



(a subsidiary of TRUE NORTH CURLING INC.)

PRESENTS THE COACHING SERIES...

“A PANE IN THE GLASS”

Bits and Bites

by Bill Tschirhart

I remember vividly my English teachers cautioning us "not to ramble" in written or spoken discourse. Well, with due respect to all my English teachers, this article is designed to ramble. I want to touch on many short topics which I hope collectively will make you a more precise curler. Nothing here really relates to any of the traditional topics with which we deal but are nonetheless important.

SLIDERS

Of all the pieces of personal equipment used by the curler, clearly the most important has to be the slider. I won't get into the debate of steel vs. teflon or slip-on vs. permanent but rather the advice to all curlers is to cool the slider regardless of its material prior to that first practice slide from the hack.

The reason is quite simple really. A warm slider (fresh from the curling lounge) over pebble will clearly adversely affect that pebble. Now, get eight curlers with the aforementioned warm sliders all sliding from the hack at the home end and you have done great damage to what is arguably the most important piece of real estate on the sheet.

Ice technicians are frequently chastised for the "fudging" that takes place in the house when the real culprits are the curlers themselves.

One of the best ways to cool that slider is to step onto the ice (gripper foot first remember), take one trip down the side of the sheet, across the away end and back to the home end down the other side. Not only will that cool the slider, but for novice curlers, it will get your "sea legs" under you and get you ready for a few hours on nature's best form of water.

Oh, and by the way, I chuckle when I see eight curlers waiting to take turns for that

practice slide at the home end. Hello, there is a hack at the other end of the ice! I make it a ritual to use that hack and I usually have it all to myself while six of the other seven stand around waiting their turn.

GRIPPER - GRIPPER

While we're on the subject of footwear, let's talk about the opposite sole material, the gripper. On this subject I wish to make two points.

First, next time the ice technician sweeps the ice following a game, take notice of the debris that collects. Among other disgusting elements in the dust pan, you will notice tiny black beads. Guess what those might be? Yep, rubber from grippers which should be collecting a pension. When stones "pick", those tiny black beads of rubber are frequently the culprits. On the ice, they are so tiny, they are almost invisible. But to the running surface of a stone, they might as well be a mountain. How do you rectify the problem? Spend the \$30 dollars at the start of each season to purchase new grippers...which brings me to point two. You will notice in the previous paragraph that I used the plural form of the noun "gripper". You should have them on both feet unless you are getting ready to actually deliver the stone. There are a few reasons for this.

Modern brushing technique almost demands that brushers brush on either side of the stone. The footwork required by brushing is very different from that employed by sweeping. It is extremely awkward to brush with someone on the same side of the stone. With a slider - gripper combination, you are restricted to brushing on the side of the stone which has your slider foot as the lead foot so that the gripper foot can push you forward. This is the push/glide technique that we all learned many years ago. But, when the situation dictates brushing on the opposite side of the stone, the slider - gripper combination is reversed. Now the slider foot is the back foot and...well, you can visualize the problem I'm sure. The solution should be obvious. Put a gripper on both feet! To be sure, the footwork must be developed to accommodate gripper - gripper. Both feet will point more or less forward and a type of shuffle step (some liken it to the footwork employed in cross country skiing) will result but it's not difficult to learn.

Exercise physiologists have also discovered reasons for the gripper - gripper combination over the slider - gripper configuration. Over the course of a game, if one was to travel on the slider - gripper setup, there is a significant physical strain placed on the knee of the slider leg as its support tissues are asked to sustain the knee joint. With the gripper - gripper combination, this knee tension is not present. Also, from a recovery point of view, the gripper - gripper situation forces the athlete to walk and when one does so, the rate of recovery from sustained vigorous exercise (i.e. brushing a draw) is much better than with the slider - gripper configuration. Who would have thought?

With gripper/gripper (and appropriate brushing technique) you will place more downward pressure on the brush head.

