TRUE NORTH COACHING *presents*

A PANE IN THE GLASS BY BILL TSCHIRHART

TEAM TECHNICAL CHECK-UP

You've heard it before from many sources, this series included; for a team to perform well in its competitive environment, it must become greater than the sum of its parts. Becoming greater than the sum of one's parts usually means a "warm-side-of-the-glass" focus (i.e. team dynamics, mental preparation, game plan, nutrition and physical preparation) but when a team calls upon me for some assistance, one of the first "cold-side-of-the-glass" diagnostic procedures I perform is a team technical check-up and it's not complicated or revolutionary. Most coaches are already aware of some if not all of its elements but few see it as a package with huge ramifications to over-all performance.

The "team technical check-up" has five elements; ***grip, stone placement, release point, rotation application and number of rotations.***

Usually when a curler hears the term "technical check-up" it's an individual thought that comes to mind. We don't usually think "team" when we hear anything technical. Well, that's going to change!

GRIP – When I record a delivery visually (we used to say "tape" a delivery but as I write this, my camcorder doesn't even have a tape installed when I analyze a curler's delivery) on my computer software, I zoom in on the grip he/she employs. Look, all curlers deliver four basic shots (with variations to be sure). We're like golfers who have four clubs in the bag. They are; a clockwise down-weight shot, a counter clockwise down-weight shot, a clockwise up-weight shot and a counter clockwise up-weight shot. For the purpose of this article, down-weight means a stone destined to remain in play whereas an up-weight shot would have enough velocity to travel through the house.

Here's the paramount question beyond what a curler would gather concerning grip in a learn-to-curl clinic, do you grip the stone for all four shots and more importantly to this article, do your teammates grips mimic yours? Taking this to its extreme, a team could have sixteen different grips (I did the math, four curlers times four shots equals sixteen, wow MENSA here I come)! That's unlikely but when I check the grips used by the four members of team it's NOT unusual at all to see as many as five or six different grips. Given that the stone doesn't know what you look like, it only knows that which you do to it, how on earth can a team expect stones to "track" the same with five or six different grips? Perhaps your team should employ one "team grip"!

STONE PLACEMENT – Again, for the purpose of this article I'll assume your team employs "the curling delivery" (if you read APTIG # 42 you'll know what I mean but if you haven't it's a "no backswing" delivery). Generally speaking, to take full advantage of the curling delivery, the stone should be somewhere in front of the hack foot. I'll leave it up to you coach to determine the "exact" location with your players but even when there's simple general agreement with the previous sentence, it's not as uncommon as you might think for some players to take great latitude with that "somewhere in front of the hack foot" admonition. How can you expect stones to track the same if they don't even begin their journey from the same place?

RELEASE POINT – Stone placement and release point are related. The first movements to create a curling shot start at the hack but there's a case to be made that the point at which the stone is actually released is another "starting point" and perhaps more important than initial stone placement.

Again, let's use extremes. The target as set by the skip is on the centerline at the tee line (on the "pin"). One player delivers perfectly on line and releases a to-the-tee weight draw shot at the top of the house with positive rotation. Another player does exactly the same thing but instead of a top-of-the-house release point, releases the stone quite near the hog line. The first stone at the point of release begins to curl. In fact, it travels about fifteen feet in "curling mode". The second stone does not begin that phase of its journey until a point near the hog line. Those two shots are completely different even though to the untrained eye they were delivered in identical fashion. They will definitely not track the

same! Oh, and by the way, in the present two hacks configuration with which we're saddled by rule makers, with the current curling delivery, technically there is no such thing a center line shot. If you draw a straight line from the middle of the hack you use to the pin at the other end, guess what, it never touches the center line.

Before I move on to the two rotation-related elements of a team technical check-up here's a good release point awareness activity. Secure eight paper cups and a felt marker. On the bottom of two of the cups place the numeral one, on the bottom of two others the numeral two, on the bottom of two others the numeral three and on the bottom of the remaining two cups the numeral four. Stand on the side of the sheet and have the lead deliver a down-weight shot (either rotation). Opposite from the release point place one of the cups with the numeral one. Now have the lead deliver an up-weight shot this time placing the other cup with the numeral one directly opposite the release point. Repeat this for the other three players. Where are the eight cups? They will demonstrate the "team release points". You'll notice that I assumed something. I assumed that rotation (clockwise or counter clockwise) is irrelevant in this activity. That may not be the case coach! You may require more cups.

APPLICATION OF ROTATION – All your players deliver stones with a positive rotation. That's a good thing but there's a problem. The lead places the gooseneck of the stone at the nine o'clock position and rotates it to eleven o'clock upon release. The second places the gooseneck at twelve o'clock and rotates the handle to two o'clock. The third places the gooseneck at ten o'clock and rotates to two o'clock. The skip (being the attentive player he/she was to the instructor in that first learn-to-curl clinic) places the gooseneck at ten o'clock and rotates to twelve o'clock. All have applied a clockwise rotation but they have done so in four completely different ways. Will those four stones track the same? Good luck with that!

I could repeat this diatribe illustrating different ways of applying a counter clockwise rotation but I believe you get the picture.

NUMBER OF ROTATIONS – In a similar attempt at saving trees, I'll refer you to APITG #44 (The Technical Double-Cross) for the explanation of the importance of applying rotation within given parameters. Become aware of rotation in terms of application and number thereof. You'll learn a lot about yourselves as a team.

Please don't conclude from this article that I'm suggesting that all teams have a team grip, place the stone in the same place to initiate the shot, release the stone at precisely the same spot relative to the top of the house or the hog line, apply the rotation in the same fashion and apply rotations in the 2.5 – 3 range (but, I come really close to saying just that on the last point for sure). If you're a junior team, I'm much more inclined to suggest exactly that given your stage of development and that's not to be seen as a put down. On the other hand, if you're an experienced adult team and you have a player or players who do something different from the rest of the team in any one or more of the areas cited and he/she does it well and consistently and the skip knows exactly how to use it effectively as a tactic that is extremely difficult for an opponent to deal with, then by all means don't have that player change.

As coach, I feel you need to conduct team technical check-ups on a regular basis. The results will become the fodder for some critical team decisions. Your job is to make the team aware of what's really happening (see APTIG #34 "Competitive Data"). They (in concert with you hopefully) make the final decision.

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

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