

*Some Aspects
of Curling*

A TEAM GAME

BY

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Introduction

These pages are not an attempt at a treatise on all aspects of curling, but are written in the hope that it will give the inexperienced curler an insight into what goes on in a game. There is probably no game in which a new player may join and have so little idea of its fascination unless an experienced curler sits down and talks to her. All she sees is stones going down the ice without apparent rhyme or reason and so is apt soon to become bored.

It is perhaps the only game that can be thoroughly enjoyed by a beginner or novice player—not like tennis or golf where she is out-classed from the start. A beginner is only called upon to curl as well or better than her opponent. In most club games the teams are made up so that a beginner is curling lead against another beginning lead; so they should be evenly matched. If they curl well, so much the better, if not nobody else's fun is spoiled.

Remember this when starting and don't worry what your skip thinks of you. If she is a curler at heart she will welcome another into the joys of the game and help you all she can. Don't hesitate to ask questions of her (not the other lead) for the more questions you ask the more quickly you will understand and enjoy the game.

The game is unique in that physical prowess has no bearing on one's ability to curl. As long as one can bend one's knees one can curl. We know of no other game where men or women of twenty-one and eighty-four years of age can be playing on the same team. In such cases eighty-four will, in all probability, be the better curler. The opportunity of making close friends of all ages, sorts and kinds is one of the happiest aspects of the grand old game.

Curling is about the only sport adults play as a team. No curler plays a complete shot nor can she. The success or failure of each shot is due to four people's thinking:—the skip's strategy and the ice she gives, the two sweepers' judgment of speed and knowledge of the ice, and the players' weight and direction to the broom. All four must work hard on all eight shots, not just on one.

These pages are intended to help the new curler become a working member of such a team.

The Ice

The path a stone takes down the rink is governed by the ice. A player does not control the bend of a stone.

The ice surface of any sheet of ice will be different every day because of the weather, and the care or the use it gets. It also may change drastically more than once during a game especially if the freezing machinery goes on or off. (A team quick to notice these things and use them is a winning one.) It is usually the losing skip or team who "beefs" about poor ice. After all, both rinks are playing upon the same sheet.

All the four members of a team should look for, find and remember how each part of their sheet behaves. Every sheet is pretty sure to have slow spots, runs, wide bends or fall offs in it. A player cannot make a good shot unless she remembers these variations in the ice surface, and their location.

The first end on a fresh sheet of ice is almost always slow and takes quite a rugged heave to get the stone to the rings; but as the pebble wears down the ice generally becomes faster. However, the outer edges that are not used as often as the center usually remain slow and require more weight than when the stone is put down the center of the ice.

Wipe the soles of your shoes before stepping on the ice!

The Turn

It is virtually impossible to make a stone go down the ice straight, for somewhere along its path it will start to turn one way or the other because of some unevenness in the surface of the ice. Therefore to know which way it will go we put a turn or slight "spin" on it to start with.

A stone should make about four revolutions on its trip down the ice. If it revolves more slowly, it is apt to lose its turn or pick up a reverse one. If it spins quite rapidly it tends to run straighter and carry farther than the correctly laid stone; and at times will take an erratic course. Also a spinning stone sometimes stops rather abruptly and does not get the final bend of a smoother running one.

For an in-turn the palm of the hand turns toward the body—for an out-turn the hand turns out from the body with just a flick of the wrist.

Don't let yourself get to thinking one turn is harder than the other—that's nonsense.

Keep the soles of your shoes clean!

Sweeping

The origin of sweeping was to clean leaves, twigs and bits of ice or even sand and pebbles from the path of the stones on out door ice. Since then it has been proven that the friction of the broom on the ice momentarily melts the surface producing a tiny bit of moisture which acts as a lubricant and so reduces the friction of the stone causing it to run farther. It also tends to take some of the "bend" off, especially with light weight.

Good rhythmic sweeping, with some weight on the broom, is not hard but does take practice, and should be learned early. If a good rhythm is maintained it is not exhausting.

Sweeping should be done near the stones but far enough away to avoid any chance of touching them. The closer the broom is, the more effective the sweeping. Sweep across the path of the stone never at the side!

Never run in the path of the stone and *never* take your eyes off it for more than a fraction of a second, for a moving stone can knock your feet out from under you too easily. A broken wrist or ankle is no help to your side.

Sweep the stone until it stops. Don't let up when you see the stone slowing down—keep at it until it stops.