Lastly, there is an obvious safety issue, especially for new curlers and those who perhaps have had too many birthday celebrations. It just makes good sense. That ice is slippery in case you hadn't noticed!

MEASURING STONES

One of my favourite trivia questions is, "When is the official conclusion of an end of curling?". The answer is, "When the thirds/vice-skips/mates have agreed on the score of the end." You knew that didn't you! But more screw ups occur at that point than any other. So permit me a few observations.

First, when the last stone of the end comes to rest, unless you have heard the conversation between the thirds and have seen one of them begin to remove stones, don't touch anything! It's just a tad embarrassing to kick stones off the playing surface only to learn that the stones you removed are part of a discussion regarding the score of the end. What's the rush?

If you are the third of the team, when you feel that your team has scored, please speak clearly to all in attendance the colour of the scoring stone(s) and the number. "One red!" "Three yellow!" Don't just say the number of scoring stones. There has been more than one case where the thirds, after surveying the scene, looked at one another, said "One", nodded agreement, removed the stones then proceeded to both walk to the scoreboard to place the end tag. Oops! Talk about embarrassing! All for the sake of saying the colour! That's like that whole Y2K confusion all for the sake of two silly digits.

We all know the process when the thirds can't agree on the score. It's time to measure. Now the confusion can really begin especially when three stones are involved. Yikes! But let's begin with stone measurement 101.

If you are NOT the third for your team, stay completely away. Above all, don't put a brush down on the ice to indicate the stones to be measured. I don't know how that got started but to the person who first had the idea, "thanks for nothing". First it's dangerous to have a brush on the ice. Step on the handle and the next view you might have is the ceiling of the curling club and the new red marking on the ice could very likely be there compliments of your circulatory system. That brush on the ice can be easily kicked into one of the stones about to be measured and technically, the measurement has been voided.

Just don't do it! Keep the brushes in your hands. If you are going to be directly involved in the measurement, give your brush to a teammate to hold for you.

New measuring devices are very sensitive and easy to use. It's rare indeed for a new measuring device to be unable to distinguish shot stone. If you have attended an officiating course, you learn that you should push the device forward to the stones in a clockwise direction. Certainly the clockwise direction is arbitrary but pushing the device forward toward the stones removes the possibility that the measurer will accidentally bump into a stone. When the stones are measured and the shot stone identified, verbalize the colour of the scoring stone. You also might either move the non-shot stone away from the button or move the shot stone toward the button. Measuring three stones can be confusing. The thing to remember is, *measure the odd coloured stone first* and compare the measure to the stones of the same colour.

Oh, and by the way, please place the score on the scoreboard at the first opportunity! It's better for players and spectators and now that so many bonspiels have end-by-end scoring, the person charged with that responsibility and your legion of fans eagerly awaiting the score at their computers around the globe will be grateful!

EXTRA ENDS

At first glance you might think that this is a section on strategy as it applies to extra ends. No! It's much simpler than that although if you want to talk extra end strategy, contact me and we'll chat.

Extra ends are played in one of two fashions. Continuous play seems to have gained in popularity. Continuous play occurs when the extra end is played toward the scoreboard end of the sheet. In other words, play continues as though the "extra end" was simply the next end in play.

The more traditional fashion of play for the extra end is the one that gained its popularity in clubs where spectators are marooned behind the glass at the home end of the sheet. For their sake, the stones were taken to the away end, and the extra end was played "toward the glass". If the extra end were inadvertently blanked, the stones were again taken to the away end the next extra end was played (hopefully to a conclusion). So, what's the problem?

Statistics will show that more stones "pick" in extra ends played toward the glass than at any other time in a game. The reason is simple. The stones are placed in the corners at the end of the sheet where debris collects. That's why we clean the running surface of a stone prior to its delivery. When stones are returned to the away end, they are taken out of those debris laden corners and moved down the center of the sheet, dropping debris as they go. As the extra end develops, stones begin to strike the debris and voila, PICK, at the most inopportune time.

The answer to this is simple. When the stones are taken to the away end, move them down the sides of the sheets!

