

Timely play – Do your part

Pay attention to the little things to make the game sweep along in a timely manner



By Jon Mielke, USCA Level III instructor & Level III coach

A new season hopefully means lots of new curlers. Teaching these new members proper techniques and curling etiquette always is a major undertaking, especially during the first few weeks of the season.

Regarding etiquette, USA Curling and many clubs have brochures and handouts to educate beginners on proper etiquette. It is one thing to put these materials in the hands of new members, but most of the related responsibility falls on skips and other veteran curlers. Don't be afraid to tactfully coach beginners on the timeless "dos and don'ts" of our grand old game.

I was going to kick off the new season of *Curling News* with a corresponding article on etiquette. But then I realized that I would need way more words that my readers care to read, plus a quick Google search yields all kinds of articles on the topic. So, I decided to focus on something that is a related and almost universal problem – slow play and not being able to play eight ends in two hours. Quick play should be everyone's goal because it is everyone's responsibility. And this applies to not only new curlers, but also to returning veterans!

A little quick math illustrates that wasting an average of 10 seconds per shot will delay an eight-end game by 21 minutes (16 rocks per end times eight ends times 10 seconds = 21 minutes). Here are some quick tips that will help you finish games in plenty of time:

Start on time – Many curlers seem to think that a 7 p.m. start time means getting to the club by 7 p.m. It doesn't! Get to the club early enough to get dressed, stretch, get to your sheet, shake hands, and be ready to deliver the first rock at the prescribed start time. Starting late means you probably won't be able to play a whole game.

Be ready to shoot when the preceding rock comes to rest – Players are often out of position when it is their turn to shoot. They may be sitting on a bench at mid-sheet or they are off somewhere looking for their slider.

Except for skips, the next shooter on a team should ideally be on the end board behind the hack when the opposing player is delivering the preceding stone. As soon as that player is sliding down the ice, the next shooter should move his/her rock into position next to the hack. The rock should be cleaned and the player should be standing behind the hack waiting for the skip to call the next shot. As soon as the shot is called and the skip's broom is in place, the shooter should get lined up and step into the hack, take a deep breath, and go. Make this your pre-shot routine – it is a huge time saver and it will actually help you make more shots.

Sweepers should also be in position and ready for the next shot. They should be waiting just outside the near hog line and, once the preceding shot is passed them, they should move toward the hack and be ready to go. Sweepers, your place is on both sides of the sheet near the back line. Don't

waste everybody's time by being out of position when it is your team's turn to shoot.

Help the skip – Other players on a team can help a skip save time. Thirds should constantly evaluate what is going on and should have their own idea of what shot to play. If the skip asks – have a quick and definitive answer.

Front-end players can also help a skip save time by moving the skip's stone to the hack before the skip gets to the delivering end of the sheet. Saving a few seconds here and there adds up.

Yield the ice – All players need to keep in mind that the ice belongs to the opposing team as soon as your team's rock comes to rest. Your team's skip should get out of the house and behind the back line and the rest of your players should move to the sidelines between the hog lines. Don't walk down the middle of the sheet toward the other end. Get out of the way and stand still. Don't make the other team wait because you are in the way.

Skips should think ahead – I sometimes joke that some skips will deliberate forever after the opposing team throws a center guard with their very first shot of the game. What's to think about?! The skip knew a month ago that the other team was going to throw a center guard, come into the house, or throw a hogger or through the house. Skips should know, in advance, what their reaction is to each possible outcome.

Skips can hone related skills by being familiar with and employing SHEETZ (shot calling is influenced by the Score, who has the Hammer, what End is being played, Environment (ice conditions, unmatched stones, etc.), Team's abilities (yours and theirs), and free guard Zone strategies and tactics). A previous article on SHEETZ is posted on USA Curling's website. Skips - think ahead and be ready to call the next shot. It is a huge time saver.

Stay out of the house when the end is over – When an end is over, it is up to the thirds to agree on the resulting score. Other players should stay out of the house. Everyone is anxious to know the outcome, but it doesn't speed things up if front-end players are in the house trying to measure stones with their brooms. Skips should move to the other end and leads and seconds should carefully remove rocks that are not in question and get in position to start the next end.

Timely play is everyone's job – It is the start of a new season. Make it one of your personal and team goals to contribute to quick play. Playing fast does not mean that you have to hurry. It just means that you are paying attention to things that waste time. By paying attention to these details, you will actually find the game more enjoyable and you will be taking a major step toward honoring the spirit of the game.

I hope your season is off to a good start. Until next time – Good Curling! To read more articles by Jon Mielke, please visit the USA Curling website at www.usacurl.org and click on the "Clubs" dropdown on the home page and go to the Membership Materials section to find past columns.