to make errors. In all cases the tap back will be more difficult than the draw behind. If you can choose the draw that comes through a narrow port, a draw where the ice runs straight at any weight over draw, or a raise that puts shot rock in a position where it's impossible to draw to – you have given your opponents a terrible shot to pull off. In choosing the more difficult draw, it is important to make sure that the person throwing the stone has a good chance of making the shot.

What if there are no guards for the four foot? Use what has been left to you. Keep trying to get the centre guard up even on skip's first stone. If they get rid of that guard but have left a corner guard, use that and go in the house. If there are no guards but one or more of their stones are in the rings, freeze up to one of their shots. Call a corner freeze if that's the only way to be shot rock. If the house is empty, draw to a place where you think their skip might have difficulty – on a known fall, biting the front twelve foot so they can't hit and be shot stone (that at least might blank the end and you can try all over again). Whatever you do, don't quit! Remember the other skip is going to be nervous facing a hit and stay or a draw to the four foot. There are many open hits and easy draws missed on last rock. Pressure can win many games – especially at club level.

### Aggressive Steal (Not Kamikaze)

**Situation:** You are two down, three ends to play, and you don't have last rock. You have three ends to score three (two for a tie) more points than your opponents. If you hold them to one this end your game is in serious jeopardy (three down with two to play) but not hopeless. If they score more than one this end, it's *Velcro time* – you've lost the game. This is the time for an *aggressive steal*. You are on offense with a little defense.

**Objective:** Steal, but defend against a big end.

We talked about the last end steal to win. In that case you really didn't care how many rocks your opponents had in play – you were in a win/lose situation – hang the torpedoes – charge!

The difference between the *aggressive steal* and the *Kamikaze* is subtle. You are still going all out for the steal, but you are aware of their counting stones and will attempt to neutralize them.

With your lead's first stone you should put up a centre guard. Your opponents, in addition to the options listed under *Kamikaze*, might counter with a corner guard. They are also aware that if they score two here – you are dead. Facing a corner guard, you have three options: continue to build up centre guards and go for the steal, draw around the corner guard first or put up a guard that blocks them from drawing behind their corner guard. I personally favour going behind their corner guard first if the bend shape allows you to fully bury. This strategy has two good things going for it: 1. it forces them to ignore your centre guard and 2. it gives your opponents a tough shot to move you back. The danger in this draw behind the corner guard is if you should draw behind the T-line or leave your shot in the open for a hit and roll. In either case your opponents would have an easy shot to tie one. Only make this call if you are fairly confident that your lead can make the draw (or you are fairly confident that their lead is so bad on tap backs that (s)he will probably miss).

Guarding the path to get behind the corner guard is also a good call. It gives you a third guard in play that is good for your steal and it prevents them from getting behind the corner guard.

Under no circumstances should you counter a corner guard by drawing behind your centre guard. The steal strategy is to build guards early, go in late. If you go in now (lead's rocks) your opponents will have many opportunities to clear the way and get at you.

If your opponents put a stone in the rings, you cannot afford to ignore it. Where in the early ends or in a tied game, you would remove this stone to avoid them getting two, on an *aggressive steal* you should consider freezing to their stone. The freeze is a difficult shot but your game is in trouble and you need some breaks. If their stone is behind the T-line, the freeze is an excellent call. The concept of negating opponents' rocks by freezing to them or drawing in front of them is an *aggressive defense*. It keeps your rocks in play, which gives you a better chance at a successful steal, and provides a lot of opportunities for your opponents to miss. Remember, you are trying to force errors. Your opponents, looking at a frozen shot stone, will have a tendency to throw a little harder and maybe miss. Pressure!

Throughout the end, on an *aggressive steal*, negate their shots by tap backs, freezes, blocking ports. If all of these subtle efforts don't work and you end up throwing your last stone against two or more of their counters, at least you should have many rocks in play that will guard your perfect draw to the four foot and/or to provide backing. You should also be prepared to give up a bundle if everything goes wrong.

