



## Instructor's Corner

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**I see teams of two curling on Thursday nights. What this all about?**

—C. Ying Dubbel

Mixed Doubles is a relatively new curling discipline designed for two players (one male and one female). The current version of the game evolved from one of the mixed competition events in the Continental Cup of Curling, in which teams of four players (two men and two women, two of which were designated as “throwers” and two as “sweepers”) competed against each other. In 2007, the “sweepers” were eliminated, making it a true doubles game, in which either the thrower or non-thrower (or both) can sweep. The first Mixed Doubles World Championship was held in 2008. In 2018, Mixed Doubles will make its debut in the Winter Olympics joining men’s and women’s traditional curling as medal events.

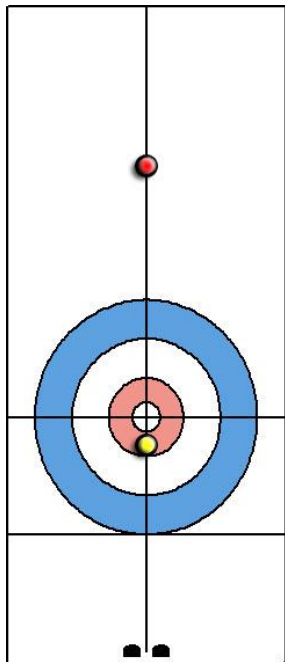
### **Evolution of the game—rules of play**

The basic rules of modern Mixed Doubles were established in 2007. Each end begins with one team—whichever team wins the right for the first end, or the team not scoring in the prior end after play begins—placing two stationary stones of different colors on the centerline, one just behind tee-line, and the other in a center guard position. The team with the center guard plays first. The team having the option to place the stones can decide to play first or last. Teams usually elect to play last. No stone may be removed from play—not your own, nor any stone in the house either—until the fourth rock of the end is delivered. Including the placed stationary stones, this effectively results in a “5-rock rule” and stones in play build up fast. Each team delivers 5 stones in alternation. One team member must deliver the first and last stones, and the other team member delivers the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> stones. Which team member delivers the first and last stones can change from end to end as desired. The game is scored as in regular curling.

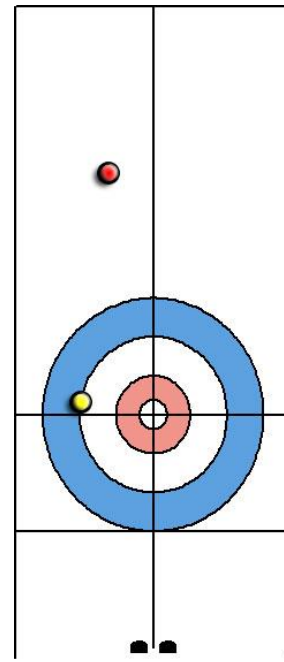
Three major rules changes occurred in the 2015-2016 season that dramatically changed play:

1. In the original rules for the game, the stationary stone placed in the house was stationed immediately behind and touching the tee line on the centerline. Beginning in the 2015-2016 season, this rule was changed so that the stationary stone in the house was placed with its back edge even with the back of the 4-foot circle (Figure 1), opening up more real estate in the four-foot, and introducing more strategy choices for the first shot of the end.
2. In the original rules of play, the player not delivering was required to remain behind the far hog line until the stone was delivered. This meant that the shooter was primarily responsible for sweeping one’s own stones. For the 2015-2016 season, this restriction was eliminated, allowing a sweeper to join the shooter and sweep rocks immediately if needed.
3. Each team is given the option, once per game, to employ a “Power Play”, in which the stationary stones are displaced from the centerline to begin the end. The team with the option may place their stone in the house is centered on the 8-foot circle just in front of tee line, and their opponent’s stone is placed as a guard 6 inches closer to the centerline (Figure 2). The “Power Play” cannot be used in an extra end. This option can generate big scores for the team using it.

The impact of these rules changes was enormous. The positioning of the house stone at the back of the 4-foot created more strategic decision-making for the first shot of the end. With the old rules, the first shot was always a freeze to the pin. (With the old rules, the first shot was pretty automatic—a freeze to the pin.) The impact of the second rule was perhaps more important for club players than professionals. By allowing the non-delivering player to sweep, it is no longer necessary to chase your own stone and sweep with a slider. Allowing a separate sweeper means that players can use a safer, two-gripper sweeping stance, and do not have to chase the stone down the ice. Sweeping with two grippers also allows for easier and more effective directional sweeping. In addition, players who use stabilizers for their delivery aid can more easily participate in mixed doubles as well. Finally, the "Power Play" injects another strategic choice in the game, allowing teams to generate instant offense when behind.



