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PRESENTS THE COACHING SERIES...

“A PANE IN THE GLASS”

Drills to Die For

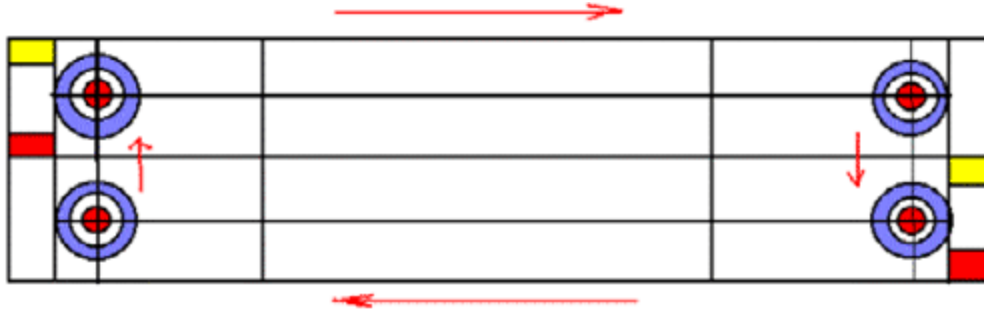
by Bill Tschirhart

Most of the following drills were developed while coaching at the University of Waterloo. Each one was designed to fill a need. Sometimes the need was personal skill development and sometimes it was a team requirement. The drills described here are meant to be altered to fit your team's needs. Most have an element of competition. They're all supposed to be FUN! Enjoy!

CIRCLE DRILL

This is a great drill for those of us who work with many curlers at once. During the tryout portion of the season it is an excellent drill for assessing talent. The drill can have any focus the coach or instructor wishes to give it. Here's how it works.

The stones begin at either end of two adjacent sheets. We'll assume for the purposes of this explanation, there are eight players involved. On each sheet the players assume the normal playing positions of shooter, two brushers and skip. Simultaneously, the shooters deliver their stone. When the shot concludes, the players rotate positions (shooter to brusher one, brusher one to brusher two, brusher two to skip and the skip crosses over to the adjacent sheet to become the shooter on that sheet). The drill continues until all the stones have been delivered. That's one rotation! Have as many rotations as necessary.



The coach/instructor can position himself/herself in the middle of the drill and monitor it. The value of this drill is its full involvement by many players simultaneously. This is one drill I use at virtually every practice. If you have more than eight players try establishing a "rest station" at each end after the "skip" position. It's a good time to provide some quick feedback to a player without centering him/her out. It also gives the player an immediate chance to affect change.

LINE DANCING

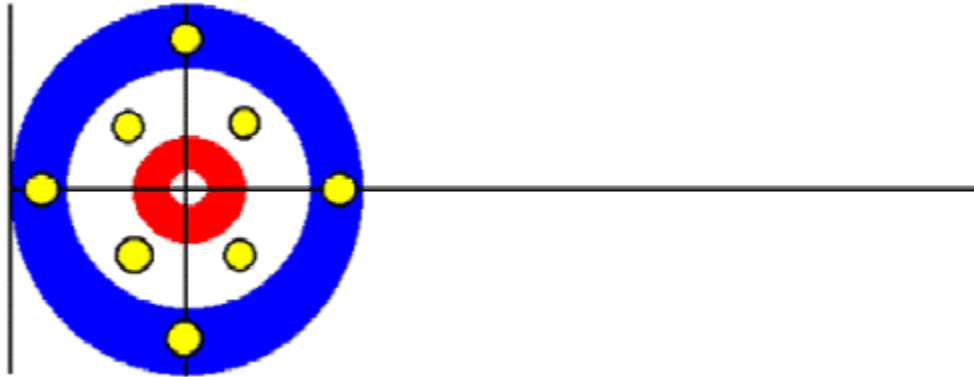
This drill sounds ridiculously simple. Try it! This is a team drill. A team can try to break its own record or the team can break into two and the twosomes can play against one another on adjacent sheets.