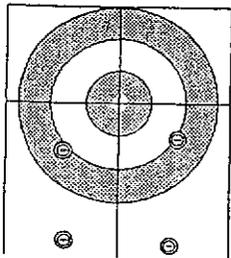
### Normal Steal

**Situation:** Score tied or you are one behind with many ends to play and you do not have last rock.

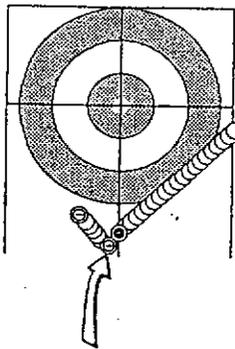
Here you are still in the game, you want to steal, but are not prepared to give them more than one.

The strategy for stealing is the same – cover the four foot. The difference is that you must positively negate every one of their counters. You should use take-outs as a defensive measure. In the aggressive steal you called tap backs and freezes to negate their stones. Here you should use *normal weight* take-outs. Again this is a subtle shift of strategy. If they have been killing you on corner guards – remove them; if they get rocks buried behind your centre guard – remove the guards and go after their shot. Your job is to balance your offensive efforts to steal with a prudent defense that holds them to one.

A word of caution. On skip's first rock (or even third's last rock) facing an empty house – if you put up another centre guard, your opponents will probably draw around you in an attempt to take two. Be prepared! Guard only if aggressive.



**TAKE TWO**  
An ideal house for the opposing skip to face on their last rock.



**ROLL TO CORNER**  
Instead of playing peel - hit and roll to set up a corner guard.

### Take Two

Situation: You are one down with last rock on the last end.

Objective: Take two to win. You don't want to take one and give up the hammer in an extra end (though this is better than not taking any).

At club level curling you have many options for going after two. If their front end have difficulty making take-outs, you can play your early rocks in the house, hope for the probable miss, then put a second rock on the other side of the rings. If they hit well, go to your corner guard game.

Let's discuss the corner guard game in detail.

The strategy is fairly straight forward - play to the sides keeps the centre clear for your last rock, burying a rock around a guard makes your opponents face a difficult shot (remove the guard or play tap back take-out).

Your objective is to cover one or both corners of the rings with guards then draw behind to put pressure on your opponents. Here we are looking at taking two to win. If you can get a corner guard up and draw behind it and your opponents peel the guard or misses the tap back, then you draw in the house to lie two. If you can trade take-outs on this open shot, you will win the game by hitting and staying on your final shot. Sound simple?

How do I get the corner guard?

Your objective in the early part of the end (first five rocks) is to keep the centre clear and, second, to put up a corner. If your opponents put up a centre guard, you should definitely remove it. Call the sweeping on the take-out to get a hit and roll, removing their stone but having your stone roll to be a corner guard; or split their stone with a light weight tap so both the *shooter* and the *shootee* roll to be two corner guards. This is a finesse shot and can only be called if their guard is more than six feet in front of the rings. If they keep putting up centre guards, keep removing them hoping for a roll to the side. Keep this up until third's second stone or until you get an opportunity where the centre is clear and you have a corner guard up. If this situation comes up - go behind - you only want to take two - get behind a corner guard as soon as it is safely available.

(To depart from our situation for a moment, if you are looking for more than two on the end - it is good strategy to try to get a second corner guard in place before drawing in. You should go for the second guard up to second's second rock. You should go behind when there are four of your rocks to come.)

Back to our situation - you want two. If your opponents draw to the four foot on their first rock, you have a few choices. You can ignore their stone and play the corner guard - this assumes that you can always get at their shot rock (you are playing on ice where it takes more than one rock to guard a shot in the rings) and you have decided on a strong offense. The risk in this strategy is that if your opponents get their shot rock guarded, you will end up scrambling to peel guards and/or tap back their shot rock later in the end.

The other approach is to tap back their shot stone so that it provides backing in the eight or twelve foot, and you stay as shot rock in the four foot. At the club level I suggest that you play a *normal bit* and sweep for a roll to the sides. A freeze to their stone is another option. The thought being, that if they play a take-out, your stone will probably stay. You are then in a position to pick their stone and lie two. This is a dangerous call. What if they put up a perfect guard? You are scrambling again.

In the latter part of the end (third's rocks) assess the house and make sure that that you will be in control of the end when you come up to throw. If there is a real mess up front and they have one or more stones in the house - don't try heroic finesse take-outs or freezes - get your third to clear the front (or at least make a hole).