**Figure 1. Normal Play setup  
(red shoots first)**



**Figure 2. Power Play setup  
(red shoots first)**

## Strategy

Mixed doubles is a new curling discipline, and with the recent rules changes, strategic approaches are still developing. What we do know is that this fast-paced game became much more popular in 2016, due in no small part to the success of the USA mixed doubles team, who won the bronze medal in the 2016 World Championship.

If the strategy of mixed doubles were to be described in one sentence, it might be "throw everything to the pin!" Mixed doubles is a game of draws, taps and light-weight come-arounds for the most part. The team that gains the advantage of angles, or controls approaches to the four-foot, will generally be able to score. By the time you can throw hits, there are likely 3 rocks on or near the four-foot behind the center guard. Steals of 2 are not uncommon, and the team with the last rock will often score 3 or even 4

in a well-played end. Games are typically high-scoring. You are more likely to see a 11-9 game than a 5-4 score.

*Managing play in standard ends.* The team delivering first has a decision to make. Freeze to the stone on the back four, or draw to top four or top button? The freeze is more likely to lead to a force of one, while the throw to the top four or top button is an attempt to gain a steal, while cutting down the rings for the team shooting last. Interestingly, a stone left short and high while attempting a freeze or draw can be left to use to drive in or tap up later, especially if it is edge-on-edge or partly buried.

*Managing play in power play ends.* Power play ends are challenging. It is very difficult to prevent the team employing it from scoring three, and two is almost easy with good shot-making. The team shooting first has four choices to defend, and the best choice for your team may depend on what shots you are comfortable with and what the score is.

- Tick/raise shot (Figure 3). This is the choice that many competitive teams employ. Typically, a back-rings weight shot is thrown outside-in at your own corner guard. You are hoping to tick this guard over or to angle-raise it into the rings. If you lose your shooter, that's OK. If you come the other way with this weight, you risk taking the guard out of play, which would be a violation. The idea is to uncover the stationary shot stone, and hold the opponents to no more than two if they subsequently split the house. This shot requires a great deal of precision. Ironically, it will come at a point in the game where you have never played on that portion of the ice and don't know the curl or weight.
- Freeze (Figure 4). I suspect many club teams will use this as the preferred shot. A perfect freeze to shot stone neutralizes the power play advantage, at least temporarily. A good miss is to tick the guard over and/or roll into the rings, opening up shot rock. (Of course, your opponents can throw another rock in the rings and you still can't hit anything until your team delivers its third rock.) The freeze is a defensive approach, and if it works you can limit the damage and maybe get a force. However, if you miss this initial freeze, you may be in for a long and nasty end.
- Center guard (Figure 5). The idea here is to simply throw a guard and come around it later to neutralize the stationary wing stone. This is an aggressive strategy, and perhaps this is a good choice when a team employs the power play when you are behind. You are essentially playing for a steal, if possible, and no less than a force by cutting down the rings and directing play back toward the center. The risk, of course, is that your opponent will likely beat you to the four-foot and lie two before you can use your center guard.
- Split the house (Figure 6). In this scenario, you just throw a stone to the edge of the four-foot on the opposite sides of the house from the power play stones. The idea here is to simply get out of the end for only two by making your opponent chase your shot rock around the opposite side of the house. Your opponents will probably try to hit and roll to the edge of the house, forcing you to hit and roll back in for shot. If you can't remove your opponent's stone and roll for shot, they will come around the corner guard again and try to set up a score of three. (See why Power Play is annoying?)

*When to deploy the power play?* The Power Play is like a trump card. You don't want to play it too early, but you don't want to finish the game with it in your pocket, either. The most obvious strategy is to simply save the Power Play option until you are behind late in the game, typically in the last 3-4 ends. The object is to use the Power Play as an offensive weapon to generate a big end to get back in the game. Alternatively, you might choose to employ the power play when you are ahead in the score and have the option to place stones in the last 1-2 ends. The idea here is to use the Power Play option as a

defensive play to keep the center open and prevent a steal by the opposition. Of course, you could also use the Power Play when ahead to attempt to put the game out of reach, especially if it appears that you may not have a later opportunity to employ it.