The object of the drill is to deliver all eight of a team's stones and to have them all come to rest on the center line. A point is awarded for each stone (after the eight have been delivered) that touches the center line. By the way, did you know that the center line is not in any of the playing rules of the game? Why then do we have a center line? Well, according to DAN PROHASKA (ice technician at the Ilderton Curling Club north of London ON) "It's there to guide the skips back to the other end of the sheet".

This is an excellent weight control and line of delivery drill. If the lead and second can deliver their stones to the back of the house on the center line, the third (or mate) and skip have a relatively easy time of it. If, on the other hand, the lead is short of the rings, well, "let the games begin"!

CRAZY EIGHTS

This is probably the all-time favourite. Again it's best played between two teams on adjoining sheets. The stones of one colour are placed systematically and symmetrically in the rings. We started by placing one in the twelve foot circle on the center line at the top of the house, and one in a similar position at the back. The remaining six were placed on the tee line in each of the 12, 8, 4, 4, 8 & 12 foot circles. Come on, use your imagination! They're in a straight line! We now use a variety of "starting positions". Our current "best set-up" is four stones in the 12 foot (splitting the tee line and the center line thus forming a square) and the other four in the 8 foot midway between the two rocks in the 12 foot (forming a second square at 45 degrees to the first).



The stones of the opposite colour are the shooters at the other end of the sheet. In turn, the team players try to remove the "target stones" (with a skip to call and brushers to, what else, BRUSH).

The object of the drill is to remove all the target stones but retain all the shooters. When the pebble settles, score one point for each shooter on the rings but deduct one point for each target stone remaining in the rings. A perfect score is EIGHT! Crazy eh?!

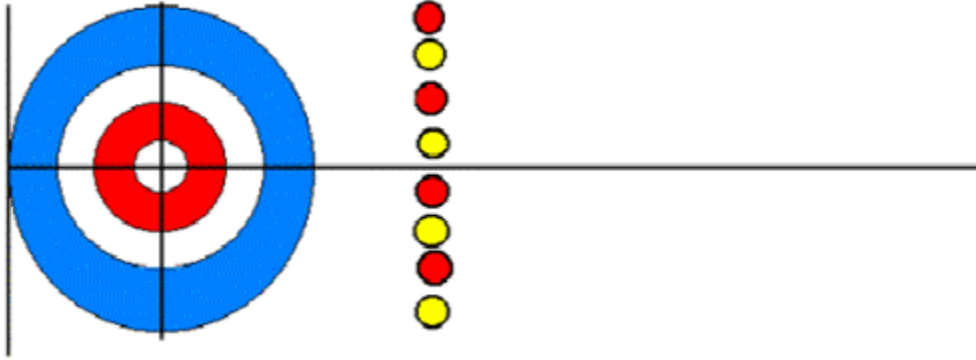
KEEP AWAY

Players play as individuals for this one. A game then is one-on-one. It involves drawing the house and brushing. Alternately, the players shoot and brush all the stones of one colour. A point is up for grabs on every shot. If the shooter draws the house, he/she wins the point. If, on the other hand, by "gorilla" brushing or keen judgment, the brusher keeps the stone out of the house, the brusher wins the point. Obviously there are 8 points per game. If the score is tied at 8, the players flip with the winner choosing to be the shooter or brusher for the decisive 9th point.

This is an excellent drill for interval timing, brushing technique and stamina. The drill is best done near the end of practice when players are a bit tired already. It's a great "tournament" style drill, getting down to a final game.

LAS VEGAS

Two teams play against one another on the same sheet. Each team donates four of its stones to be part of a line of stones in front of the house. These stones are placed alternately by colour with about a stone's width between each.



Each player then delivers one stone in game fashion alternating with the other team. The object is to score points by "raising" stones into the rings. The rings have value with the 12 ft. worth 2 points, the 8 ft. worth 3, the 4 ft. worth 4 and the button a big 5 points. If you can remove an opponents stone(s), go right ahead.

When the last stone has come to rest and the score is determined (each team can score points), the team with the lower score (or if tied, the team that delivered the first stone) can **DOUBLE** the points. If that's the case, then that team **MUST** shoot first or pay up on the first "bet". At the conclusion of the "double" end, the same regulation is used to allow for a **TRIPLING** of the original bet.