If your corner guards haven't worked out but there is a single centre guard, you might consider having your third draw behind it. If you decide to use this centre guard to make your two, you must be certain to have the shot bury (not be in the open) and be in front of the T-line. If you are open they can hit and roll behind the guard; if you are behind the T-line they can freeze up; if you rub the guard you can split the guards to end up with two corners with three rocks to come. Keep these options in mind when calling the draw behind.

### Hold your opponents to one

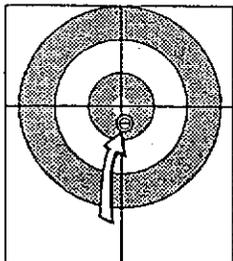
Situation: you are two up coming home without last rock; or one up last end without the hammer.

In either situation your main objective is to hold the opposition to one. This will give you the win or last rock in an extra end. Your opponents are probably going to try to get two rocks by playing to the sides – either using corner guards or drawing into the rings. (S)he is looking for good separation between the two rocks in the rings to prevent you from having an opportunity for a double. One effective way to combat the corner game is to force the play to the centre of the house. If, later in the end, they have two rocks counting near centre line you will have a good chance to bail out with a double. My choice in this situation is to have my lead plunk his or her first stone on centre line biting the four foot. On subsequent shots, I would hit every opposition stone and call sweeping for peels.

There are a number of skips who, if two or more up without the hammer, will have their lead throw the first stone through the rings. The thinking is to not have any stones in play throughout the end. Whatever the opposition does – peel it. This works very well if your team can peel. In my opinion this is the toughest shot to make consistently, especially at the club level. My objection to this strategy is that it gives your opposition a chance to take control of where and how the end is played. They can choose a corner, a straight piece of ice or twelve foot, T-line for their shot. One miss from your team (nose hit on a corner or breezing a take-out on the biter) and they have control. I like my opposition to play where I like the rocks to be – in this situation that is the centre of the house.

With the *rock-in-the-four-foot* strategy – If they play a perfect tap back or freeze you can hit their rock and have a good chance for a double. At the very least you can expect to have whatever rocks remain in the rings near the centre – clustered.

If they attempt to hit your lead's rock and miss, think carefully about your next call. If you are two up, I would have my lead throw the second stone through the rings. One stone in the four foot is all that you need to force the play. A second stone in play gives your opponents something else to hide behind, draw up to, etc., in his/her attempt to get two rocks counting.



#### FORCE PLAY to CENTRE

This opening draw will tend to make end play to centre.

If you are only one up, you might consider trying for a steal and guarding your shot. Play the guard tight (two to four feet in front of the rings). The downside risk is that they end up taking their two around centre guards or that they split your guard to get two corners. The choice of guarding and going for the steal or throwing through and playing for the extra end should be based on a number of factors: how has your lead been playing and can (s)he make the guard, has this game been one where each team has scored with last rock, how well have your second and third been hitting (peeling), has your draw weight been good and do you feel confident that you will be able to throw a perfect guard later, what do you think your opponents will call based on what you've seen so far. You should know enough about both your team and the opposition by this point in the game. It is the old question of balancing defense and offense and the decision is the skip's. That's you.

#### Playing Catch Up

We've all faced the situation: the other team catches the ice in the first end quicker than your team – they are lying four when you come up with last rock and you come up light – down four to zip and your confidence is about the size of a flea's eyeball.

Don't panic!

Don't try to catch up in one end!

First, do a little mathematics. There are seven ends left (club draw) and you will have last rock on four of them if each team scores when they have last rock. If you can take two on each of the four ends where you have last rock, and limit them to only one – you will win eight to seven. There is no need to get suicidal and try to take three or four on the next end followed by a *kamikaze steal*. You must first build up your team's confidence through conservative leadership that gets you on the scoreboard. Certainly, you should call an aggressive offense with last rock. Once you have built up the confidence level, call a little quieter take-out that you can control for planned hit and stays and hit and rolls.

If disaster hits, always take a few moments to assess: what the difference in score is, how many ends are left, and what scenarios could allow you to catch up. Share this information with your team. Come-backs require that every member of your team believes that you can do it.

Use the pressure of a come-back attempt to focus concentration.

				1						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

Your job is to not let your team act as if they are already beaten. They must all believe that you can win if you curl to your potential.