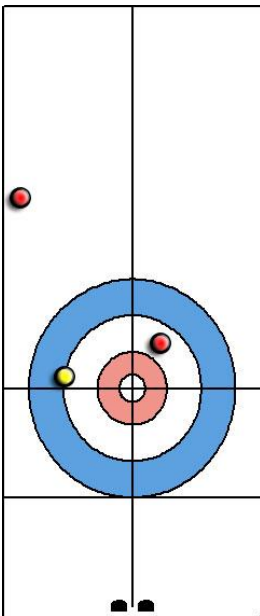


Figure 3. Tick/raise

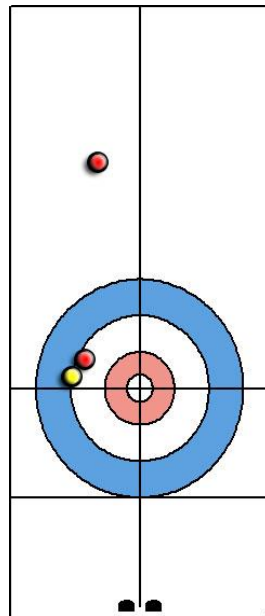


Figure 4. Freeze

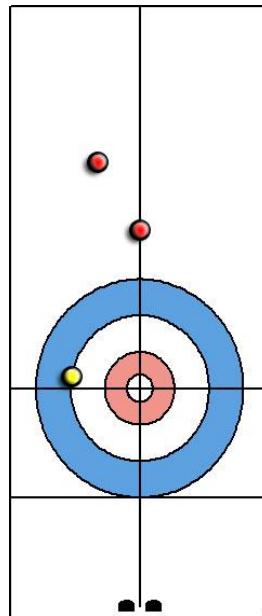


Figure 5. Center guard

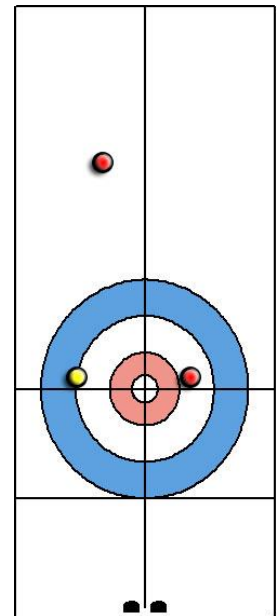


Figure 6. Split house

### Mechanics of Play

Mixed doubles has a distinctly different rhythm from typical curling. You have two basic choices for deploying your team:

1. Non-delivering player holds broom and calls line. *Advantages:* shooter gets a clear target; clear view of line; easier for team to read ice; speeds up play. *Disadvantages:* shooter must sweep own stones; cannot sweep stones full length of ice; must sweep on slider (hinders directional sweeping); less able to judge weight.
2. Non-delivering player joins shooter at delivery end. *Advantages:* stones can be swept immediately; can sweep with two grippers (makes directional sweeping easier); able to judge weight accurately. *Disadvantages:* shooter must choose appropriate target line; shooter must call own line; line-calling may be slightly obstructed; reading the ice more difficult.

Teams with players that deliver with a stabilizer or other delivery aid, or players that are not comfortable sweeping on a slider will have to opt for #2. In either case, the non-delivering teammate should remain on the far end of the ice after the shot is completed in order to observe the opponents' shot and to sweep stones in the house as necessary. If employing option #2, the non-delivering teammate should decide on a shot, note alternate shot outcomes, estimate the target for the shooter, (e.g. middle eight-foot), and hie to the other end to sweep the delivery. (In WCF, USCA, or CCA events, you get 22 minutes of thinking time for 8 ends of play, so you can't dally.)

## **Directional Sweeping**

In mixed doubles, one sweeper is the default, so this setup is ideal for directional sweeping. This is all the more important because most mixed doubles shots are lighter weight shots that are more amenable to directional sweeping. At the professional level, brushing materials are regulated to minimize directional sweeping, but at the club level, using non-professional brushing materials, it is possible to alter the rock path with appropriately applied directional sweeping. Normally, the sweeper should be initially stationed on the low side of the rock to maximize your ability to hold line. If you sweep with two grippers, it is relatively easy to transition to the other side of the stone and sweep from the high side if you need more “bury” or are simply a tad wide and can safely sweep without carrying the stone too far. Of course, you need good technique to enjoy the benefits of directional sweeping: you must use your brush head cross-wise, and you must brush at a steep angle, 45 degrees or less from the path of the rock.

## **Mixed doubles is fun!**

Mixed doubles is a fast-paced game that will test your draw and finesse shot skills, and your ability as a solo sweeper. You only have to find one teammate, and you can easily play a game in less than 2 hours. Because there are so many rocks in play, you are rarely out of the game. Why not give it a try?

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

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