HORSE

This is a direct copy of one of the most traditional basketball one-on-one shooting drills called "horse" (or some other unmentionable and truly obnoxious and politically incorrect name).

In the basketball version, two players try to match shots. If the first player makes his/her shot, the other must duplicate it or get a letter from the word "H-O-R-S-E". If the first player misses then the other gets to establish a shot and if successful, his/her opponent must match it or get the letter. The game ends when someone is a H-O-R-S-E!

In curling, the two players try to draw to one of four zones. Zone one is the front half of the "free guard zone". You guessed it, zone 2 is the back half of the free guard zone. Zone 3 is the front half of the rings and zone 4 is the back half of the rings. You decide about the tee line, its your team! The player shooting first simply declares a zone and if successful forces the opponent to match it. If the first shooter is unsuccessful, the second can hang a letter on the first by either successfully drawing the declared zone or he/she can choose to establish a new zone. If the second player chooses to try to draw into the declared zone and is unsuccessful, the first player retains the declaration of the next zone. Success in drawing the zone declared by the player who declared it, results in retention of the right to declare the next zone.

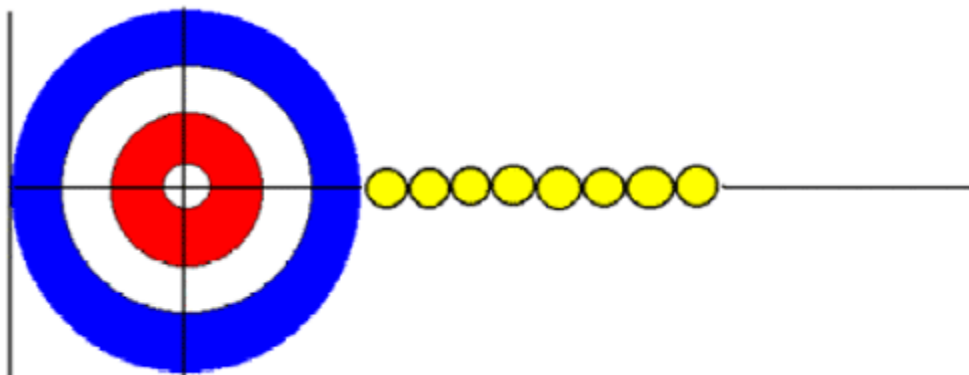
HIDE AND SEEK

Teams of two work best here. The object of this drill is to draw behind guards in an effort to prevent, or at least make it as difficult as possible for your opponents to remove your stone from play.

One team manually places a guard stone. That team then attempts to hide behind it. The opposing team's task is to remove that stone from play. If the drawing team fails to draw behind the guard, it's a simple matter of an open hit. If the draw behind the guard is successful, then we're talking a down weight hit or possibly a run back of the guard onto the target stone. A point is the prize to the hitting team if the drawn stone is removed from play but the drawing team scores the point if the hit is unsuccessful.