Always react to disasters with a plan. If, for example, you go four down with only four ends to play then if you were to score two on the fifth end, give up one in the sixth, take two more in the seventh – you would be able to tie by stealing one on the last end. If you can manufacture a three on either of the ends where you have last rock, you will be able to win with a last end steal. These are all possible.

In catch-up situations, look for changes in the opponents' game. Often a team that has built up a healthy lead through an aggressive draw game, will switch to a defensive peel game. At club level this will often result in nose hits or misses. Call your game to take advantage of changes.

If your opponents stick to the draw game that got him/her the lead – pressure with bump back, hit and roll, freezes to rocks behind the T-line. The key is to use your team's focused concentration to make shots that put pressure on the other team. Your opponents have built up momentum with their big end. You can attack their momentum by taking two in the fifth. Stealing the sixth would tend to change their confidence to worry. Keep plugging and you can get them to panic. At the same time your team's confidence is growing. You are gaining momentum.

### First End – Disaster or Success

Beware the first end of a game!

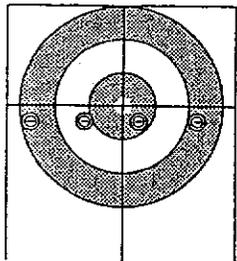
The ice, if freshly pebbled, will be heavy and sweeping will have little effect; your lead may have had a bad day at the office and is still thinking work; etc.

Freshly pebbled ice is the most predictable variable. It is heavier than it will be for the rest of the game; it will tend to run straighter; areas that will run straight later in the game may fall due to the pebble. All of these unknowns (to both teams) mean that *lady luck* could play a big part in the first end. How often have you asked your lead to remove one of their guards on heavy, first end ice and (s)he ends up raising them into the house; or every take-out you call does not bend enough and you keep wicking their shots to become twelve foot biters.

Try to eliminate luck.

If you have watched competitive curling on television, you will have noticed a tendency to mount a strong offense in the early ends – build up a lead (if the offense works) – then play the rest of the game defensively. This strategy is based on two premises: we can take advantage of the other team's uncertainty in the first end; and we can peel every rock in play for seven or eight ends. These teams also have an advantage that you do not have (other than their ability). They have practiced on this sheet. The pebble is worn down to playing speed and they know draw weight.

There is often a good opportunity to score big on the first end. There is an equal probability that your opponents will score big. My advice – never try to steal on a fresh pebble – put your lead's first rock in the house, then hit everything they put up – play defensively. If you have last rock – be offensive, but with caution. You probably are not confident about your draw weight so that keeping the centre clear for your last draw is not a reliable defense. You do not want to face a bunch of their rocks on your last stone. Try to keep the house open so at worst you will have an open hit and stay to bail out the end.



**GARBAGE DEFENSE**  
Their skip has to hit  
and stay for one.

### The Garbage Game

Every club has a few skips who always seem to get lots of rocks in play and, on skip's rocks, often manage to pull off a miracle shot that bumps and raises rocks leaving them shot. The strategy sections of this book talk about controlling where rocks are with a plan for their future use. The *garbage* team has no preordained future for any rock. Their philosophy seems to be "We're a draw team. If we get rocks in play, we can score."

You know the skips in your club who play this type of game. Recognizing a garbage team when you play them for the first time shouldn't take long. Characteristics include: reluctance to remove guards with last rock; draw at every opportunity; freeze to any and every rock in the house (they might even freeze to your left foot if you stand still). Recognition is the key to controlling a game against *garbage*.

OK, what do I do?

Your objective is to get the other team to hit rather than draw. If you have first rock, play your lead's first stone into the rings, close to the centre line (don't play to the sides as this can set up two for your opponents), in front of the T-line. Your opponents are almost forced to hit. If they make the hit and stay, you should hit and stay.

If they miss, you will be tempted to put up a guard. Don't! Put another rock in the rings in the middle of the eight foot and parallel to the first rock. Repeat this until you have a line of rocks (assuming they miss a lot) across the house in front of the T-line. Your opponents will need a hit and stay on your shot rock to count one. They are now playing a hit and stay game - not the draw and garbage game that they prefer.

When you have last rock, peel any guards that they put up. When you get the chance, draw into the house. Since you have last rock, these draws should start at the edges of the rings and work towards centre with subsequent draws. Always keep your shots in front of T-line. Don't give them a chance to freeze and be shot rock.

