

Training Tips By Request

By Jon Mielke

For this summer edition, let's go to the mailbag and respond to reader input and inquiries on previous columns. First, we'll talk a little more about sweeping and then about eye dominance and how it affects your setup in the hack. Copies of earlier articles are available online at the address presented at the end of this article.

Sweeping Technique – Feedback on my recent column on sweeping focused on the position of the broom handle and hands when sweeping. Regarding the handle, remember that we encourage people to work at being able to sweep on both sides of the stone, which allows both sweepers to get closer to the stone and thereby warm the ice more effectively. Regardless of which side of the stone you sweep on, the handle of the broom should ideally be on the side of your body nearest the far end, toward the skip.

This position allows several things to happen. First of all, the recommended position allows the entire side-to-side sweeping motion to be closer to the stone. Creating heat closer to the stone is vital. The farther a sweeper is away from the stone, the more the ice will cool off before the stone reaches the swept area. Conversely, when the handle is positioned on the side of the body nearest the shooter, the broom head moves more parallel vs. perpendicular to the path of the stone. This forces the front sweeper further away from the stone and diminishes the impact of any heat that has been created. Also, when the handle is incorrectly positioned on the side of the body nearest the shooter, the resulting sweeping motion pulls the broom head back toward the stone, thereby increasing the risk of a burnt stone. Remember, for optimal results, always keep the broom head moving perpendicular or angled slightly forward relative to the path of the stone.

Concerning hand position, regardless of whether you sweep in an upright position or with your back more parallel to the ice, the hand closest to the target end should be the upper hand on the handle. That hand location will put your shoulders and hands in a position that allows the broom head to move in the previously discussed perpendicular or slightly forward direction. It will also put your body in a position that allows you to look down the ice so you can judge the distance to the desired location, receive visual cues from the skip, and avoid tripping over stones that are already in play.

None of the prescribed changes in hand and handle positions will feel comfortable at first, but give them a try and stick with it. They will make you a better sweeper, and good sweepers really do make a difference.

In all fairness, it should be noted that some very effective sweepers and accomplished curlers (my son included) sweep contrary to what has been described in the preceding paragraphs. It can be done, and done so quite effectively. But remember, regardless of what hand and handle positions you use, producing heat is of utmost importance, and you cannot do that without producing pressure.

Pressure is not going to come from just arm strength or broom head velocity. We have all seen club curlers frantically flail away with their arms moving like hummingbird wings, while accomplishing almost nothing. You need to get your entire upper body into the act and really bear down on the head of the broom. That is where heat comes from and that is what will really contribute to you becoming an effective sweeper.

Eye Dominance – According to Wikipedia, eye dominance is the brain's preference to receive visual input from one eye vs. the other. Most often, right-handed people are right eye dominant, and vice versa, but not always. Are you right eye or left eye dominant? Do you know? Does it matter? Yes, it does matter!

Let's start by determining if you are right eye or left eye dominant. Extend your arms in front of your face and create a circle by overlapping your index fingers with each other and your thumbs with each other. Next, look at a distant object through the circle and draw your arms back toward your face, keeping the distant object in sight. You should end up with your hands directly in front of either your right or your left eye. That eye is your dominant eye, the eye that you use to focus on distant objects, like the skip's broom.

Why does it matter? Remember that the most important line on a curling sheet is the invisible line from your hack foot to the skip's broom. In the hack position, the rock should be on top of that line, the hack foot should be centered in the hack and pointed down that line, and your dominant eye should be directly behind and looking down that line.

Everything lines up perfectly if you are right-handed and right eye dominant and vice versa. But if you are not, your dominant eye is not lined up with the line of delivery and you will have to move the rock or your body sideways during the delivery to get everything on the same line. Moving things sideways during a delivery increases the likelihood that you will miss both the skip's broom and the shot.

So, what can you do to get everything lined up? First, rather than positioning your foot in the center of the hack, move it and your entire body sideways toward the centerline. For a right-handed curler, this adjustment will move your dominant left eye closer toward a position directly in line with both the center of the hack and the invisible line that runs from the hack to the skip's broom. Another adjustment that will bring things more in line is for the shooter to cock his or her head slightly to the right (for right-handed curlers). This adjustment will move the left eye even closer to a position directly behind the hack and in line with the invisible line from the hack to the skip's broom.

Having made these two adjustments, remember to keep the stone on the invisible line running from the center of the hack toward the skip's broom, and during the drawback position of your delivery, bring the stone back to the middle of the hack rather than to the center of your hack foot (which has been repositioned toward the centerline). That way, you will get your dominant left eye more in line with the intended line of delivery. Now, as you slide down the ice, your dominant eye should be directly behind the stone and looking straight down the invisible line toward the skip's broom. Taken together, these adjustments will help compensate for opposite-eye dominance and help inflicted people (like me) hit the broom with increased regularity.

Until next time, keep those cards and letters and e-mails coming. And, as always, 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).