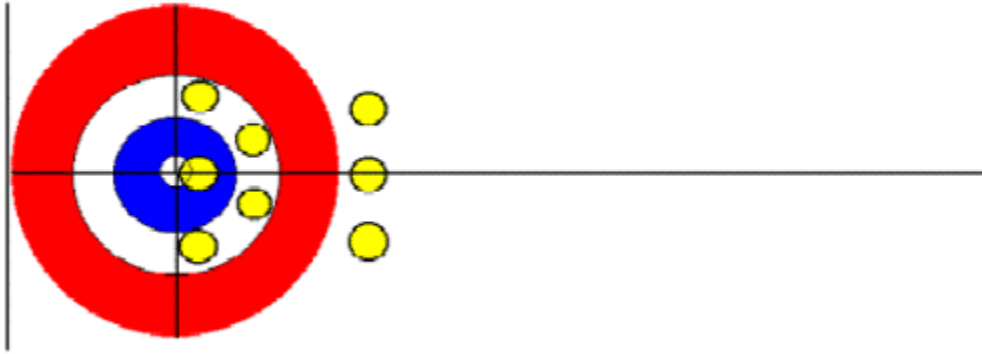
POP GOES THE WEASEL

This is another drill for which teams play on adjoining sheets. All the stones of one colour are placed on the center line from the edge of the 12 ft. toward the hogline (with the stones in contact with one another [sort of the ultimate "freeze"]). The stones of the other colour are at the shooting end of the ice. The object is to raise as many stones from in front of the house onto the rings as possible. (Use the 5,4,3,2&1 counting system.) Experiment with new and exciting formations for the stones out front!



PICKET FENCES

Each team has its own sheet. Stones are arranged according to the diagram below. The space between the three stones in front of the rings is EXACTLY the diameter of one stone! Like "crazy eights" the object is to remove as many of the target stones and retain as many of the shooting stones as possible. Executing the drill and counting is the same as "crazy eights" as well.



HOT SHOTS

Ford really did have a better idea! The advent of this company's sponsorship has seen a rebirth of the old "points game" that was popular in clubs in the 40's & 50's (that's the 1940's and 50's). But who would have thought then that success at this "game" would win you a new automobile?

Of the six shots, all but the last "tie breaker" shot are scored 5,4,3&2 with the button worth 5 and the 12 ft. worth 2. Here they are as described to me by one of the FORD HOT SHOT winners, KAY MONTGOMERY of Saskatchewan (Scott Tournament of Hearts 1995).

1. Draw to the button.
2. Raise. A stone is placed on the center line tangent to the top of 12 foot circle.
3. Draw the port. A stone is placed adjacent to the center line just off the top of the 12 foot. The other side of the port is another stone, placed a predetermined distance from the first. The stones may be placed to allow for either rotation of the shooting stone (i.e. inturn or outturn).
4. Hit. A stone is placed on the center line tangent to the button behind the tee line. Contact must be made with the target stone.
5. Hit and roll. A stone is placed adjacent to the 12ft. circle midway between the tee line and the center line. The target stone may be placed to allow for either rotation of the shooting stone. The shooting stone must make contact with the target stone.
6. Double take out. Two stones are placed on the edges of the 4 ft. at a forty-five degree angle to the tee line. The shooter must cause both target stones to be removed from play.

THE GREAT SHOOT OUT

Full credit for this goes to JIM WAITE and the staff of the first Trillium Curling Camp (Peterborough, summer of 1993). It is a great way to end a camp, clinic, seminar, course etc.

Basically it's a draw-to-the-button! The rings have value (5,4,3,2,&1 for the f.g.z.). In camp situations, there may be many teams represented (In Peterborough there are now 24 in three divisions). All the leads get in the hack (with their skip in the house and brushers at the ready) and on a signal they all deliver their draw. Points are recorded. Then it's the seconds' turn, followed by the thirds and skips. Now groups get together (boys & girls, jr.'s and sr.'s, reds &

blues & golds ...). Each group chooses four players from within the whole group, one to shoot, two to brush and one to skip the shot. These players are now shooting one shot for DOUBLE points (10,8,6,4&2). Points are then added and recorded. Now, the groups reassemble in conference to choose a new group of four to shoot for TRIPLE points (15, 12, 9, 6&3).

The double and triple point shots generate much enthusiasm 'cause there are now supporters who hopefully will be very vocal in their support!

SCOTCH TWOSOMES

Wonderful people those Scots! They gave us golf, curling, haigus, scones, bagpipes (and the two songs that go with them) and scotch whiskey. In terms of the whiskey, they also brought the containers in which the whiskey was held (mind you the containers were the Scots themselves). Few realize that in the birthplace of our great game, SCOTCH TWOSOMES is the preferred form. The rule variations are simple.

One player plays the first four stones of the end and the "skip" the remaining four. The player in the house may only brush when the delivered stone reaches the hog line. Usually a game is of 6 ends duration.

It's a great way to practise thanks to the Scots! We owe them much!!

