

// TRAINING TIPS FROM JON

Who is the teacher?

By Jon Mielke, U.S. Curling News Columnist

There are teams that I love playing against in league games and others that I hate playing – and it has nothing to do with the prospects of winning or losing. I love playing teams where it doesn't take all four players to repeatedly decide what shot to play and with players who are always ready to go when it is their turn to shoot.

Against teams like this, we are assured of playing a full eight-end game in less than two hours. On the other hand, teams with players who are never ready when it is their turn – and where it often takes a caucus of all four team members to make basic strategy calls – make it difficult to get in even a six-end game before time runs out. Standing out on the ice to time-and-again wait for the other team to do something takes a lot of the fun out of the game.

But how do new curlers learn basic rules and proper etiquette? Some clubs wisely make basic rules and etiquette a part of their introductory Learn to Curl sessions. They may even have related handouts for new members. In most cases, however, new curlers learn how to play the game and how to conduct themselves based on instructions that they receive from their teammates. For a variety of reasons related instructions are never delivered or assimilated. It is hard to fault someone for inappropriate behavior if he or she simply do not know any better.

With these thoughts in mind, here are some suggestions on rules and etiquette for both new and not-so-new curlers:

Start on time – Many curlers seem to think that a 7 p.m. start time means getting to the club by 7 p.m. It doesn't! Get to the club early enough to get dressed, stretch, get to your sheet, shake hands, and be ready to deliver the first rock at the prescribed start time. Starting late means you probably won't be able to play a whole game. Keeping everyone else waiting is not cool.

Be ready to shoot when the preceding rock comes to rest – Players are often out of position when it is their turn to shoot. They may be sitting on a bench at mid-sheet or they are off somewhere looking for their slider.

Except for skips, the next shooter on a team

should ideally be behind the hack when the opposing player is delivering his/her stone. As soon as that player is sliding down the ice, the next shooter should move his/her rock into position next to the hack. The rock should be cleaned and the player should be standing behind the hack waiting for the skip to call the next shot. As soon as the shot is called, the shooter should step into the hack and be ready to go. Quick math illustrates that **wasting an average of 10 seconds per shot will delay an eight-end game by 21 minutes** (16 rocks per end x 8 ends x 10 seconds = 21 minutes).

Sweepers should also be in position and ready for the next shot. They should be waiting just outside the near hog line. When the opponent's shot passes them, they should move toward the hack and be ready to go. Don't waste everybody's time by being out of position when it is your team's turn to shoot.

Yield the ice – All players need to remember that the ice belongs to the opposing team as soon as your team's rock comes to rest. Your team's skip should get out of the house and stand behind the back line and the rest of your players should move to the sidelines between the hoglines. Don't walk down the middle of the sheet toward the other end. Get out of the way and stand still. Don't make the other team wait because you are in the way.

Skips should think ahead – Skips need to pay attention to what the other skip is calling. Even before their shot is thrown, think about what you will do if they make the shot. Don't wait until their rock is thrown to start thinking about what you want to do.

Skips can hone related skills by being familiar with and employing SHEETZ (shot calling is influenced by the **S**core, who has the **H**ammer, what **E**nd is being played, the **E**nvironment [ice conditions, unmatched stones, etc.], **T**eam's abilities [yours and theirs], and **F**ree Guard **Z**one strategies and tactics). Skips – think ahead and be ready to call the next shot. It is a huge time saver.

Thirds contribute to shot calling only when asked. They should constantly evaluate what is going on and should have their own idea of what shot to play. **I**f the skip asks – have a quick and



definitive answer. Leads and seconds almost never go into the house to discuss shot options. These front-end players should go to the other end of the ice and move the skip's stone to the hack in preparation for the next shot.

Stay out of the house when the end is over – When an end is over it is up to the thirds to agree on the resulting score. Other players should stay out of the house. Everyone is anxious to know the outcome, but it doesn't speed things up if front-end players are in the house trying to measure stones with their brooms. Skips should move to the other end and leads and seconds should carefully remove rocks that are not in question and get in position to start the next end.

Timely play is everyone's job – Make it one of your personal and team goals to contribute to quick play. Playing fast does not mean that you have to hurry. It just means that you are paying attention to things that waste time. By paying attention to these details, you will actually find the game more enjoyable and you will be taking a major step toward honoring the spirit of the game.

Curling ice is sacred – Curling ice is unlike any other ice in the world. It is scraped flat and then pebbled with purified/deionized water that is heated to precise temperatures in an attempt to drive out oxygen and produce harder pebble that will last a whole game. Club volunteers go to great lengths to produce good ice that makes the game fun. Don't spoil it by wearing dirty shoes or by kneeling on the ice at the end of your delivery. Warm knees and hands melt pebble and produce flat spots in the ice. These flat spots eventually lead to missed shots by both teams. And, remember to thank ice makers for all their work – they are universally over-worked, under-paid and under-appreciated.

So, who is the teacher? Who helps new curlers learn proper etiquette? The quick and easy answer – we all do. Teaching and learning take place at Learn to Curl sessions, during games, and after games during broomstacking. It is done

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