

Editor's note: This is the second part of a two-part series on balance. The first part appeared in the May 2011 issue.

Well, winter is right around the corner and it's time to get back on the ice. It's a perfect time to work on the ABCs of good delivery – alignment, balance, and curl (grip, turn and release). We talked about alignment and a little bit about balance in last spring's issues of the Curling News (available online).

So, now you're ready to do it on the ice. Start by placing a plastic cup at the near hogline, somewhere within 18 inches of the centerline (the cup is a substitute for the skip's broom and the outer edge of these locations is equal to shooting to the outside edges of the house at the other end of the sheet). Next, step into the hack, with the ball of your hack foot about halfway up the incline of the hack. Stand with a stone in front of you, your feet about shoulder-width apart, and the slider foot flat on the ice with the heel about even with the toe of your hack foot.

Point your hack toe at the cup and square your shoulders and hips with the invisible line that runs from your hack foot to the cup. Next, squat down and relax. Your non-shooting arm should be on top of the broom with the handle running under your armpit. The broom's pad or bristles should be pointed up (not laying on the ice). Grip the broom about 18 inches from the head and point it at about the 10 o'clock position – not straight to the side and not straight ahead. Maintain positive pressure on the broom – better on the broom than on the stone. Now, here is a little cadence to help you with what comes next: rock, foot, rock, foot, slide. From the kneeling position (or you can start with your hips slightly elevated) and with the rock centered on the invisible line that runs from your hack foot to the cup on the hog line, lean slightly forward to enable the rock to move slightly toward the cup. This motion simply breaks the inertia between the stone and the ice. Don't use your arm to move the rock – use your upper body. If the ice isn't sticky, you can even eliminate this “forward press” motion.

Next, pull your hips up and back behind the hack. At the extreme end of this motion, you should be able to imagine that you are sitting in an invisible chair. This motion will also pull the rock back. Make sure you pull the rock back with your body and not with your arm. The rock should move straight back to your hack foot, right along the invisible line that runs from your hack foot to the cup. Your slider foot moves back, too, to a position where the toe is about even with the heel of your hack foot. Your weight transfers from being about 50-50 on both feet to being largely on your hack foot.

Now you're ready to start moving forward. It is very important to start moving the rock, your upper body, and your slider foot forward before you start driving out of the hack with your hack foot. As your slider foot moves forward, it also moves inward so it can get centered under your chest and directly behind the stone. As it moves into position, drive out of the hack with your hack foot (slide). Remember, all the stone's momentum comes from the drive out of the hack – not with a push from your shooting arm. Your shooting arm should stay fairly straight, with only a relaxed flex, throughout the entire delivery. Also remember to keep the rock moving along the invisible line and keep your shoulders and hips square to the cup.

Repeat this practice slide until you get comfortable and things start to feel rhythmic and automatic. Move the cup back and forth along the hog line and adjust your set-up in the hack accordingly – always squaring to the cup/skip's broom. Be sure to reposition the stone so it is always centered on the invisible line from your hack foot to the cup. Also, watch to see where your slides are ending up. Are they directly on top of the invisible line and straight to the cup? If not, try things like adjusting your body in the hack, repositioning the stone during your set-up, and eliminating any unnecessary side-to-side motions in your delivery. Stay straight – you and the stone should always move straight to the cup,

regardless of its location. If you can't hit a cup that's 33 feet from the hack, how can you expect to hit the skip's broom that is 125 feet away?

Now take several more slides without the stone. Everything else is the same but concentrate on sliding with your shooting hand on an invisible stone – not resting on the ice for balance. Learn to balance without a stone so you don't lean on the stone during your delivery. Once you start feeling comfortable with your slide, you will be able to push harder out of the hack. This is important because the stone's momentum comes from your drive out of the hack and not from a push at the point of release. Remember, draw shots on keen ice need a light kick out of the hack; heavy ice requires a stronger kick. For takeouts, bring your hips farther back and apply more leg drive.

Keep working at it. You will find yourself making more shots, your skip will love you, and you'll win more games. Good strategy only makes a difference if you're shooting over 50 percent. Do your part and have more fun in the process. Until next time – good curling!

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