



## Instructor's Corner

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### **New sweeping rules for 2016-2017—and other rule changes**

In the 2015-2016 season, championship-level curling was rocked with a paradigm shift in sweeping (“directional sweeping”) that threatened to change the competitive balance of the game. Elite curlers found that certain sweeping materials (hair brushes and some of the newer “textured” fabrics) when combined with the proper technique allowed tremendous control over thrown rocks—making them curl more or less as needed—and shooting percentages soared into the 90s for most elite-level teams. Proficient sweepers, using artificially textured fabric brushes and proper technique, were able to “back up” stones, make them “curl off the sheet” before reaching the far tee line, or cause stones to slow down and stop. A stopgap ban on hair brushes and the most egregious of the new fabrics was put in place, but was not sufficient to eliminate all the effects of directional sweeping during the championship season last year.

#### **Back to the Future**

In May 2016 a Sweeping Summit was held in Ontario, bringing together elite curlers, coaches, manufacturers and scientists, to help better understand the effects of technique and brushing materials on directional sweeping. One goal of the summit was to identify a fabric material that had minimal directional effects, but was still able to carry rocks farther down the sheet with vigorous sweeping. The idea was to create a situation where brushing makes the rock go farther, and straightens it, but has minimal ability to “steer” it. The result of this investigation appears to have been successful in identifying an acceptable fabric.

#### **Approved brushing material**

The World Curling Federation adopted a standard brushing material that will be used by all players in WCF events, and curling associations (*e.g.* Canada Curling and USA Curling) have adopted this recommendation. The new material is a coated 420 denier nylon Oxford cloth. This is a medium-fine plain weave material that has a thin waterproof coating on the reverse side. The weave surface is relatively flat, so it does not have great ice-scratching (directional sweeping) ability. You can use any color you want, as long as it is the official ugly yellow. (Brush head color does make a difference in sweeping efficiency. Darker materials are more efficient in heat transfer than lighter-colored materials.) Brush heads used in world competition must be purchased from a manufacturer, made with the approved fabric, and cannot be home-made. Rigid inserts (as found on the IcePad), ridged foam (as found on the Norway head), or foil backing (as found on heads from various manufacturers) were found to enhance brush aggressiveness and are not allowed. Brush surface area, not surprisingly, also was found to change effectiveness, so approved brush heads will have maximum and minimum dimensions. Anyone competing in a USCA championship event, or playdown leading to a championship event, will be required to comply with the newly adopted equipment rules. This would include, for example, US Club Nationals, US Junior Championships, etc.

## **Brushing rule changes**

It has been re-affirmed in Rule 7(a) that “The sweeping motion can be in any direction (it need not cover the entire width of the stone), deposits no debris in front of a moving stone, and finishes to either side of the stone.” (The language describing a “side-to-side direction” was removed.) Angle-sweeping and corner sweeping is still allowed. This rule applies to curling at all levels.

For championship play (e.g. WCF events), players must declare their personal sweeping device before the start of the games, and must use only that device throughout the game. (No more brush-swapping to put the fresh brush on the desired side of the sheet.) Alternates entering the game must assume the brushing device of the player they are replacing. Brush heads may not be changed during the game.

## **What does it mean for recreational play?**

The WCF rules are not intended to rule club play, or force recreational curlers to purchase WCF-approved equipment. (The approved brushing material will be considerably less durable than traditional materials you are used to curling with.) In addition, the WCF envisions that recreational play is where manufacturers can innovate and develop new technologies (excluding “fabric coatings and treatments”). Eventually, manufacturers will be selling mostly compliant materials to recreational curlers, but meanwhile there will be a mix of older and newer brush technologies being used in club curling. To avoid a “wild west” scenario, the WCF has established some recommendations for club play, abridged here:

- For leagues, competitions, or events primarily for recreation or fun, or events limited to novice/inexperienced curlers, equipment limitations may be unnecessary.
- For leagues, competitions or events where significant prizes or awards can be earned, it may be desirable to require sweeping equipment to conform to WCF standards.
- Highly proficient sweepers should consider the ethics or fairness of using non-conforming equipment in club play even if the rules allow it.

One of the outcomes of the Sweeping Summit study was discovering that brushing effectiveness of fabrics declines with use. Brush heads should be replaced regularly to keep them effective. The WCF recommends replacement of your brush head at least twice per season if you are curling twice a week.

## **Other rules changes for 2016-2017**

Several rules changes were adopted by the WCF for the 2016-2017 season. Summarized here are rules that are relevant to club play:

- If, during the delivery of the stone, a stone is released by the player and re-touched, it will not be removed from play. (Provided, of course, it is not touched at the hog line or beyond.)
- In mixed doubles, if a player delivers a stone out of proper rotation, and this is discovered before the next stone is delivered, the stone is removed from play; if not discovered before the next stone is delivered, play continues and the player that delivered the first stone of the end can deliver a maximum of two stones in that end.
- Rule 10(e) which provides for players to change the type of brush used during play has been deleted. (Mention of corn brooms has also been deleted as well, since they are no longer allowed in play.) Note: this rule is made obsolete by championship rules preventing brush-head swapping during a game, but leaves a gap for recreational curlers, who may not be abiding by championship rules.
- Rule 8(d) has been modified: If a moving stone is touched by a stone deflecting off the sheet dividers, the non-delivering team shall place the stone where it reasonably considers the stone

would have come to rest has the moving stone not been touched. (This is the “Shuster” rule inspired by the US-Japan debacle last year in the men’s World Championships.)

- “Debris” has now been defined (relevant to the sweeping rules). “Debris” is any substance, including frost, snow, or material originating from brushes, shoes, or clothing.
- In the humor category, curling is now explicitly defined in Rule 1(a) as being played on “ice” so it qualifies as a winter sport. Glad we cleared that up!

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