



## Instructor's Corner

I'm a relatively new skip. I seem to be losing my curling games even though my team is making shots. What am I doing wrong?

—Hugh Blewitt

If your team is not curling 60%, strategy doesn't matter too much. But if you are making your shots—and the other team is, too—then strategy matters a lot. Good strategy won't win games, but good strategy makes it likely that you will win if your team curls better than the opposition. On the other hand, bad strategy means you must curl twice as good to achieve half as much. This article summarizes some commonly employed bad strategies. In all the diagrams the non-hammer team is red, the hammer team yellow.

### 5 Ways to Blow a Curling Game

#### 1. Guard lonely shot rock without hammer

You are in a close game and find yourself without hammer in the 4<sup>th</sup> end. The good news is that you are shot stone in a very good position (Figure 1). The bad news is that the hammer team has repeatedly cleared your guards and has rolled a few potential counters into the house. This situation should scream “Danger, danger danger!” Resist the temptation to guard shot rock in this situation. If your guard is not perfect and the hammer team removes shot rock, you are very likely to drop 3 or 4 and probably the game. What you desperately need is another stone in the house to lie 1-2 or even 1-3 to

avoid a disaster. The 2<sup>nd</sup> stone must be placed where it cannot be doubled out, even if it is in the open. In this particular case frozen or tucked around the corner guard would be a good spot to put 2<sup>nd</sup> stone. Even a hit and roll to lie 1-2 or 1-3 would be helpful.

You can afford to give up 1 or 2 without hammer in a close game. Dropping 3 or 4 is usually fatal. Always look to get two counters in the house when you don't have hammer. It's a good insurance policy. You don't have to steal every end without hammer; giving up one is usually a good result.

#### 2. Put your guards in the house

You are down 1 in the 5<sup>th</sup> end and really need to steal this end if possible. Your team got off to a good start and has a stone well-positioned to steal, and it is your turn to throw. Where to place your guard? You could throw a guard a few feet in front of the house, or you could place your guard biting the 12-foot and sit 2. What the heck, if sitting one is good, sitting two is better! You might even wind up stealing two instead of one! Resist putting your guards in the house—this only gives the hammer team the opportunity to hit and roll a potential counter into the house each time they clear a guard. This leaves you in the “lonely shot rock” scenario above, except you don't have the option of playing for a force, but must guard for your life since you are behind in the score late. If you throw an imperfect guard anywhere along the way when the hammer team is sitting 2-3-4-etc., you could drop a bundle with little hope of recovering in the remaining ends. When you want guards, put them outside the house so the other team can't clear them and roll for additional counters. Putting guards outside the house also makes runback doubles a little more difficult, too.

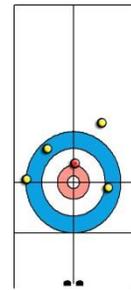


Figure 1

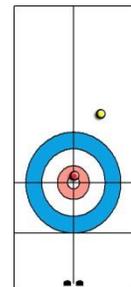


Figure 2

### 3. Guard rocks behind tee line

Rocks behind tee line are just sad. They can never be made better, and they are often freeze targets or backers that make removing stones above them difficult. Unless you just have no other option—maybe you are behind late in the game without hammer and your only good rock is sitting back button—resist the urge to guard a rock behind tee line. Your guarded rock only becomes a better freeze target, and opposition stones can be partially buried behind your guard and above your stone, making them very hard to remove. With the hammer, it's usually better to split the house than guard when you have shot rock behind tee line; without hammer, splitting the house to sit 1-2 may also be advantageous if you don't need to steal and are happy with a force to 1.

### 4. Don't clear the guards with hammer

It is sometimes tempting to get caught in a draw game with hammer, but this can lead to a steal or an undesired force. When things have just not gone right, clear the guards! If you can't blank or score 2, you need to ensure that you get your one with hammer. In Figure 3, you are in a close game in the middle ends. Things have not gone all that well for you this end with hammer, and your third is throwing the first of two stones. It might be tempting to play a come-around freeze to opponent's shot stone behind tee line, perhaps tapping it back to set up an eventual deuce. But if this shot is missed—and it will not be easy in this scenario—your opponent may bury another and sit 2 guarded against you, leaving you with little opportunity to score. Start clearing the guards, and any replacement guards, try to open up a line to get your one and live for another, better day. A double peel here will go a long way toward opening up a way to access shot rock. If your opponents throw perfect replacement guards, you may have to try a runback double, the difficult freeze-tap, or accept a steal of one. On the other hand, if your opponents throw a half-shot guard somewhere along the way, you may get lucky and be able to tap out shot rock for a score of 3. (Of course if you successfully make the double peel, your opponents may likely call a shot to sit 1-2 against you to guard against dropping a 3-spot.)

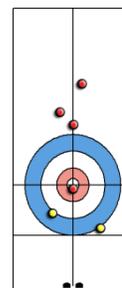


Figure 3

### 5. Put up guards when you are in control

You find yourself up 3 in the 7<sup>th</sup> end of an 8 end game without hammer. If your instinct is to throw a center guard in the scenario, shame on you! The only way your opponent can get back into the game with two ends to play is to have guards in play. If you throw a center guard, you are helping your opponent! The more guards in play, the more stones they can potentially hide and score. Do yourself a favor when you are up by 2 or more: bring your first stone into the house and make your opponent figure out how to establish a deuce or trey with their own guards. The usual strategy is to put one or two stones in the 4-foot, then start clearing the opponent's guards at your first opportunity. The idea is to get out of the end giving up only 1 or 2, and coming home with hammer tied or up 1. This strategy works earlier in the game, too, putting you in control with the hammer tied or ahead.

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