Somewhere during a game against *garbage* you are going to miss the take-out or hit and stay instead of peel. They are going to succeed in building up *garbage* in some ends. You then have the choice of trying to clear out the *garbage* or playing them at their game. I would clear the *garbage* up to third's second shot. This is especially true in the dreaded first end.

If the *garbage* builds in later ends and your team has been drawing well, you might gamble and draw behind the *garbage* before they do. This change in tactics could easily throw your opponents off their game and you might crack a big one.

When you play this *anti-garbage* strategy, tell your team what you are doing and why. It's part of the communication. It will help their concentration and you will probably get better shots from your team.

## Some Random Thoughts

### Natural Shots

During the course of a game keep your eyes open for what I call Natural Shots. These are shots that, because of the position of two or more stones, you can absolutely predict what will happen if you hit them.

### Natural Raise Take-out

If there are two stones touching – hitting the lead stone will result in the second stone travelling on a line drawn through the centers of the two stones. This direction is almost independent of the angle that you hit the lead stone. Watch out for this situation and use it to your advantage. If this line through the centers is pointing at a rock in the house, then hitting the first rock will result in a natural raise take-out.

If the shot rock is theirs, take advantage.

If the shot rock is yours and you have a chance to protect against a natural double (before your opponents take advantage of it) you have two choices. The obvious choice is to guard the combination. This is often a good choice especially if the rocks are near centre and you are trying to steal. The risk is that a natural raise take-out is also a natural raise double. The guard is not desirable if you have last rock. What you don't want is more guards.

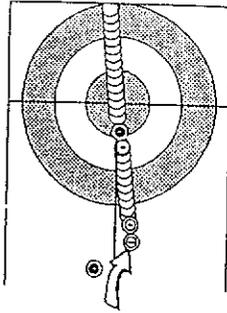
The other option is to play a raise on the two stones that form the natural. This is an offensive defense – it eliminates the natural and it gives you another stone (or 2) in the rings plus a guard on the original shot rock. The risk here is that you tap too hard and make the take-out for your opponents.

Your judgement on the ability of the player throwing the stone and the game situation will influence what you call.

Whatever you call here – do not let the natural remain.

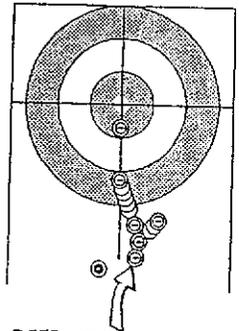
You should also look for opportunities to create natural raises.

When calling guards late in an end, you can line up your guard so that it is corner frozen to another guard creating a natural angle that is pointing away from your shot stone. This takes away the raise take-out.



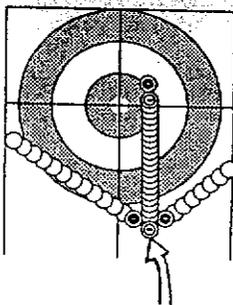
NATURAL DOUBLE

Guards are lined up so that as long as you hit the lead stone, the second stone must hit their rock. A double is almost certain.



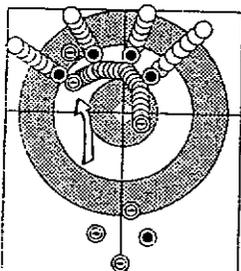
DEFENSE the NATURAL

Do NOT leave the natural for your opponent



#### SPLIT & CONTINUE

A natural where the guards are doubled out of play and the shooter continues into the house. Not luck, but recognition of a situation.



#### BACKWARD TAKE-OUT

This shot actually happened in the Lakeshore bonspiel. We were lying 4 with guards. When the smoke cleared - they lay 3.

The same technique can be used to line up guards so that on a subsequent shot you can play a raise take-out on an opponents' guarded stone.

Also be aware of naturals when drawing into the house. The obvious advice is to not draw into a position where your opponents will have an easy raise take-out.

#### Split and Continue

When two rocks are side by side and separated by ten to fourteen inches, it is an obvious *hit and roll* double. This is also a *natural*. In this situation the shooter will slow down after hitting the two stones but will continue to travel forward. This situation often occurs where there are two parallel guards. If you can split them with good weight you will get the bonus of your shooter continuing forward and freezing up to their shot rock (or removing it).

