

As a sweeper, how do you know when to sweep? Generally speaking, calls related to line are up to the skip and calls related to weight are up to the sweepers. There are certainly exceptions, but sweepers are in the best position to judge the speed of a draw shot and to know if the stone needs sweeping to get it to the desired spot on the ice.

So, how do you know? Well, there are four primary ingredients that help sweepers determine if brushing is needed. First and foremost, sweepers need to develop good judgment. They must be able to observe the speed of the stone and, given its location on the sheet and the keenness of the ice, know if it has plenty of weight or if it needs sweeping. If it's light, don't wait for someone else to tell you – sweep!

A second bit of input that helps sweepers know if brushing is needed is the shooter. Right out of the shooter's hand, that person should have some sense of how the rock was thrown. Was it heavy or was it light or was it about right? The shooter should immediately communicate with the sweepers and let them know how the rock felt.

As the rock nears the far house, the skip is also in a position to judge the rock's momentum and to provide input to the sweepers. Actually, at that point, the skip will usually override everything else and is providing a directive, rather than merely input. Trust the skip's judgment when he or she calls for sweeping, regardless of whether it is for line or weight.

A fourth input tool that many sweepers use to help determine weight is a stop watch. The timing method used is the same interval timing that we discussed in the last article about using a stop watch to develop muscle memory and thereby being able to throw all kinds of weights precisely.

As we talked about last time, interval timing involves timing the delivery from the time that the lead edge of the stone touches the backline, until it touches the near hog line. The key to getting accurate times is to have a shooter who does not "feed" or pull back on the stone during the delivery. Ultimately, the goal is to determine the relative keenness of the ice based on an interval time for a rock that comes to rest, without sweeping, at the far tee line. Typically interval times on club ice are in the neighborhood of 3.4 to 3.6 seconds.

We also mentioned in the last article that 1/10th of a second in interval timing is equal to about 6 feet in distance. Therefore, on 3.5- second ice, a rock thrown with an interval of 3.6 seconds would come to rest just biting the top of the house. Conversely, a rock thrown at 3.4 seconds would travel to the back line. If the skip calls for tee line weight and the shooter throws a 3.7 second shot, start sweeping because you need to take the rock an extra 12 feet.

Sweepers and the shooter should communicate what kind of interval time the shooter is striving to throw. If the skip calls for a shot to the tee line on 3.5 second ice, the shooter should tell the sweepers that they should look for a 3.6 second throw. Remember, a 3.6 second throw would naturally stop at the top of the house. But, the goal is to throw just on the light side of perfect and to leave it up to the sweepers to make the shot perfect. Don't "take the broom out of your sweepers' hands" by throwing just a bit too heavy.

Mechanically, teams should have their strongest sweeper sweeping next to the stone. That sweeper should be ready to sweep immediately, even before the stone gets to the near hog line. The other

sweeper should, therefore, be the person in charge of timing. You don't need two timers – it will only lead to confusion and leave you without a sweeper for a portion of the trip down the ice. The timing sweeper should immediately communicate the resulting time to both the other sweeper and to the shooter. Letting the shooter know will help them constantly recalibrate their muscle memory so they can effectively know how hard to push out of the hack.

Sweepers also need to communicate weights with the skip. Let the person in the house know where you expect the rock to end up. Different teams use different terminology and many use zone numbers. We'll talk more about that in later articles, but, for now, remember to communicate with the skip. Saying something and being wrong is better than never saying anything at all. Say something – it's part of your job as a sweeper. You will get better with practice.

I also have to say that after I teach my team members how to interval time to judge rock speed, within a couple weeks I inevitably tell them to put the watch away and to start using their head. There is nothing more frustrating than calling for a rock to the top of the four-foot and then watching it stop in the 12-foot without the sweepers ever laying a broom to it. When asked why, they invariably say that the watch said that the weight was good. Remember, the stopwatch is a great tool, but it is no substitute for good judgment. Always remember to use your head!

Until next time – good curling!

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