



Instructor's Corner

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My team constantly chattering up and down the ice on every shot. It's slowing our game down. Any suggestions?

—Elway S. Yellin

So how many times have you experienced this scenario?

Shooter: "What's the shot?"

Skip: "Take this out."

Shooter: "What?"

Skip: "Take this out!"

Shooter (to front end): "What did he say?"

Sweepers (to skip): "What's the call?"

Skip: "TAKE THIS OUT!"

Shooter (to front end): "Did you get that?"

Sweepers (to skip): "Takeout?"

Skip (exasperated): "YES!!!!"

Shooter: "What weight?"

Skip: "Bumper"

Next sheet over: "SWEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!" "HURRRRRRRRRRY!!!"

Shooter: "I can't hear! What weight?"

Skip: "BUMPER!"

Shooter: "Normal?"

Skip (turning blue): "BUMPER!!!"

Shooter (to sweepers): "Did he say bumper? Or normal?"

Sweepers (to skip): "Did you want bumper or normal?"

etc.

It's like Abbott & Costello, except not as funny...and a lot colder. Not counting the skip's icy stare. To quote the Captain from "Cool Hand Luke," "What we got here [is] a failure to communicate."

You may have noticed that a curling rink is a very noisy place. Especially when certain individuals are on the sheet next to you. (You know who you are...when you call sweep, 3 sheets put the brooms down.) This is where some non-verbal communication can do wonders for your team. Non-verbal communication is better than shouting: (1) it is very fast—light takes only a little more than 100 nanoseconds to travel down the sheet, and (2) it can't be drowned out by the activities on neighboring sheets. Here are some ideas to improve your non-verbal communication skills:

Calling the shot. To properly execute a shot, the shooter needs to know three things: (1) What is the desired line of delivery; (2) what weight needs to be thrown, and (3) what turn is to be applied. This can be easily communicated non-verbally.

Draws. For a draw, tap the ice with your broom a couple of times to indicate where you want the stone to come to rest; place your broom where you want the shooter to aim; and hold out the

proper hand to indicate the desired rotation. When playing with experienced curlers, “giving the turn” is usually not necessary, as it can be deduced from the relative positions of the desired final location of the stone and the target. Avoid diagramming the play on the ice like John Madden gone wild on the telestrator: some shooters will tire quickly and deliver at your broom as soon as it stops moving. (This may not be what you intended as the target line!) If you must diagram on the ice, keep your broom head flat, and turn it vertical to indicate that you have decided on a target. If your team understands this convention, they won’t deliver until you turn your broom head up.

Keep in mind that it is hard to get a good perspective on the house from the hacks. So it may not be obvious that you want a stone in the house or want a guard. An easy way to communicate this non-verbally is to stand in the same location in the house when you start your call. I usually start behind the tee-line so that my broom will only reach the top button/top four area when held in front of me. If you start in this position, and just tap your broom somewhere in the house without moving, then the shooter knows you want the stone just above tee-line. If you take a step or two forward, you are asking for top-house weight. If you take several steps forward before tapping the ice, you are calling for a guard. And if you take a step or two backwards to give the signal? Yep. You want back-house weight. How about freezes? Just tap directly in front of the desired freeze target.

Return to the tee line to give the final target, as the line of delivery is a little different depending on where you stand. A broom on the four-foot line at the tee line is a wider shot than a broom on the four-foot line 3 feet in front of the house. Give all your draw shot targets at the tee line for consistency in learning the ice.

Takeouts and taps: For a takeout, tap the stone you would like removed. Then communicate your weight with a hand signal. You and your team should agree on those signals and what they mean. On my teams I communicate four different weights: I tap my belly for “normal,” firm weight; my hips for “bumper” weight; my knee for “hack” weight, and my shoulder for “peel” weight. Some teams use various parts of their arm to indicate weights. Choose something that is easy to see and understand. The shooter, standing or squatting in the hack, can quickly and silently acknowledge the weight called by repeating the sign. If there is a mixup, the skip can give the sign again until properly acknowledged. Once the stone to be removed is identified and the weight call is given and acknowledged, turn up the broom target and go. Optionally, you can give a turn signal by holding out an arm for a moment. This is important for newer curlers, or for when you are playing “negative” ice.

If you are tapping a stone back—not taking it out—tap the stone you wish to move, then tap behind the stone where you would like it to come to rest after tapped. You may want to make this motion twice to emphasize this is a tap, not a takeout. Alternatively, tap the desired stone, then hold your broom sideways with your hands apart. These are both common hand signals for taps. Then set your target and optionally give a turn signal.

For takeouts and taps, unlike draws, the broom is normally held beside the rock, as these shots are typically taken with very little ice. Plus, it’s hard to line up the broom properly when standing several feet behind the target rock.

Sweeping. Verbal communication is still the primary means of communication with sweeping, as there is so much to communicate about the shot as it progresses, not just whether to sweep or not. But hand signals can come in handy, nevertheless. If a shot is a little wide, and you don’t need/want sweeping, a simple gesture such as holding up a hand can communicate the situation quite well. The sweepers should be watching you, or at least looking at the house, as well as the stone as the shot progresses. A hand up signal means “Not ever!” without cluttering up verbal bandwidth. Taking your hand down, without any additional verbal cues, means you’ve transitioned from “Not ever!” to “Maybe sometime... get ready!” In a really noisy environment—we’ve all been in those clubs where sound goes

to die once it escapes the skip's lips—you may have to signal when to sweep by hand signals. A hand up is “no” and waving your hand back and forth means “sweep.” For this to work, your sweepers have to look up every now and then.

Tweaking. (Not twerking. We don't do that on the ice.) On some teams, there is a lot of fine-tuning of called shots by communication between the shooter and skip. If the shooter wants a little more or a little less ice, you don't have to yell up and down the ice. Just point in the direction you would like the broom to be moved a little. No yelling necessary. Make sure your skip is OK with this...some skips don't like their teammates calling their own ice.

Final thoughts

Try more non-verbal communication in your games. You may find you shave quite a few minutes off every game and can play at a more predictable pace. You will have to pow-wow with your team and agree on what non-verbal signals you are using and what they mean. Once you start communicating this way, you may never have to go back to the Abbott and Costello routine...

*Good curling! Have a question for Instructor's Corner?
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