

# What Makes A Good Skip?

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What makes a good skip? Well, it depends. For many league teams a good skip is someone who shows up on time every week, is fun to hang out with, makes a few shots, and always has time for a beer after the game. There is nothing wrong with that but if your team is slightly more competitive it takes more to be a good skip. My list includes mechanics, strategy, ice awareness, and mentality.

**Mechanics** – Mechanics involves almost everything that it takes to deliver a stone successfully – alignment, balance, release, rotations, etc. These things need to be so automatic that it frees the skip's mind to concentrate on just one thing – throwing the right weight. When the skip (or any other player) gets in the hack, they should not be worried about their balance or hitting the broom or throwing the right number of rotations. Their technique must be consistently solid and they are not thinking about all those other things. They can eliminate all those variables from their mind and just focus on throwing the right weight, regardless of whether it is a guard, a draw to the four foot, hack weight, normal weight, etc. This is easier said than done and it can take years to get to this point. Some players never do. But it is something that all players, and especially skips, should aspire to if they want to be good at a higher level.

**Strategy** – A team can shoot 100% and still lose if the skip makes poor strategy calls. A good skip understands how the game is played and either consciously or unconsciously uses "SHEETZ" to call the next shot or to plan for the next end.

SHEETZ is an acronym for **S**core, **H**ammer, **E**nd, **E**nvironment, **T**eam, and **f**ree guard **Z**one. The first three letters are often referred to as "playing the scoreboard." First of all, sound strategy should be dictated by the **score** – is your team ahead or behind and by how much. If you are way ahead you may want to play defensively but if you are way behind you may have to be aggressive.

Strategy is also dictated by which team has the *hammer*. A team can typically afford to be more aggressive if they have the hammer but they may want to be more cautious if they don't. Similarly, the *end* that you are playing must be considered when choosing a strategy. Being behind by three in the third end may not be too worrisome but it is a totally different story if you are in the seventh end of an eight end game. Score, hammer, and end must all be considered in conjunction with each other when deciding how to play any given end.

*Environment* is more of a factor in some clubs and on certain sheets than in others. Environment involves things like the uniformity of the stones and the consistency of the ice (speed, amount of curl, etc.). Hopefully you are playing on a good sheet with a good set of stones. Quite often, however, ice can change during a game. It may speed up in early ends and the pebble may get flat in late ends, thereby affecting the amount of curl. There may be an area where rocks won't curl or they may even fall back or really take off. Good skips notice these things and use them to their advantage by forcing the other team to throw more difficult shots while saving the more makeable shots for their own team.

*Team* relates to the strengths and weaknesses of both your team and your opponent's. If one of your players or even your entire team is better at draws than takeouts, your skip may want to

play more of a draw game or if hits are your strength you may want to play more defensively. The same applies to your opponent. If they like to hit, try to force them into a draw game or vice versa.

*Team* also relates to your team's mentality. Some teams love a junk game while other hate having a dozen rocks in play every end. Skips must know their team's comfort zone and call the game accordingly.

*Zone* refers to the free guard zone. A good skip knows how to use it to generate offense or to play defensively. Typically, try to keep the middle open and force play to the outside if you have the hammer and try to plug up the middle for a potential steal or force of one if you don't have the hammer. Accomplishing these goals may be easier or more difficult given the four-rock and now the five-rock rules, but the strategy is usually still worth pursuing.

**Ice Awareness** – The next qualities of a good skip are the ability to read ice and call line. A good skip watches every shot (his and theirs) and uses early ends to learn how the ice is curling both coming and going and playing inside out and outside in. Knowing where to put the broom for every kind of weight is vital to making shots.

A good skip must also be able to call line. In some clubs rocks may curl gradually while in other clubs all the curl may be inside the hog line. Curl also varies greatly with weight. A good skip must know when to call for sweeping in order to increase the chances of making shots.

**Mentality** – All players, but especially skips, need a certain mentality when they get in the hack. They must be confident that the shot being called is the right shot and they must be confident that they can make it. If you think you can, you might be right. If you think you can't, you will be right. Good skips have a high degree of self-confidence and they love throwing a tough shot to score a big end, to bail the team out of a disastrous end, or to make a critical draw to win the game.

Good skips are seldom born, they are made. Don't be afraid to learn how to skip. It takes a lot of time and throwing a ton of stones (no pun intended!) but our "Grand Ol' Game" needs more skips as it continues to bring in players. These new curlers need a skip – it might be you!

**Gift Idea:** Need a cute book for a child in your life? Check out "Ailsa Goes Curling With Granite" at [www.HackPebbler.com](http://www.HackPebbler.com).

Until next time – I hope your season is going well. Maybe try skipping a game. Good Curling!

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