The closer the two rocks are to each other, the more the speed of the shooter is reduced. It is also possible to have your shooter proceed forward at a predictable angle if the two guards were slightly offset. Experiment with this type of situation at the end of one of your practice sessions. Try to get a good feel for what happens with a variety of separations and a variety of angles.

#### Shooter Can Move in Reverse

This is not a situation that you will encounter often but it occurs often enough to discuss. It also illustrates the need for the skip (you) to look past the single shot and use some of the combinations that you learned in the local pool hall.

The diagram on the side bar shows a situation that actually occurred in the Lakeshore Bonspiel. While it is an extreme example, it illustrates the cumulative effect that multiple hit and rolls can have resulting in the shooter travelling backwards.

Author's note: I did have last rock and did make the draw for one.

Plan hit and rolls to roll behind guards, make doubles, triples, etc. Before you put down your broom, be sure that you are aware of all the possibilities. If you see the possibility of multiple hit and rolls, you might want to call heavy weight (assuming your player can control it) as each hit will significantly reduce the speed of the shooter.

#### Plan "B" - Alternatives

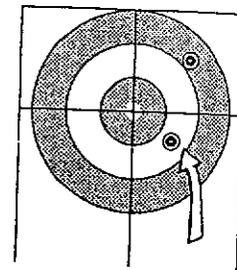
These examples of predictable actions that can occur when more than one rock is in play underline another aspect of skipping - looking for alternatives.

You must be aware of the position of each rock in the house. You must also stand well back in the house so that you can see each rock and the shooter as it comes toward you. In this position, look for ways that you can salvage some good from missed shots. This can be a simple precaution. Your second throw is a take-out a little wide and it is going to miss their shot rock. You have a rock behind their stone that this errant take-out might wick out. Call the sweeping to either miss your rock or to hit enough of it to stay.

There are many times when a *Plan B* shot works out better than what you called. You call for a double on two guards and the shooter comes out a little narrow, squeezes through the narrow port to hit shot rock and stay. In the *garbage game* that we discussed a little earlier, success is predicated on *plans B, C, D and E*.

*Plan B* shots can also be considered when you are deciding which shot to call. If you are facing two rocks and want to get rid of the lead rock, call the take-out in the direction that will give more chances for options. If the thrower tends to be heavy and wide on take-outs, play the turn so that if (s)he does come heavy and wide you will hit the back stone as an alternative.

You can also call *plan Bs* as a way to overcome one of your player's weaknesses. If you would like a raise take-out, but know that the thrower always bombs doubles so that you can't control direction with sweeping, clearly call a *normal* hit on the lead rock and sweep for the alternative raise hit. You will probably get the weight you wanted and, perhaps, make the raise.



#### PLAN 'B'

Call so that if you miss lead rock you have a good chance of hitting the second rock.

### What is draw weight

How fast is the ice?

It is essential that each player have an excellent feel for draw weight. At your home club you play often enough that you have an instinctive feel for weight. You know that the early morning draw is fast and at 7:00 p.m. it starts out very heavy.

The problems occur when you are playing on another club's ice. You must have some method of communicating the weight. The lead will have the best feel. When the skip squats in the hack and asks about draw weight, (s)he needs precise information.

There are many ways of describing draw weight:

One way is to reference to your own club's speed. This can be a crude measure "It's a little faster than the 9:00 p.m. draw".

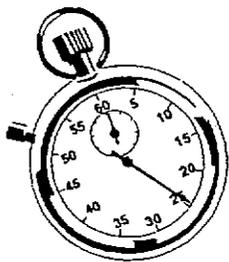
A more precise method is to develop a numbering system that relates to your home club. For example, set up a 10 point scale with 5 being the same speed as your club with higher numbers being faster and lower numbers slower.

### Stopwatches

Use a stopwatch. A stopwatch can measure the time a rock travels down the ice very precisely. The longer it takes – the faster the ice. The stopwatch can be a very valuable tool. You must learn to use it correctly.