When a stone reaches the house the skip may prefer to sweep it on alone. She will say, "I'll take it." Let her and get out of the way for she is fresh.

In sweeping the last stone before it is your turn to play your shots, ease up on your sweeping; then walk, don't run, back to the hack. Be sure you have caught your breath and have relaxed before you play your shot.

When a stone stops with something under it never say, "It picked up a straw." It was your business to see that it did not do just that.

Sweepers should remember a stone must be completely over the hog line to be left in play but a stone striking such a stone and so being prevented from crossing the hog line remains on the ice.

Watch the skip's signals so you will know what shot is called for and so can sweep accordingly.

Be alert to stop a stone which hits the boards and bounces back into the house as it may move another stone.

Both sweepers may be on the same side of a stone if they are more comfortable that way. Usually the vice sweeps next the stone, then the two, but the stronger sweeper should be next to it.

A bit of sand or grit on the ice and caught by a running stone will cause it to change direction sharply and stop short. Watch your shoes—they can track in mud and pebbles which do nobody any good.

The Draw Shot

Without question the hardest shot for a skip to play under pressure is the cold draw to the rings—the shot the lead is called upon to play nine times out of ten in a competition. For it must have absolutely perfect weight, neither a foot too far nor a foot too short, and its direction must be perfect as it usually must go between other stones out in front. Yet this is the shot most called for from the number one, and by them often thought of as stupid and simple. It is only those skips who have had the years of practice or drill in the draw shot obtained playing number one position that can count on this shot under pressure. It has won many games!!

The Simple Take Out

When a single stone is to be taken out never do it with more than back of the rings weight! Any fire stone is all right if the stone is hit squarely but if hit at an angle your stone will go out too and therefore is lost; while if you play your shot with just enough weight to push the opposing stone out no matter what angle you strike it your stone usually stays in the rings as a counter.

The need does arise for a heavy take out when it is necessary, due to guards, to get through a narrow port that will not allow for the bend a lighter stone will take—but is not called for more than once or twice in a game of 10 or 12 ends.

Always (and this is most important) play the simple take outs with the *same weight*. Only if you do this can a skip know what ice to give you for your shot. It is always better to have a take out strike and roll a bit one way or another; so unless the skip is sure of the weight of your stone, she cannot give the correct ice for the roll she wishes and the wrong roll can be disastrous.

The reasons for a roll are that if your stone stays in the same place it is easier for the opposition to duplicate your shot than to play on a different path in the ice. Also if your shot can be made to roll behind a guard or onto a stone its value is doubled.

A narrower broom is given for this than a draw for the stone will reach its objective before it has completed its bend.

The Double Takeout

The double takeout is when a shot strikes an opponent's stone and ricochets to strike a second one and pushes them both out. If one thinks of it as merely hitting the first stone at an angle with hack weight it will seem simpler. Hack weight may be defined as enough to bump the back boards. The farther apart the two stones to be moved are, the heavier must be the shot. It is most *important* to be on the broom on this shot.

The Promote or Raise

To promote a stone from the front of the rings to the tee use only enough weight for your stone to reach the tee. The ice given will be a bit narrower for your stone will strike the other before completion of its bend.

Other Shots

In wick, out wick, wick and curl in, chap and lie, chap and roll, chip the winner—all these shots commonly used are hard to describe in words and are best learned in play. Most of them are played to ricochet, (carom or wick) off another stone.

Responsibilities of All Members of the Team

To know the ice! It is just as important for the lead, two and vice to know the ice as for the skip.

To do this requires the player to watch every shot, their opponents as well as their own.

A good lead will know the speed of the ice by watching her own and her opponent's first stones. So should the others. From then on as each stone travels over a different sector of the ice a player should watch it and remember its path (e.g. the bend or fall, the slow or fast spots). Only by noticing these things can a player know just how to play if her skip asks her for a similar shot, or know the weight her skip expects from the broom she gives.

The speed of a stone is primarily the responsibility of the sweepers, for they can judge it seconds before the skip who is far down the ice. Here again is reason to know the ice.

The skip will call the sweeping for direction and can always stop the sweeping by yelling but sweepers should always pick up a stone at once if they think it to be too light.

Different players stones run differently. Those stones delivered with a smooth follow through have a run, while those pushed or choked tend to stop more suddenly, as does a spinning stone.

The remembrance of these things can make winners out of poor shots.

