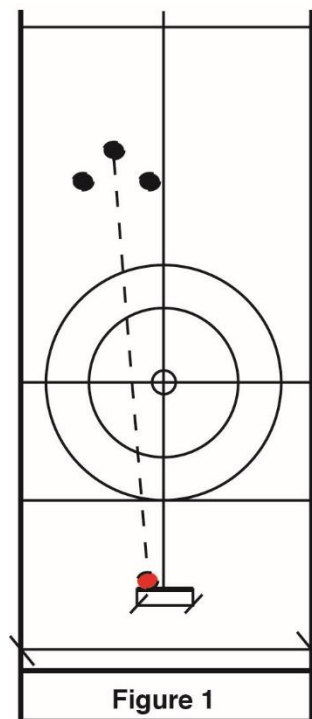


Split the Cups For Better Alignment

Do you consistently hit the broom? Are both the stone and your body sliding along the invisible line from your hack foot to your skip's broom? If not, you are probably missing the broom and missing shots. Read on for some ideas on how to improve your alignment and your shooting percentage.

The ABCs of a good delivery include Alignment, Balance, and Curl (grip, turn, and release). Balance is obviously the most important because if you don't have a good, balanced delivery, it is hard to focus on the finer points of a solid delivery – the fear of falling down over-rides all else. If balance is holding you back, you may want to check out my previous articles on developing a good, balanced delivery. The Curling News instructional library is available at www.teamusa.org/usa-curling (click on *Clubs – Membership Materials – Curling News – Columnists – Mielke*).

Here is a simple drill that you can use to refine your slide and help you hit the broom more consistently. Start by placing three cups in a triangle out on the ice (see Figure 1). Initially, place the cups to the left side of the center line and at a distance from the hack that is several feet shorter than your typical slide.



The two cups closest to the hack should be about 15 inches apart – wide enough for a rock to go through. Start out wider if that makes you more comfortable and then tighten things up as you get more proficient at the drill.

The third cup should be centered between the first two cups and 12-15 inches farther out from the hack. This cup is your target – a surrogate for the skill's broom. It should be easier to hit because it is about 100 feet closer than the skip's broom would be during a real game.

The object of the drill is to slide both the stone and your body between the two closest cups and to hit the farthest cup without touching the other two. Start by setting up in the hack, just the way that you do for a normal shot. Step into the hack from the back and aim the toe of your hack foot straight at the farthest cup. Then crouch down with your shoulders at a 90 degree angle to the desired line of delivery. The stone should be directly in front of your hack foot, centered on the invisible line that runs from the toe of your hack foot to the farthest cup. For right-handed curlers who are right eye dominant, their right eye is also directly behind the stone and in line with the intended line of delivery.

Go through the same pre-shot routine every time, regardless of whether you are practicing or playing a game. The way you practice is the way that you will play. Don't cheat yourself by taking shortcuts.

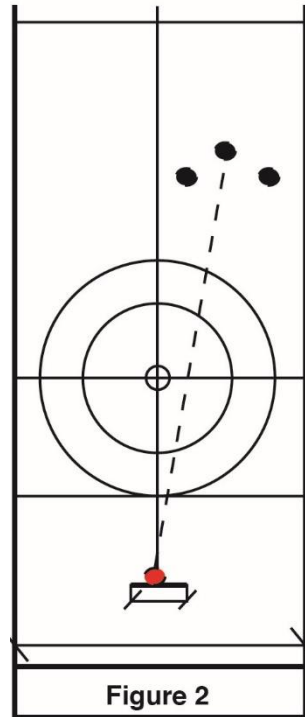
Once you are set up in the hack, go ahead and shoot at the farthest cup. Take a slight forward press to break the stone's inertia, elevate your hips, pull the stone back toward your hack toe by sliding your slider foot back slightly while moving your hips back to a position behind the hack. Be careful, do not pull the stone back with your shooting arm – pull it back with your hips. Using your arm instead of your hips will probably move the stone sideways and off the all-important invisible line. The rock should move straight back and then straight forward on top of the invisible line throughout the delivery – no side-to-side motions that will eventually require fixing or result in a shot being thrown wide or narrow.

As you start the forward motion, the stone moves out in front as you lean into the shot and your slider foot moves gently into the newly-created space between the hack and the stone. The slider foot should end up directly behind the stone and centered under your chest. If your slider foot is in any other position, you will not be able to balance on it. As a result, you will fall or put undue pressure on either your sliding device (broom or stabilizer) or the stone. Any of these unbalanced results will cause you and the stone to go out of alignment and the shot will, in all likelihood, be missed.

As you apply leg drive to your shot, you and the stone should be sliding directly at the farthest cup. Ideally, you and the stone should slide between the two closest cups without touching either one and the stone should then make a direct hit on the farthest cup. For right-handers, the broom/stabilizer should pass to the outside of the left cup. And remember, if you miss the center of the third cup by an inch or two at close range, you would have missed the skip's broom by several inches at the far end of the sheet.

Many people have more success with alignment on one side of the sheet vs. the other. To practice on both sides of the sheet, reposition the cups as shown in Figure 2. Everything is the same except the cups are now on the other side of the center line. This repositioning will also affect your set up in the hack. You need to point your hack toe in a different direction and the invisible line from your hack foot to the broom now intersects the centerline and runs down the

other side of the sheet. Also, pay special attention to where the rock is located when you set up in the hack. Rather than being fully on the left side of the center line, the right edge of the stone is partially on the center line. This provides a good spot check to make sure that you and the stone are properly aligned before you start your shot.



Practice a variety of shots by repositioning the cups in different locations across the sheet. At the widest point on each side of the sheet, the invisible line from the hack to the target cup should point to the outside of the far house. If you are better at the drill on one side of the sheet vs. the other, work even harder on your weak side – turn a weakness into a strength.

Hopefully this little drill will help you hit the broom more consistently. When you get proficient enough to take balance and alignment for granted, you can start concentrating on weight control – that’s when the game gets really fun!

Until next time – Good Curling!

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