

Reading Bodies, The Body Does Not Willingly Lie.

The field for the USA Nationals has narrowed and seeding is settled so that teams to prepare for Philadelphia in February and striving for a podium finish. Spectators observing teams perform at the top level will see a display of various people skills on and off the ice. According to James Borg an expert on non verbal communication **context** (the situation the team's in), **congruence** (the consistency of people's behavior under pressure) and **clustering** (the variety and number of non verbal movements and signs) of behaviors will show a team's helpful interaction with each other when they are under pressure. Borg likes to say the body does not lie. Let's explore a little bit more in the next paragraphs what we might see from teams on and off the ice. But first we will discuss some aspects of pressure and their influence on behavior.

Pressure Points Affecting Behavior

We know when a performer perceives stress negatively this can lead to lower performance and affect how they trust themselves and others. When individual pressure builds, positive behaviors can sometimes be minimized between team mates. It is normal that a form hostile confrontation between people whether happens. Emotional upset caused by team mate relations can hijack a curler during their performance by causing them to lose focus, worry and attend to other things and rather than what they are doing. These things happen all the time to curlers, curlers are human, but what we have to remember is that curlers cannot control what happens to them in their team relationships, but they can control how they respond to them. Curlers have to learn to cope to reduce the negative effects of these things on our performance. So how do they do that? Easy right! Wrong. There's nothing easy about this part of curling performance at the top level. The few great curlers at the world level have hard-won success by developing individual and team strategies that work under pressure. For those watching the games in Philadelphia here are a few perspectives that can be used to learn what might be going on between team mates

Four behaviors to watch for in teams under pressure

1. 'Circle of Trust'

Look for teams that have identified people that are close to them and willing and able to support them through your performance preparation. See if they have recruited them to be part of their performance team. Typically, friends, family, team mates, coaches, work mates are recruited for this purpose. See if the teams have distanced themselves from unhelpful or toxic people. If they have done this they have protected their outer shell. The inner shell is that what happens inside the team (including the coach) stays in the team and the core of the team's self belief is always preserved and protected. Team mates that chip away at this when the team is under pressure usually drain the team of energy and put the skip in a terrible situation to carry the team's performance and manage the people aspect too. Few skips can do both excellently. Look for skips that have high energy and teams that feed the energy down the line from lead to skip so that each shot looks and feels like a team shot. Listen for gossip behind the glass like a discussion about players playing on one team at nationals already scouting to play with another team

next season; look for inconsistent behaviors between team mates on the ice. These are two strong signs that trust might not be high between team mates.

Social Routines

Look for positive team behaviors at Nationals in Philly. These behaviors look like team mates warming up in a similar fashion; smiling, arms and legs relaxed. Open stances to each other, 'high fives', smiles where people show their teeth, arms (not crossed) and ankles loose (not locked). The sounds weird, but fake smiles are common in curling and team mates at ease with each other smile big and broad (not always, but curlers enjoying the opportunity to be with each other in pressure show this often). Look for the proximity of team mates to each other when they talk, and show 'love' or 'hate' to each other by opening their palms or pointing fingers. Check out the 5th end break. Look for positive eye contact, open body language, listening ears (turned slightly toward the speaker), nodding, weight shifts (make sure you know the score and context and look for two to three behaviors at once). At the end of the game watch the ten minutes after the final shot. This period can often show the victorious and defeated sides of body talk. The body does not send messages the brain does not want it to.

Conflict resolution

When a conflict arises in competition it usually happens around the calling of line and weight weighed against the risk and reward of the shot against the context of the situation and the belief the team has in the person throwing the rock. Teams show their ability to resolve conflict when effective decisions are made under pressure. Look for teams where vices and skips look at the shot from same and different vantage points and come back together side by side. This often shows a back end that can resolve a difficult decision and come together. The team mate that walks away from the skip in difficult situations can be communicating 'over to you skip' and they turn their back on the skip, slide to a distant point on the ice from the skip, cross their ankles and fold their arms. They are likely showing disagreement with the previous interaction. Experienced curlers know body does not lie.

When you are watching the top teams look at the situation they are in (high pressure or low pressure), look at the consistency of their body language (how often they do what they do in high pressure and low pressure situations) and look at the number of behaviors at the time (crossed arms, distance from team mates, place of safety on the ice and absence of eye contact with team mates after a conversation on the ice at a difficult moment). Pay attention, keep focused on what is in front of you because these behaviors happen rapidly and change as quickly as the brain responds to pressure. Remember, reading bodies is one technique and is not an end in itself for knowing teams. It is a means of interpreting the team psychology. Have fun with it. It is amazing what our bodies communicate under pressure.