

New Season - Phrases to Remember

By Jon Mielke

We've covered a lot of topics during the four years that I have been writing for *Curling News*. Hopefully some of them have been helpful to my readers.

So, as we head into a new season, how many of my shared insights do you remember? Here are some related phrases that you can take with you as you head out on to the ice. Full articles on all of these and other topics are posted on the *Curling News* website.

Remember the ABCs – a good delivery is dependent on alignment, balance, and curl (grip, turn, and release). It doesn't matter if you are a seasoned veteran or a beginner. The most important of these elements is balance. If you are not sliding in a balanced position, you cannot focus on alignment or curl. We will talk more about alignment and curl later. Get your slider foot centered under your chest and your hack foot fully extended behind you as you drive out of the hack. Your broom should be at the 10 o'clock position (for right-handers) and there should not be any weight on the shooting hand. Practice, practice, practice.

Stay on the invisible line – the most important line on a sheet of curling ice is the invisible line that runs from the shooter's hack foot to the skip's broom. When you are getting set up in the hack, take extra care to ensure that the stone is positioned on top of this line (many players misplace the stone to a position between the two sides of the hack). During the forward press, drawback, and forward delivery, the stone should stay on top of this line and the shooter's slider foot should be directly behind the stone and on top of the line. Sliding anywhere else will result in a shot being either wide or narrow.

If your fingers turn white, your grip is too tight – don't grip the stone like you are trying to choke it. Curling is a game of finesse and feel. Grip the stone by bringing your fingers in from above the center of the stone, cup the bottom of the handle between the middle knuckles of your hand, and lay your thumb across the handle with the pad on the side (there is actually a slight pinch between your index finger and thumb). Quite often, a tight grip is a sign of poor balance – don't make the stone a crutch to keep you from falling.

A million dollar slide and a two cent release equals a two cent shot – it doesn't matter how pretty you look coming out of the hack, if you have a poor release you are going to deliver a poor shot. Remember to cock the handle to the 10 or 2 o'clock position and turn it toward 12 during the last four feet of your slide. Strive for 2 ½ to 3 revolutions over the full length of the ice. Also remember that a stone does not start to curl the instant that it leaves your hand – it may travel 10 or 15 feet before it starts to curl. If a stone moves off the invisible line right out of the shooter's hand, it probably means that the shooter turned the stone off line because of a poor release – shot missed.

Head over head – when you are sweeping, remember to keep your head directly over the head of the broom. This position will give you increased downward pressure and effectiveness. Also position your body so you are looking down the sheet towards the skip at all times. Doing so will help you judge weight, communicate, and be safe.

.1 seconds = 6 feet – I am a huge believer in interval timing to develop muscle memory and to throw any variety of guard, draw, and tap weights. Practice with teammates and learn how to throw weights (back line to near hog line) varying from 3.0 to 4.0 seconds. With that skill in hand, teams can time the ice to determine tee line weight (typical club times are around 3.5 to 3.6

seconds) and take all the guess work out of throwing various weights. A tight guard on 3.5 second ice would require an interval time of just over 3.6 seconds. Back circle weight would need a 3.4 second interval time (.1 second = 6 feet – do the math to throw middle guards, hack weights, etc.).

Don't take the broom out of your sweepers' hands – sweepers can make lightly thrown draws and tightly thrown hits good. But, they can't make winners out of hits that are thrown wide and draws that are thrown heavy. Know which side of perfect you can err on and let your sweepers do the rest.

Two for me and one for you – skips need a plan going into a game and into each end. Have a goal for the end. If nothing else, remember that basic strategy says that the hammer should be worth 2 or more points – play for a deuce or more or blank the end and keep the hammer. When you don't have the hammer, try to force the other team to settle for a single point. Two for me and one for you wins every time, but it is easier said than done.

More strategy - playing without a plan is planning to fail – understand the free guard zone and use it to your advantage. Know when to throw guards and when to play into the house. Know when to play to the center of the house and when to force play to the outside of the sheet. Play the scoreboard, especially down the stretch. Pay special attention to the score, what end you are in, and who has the hammer. If you need points, try to generate offense. If you are ahead by several points, play defensively and don't put up guards – the other team may use them to get back in the game. Rather, throw your stones into the house above the tee line and let the other team try to figure out how to deal with them. Understand and use the free guard zone!

Etiquette – curling etiquette is something that makes our sport special. It is up to veterans to help beginners learn not only how to shoot and sweep, but to know what kind of behavior is expected and what is unacceptable. Don't be afraid to do on-ice and off-ice coaching. New players are anxious to learn and veteran players are their primary source of information and inspiration - it is up to you to help. Also remember that 10 seconds = 21 minutes. If every player wastes 10 seconds getting ready to shoot, a game will last 21 minutes longer. Be ready when it is your turn and help your teammates be ready, too.

I hope these little reminders will help get your season off to a good start. Until next time – good curling!

(Mielke is a Level III instructor and a Level III coach. He is a member of Bismarck's Capital Curling Club and a 2012 inductee into USA Curling's Hall of Fame. His previous articles are available on line at: USA Curling – Media – Curling News – Columnists – Jon Mielke).

Phrases to Remember

Remember the ABCs

Stay on the invisible line

If your fingers turn white, your grip is too tight

A million dollar slide and a two cent release equals a two cent shot

Head over head

.1 seconds = 6 feet

Don't take the broom out of your sweepers' hands

Two for me and one for you

Playing without a plan is planning to fail

U14 Trophy

Top Tier – square 6” x 3”

Front panel

North Dakota
U14 Champions

Trophy donated by Jon Mielke
Member of United States Curling Hall of Fame

Side panel 1

Curling Quiz – Describe the Following:

- ABCs of a good delivery
- Slide on the invisible line
- Practice with purpose
- Don't follow a miss with a miss
- Island of Ailsa Craig

Side panel 2

Curling Quiz – Describe the Following:

- Play the scoreboard
- If fingers turn white – grip is too tight
- Sweep with head over head
- You will play the way you practice
- Strategy goal – 2 for me and 1 for you

Side panel 3

Curling Quiz – Describe the Following:

- A million \$ slide + a 2 release = 2 shot
- Don't take the broom out of sweepers' hands
- Playing without a plan is planning to fail
- Miss on the Pro Side
- Spirit of Curling

Tier 2 – square 10” x 4”

- 4 plates per side - total of 16 plates
- Each plate 4.25” x 1.5”

Tier 3 – square 14” x 5”

- 9 plates per side – total of 36 plates
- Each plate 4.25” x 1.5”