Always be on the skips broom even if you may not agree with it. If you give the right weight and are on her broom that is all you should do. If you don't take her broom the skip will not know if you can do it, or what the ice will do in that particular place, and she may begin to alter her broom for what she thinks is your weakness then suddenly you take her broom with disastrous results.

Never play a shot unless you know what is called for. Ask the skip to repeat her directions.

Also be sure you know how the stones lie in the house. This can be done by looking at the house carefully every time you sweep a stone down.

Think before you play each shot; if it is safer to be wide or narrow, heavy or light. Sometimes damage can be done by only one of these four errors, while being a little off in one of these directions may have several useful alternative results.

Never buck your skip. She needs your confidence. She is lonely in the house and is trying her hardest.

You will not enjoy your game if you are critical of your skip and the team talks about it. All you should have time to think about is beating your opponent and being on the broom.

Obtain a rule book and read it. Curling is unique in that there are no penalties for violation of rules, so it is most embarrassing for all concerned if they are violated.

The Lead

Elsewhere we have discussed the necessity of the lead's learning the ice as soon as possible, and her responsibility for sweeping. As lead and second sweep more stones than the vice, they should watch this carefully.

The lead has two shots—the draw and the simple take out. It is far better for her draws to be a bit short than through the house. A stone through the house is a lost stone while a short one can always be promoted later or drawn around so it becomes a guard.

Her takeout should never be more than back of the rings weight for if she goes out, too, it is again a lost stone. If the opposing stone is in the back of the house and her stone just rests on it, that's better than a lost stone, for it cuts the opposing stone out and is anchored so the opposition cannot take it out.

There is the feeling around that the lead is a lowly position of no importance. How wrong can you be! A good ice reader and judge of sweeping is of utmost value. And if the lead puts her shots as directed the team is then in command of the end and can build it their way, forcing the opposition into the defensive. If she misses, her team is forced to play the end as the opposition chooses.

The lead and second are the ones to clear the house of stones and prepare them for the next end. The lead should sweep all dirt from the front of the hack at the beginning of each end.

Practice at every opportunity.

The Second

The second must know the ice and judge the sweeping of a stone for speed as we have explained elsewhere. All that is under the heading of "The Lead" applies to the Second player, but she will be called on for a variety of shots.

The test of a good second is if she can play a firm take out on her first shot and a long guard on her next one. She must remember that she must not be light when her side has the last shot for nothing is worse than for her skip to come to play her last stone and have the front all cluttered up.

The Third or Vice

Everything said about the Lead and Second holds true for the vice. But a vice should be able to play every shot there is. For if the first two have missed their shots the vice will have to correct the resulting poor position.

The vice must know the ice for she has to give the broom for the skip and call the sweeping on those final all important last shots. She must have a working knowledge of strategy. Of course when it is the skip's turn to play, she may call her own shots and ice but it should not be necessary and tends to delay the game.

If a measure is needed to determine the winning stone or stones, it is the vice's responsibility to do so or to call an umpire. All others must stay out of the house. Place brooms on stones to be measured so no one will move them.

A vice should never move a stone or allow one to be moved at the completion of an end until she and the opposing vice have verbally agreed on the score.

Vice is also responsible for the *morale* of the rink.

If the skip has a difficult last shot into a crowded house tell her if she made it or not. She probably can't see and she is too interested to wait calmly until the score is posted.

The Skip

A good skip is only developed by practice and experience in competition, not by reading all the books there are.

A skip is expected to be able, under pressure, to play every shot and in any sequence.

She must read the ice quickly and accurately, must notice any change in it as it occurs, for she is entirely responsible for giving the correct ice for her team's shots.

She should know her players' abilities, likes and dislikes. For often

it may work better to call a player for a shot of which she is confident than the strategic one. She must know what weight each player prefers when asked to take out in order to give the correct ice. She must know if each player tends to be wide or narrow, light or heavy, and adjust her ice accordingly as well as plan her strategy around that knowledge.

She must be quick to notice the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition players. Many games are won because a skip realized the opposing second or skip hesitated to play a promote or an out turn draw.

Skips should develop the signals given by her broom with care. They should be clear and definite. Signals so given should be sufficient and no voice needed, except in unusual situations.

It is wise for the skip to tell the sweepers what shot she is to play, for often she has discussed it with the vice and so no signals are given.

If a player's shot is off the broom or wrong weight she should watch for an alternative result and sweep for it.