RADAR O'REILLY (M*A*S*H 4077)

Like "Keep Away" and horse" this is a one-on-one drill. Player "A" delivers a shot that must remain in play. Player "B" to win the point must make contact with it and move it to within a pre-agreed distance (i.e. brush handle length). The shot by player "B" may be altered so that it does not come in contact with player "A's" shot but comes to rest within a pre-agreed distance. Player "A" wins the point if player "B" is unsuccessful. Players alternate as "A" and "B". This is a good drill for player "B" to practice judging line and time (i.e. stopwatch) on an opponent's shot.

CLIMB THE LADDER

If there is any question asked of me more than any other it's, "If you had to identify one team skill which is the key to success, what might it be?"

In my mind, there is a clear cut winner, it's WEIGHT CONTROL and its companion, WEIGHT JUDGMENT. Climb the Ladder was designed by Pat "B" Reid (Ontario has more than its share of "Pat Reids" in curling) precisely for this purpose. It's the newest in the stable of "Drills To Die For".

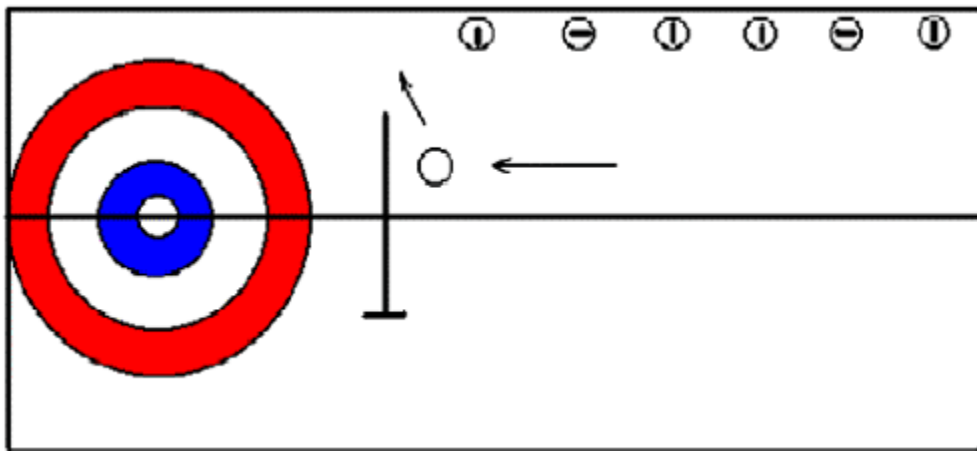
As with most of the drills, it's a team drill in that the players deliver their two stones in the normal rotation (lead, second..) with the skip in the house and the brushers doing what they do best, brushing. The object of the drill is to deliver stones to pre-arranged distances in either an

ascending or descending sequence.

In ascending sequence, the lead attempts to deliver his/her first stone just over the hogline (within a brush handle length of the hogline). When the stone comes to rest, it is pulled to the side of the sheet and the handle is positioned either perpendicular to the side board (made shot) or parallel to it (missed shot). The lead then delivers his/her second stone within a brush handle length of the previous stone. That stone is then pulled to the side and its handle positioned either perpendicular or parallel to the side board. After all eight stones have been delivered, simply check the handle positions for the team score.

It helps to position a brush on the ice (see diagram) as a target. In descending sequence, the first stone is delivered by the skip to within a brush handle of the backline. The rest of the stones are then delivered to come to rest in positions toward the hogline. The last two stones are delivered by the lead.

Try a variation where all sixteen stones are delivered, thus making each "zone" smaller. (I know, I omitted the tee line in the diagram. Feel fortunate you got a diagram!)

