

Laser Straight Alignment and Release

By Jon Mielke

A previous article talked about using plastic cups to refine a shooter's alignment toward the skip's broom. Sliding through cups is a terrific drill but it doesn't detect small side to side movements during a delivery and it definitely does not identify faults in a player's release. Remember, a million dollar slide and a two cent release produces a two cent shot.

To take a closer look at a shooter's slide, alignment, and release, a curler needs two helpful assistants, some kind of video recorder, and a laser with a range of at least 50 feet. The 50 foot range is necessary so the laser can be positioned about 20 feet outside the hog line and still project a sharp dot to the hack. It may be necessary to shop at a specialty tool store to get a strong enough laser. My home club has a laser that is available for all club members to use.

With the necessary equipment in hand, start by positioning a stone in front of the hack that will be delivered by the shooter (e.g. the left hack for a right-handed curler). The stone should be directly on top of the invisible line that runs from the hack foot to the broom. In this drill, the "broom" will be the laser that is placed on the ice about 20 feet beyond the hog line.

The laser beam should be aimed at the stone with its beam/dot in the center of the striking band in the middle of the stone. It may be necessary to place the laser device on a platform (a piece of wood, plastic, etc.) to keep the device from melting into the ice and/or to elevate the beam in order to hit the middle of the striking band.



With the beam in place, one of the shooter's assistants should stand directly behind the laser and video record the shooter's delivery. The focus of the recording should be the laser point on the striking band. The second assistant should be positioned to catch the stone just before it reaches the laser. The shooter should deliver the stone (slide and release) just as he/she would in a game.

The resulting video recording should be analyzed in two parts. The first part of the analysis should focus on the delivery prior to the release of the stone. The review will show if the laser dot stays in the middle of the stone or if it moves away from the middle. If the laser dot moves away from the center of the stone, the stone and probably the player are sliding either wide or narrow. The resulting shot will be correspondingly wide or narrow. In some instances the player may attempt a mid-course adjustment by "cross-firing" and throwing the stone sideways back at the broom. In either case, the desired shot will be missed.

The second part of the analysis should focus on the laser dot after the stone is released. It is important to remember that a curling stone does not start to curl the instant that it is released. A draw may travel 12-15 feet before it starts to curl and a takeout travels even further before it starts to move laterally. With this being the case, the laser dot should stay in the middle of the stone even after it is released. If the release is faulty, the dot will almost immediately move

across the face of the stone after it is released. With a pure release, the dot will stay in the middle of the stone.

If a faulty release is detected, the shooter should look for fixes such as maintaining a properly cocked handle (10 o'clock or 2 o'clock) until about the last 4 feet of the slide and then putting a positive rotation on the stone without over-rotating the handle beyond the 12 o'clock position. This drill should be run with the laser being placed at various locations on the ice to simulate shots at the outside edges of the far 12 foot, down the middle, in-turns, out-turns, etc. The laser and the camera will not lie and will help identify faults in a player's slide/alignment and release.

One thing that the laser and camera will not detect is a "lazy" handle. It is important to remember that shots on typical club ice should have 2 ½ to 3 revolutions. While the laser and camera may suggest a sound slide, alignment, and release, a lazy handle will not curl like other shots – it may over-curl or even lose its turn. With the equipment out of the way, count the number of revolutions that the handle makes as the rock travels down the sheet. If the handle is under rotating, work on that and then go back to recording. Putting it all together will undoubtedly result in more successful shots and more wins.

Until next time – Good Curling!

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