She should stand on the tee line when holding the broom so her players may have a basic point from which to judge distances. Sometimes if a player continues to be light, it helps if the skip steps back a bit or if the player is heavy to move forward.

Keep it in mind the skip is not an old so-and-so, but throughout a game, very lonesome—you don't know how lonesome until you yourself have to play a last gasper through a narrow port to the two foot to win, with nothing behind the tee to rest on. Don't let her expression throw you. Some get an awful granite faced look—that's concentration, not being ugly—and some have eyes not as good as they used to be, too.

Odd Items of Strategy

It is harder to take out a stone on the outer edges of the circles than one in the center.

If you are scoring stone on the side, with the center open, and the shot called to the front of the house—if it is a bit heavy, it is better to sweep it through and out than to leave it behind the button for the opposition to rest on.

Don't let two of your scoring stones get close together if you can help it, for it invites a double take out. However, make them touch if possible—then only one is apt to go unless they are side by side.

It is better to rest on an opponent's stone in the back of the rings than take it out, for it will take two opponent's shots to move yours.

Always get a second shot in the rings, if opponents have several in, before going for shot. Otherwise, they may blow a big end on you and one big end is equal to many one ends.

Use the first two ends to study the ice. Use as great a part of the sheet as you can by in-turns or out-turns, or if possible force your opponent to play the strange ice first.

Remember to play for the score. Sometimes it is better to let the opponents have a one end, especially in the next to last end, in order to have the last shot in the last end. If behind and you lie one, it may be wise to gamble on a shot to give you a big end.

Remember the opposing skip can miss too; so plan your game to put pressure on her not yourself.

If you lie shot with many stones out in front it may be wiser to hog your shot than risk opening up the front.

A stone away off the broom and running down the side boards is of no value unless it reaches the rings so sweep it all the way for it may reach the outer edge of the side of the rings.

Keeping the Game Going

A game that moves along steadily and smoothly is a joy but one that drags is a bore and can be agony for all involved, and quite unnecessary.

Each player should be ready to play her shot when it is her turn, not be half way down the ice looking at the house. Immediately your opponent has played her shot get your stone ready. Long standing in the hack does not help a shot unless one is out of breath from sweeping.

Players, after sweeping a stone down the ice, should immediately go to the sides of the ice so as not to interfere with the *opposing player's* view of her skip's directions.

Players should at all times stay out of the house.

Stand still when any player is about to play her stone.

The vice should start down to the house as soon as her last stone has been delivered, not after it has come to rest. She can see what it does as she walks down.

The skip should always be planning the next shot to call while the opposition is playing hers. She may need to plan several alternative ones so she will be ready at once.

There are very few times when lengthy conferences are necessary. There is usually only one shot that is the correct one to call. If the skip cannot decide quickly *she should not be a skip*. Occasionally a skip will need time to figure out a difficult situation—then she should take all the time she needs—but not on every shot.

Players should start immediately, after the thirds have noted the score, to clear the house and prepare for the next end.

Safety Rules

Remember falls on the ice are dangerous.

Stones weigh forty pounds so:—

1. Never step backwards in or around the house without looking.
2. Never take your eyes off a moving stone when sweeping.
3. Never push a stone towards another's feet.
4. Watch opponents' stones—they may come near the boards where you are standing.
5. On take out shots, or any striking stone anticipate where stones will go. Keep out of their way!
6. Never carry or lift a stone—push it.
7. As soon as a stone is out of play push it into its corner out of the way.
8. Always wipe your feet before going on the ice—dirt on your shoes or on the ice may spoil a shot or cause a fall.
9. When not sweeping keep near the boards, out of the way.
10. When smoking, cigarettes should always be put into trays.
11. Hairpins can cause a fall or stop the run of a stone.

Customs

The manner of deciding who has last stone in the first end varies in different localities. In some the leads toss a coin, in others the vices do so. Other places the leads toss a broom and the last one to be able to get her hand on the handle wins. Sometimes whichever team is on the top of the bracket may go first.

It is customary most places for the thirds only to post the score, but for the second to keep the score card, if there is one.

The blue stones usually are given to the skip of the team representing the oldest club, or if a club match, to the senior skip.

Winners treat the losers after a game.

A skip may choose to play the stones of lead position and it is done frequently.

