

The Most Important Line

By Jon Mielke

What is the most important line on a sheet of curling ice? This is a question that I routinely ask skills clinic attendees or individuals who want advice on how to improve their delivery. Respondents typically look bewildered and offer a variety of responses. Ultimately, I suggest that the most important line is the invisible line from the hack foot to the skip's broom.

Instructors, whether they are teaching beginners or doing refresher work with intermediate curlers, talk about the "ABCs" of a good curling delivery – alignment, balance, and curl (grip, turn, and release). Balance is something that curlers must learn and eventually take for granted and the release can warrant an article all its own (a million dollar slide and a two-cent release produces a two-cent shot). So, for now, let's focus on alignment and the invisible line.

Experienced league skips can often tell if a teammate is going to miss a shot, simply by the way he or she sets-up in the hack. Sometimes it is simply the way that the shooter's body is positioned – are they lined up to drive out of the hack straight toward the broom? The simple answer for shooters is to clean the ice in front of the hack, clean the rock, set it in front of the hack, and then stand-up behind the hack and wait for the skip's call. When the skip's broom is in position, step into the hack with the hack foot pointed at the broom. Then kneel down and square your shoulders to the invisible line from the hack foot to the skip's broom.

The next, all-important step is to get the stone centered on the invisible line. Quite often, the rock is misplaced and subsequent movements are not on the invisible line. Just watch, many curlers start their delivery with a misplaced rock or take the stone back to a point in the middle of the hack rather than to the hack foot. In either case, the resulting shot will probably not be at the broom.

Starting the stone on the invisible line and bringing it back to the hack foot also places the stone in line with what is typically the shooter's dominant eye. This allows the shooter to look over the top of the stone and directly at the skip's broom during the slide – much like looking down the barrel of a gun when aiming. That's a good thing.

With the body square to the broom and the rock centered on the invisible line, subsequent body and rock movements throughout the delivery should be either straight away from or straight toward the skip's broom. Any sideways motions will have to be corrected for at some point during the delivery (C-curve) and will often result in a shot being thrown wide or narrow. Keeping things simple and straight will result in more made shots.

Shooters can also do a performance check on themselves once the stone is out of their hand and traveling down the ice. Rocks typically do not start curling during the first 10-15 feet after the point of release. Take a look – is the released stone on the invisible line? And how about the shooter's body – is in on the invisible line and going straight toward the skip's broom? If not, the alignment was faulty and the shot will probably be wide or narrow.

So, don't forget to look at and use the most important line on the curling sheet – that invisible line from your hack foot to the skip's broom. If you line up with and slide down that line and keep the rock centered on that line, you will make more shots, win more games, and have more fun.

For more intermediate skills materials, check out USA Curling's website at www.curlingrocks.net (click on Inside the USCA – New Training Tools – Skills Camp Handouts). Good curling!

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