



Instructor's Corner

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"You can observe a lot by watching"—Yogi Berra

During the curling season there is abundant opportunity to watch curling on broadcast television and on various streaming platforms like the YouTube channels of the World Curling Federation and the World Curling Tour, and ESPN3 (WatchEPSN). While you are not likely to have the pampered ice conditions and shotmaking skills of the pros, you can learn a lot about game management and strategy from watching the pros in action. In my opinion, probably none is better than watching the Season of Champions broadcasts of TSN which is streamed in the U.S. on the ESPN3 channel of WatchESPN. Among the more colorful, knowledgeable, and instructive commentators is Russ Howard, a multi-year Canadian and world champion and Olympic gold medalist for Canada in 2006. Russ has an pithy and instructive color commentary style that, if you listen, will provide some gold nuggets for your curling game at the club level. Here are some of my favorites from the last two seasons:

Wayward guards and short stones

If you come up short on a come-around (especially with hammer up the middle), sweep it ALL the way into the house, this way, if the opposition hits your stone, you can hit it back while the free guard zone is in effect. If you leave that short stone half-way in, your opposition can nose hit and sit outside the house in the free guard zone, protecting shot rock until expiration of the free guard zone stones.

"Don't guard the rock, guard the path"

The best guard is not necessarily one that sits directly in front of the stone to be guarded. Rather it needs to protect the path to the guarded stone. On swingy ice, the best spot may be decidedly off-center, one that blocks a draw path for a freeze or tap-back. This will be especially important to consider if there are other guards in play.

"Don't go defensive until there are less ends to go than you are ahead"

A tricky decision for every skip or team is when to go into a defensive shell when you have amassed a sizeable lead. That is, when do you stop throwing guards and offensively pressing, and direct play into the house and play mostly hits and peels to burn off ends while (hopefully) trading ones the rest of the game? Many a team has built a substantial lead early in the game, only to fritter it away by the last end by allowing their opponents back into the game by going defensive too early. Russ' rule of thumb is a good guide. It basically defines when you can concede deuces to your opposition when they have hammer to your one when you have hammer, and still come out on top. So if you are up 4 in the first of 8 ends, it's too early to change your game plan. But if you are up 4 with 3 ends to play, it's probably a safe strategy to avoid taking risks and leaving lots of rocks in play in the remaining ends.

Right Angle Rule

Knowing angles and anticipating potential jams is critical for being a successful curler. When throwing slash doubles it is important to know if you are going to get a favorable or unfavorable jam. Refer to Figure 1, which depicts a potential slash double of the red stones. Will the raised stone jam on the yellow stone outside the house? The simple way to figure this out is to look at the relationship between the three stones. If three stones are aligned in such a way that lines drawn between them define a right triangle—that is, with an angle of 90 degrees between them (Figure 2)—then the double takeout is likely to jam. If the angle is less than 90 degrees, the raised stone should go over the top. If the angle is more than 90 degrees, the stone should pass behind. Simple! Look for these 90 degree relationships when you are sizing up potential raise takeout jams.

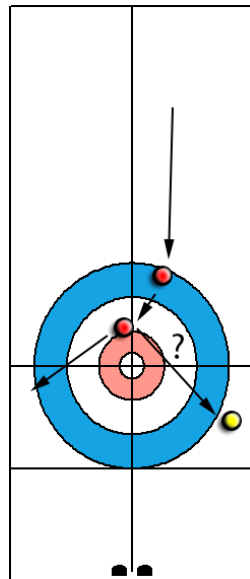


Figure 1

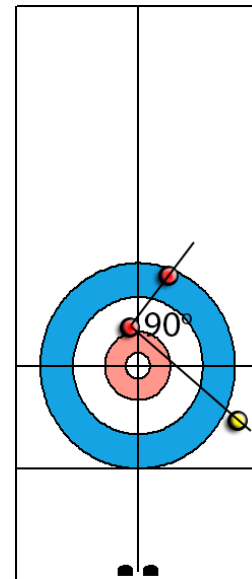


Figure 2

What have you learned?

Hopefully, you can use these tips in your games. If you have heard additional nuggets of wisdom from curling commentary, please share and I'll write them up with some examples in a future article.

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

Send an email to curlingschool@uticacurlingclub.org