DON'T TOUCH THE STONES

This one is for skips and thirds. When you indicate a takeout, don't touch the opposing team's stone to so indicate. Figure out some other sort of signal but stones should NEVER be touched until an end officially comes to an end. I don't care if you see the "elite curlers" on TV do it or not. Be right! Don't ever touch a stone! It's against the rules!

RULE VIOLATIONS

For unsupervised play, the onus for indicating rule infractions is 100% the responsibility of the offending team, full stop. If you feel that your opponent is breaching a rule, forget it! There's nothing you can or should do about it! Do not under any circumstances draw the perceived rule infraction to the attention of the opposition. It will only cause ill will and distraction.

But, when a team or member of the offending team DOES breach a rule and declares it, in many cases, the non-offending skip has the responsibility of selecting from a few options at his/her disposal. Know what they are! That's YOUR responsibility! Don't look the offending team in the eye and shrug your shoulders because you don't know the rules. You should! To that end, get a rule book and learn the rules of the game especially those for which the non-offending team has options from which to choose. It's a good idea to deal with the rules, there aren't many (see "golf rules") one at a time at games or practices.

If you are the offending team, once you have declared the rule violation, your role in the matter has concluded. You have no right whatsoever to complain about the option selected by the opposition. You caused the problem. Live with its consequences whatever they may be!

PLAYDOWN ENTRY

When your team enters the playdown trail leading to a provincial/territorial, national or international championship, make sure, barring unforeseen circumstances, all members of the team are able to play throughout the playdown journey. Don't enter at the club or zone level *just for the fun of it!* If that's your motivation, enter a funspiel, not playdowns. Too many teams work long and hard to be competitive to have four club players enter *just for fun*. Don't misunderstand! I'm all for having lots of teams enter playdowns but do so for the right reason and that reason is to win the provincial/territorial, national or international title. It's not to see how you'll do at the early stages then when success results and your team is expected to continue in the process, you start to consider dropping out as vacations had been planned etc. That's not fair to anyone, not the least of which are those teams, that you beat fair and square, who did all that hard work in hopes of advancing. You owe it to them

and your selves to be prepared to go all the way.

So, when your team considers entering playdowns, look down the calendar road and make sure your team is committed to all the stages along the way even though you feel reaching those later stages is unlikely!

SAFETY

Early in this diatribe I mentioned that when indicating a measurement at the conclusion of an end, don't place your brush on the ice to so indicate. It's dangerous! That applies anytime by the way, especially in practices. When you need to place your brush somewhere, place it on the end or side boards, not on the ice. If a curler was to inadvertently step onto a brush resting on the ice, that brush will slip easily resulting in a very awkward fall to the ice. It's not worth the risk!

The same is true for stones. Obviously when stones are in play, they may be anywhere on the ice. But when the end is over, place the stones in their designated areas in the corners of the ice. In practice, if a stone is not being used in a drill for example, place it in a similar location. Stepping on a stone inadvertently can result in serious injury. Make the whole team aware of the dangers of misplaced brushes and stones.

HANDS & KNEES

When you release the stone, don't watch it from a hands and knees position! Stand on your feet. It's against the rules to do anything, I said anything that is detrimental to the integrity of the ice surface.

BRUSHES

The synthetic brush seems to be the industry standard at this time. That said, many prefer, this ink-stained wretch included, a natural hair brush. If it's the former, when you begin to see dirt between the weave of the synthetic material on the head of the brush, it's in your best interests to clean it. That dirt greatly diminishes the effectiveness of the brushing. Cleaning it is simply a matter of warm, soapy water and an old toothbrush or fingernail brush. Keep it clean and all that blood, sweat and tears from brushing will be well-served! Elite curlers sometimes change synthetic brush heads during a game. What does that tell you? If you use a natural hair brush, news flash, they don't last forever. When you start to see the first hairs leave the brush head, buy a new one!

Enjoy working with your athletes. I'll see you soon behind a pane in the glass!