



## Instructor's Corner

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### ***What are some good ways to use guards?***

—Heidi Stones

The advent of the free guard zone changed the game of curling significantly—increasing the chances of scoring and decreasing the occurrence of blanks ends—by allowing teams to put guards in play early in the end. But using guards is not so simple as it might appear. “Hidden” rocks are not always so hidden, especially on swingy ice, so a more thoughtful approach may be more productive.

This article features a handful of common guard scenarios that are likely to come up in your games, with some suggestions about how to get the most out of guard stones. In each case you are shooting the yellow stones.

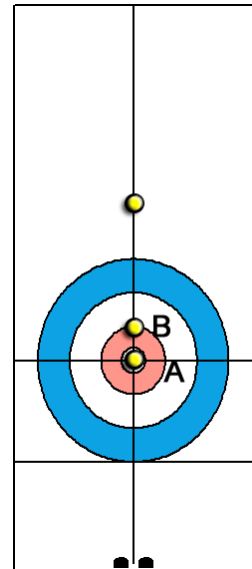
### **1. I'm on the button!**

Your lead tossed a perfect center guard with your first stone of the end, and now you have a chance to come around to set up a chance to steal. Where do you put your stone? The rules of the game specify that stones closest to the pin are the ones that score, so of course the best place is right on the button (position A), yes? What could be closer to the pin that covering it, after all?

Upon a little reflection, placing a stone right on the button might not be such a good choice. There will be several (many?) more stones to come, and your opponents are under no obligation to leave your stone sitting on the button. What is very likely to happen is that your opponent will freeze to your stone or tap it back a foot with a well-placed draw. Eventually, your once beautiful stone will wind up behind the tee line with opponents' rocks above you—shot—that will be exceedingly difficult to remove.

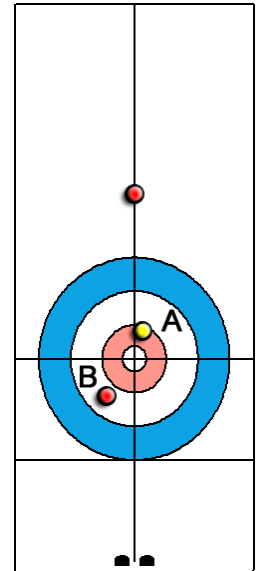
It is far better to place your come-around on the top four—above the tee line—as indicated by position B in the diagram. This positioning has two purposes: first, it cannot be easily tapped behind the tee line by an opponent's draw shot; second, a stone in this position also makes it exceedingly difficult to out-draw, and if it is out-drawn the opponent's stone will be exposed.

So, make that first come-around good—but not *too* good! Keep it above the tee line. And sweepers, that means you! If you have the choice of perfectly burying a stone behind a center guard right at the tee line or behind, or leaving the rock above the tee-line but partly exposed, go for the latter.



## 2. When a half is better than a whole

When coming around a guard it is not necessarily advantageous to be completely buried. As mentioned in scenario 1, if a stone is required to be swept to the tee line or behind to be fully buried behind a guard, it is almost always best to leave the shooter above tee line and partly exposed. When coming around an opponent's guard, you have additional incentives to leave your stone partly exposed (position A in the diagram). One, the staggered placement of the partially buried stone makes the runback and stick of the center guard more difficult than a straight-back shot (whether it's called or made by accident) and even if the runback and stick is successful, the shooter will not be in a position to guard shot stone. Two, your opponent may be tempted to go after your shot stone peeking out from behind the guard: a complete miss leaves you with the opportunity to further guard shot stone; a peel of the center guard allows you to replace it with a better guard of your own. The tactic of leaving your stone partly exposed is even more powerful if there are "catchers" behind tee line on the opposite side of the rings (e.g., a stone at position B).

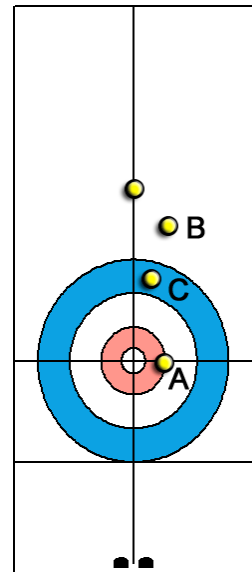


Placing shot stone slightly exposed is doubly diabolical with your last shot of the end without hammer: your opponent will have to agonize over trying to tap you back to lie shot, or to attempt to out-draw your stone on the other side: both are high-difficulty options, especially at the club level. (If you had made your stone perfect, top button behind the center guard, your opponent would probably attempt a straight-back runback without any guilt or much thought. For skips adept at throwing hits, this might be the easiest out for them.)

## 3. Christmas trees

A very common scenario in curling is having a shot stone in the rings, exposed but not too far out of line with an existing center guard (Stone A in the diagram). What to do with your next stone? For many club skips, the first thought is to place another guard in position B. While this is not a bad call, it does simplify things for your opponents: they will either peel stone B or go after the center guard with an eye toward doubling off the two guards. If your opponents have the hammer, the most they are risking is a steal of 1.

A better alternative is to partially bury a stone above yours high in the rings (position C), half-buried behind the center guard and half-covering the shot stone. The arrangement of these stones resembles a "Christmas tree," a term popularized by 6-time Canadian champion and 2-time world champion Colleen Jones. The point of this stone arrangement is that it is not possible to hit any of the two shot stones and stay in the rings, and it is likewise impossible to double out stones A & C because of the way they are overlapped. A double peel of the center guard and stone C is also very difficult. The most likely outcome is that your opponents will go after and remove stone C and roll out, at which point you can simply re-establish the Christmas tree. Eventually, you will force your opponent to draw against two or concede the end to you by removing one of your two stones. This tactic puts a lot of pressure on your opponent, with very little risk that your opponents can build up a house by hitting and staying in the rings for 2<sup>nd</sup> shot.



**Try it out!**

So, in your next game, use those guards responsibly. You might just find you increase your scoring chances.

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