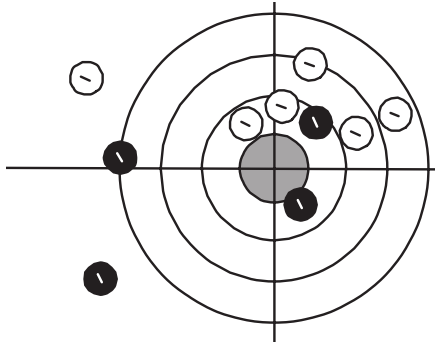


Strategy



Strategy is the approach a team takes to curling, either on a specific shot, during a game, or over an entire season. Whatever the circumstance, have a plan and attempt to implement it. It is not enough to “play the situation.” Have a game plan and be patient—but also be flexible, as teams are often faced with having to change tactics.

styles of play

The **draw game** is characterized by offensive or aggressive play. Guards, raises, come-arounds, and freezes are all designed to score more than one point or to steal. The shots required are generally more difficult and riskier, requiring more finesse. Strategy becomes more complicated as more rocks are in play.

The **take-out game** is a defensive style of play in which the house is kept free of opposition rocks and the front is kept as open as possible. Conservative play is designed to keep the game close, hold a lead, or keep the opposition to one point when they have the hammer. As a result of few rocks being in play, most shots are relatively simple.

types of shots

There are two basic shots in curling—a **draw** and a **take-out**. A draw stops in front of or in the house. A take-out involves hitting and removing another rock from play.

There are several variations on these two basic shots:

- **Guard.** A draw typically between the hog line and the house that is used to prevent the opposition from hitting a rock in the house.
- **Come-around.** A draw that curls around a guard and into the house.
- **Freeze.** A draw that finishes immediately in front of another rock.
- **Raise.** A draw shot that raises another rock into the house or a take-out that promotes a stone into another situation in an attempt to remove it from play.
- **Hit and Stick.** A take-out that remains very close to the position of the removed rock.
- **Hit and Roll.** A take-out that rolls some distance from the removed rock, often behind a guard.

strategic factors

There are a number of factors to consider when formulating strategy—both on the ice and off. Make sure all team members know these factors going into every situation.

ATTITUDE

If your team is comprised of people who love to “let it all hang out,” by all means, play the draw game. Curling is, after all, recreation. If, on the other hand, your team prefers to take a more cautious approach, play the take-out game.

ABILITY

Make an objective analysis of each team member’s ability to draw, take-out, and sweep before your team formulates an overall strategy. Attempt to force situations that accentuate your strengths.

YOUR OPPONENT

If your opponent prefers shooting take-outs to draws, set up situations calling for draws. If your

opponent has a tendency to flip out—turn take-outs wide, try to exploit it.

THE FREE GUARD ZONE

The Free Guard Zone (FGZ), the area in front of the house, emphasizes the importance of a game plan more than any other factor. Simply put, if a lead’s rock is in the FGZ, an opposing lead cannot remove it from play until the second is shooting. Thus, the position of lead rocks will dictate play. If the rocks are not placed properly, the end will develop largely on situational execution, which may be the plan of your opposition.

THE END

Early in the game, it is important to keep the score close as you build your team’s confidence. The early ends are generally played defensively, although practice sessions before competitive games have made for more aggressive early-end play.

As the game progresses, a number of interesting and complex strategy situations will arise. Keep your game plan in mind, but be prepared to be flexible.

During the later ends, teams will have their greatest opportunity to take control of the game. By this time you should know the ice and the opposition’s ability. Implement the tactics that play to your team’s strengths and your opponent’s weaknesses. If you have a comfortable lead, play your rocks into (or even through) the house. Remove opposition rocks in front of the house as soon as possible. If you are behind, use the Free Guard Zone to your advantage and get as many rocks in play as possible.

The last end of a close game provides teams with their greatest strategic challenges. If they have a narrow lead, teams without the last rock advantage (the “hammer”) will be faced with some interesting choices as the end unfolds. The same is true for teams with the hammer that are trailing by one. Everyone on the team should know what the objective is—to steal, to win, or to play for the extra end.

THE HAMMER

The last rock advantage gives you the opportunity to become more aggressive, especially after the first few ends. Skips will attempt to implement a strategy that will result in scoring more than one point.

Without the hammer, play tends to be more conservative. Skips will try to limit the opposition to scoring only one point.

ICE CONDITIONS

Here are some strategies to deal with various

types of ice:

- On heavy ice, draw rocks into the house. Let your opponent try the upper-weight take-outs.
- On fast ice, establish your team’s draw weight as soon as possible and keep take-outs on the quiet side. Get ready for a lot of sweeping.
- On swingy ice, take-outs are more difficult because weight and line of delivery are critical. An aggressive style of play is called for. Get your rocks in play and let your opponent shoot at them.
- On straight ice, a take-out game is encouraged. Offense must be generated with freezes and raises.

rock placement

THE SCORE

If your team trails by more than two points late in the game, you need rocks in play. Go to the draw game. If you lead by three or more, your objective is no longer scoring multiple points, but preventing the opposition from scoring a big end. With that in mind, keep it clean. With fewer rocks in play, you are less likely to give up more than one point in an end. In deciding where to place rocks, the most important strategic factors are the Free Guard Zone, the score, the end, and who has the hammer. The team without the hammer will tend to place rocks toward the middle of the sheet to control access to the four-foot. The team with the hammer will tend to place rocks away from the middle of the sheet to keep access to the four-foot open and create opportunities to score multiple points by “splitting the house.”

Conservative strategy largely ignores the FGZ and lead rocks are placed in the house. This is often done early in the game, or when your team leads by more than two points. Aggressive strategy utilizes the FGZ, and lead rocks are placed in front of the house. This is often done once lead players have established their draw weight or when your team trails by more than two points.

It’s important to remember that each team’s strategy is aimed at both placing rocks where they want them and preventing their opponent from doing the same.