Delivering A Stone

The fine points of the delivery of a stone are better left to others but here are a few fundamentals to remember:

1. Put your foot squarely in the hack, not twisted on its side—weight balanced—*never forward*.
2. Face the broom squarely—not the center line.
3. Keep low, only high enough to keep your arm straight.
4. *Swing* the stone with your arm always straight. Let your arm follow all the way through after the stone leaves your hand. Don't push, let the stone flow off your fingers.
5. Left foot must slide back with backswing and forward with forward swing but do *not* let it get ahead of stone.
6. Keep shoulders straight through entire delivery—don't twist.
7. *Keep your eye always on the broom*—never look at the stone.
8. Hold the stone lightly.
9. Desired weight is obtained by length of backswing. The heavier the shot the longer the backswing—never by pushing.
10. There are only four fundamental weights for all curling shots: guard weight, tee weight, back of rings, and hack weight. Any spot between these objectives can be reached by good sweeping. The one shot used beyond these is the seldom needed fire stone, a heavy shot, to break up a house or remove several stones. A skip and third should be able to play this.
11. Always clean the bottom of the stone and don't leave the dirt you have removed just where you are to place your stone.

Cause and Correction of Common Faults

Stubbing a stone—

1. Getting the body or left foot ahead of the stone on the forward swing.
2. Holding the handle too far back.

Off the Broom—

1. Bent elbow especially on out-turn.
2. Looking at the stone not the broom.
3. Not facing squarely to the broom.
4. Turning handle on back swing.

To correct try bringing hand up to level of eyes on follow through. It should end in direct line between eyes and broom.

Loss of Power—

1. Choking stone by holding it and not allowing it to flow off finger tips.
2. Not high enough backswing.
3. Checking stone on back swing—not letting it flow freely.

Glossary

Back of the rings weight—a stone delivered with enough force to reach the back of the circles.

Bend—the curve in the direction of the turn of a stone as it slows down to a stop. The amount of bend depends on the ice—also called curl or draw.

Come to, or kiss—to make a stone just touch another but not move it—crack an egg on it.

Curl—the same as bend.

Draw—a shot that comes to rest in the circles without striking another stone. Sometimes used to denote bend.

Draw weight—force necessary to make stone stop in circles.

End—part of the game when all 16 stones have been delivered in one direction and points are scored.

Fall off, or fall—when a stone bends the opposite way from the turn which has been put on it either as it is travelling down the ice or as it slows to a stop.

Fire stone—a very fast shot.

Freeze onto—when a stone comes to rest touching another stone, sometimes called kissing or cracking an egg on it.

Guard—to place a stone in front of another so as to guard it, or the name of a stone so placed. A long guard is one placed far in front of the house.

Hack—the holes in the ice in which to put your foot to deliver a stone.

Hack weight—weight required for stone to bump the back boards.

Hog—a stone which does not cross the hog line—a line about 15 feet in front of the circles. Such a stone must be taken off the ice unless prevented from crossing the line by another stone.

House—the part of the ice covered by the circles, or the stones as they lie in the circles during an end. Also called head.

- Ice**—the sheet of ice played upon. Also the distance to one side the broom must be put to have a shot reach the desired spot due to its bend.
- Lead**—the first player on a team.
- Light**—a stone delivered with too little power or a short stone.
- Narrow**—to be narrow—a stone delivered inside of the broom; narrow ice—ice with very little bend; narrow broom—one placed near the objective as is necessary for fast shots.
- Pebble**—the slightly rough surface added to the original ice bed.
- Port**—a narrow open space between two stones.
- Promote or raise**—to strike a stone which is in front of the circles and push it in to a desired spot.
- Rink**—the building in which you play; the four members of a team.
- Roll**—to strike a stone and slide a bit one or the other way.
- Run**—the smooth passage of a well delivered stone. A track in the ice which may cause a stone to follow it.
- Sheet**—the playing surface of ice for a game.
- Shot**—word used to denote stone scoring at a certain time. The playing of a stone.
- Tee**—the mark in the center of the circles.
- Tee line**—the horizontal line through the tee; also called the sweeping score.
- Turn**—the spin put on a stone on delivery. In-turn—the palm turns in to the body. Out-turn—the palm turns out from the body.
- Vice**—the name given to the third player—vice skip.
- Weight**—the amount of force put into the delivery of a stone—the speed of a stone.
- Wick**—to ricochet or bounce off another stone.
- Wide**—the reverse of narrow—a stone delivered outside the broom; wide ice—ice with a wide bend; wide broom—one placed far from objective as for a draw shot.

Don't bemoan or alibi your poor shot. Your neighbor is not interested. *You just missed it!*