Over what part of a rock's travel should we measure the time? There are at least two popular methods: from *hogline to stop* and from *touchdown to stop*. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

In *hogline to stop*, time starts when the rock crosses the first hog line. The advantage of waiting until the rock reaches the hogline is that the rock must (by rule) be travelling freely at that point. This effectively eliminates any differences in the players' deliveries. The rocks of the player that slides out in perfect Curl Canada form and the one who fires from the hack are both sliding freely at the hogline. The disadvantage is, that if the skip is timing the rock, it is very difficult to accurately determine when the rock actually crosses the hog line.



In *touchdown to stop*, time starts as soon as the player touches the rock to the ice during the delivery. It is much easier for the skip to determine when the rock first touches the ice. Obviously there will be large discrepancies between the Curl Canada curler's rock and the no-slide pusher's rock. This method should only be used if all four players have very similar deliveries.

In both methods, timing stops when the rock comes to rest. If the rock stops on the T-line, then the time is accurate for T-line draw weight. If it stops short or long, you must correct the time. As a general rule: add 0.1 seconds for each foot that the rock is in front of the T-line, and subtract the same for each foot behind.

Who should time the rocks?

I am sure that you have seen the skip who is using the stopwatch that his wife gave him for Christmas for the first time. Timing everything that moves, not being ready to sweep in the house, missing sweeping calls – because he is fumbling with the watch. This is an example of how a stopwatch can interfere with the skip's job. Timing should be done by the front end. They should time their opponents' rocks not their own. If you try to start and stop a watch while sweeping and judging weight – something will suffer. Not every draw needs timing. Early in the game, when the pebble is breaking down, it's valuable to time most draws. Later in the game you should time one or two an end to catch any changes that might occur.

If the skip insists on timing rocks, (s)he should follow the same guidelines. Never let a stopwatch interfere with reading the ice (both teams' rocks), calling sweeping for line or sweeping in the house.

A stopwatch is very useful in practice sessions. If you are attempting to have each player throw the same *normal weight* take-out, a stopwatch is an excellent way to measure consistency. Obviously in timing take-outs, the watch is stopped as the rock crosses the T-line.

### Bonspieling for Fun

One of the great things about curling is the opportunity to curl and socialize with friendly people across Canada and through many areas of the United States and Europe. Bonspiels come in many shapes and sizes. They are not only for the top notch teams.

Once you have become competent at the club level (win at least as many games as you lose), you should get into the fun bonspiel circuit. Start off with a one day point spiel. Most good teams avoid point spiels like the plague. You will be playing against teams that are there for the fun and camaraderie. This will give you a good opportunity to test your ability to adjust to foreign ice.

There are also weekend spiels in both points and knockout format. Pick spiels where the prizes are merchandise or pins and not cash. You should be playing against teams of similar ability. Most of these spiels focus equal attention on the curling and social activities. There are usually good home cooked meals and parties.

Many areas have special bonspiels for novices. These vary in qualifications with less than five years curling or never won a bonspiel as typical criteria.

The USA have wonderful social mixed spiels. These usually run for a four day weekend and include cocktail parties, dinners, breakfasts as well as curling. Prizes are usually bonspiel pins or small trophies.

The next level of spieling is the competitive spiel with many events. Typical formats are 96 teams or more competing in 10 to 20 separate events. The first three or four games are used to determine which event you will play in. So, if you lose your first three games you will be in a knockout event along with all the other teams that have lost three games. This type of bonspiel gives you an opportunity to play against, and probably get beat up by, teams that are much better than you. You can learn a lot from these games. You still have a chance of winning an event after sifting to your level.

At all bonspiels, be prepared to have a fun time. It is customary for players to trade pins. Bring your club pins and offer them to any opponents who do not have one. The trading usually occurs during the post game socializing.

There are often parties that are held in conjunction with the bonspiel that are not an official part of the spiel. To get invited to these, you need to be noticed by the people who do the inviting. Playing against a committee member is a great way, but that is a long shot. I've used a couple of attention getters. Recruit a front end that plays piano for sing-songs or has a repertoire of jokes. Dress your team up in matching outfits that are easily noticed (eg. bright red pants). Wear outlandish hats. Whatever the gimmick, get noticed and participate in all the activities.

Bonspieling, especially at out of town events, is a great way to improve your team. The competition, reading and throwing on strange ice all help. The chance to get to know each other both in competitive and social settings is invaluable in building compatibility. Compatibility is the single most important attribute of a good curling team.