

Brushing Wins the Battle

By Jon Mielke

In a previous article, we talked about knowing when to sweep. But knowing when to sweep does not do much good if your well-timed sweeping is ineffective. So, what does it take to be an effective sweeper?

Look around during league play or at a bonspiel. You will see almost as many sweeping techniques as there are curlers, and some of them are pretty entertaining. But watch a world or Olympic event – the participants' techniques are strikingly similar. Everything is done to create maximum heat via pressure and velocity. Here are some related things to strive for when you are modifying your sweeping technique to achieve maximum results:

- Sweepers wear two grippers (sweeping with a slider on one foot is less safe and makes it more difficult to put maximum pressure on the ice)
- Sweepers stand behind the back line when the shooter is in the hack and start moving down the sheet as the shooter goes into motion (this also facilitates good communications)
- Sweepers' feet move side to side in a shuffle movement (vs. walking down the sheet)
- Sweepers face down the sheet and look up frequently (helps judge weight & need for sweeping)
- There is one sweeper on each side of the stone
- When sweeping, a sweeper's head is over the head of the brush (this helps put maximum upper body weight on the brush head and thereby create maximum pressure and heat)
- The shaft of the broom does not rest on a sweeper's thigh (that would put pressure on the thigh and not on the ice)
- Brushing motion is side to side and high velocity
- When not sweeping, sweepers are still in a sweeping position (if you are not in position and the skip suddenly calls for sweeping, there will be a delay plus you may lose your balance with a related sudden movement)
- Sweepers often sweep lightly and continuously to keep the running path clean (this also keeps them in position to respond quickly and safely for sudden sweeping calls)

It is also important to note that there are two basic body positions for sweepers. In one, the sweeper's back is fairly vertical and the hands are roughly 1/3 and 2/3 of the way down the shaft of the broom. In the other position, the sweeper's back is nearly horizontal, with one hand about halfway down the handle and the other hand within about a foot of the brush head.

Both of these positions are effective but the upright option is easier to teach and puts less stress on the lower back. More accomplished curlers may, however, want to experiment with the more horizontal option. In either case, the sweeper's legs are angled away from the stone, putting the sweeper into a tripod position involving both feet and the head of the broom. This position transfers the maximum amount of body weight and pressure onto the head of the broom.

Whatever changes you make to your current technique will feel awkward, but don't give up. Personally, I remember all the adjustments that I made over the years. I went from a corn broom

to a brush, from sweeping with a slider to two grippers, from sweeping strictly on one side of the stone to being able to sweep on both sides, from sweeping with the handle of the broom on my thigh to getting all my body weight going down the broom and on to the ice, etc., etc., etc.

None of these changes came easy but they were all worthwhile, because effective brushing truly does contribute to winning the battle. It may even be the difference between winning and losing. Good shooting, by itself, does not win games, and good strategy, by itself, does not win games. Similarly, effective brushing, by itself, will not win games. But, all three taken together, along with good team communications and compatibility, are what it takes to be a really good team. Do your part and work at being a good sweeper. It really does make a difference.

Until next time – good curling!

(Jon Mielke is a Level III instructor and a Level III coach. He is the past chairman of the USCA's Training & Instruction Committee and a member of Bismarck's Capital Curling Club. All his previous training articles are available online at: USA Curling – Inside the USCA – CNews Columnists – Columns by Jon Mielke).