

Got a Drift? Here's a Fix!

By Jon Mielke

It is pretty common to see curlers drift during their slide. For right-handed curlers, their body tends to drift to the right of the intended line of delivery when throwing down the right side of the sheet, especially when throwing takeouts. The same thing happens for left-handers shooting down the left side of the sheet.

If the shooter has the rock on the desired invisible line running from the hack foot to the skip's broom, one of two things happens if the shooter is drifting, either the sideways movement of the body pulls the stone off line or the shooter lets go of the on-line stone and then loses sight of the exact path of the stone because the stone and the body are moving on different lines towards the far house. Neither outcome contributes to a successful shot.

So, where does the drift come from and how can it be fixed? In most cases, the drift is caused by a sideways movement of the slider foot and leg. Visualize yourself (a right-hander curler) getting set up in the hack for a takeout of a stone at the outside right edge of the far house. Your shoulders are square to the invisible line that runs from your hack foot to the skip's broom and your stone is directly on top of that line.

Everything in your delivery sequence is perfect. Your forward press is straight at the broom – you lean straight at the broom and the stone moves slightly forward directly on top of the invisible line. Your drawback is perfect, too. Your hips come up and straight back away from the broom. You pull the stone back to your hack foot, using your body without cocking your elbow and you drive out of the hack with the stone still on top of the invisible line.

And then it happens – your body and the stone are moving on different lines. The rock is moving down the invisible line but your body is drifting to the right of the desired line. Where did that come from?

The most common source of drift for right-handed curlers is the sideways momentum of the left leg (the right leg for left-handers). Remember that almost everything in the set-up process relates to the all-important invisible line. The hack foot is pointed down the line at the skip's broom, the shoulders are square to the line, the rock is on the line, and your dominant eye is looking down line (unless you are left-eye dominant, which was the topic of one of my previous articles).

But your slider foot is not on the line – it is to the left of the line so it can move back beside and behind the hack during the drawback sequence. As you move forward during the delivery, the slider foot must move to the right in order to get centered under your chest and behind the stone. Especially when throwing hits, this slight left-to-right movement gets intensified to get the slider foot to the right place faster and to generate more weight. Unfortunately, the slider foot quite often does not stop at the proper position and then move down the sheet on top of the invisible line – all that body mass just keeps moving to the right, off the intended line of delivery.

There are three mechanical things that may be contributing to a drift – try them all in an attempt to solve the problem. First of all, do not take your slider foot too far back during the drawback

sequence. The toe of the slider foot should not go back farther than about even with the heel of the hack foot. Taking it farther back will necessitate a faster forward movement of the slider foot which will increase the likelihood of overshooting the desired position of the slider foot during the subsequent slide. Practice by putting a plastic cup behind the hack along the path that the slider foot takes during the drawback process. Put it on the slider foot's path about a foot behind the hack. If you hit the cup during your delivery, reduce the backward movement of your slider foot.

A second adjustment that you may try has to do with the line of your slider foot during the drawback movement. On shots down the right side of the sheet, do not bring the slider foot back parallel to the centerline – take it back parallel to the invisible line, moving slightly from right to left and away from the side of the hack. If the slider foot is taken straight back along the side of the hack, it creates the need to move the slider foot straight forward along the side of the hack and then to the right in order to get it under the chest and behind the stone. Conversely, taking the slider foot back on a slight outward-to-the-left line will reduce the need to move the foot to the right to get it on the desired line. Make things as straight and simple as possible. Sideways movements create problems so try to eliminate them as much as possible.

The third adjustment, and perhaps the biggest, is to think “merge” when moving the slider foot into the proper position. Do not be too anxious to get the slider foot in behind the stone and under the chest. Rather than jamming or jerking the foot into the right position, imagine that you are smoothly merging your car from the on-ramp onto a freeway. Make it a nice, gradual movement. Doing so will reduce the tendency to overshoot the desired sweet spot behind the stone and under the chest. Getting the related body mass moving down the invisible line will eliminate the sideways movement of significant body mass that contributes to drifting.

Hopefully these adjustments will help you eliminate drifting and get both you and the stone on the same line towards the skip's broom. If it does, you will make more shots and win more games.

I hope your season is 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).