



Instructor's Corner

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Five Rock Rule

As of October 1, 2018, curling will adopt a new, five-rock, free guard zone rule into the official rules. The previous, four-rock, free guard zone was established in 2002.

Experimentation with the 5-rock rule began in 2011 with the Canadian Open. The Grand Slam of Curling has employed the five-rock rule for all events since 2014.

The new five-rock rule means that you may not remove from play opponent's stones in the free guard zone until five rocks are thrown; that is, the first opportunity to remove an opponent rock in the free guard zone will be the first shot of the second for the team with the last rock advantage. Of course, you may remove your own stones from the free guard zone with impunity (i.e., the "peel of shame").

So what is the impact of the five-rock rule? The primary objective of adoption of the five-rock rule is to generate more offense, rocks in play, and fewer blank ends. While the impact will likely be the greatest at the elite level, there will still be significant impacts at the club level. Most of the benefit of the five-rock rule will accrue to the team with the last rock advantage. One major impact of the new rule is to make defending a lead without hammer much less safe. The team with the last rock will be able to set two corner guards before they can be removed, increasing the chances of scoring three. (A previous instructor's corner article explains how to set up a potential score of three with two corner guards.)

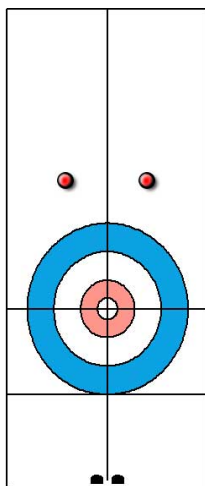


Figure 1

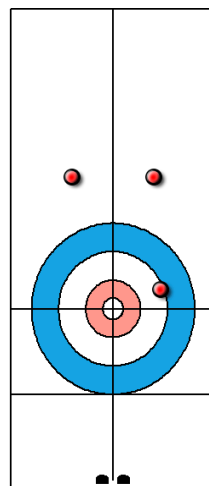


Figure 2

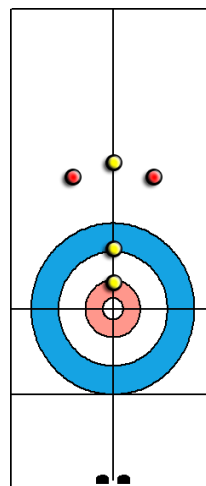


Figure 3

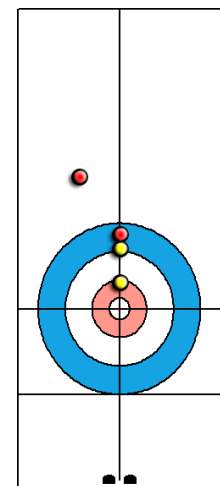


Figure 4

With the four-rock rule, a team without hammer leading by three will generally throw through, conceding up to two, but not three points. The team with the last rock will generally set two corner guards after four rocks are thrown (Figure 1), but the opposition will be able to start peeling those guards right away, preventing the hammer team from hiding two rocks behind guards that would normally be necessary to score three. (Team with red stones have last rock advantage in all diagrams.). With the five-rock rule, the strategy of throwing through without hammer 3-up is a loser, because you can't start peeling those guards until your fourth shot, at which time you may be looking at Figure 2,

which is the starting point for scoring three with hammer. With the five-rock rule, you will not be able to throw through safely without hammer unless you are up 4 or more. So what to do if you are defending a 3-point lead in the last end without hammer? A typical strategy is to throw two stones into the house, one top four, one top eight and then guard with your third stone, while your opposition is establishing corner guards. There will be a lot of rocks in play! But your opposition will have to deal with your stones in the house at some point in order to score three. The hammer team can't waste time chasing your rocks in the house if they want to score three without the benefit of multiple misses by your team. Of course, there are lots of possibilities to vary strategy here. The team with hammer could attempt a combination of corner guards and freezes (Figure 4), but it is usually more difficult to score multiples with frozen stones than with guards.

The five-rock rule will enable the team with the last rock advantage to press for three instead of two at any time during the game. The best defense to this may be offense, with the team without last rock attempting to steal from the very start of the end, trying to direct play toward the center where scoring two or more may be more difficult than playing to the wings. One thing is for sure: there are likely to be more rocks in play in more games with the five-rock rule. A defensive style of play keeping the house a clean as possible will be more difficult than with the four-rock rule. The five-rock rule will probably appeal to offensive-minded skips, and teams that relish draws and finesse shots like come-around tap-backs.

It will be fun to see how skips adjust this season. How will YOU use the five-rock rule?

If you want to know more about these topics and more, check out the Instructor's Corner archive on the [Instruction Page](#) at the Utica Curling Club web site.

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