

Poor Release = Two Cent Shot

By Jon Mielke

Years ago I heard Bill Tschirhart of Canada's True North Curling, Inc. say that a \$1 million slide and a 2 cent release will produce a 2 cent shot. For all that I have said in previous articles about proper alignment and good balance, none of that matters if you don't have a good grip, turn, and release. So what makes for a good release?

A good release starts with a proper grip. First of all, remember that you are not trying to choke a chicken. If your knuckles are turning white, your grip is too tight. Slide your four fingers under the handle with the pads of your fingers at about the middle knuckle at the bottom of the handle. Don't let your fingers fan out – keep them close together. Don't jam them into the curve of the handle and don't let your little finger drift off the back. If you do, you will end up either steering the stone narrow or flipping it wide.

Keeping your wrist high above the handle, now fold your thumb over the top of the handle and lightly pinch the handle on the side opposite your palm. Your palm should not be touching the handle. Here is a little drill to make sure that your grip is directly above the bolt hole (e.g. the center of the stone). Once you have gripped the stone, stand up over the stone without moving your grip. Now, using only your shoulders, lift the stone a few inches that then gently set it back on the ice. Listen to how many sounds you hear as the stone hits the ice. If you hear more than one, your grip is not centered. Adjust your grip either forward or back and try again. When you find the "sweet spot" you will only hear one sound – the entire cup hitting the ice at the same time. From now on, never throw another shot without your grip at that "sweet spot."

So, you're in the hack, you are aligned to the skip's broom, you're balanced, and your grip is good. Now it's time to cock the handle. Depending on which turn is being played, turn the handle to either the 10 or 2 o'clock position. The handle should stay in that location until about the last 4 feet of your slide. During that last 4 feet, gently but firmly turn the handle toward the 12 o'clock position and release it. Make sure that your hand is not on the handle at or past the 12 o'clock position or you may end up steering the stone and getting it immediately off line.

Remember, a curling stone does not start to curl until it is well beyond the point of release. If the stone is immediately off that invisible line from the hack to the skip's broom, there was probably a faulty release. Here is another little drill to check out your release. Set a plastic cup on the ice about 5' beyond where you normally release a stone (remember to keep it within 18" of the center line at the hog line – that is equal to shooting at the outer edge of the house at the other end). Next, set up another cup 10-12 feet farther down the ice, on a line that runs from the delivery side of the hack and through the first cup. (A great way to set this up for several throws is to use a string or laser set up from the hack. Once you have the cups set up in a straight line, use a marker to put light marks on the ice so you can reposition the cups after each practice throw. Don't worry, the lines will come off the next time the ice is scraped).

Now, shoot at the nearest cup – you and the stone should go straight to that cup and, once you release the stone, it should hit both cups. If you miss the nearest cup, your alignment was probably bad. If you hit the first cup but not the second, there is probably something wrong with

your release. Start over and try again until you get it right. Strive to hit the cups with the exact center of the stone. If you miss at close range, you will be way off at the far end.

Remember to count the rock's rotations as it travels down the ice. For the ice in most clubs, curlers should strive for 2 ½ to 3 revolutions and everyone on your team should have the same number of revolutions. A "lazy" handle will curl more or may even lose its turn and an over-rotated stone will tend to run straighter. Be consistent as an individual and as a team – you will make more shots and win more games.

Also strive for a common release point for everyone on your team. Rocks with drastically different release points will curl differently. Consistent release points and rotations will make reading the ice and anticipating curl much easier for the skip.

It's nice to look pretty as you're sliding down the ice. But remember, a \$1 million slide and a 2 cent release will get you a 2 cent shot. Until next time, good curling!

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