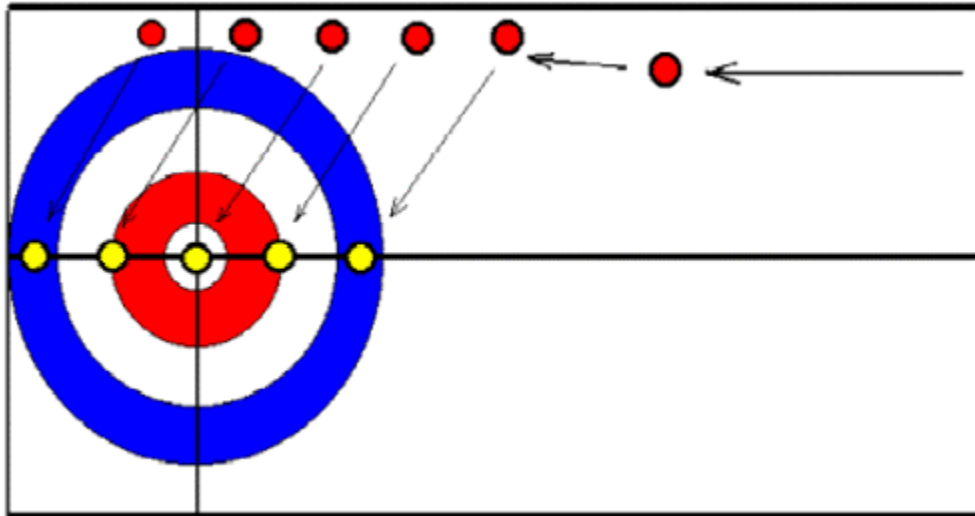


One aspect of the game that has changed is the ability of some of the top level teams to use stones that end up near the side boards in the free guard zone, to re-direct their stones into the house to remove an opposition stone and score "the big end". The Wayne Middaugh's and Sandra Schmirler's turned this into an art form. Here is a drill which will go a long into putting this weapon into your team's arsenal.

Stones are positioned in the house (number and exact position at your discretion, the diagrammed configuration is just a sample). Stones are then placed near the side board in the free guard zone.

These are the stones that will redirect the shooters into the house to "pick off" the "hombres".

Be sure to position the re-direct stones on both sides of the sheet.



PROGRESSIVE HOG LINE

This drill is similar to CLIMB THE LADDER. The concept is simple. With each player delivering his/her two stones, brushers brushing and skip in place, the lead delivers a stone. Wherever that stone comes to rest, it is pulled directly to the side line. It then becomes the new hog line. The lead's second stone must get over that hog line. If it does, as with the first stone, it is pulled directly to the side and becomes the new hog line. If a stone slides through the house it's out of play of course. The object of the drill is to get all eight stones over the hog line. Hint (or rather, confession): If the delivered stone overlaps the hog line stone, I count it. You set the rules for your team!

This drill can and should be played in reverse order. Delivered stones cannot pass the previously delivered stone.

THE CASH BONSPIEL

The first time I saw this "activity" it was demonstrated by my friend Pat "B" Reid and has become a staple at clinics I have the pleasure of conducting. I like it for a variety of reasons that will become evident as you read on.

To prepare, you need to purchase some "cash" for the participating teams. I like those gold foil-covered chocolate coins but around Halloween time, those boxes of mini chocolate bars etc.

work fine.

Each team is provided with a cache of money (usually 20). One player is designated as the team “accountant” (pay entry fees and collect winnings). A willing volunteer is designated as the “banker” (collects entry fees and distributes winnings). The leader has the responsibility to create the shots the teams will attempt and direct play.

Each team is assigned a sheet of ice. If there are more teams than sheets of available ice, some may have to share a sheet. To warm up, the teams delivery the stones to the away end

The leader sets up a shot, describes what has to happen to “make the shot” and establishes an entry fee for the shot (\$1, \$2, \$3 ...). The teams place someone in the house and declare two brushers and a shooter. All the shooters assume their positions in the hack awaiting direction from the leader with the words “*Ready, Focus, Deliver*”. All the shots begin together.

When all teams have attempted the shot, those who made the shot as described by the leader share the money in the bank. If no team makes the shot, the leader can instruct the teams to attempt the shot again (with a different shooter) or move on to another shot. In any event, the money will build in the bank (aka “carryover”) until a team next makes a shot. A different player attempts subsequent shots throughout the activity!

If a team runs out of money, it continues to participate but obviously does not pay entry fees. When it wins some money, it starts to pay entry fees.

The “last shot” of the event is always a draw to the button with the team drawing closest, winning whatever money is in the bank!

PICK-UP STICKS

This is the newest of the lot with thanks to Lynita Delaney of the USCA for this idea. This drill, as with most of the drills in this article, is a team drill and might be the most realistic of them all. We’ll assume for the purposes of this drill that the stones are coloured red & yellow. Half of each set of stones are delivered to the away end as a warm-up.

The team then sets their brushes down (*on the sideboards, never on the ice... it’s very dangerous to do that as a player inadvertently stepping on a brush handle can easily fall*). Each player grasps a yellow & red stone (one in each hand) and assumes a position just outside the rings at the home end. On a signal, the eight stones are slide toward the button. After the stones come to rest, any that touched a sideline or sideboard are removed from play. All that are in play remain in place. One coloured stone will be “shot”. The object of the drill is for the team to play a shot that makes a stone of the opposite colour “shot”. If the team is successful, it wins a point. If it is unsuccessful, it loses a point.

The drill is repeated with the players creating a new situation in the manner described above with

a different player delivering the shot.

The drill can be a standalone drill with one team, or it can be competition among teams!

BOCCE CURLING

This is more an activity than drill but a good one nonetheless. To set up, place a “target” (I like those brightly coloured [usually an orange hue] plastic cones but ice hockey pucks work too) in the exact center of a sheet of curling ice. The teams position themselves at opposite ends of the sheet with a complete set of stones.

The object of the activity is exactly the same as for a regular game of curling; have as many of your stones closer to the target than the closest stone belonging to your opponent.

The “target” can move of course. If it does, then wherever it lies becomes the “button”. If a team delivers a stone which either directly or indirectly causes the “target” to be removed from play, it’s placed back to its original position (i.e. the center of the sheet).

Some play a variation that states that no opponent’s stones, either directly or indirectly, can be removed from play. If that occurs, the shooting stone is removed and all stones displaced are replaced.

This is a good game for newer curlers as it slows every technical aspect of the delivery down to a manageable pace.

Usually there is no brushing but all other rules of curling apply!

SEND YOUR DRILLS TO ME FOR INCLUSION IN THE CONSTANTLY UPDATED VERSION OF "DRILLS TO DIE FOR".

SOME THOUGHTS ON PRACTICES FOR COACHES

A practice is an investment in time and effort for all involved! For my scholastic athletes it's about 2 hours from their studies. If I'm asking them to give up that amount of valuable time, it places a responsibility on me to provide a practice that will justify the time and effort the players are willing to put forth.

1. Practices should be ENJOYABLE & FRUITFUL (for the coach and the players)!
2. Each practice must be pre-planned. It is a sign of strength, not weakness for your players to see you with a written plan in your hand!
3. Each practice should have a focus or theme and that focus should be announced to the players prior to the practice.

4. Some activities should be part of almost every practice. i.e. pre-game on-ice warm-up
5. There should be something new to do at each practice.
6. The activities selected should advance the players' physical and mental preparation for play in competition. In terms of physical preparation. Some drills should be anaerobic and others aerobic in nature. Time should also be set aside, not necessarily on-ice time, for mental toughness and stress management strategies.
7. There should be time in each practice for dialogue between the coach and each player.
8. There should be time in each practice for dialogue between the coach and the team but don't use "ice time" for dialogue when the dialogue could have taken place off ice.
9. Maximize ice time! Use all the hacks for example. Avoid having players standing in line waiting for a turn to participate. The players WANT to be active!
10. HAVE FUN!!!!

SUGGESTIONS

At the conclusion of your practice, ask one of the participants to state what he/she felt was the focus (i.e. main teaching point) of the practice. The answer should be quick and correct. Also ask yourself if you would have enjoyed your own practice.

Just as the players should maintain a journal, as the coach, you should as well. One of the components of that journal should be the practice plans you have implemented throughout the season.

Some practices should take place at a location other than the curling facility and can focus on "warm side of the glass" skills.

Remember, players tend to play the way they practise!

