

# THE GAME OF CURLING

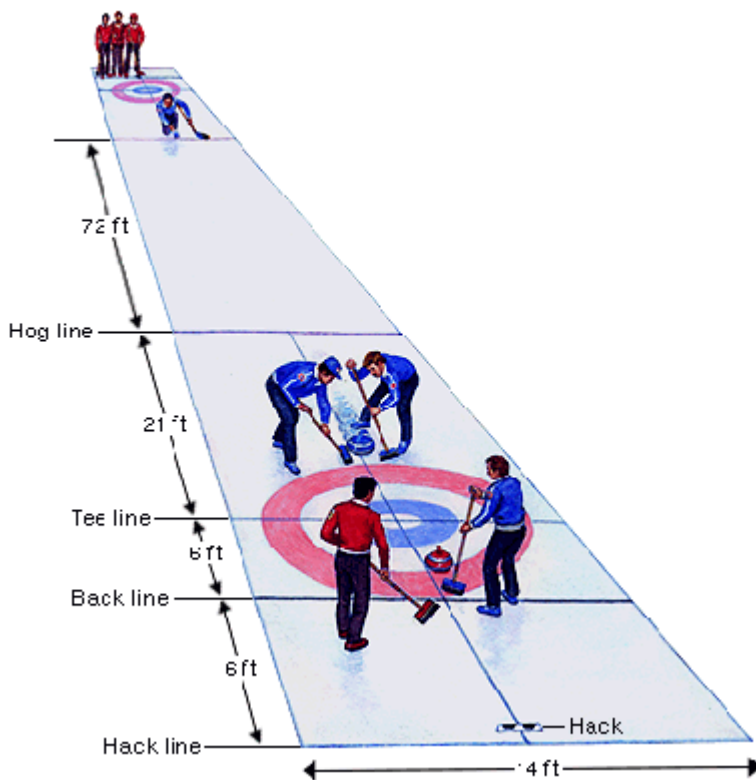
Have you ever watched curling on TV and wondered what was happening? What is all the shouting- seemingly between members of the same team? Why are they sweeping in front of a strange-looking rock that is sliding down the ice - is the ice dirty?

They seem to be trying to get the rock into the big circle at the other end. Some must not be very good players since they can't seem to get the rock as far as the circle.

What is going on? In the description below I'll try to make it a little clearer, and introduce some of the common terms used in curling. It's not as complicated as it may look and hopefully you will find matches more interesting to watch. I know you will find it even more fun to play.



## Curling Sheet



## The Ice (what are all those markings?)

The game is played on a 'sheet' of ice. Before the game your team mates may ask "What sheet are we on?" Most curling clubs have more than one sheet in the ice 'shed' that are numbered 1, 2, 3 and so on, much like alleys are numbered in bowling.

At each end of the sheet is a raised bump called "the hack". This is simply the place to put your foot when it is your turn to play - to push off from and slide your rock down the ice.

The sheet is 150 feet in length. I must admit it does seem a little longer when it is your turn to play.

Thirty three feet (33ft) from each end is a line across the ice called the hog line. When throwing you must release the rock before the first hog line or your rock is removed from play. Some clubs put a little 'piggy bank' at this

line and the offender not releasing the rock in time must put a Looney in the bank for his or her transgression. So there is a chicken and egg question in curling; which came first....the term 'hog line' or the piggy bank?

Your rock must cross the far hog line. If it stops short, you have 'hogged' the rock, your shot doesn't count and the rock is removed. No, there is no 'piggy bank' fine for doing this.

At each end is a colourful circle with a bulls eye in the middle. I'll explain a little more about this when I talk about how to score points.

### **The Rocks** (they look so heavy...)

There are 16 of these on each sheet. Ours come from a quarry in Scotland and are expertly cut, polished and fitted with a throwing handle. Each team has eight of one colour, two for each player, that are thrown alternately by each team.

"Thrown?"

You will hear the term "it is your turn to throw your rock." Don't try it. Each rock weighs about 44 pounds. You simply hold the rock by the handle and slide it down the ice. Turning the handle to the left or to the right will cause the rock to curl (curve) to the left or right. Your skip will signal to you which "turn" to throw.

### **The equipment** (It's fairly simple)

You need some curling shoes or a slider fitted onto your shoe to help you slide along the ice. Without this, a head-first dive to the ice might be in the cards for you.

The other piece of equipment is a broom used to sweep in front of a rock that is sliding down the ice. When your skip yells for you to sweep you had better have your broom at the ready.

What's the purpose of sweeping a rock? Well, it serves a few purposes. It keeps the rock sliding straighter down the ice and it helps it slide further if it is not sliding far enough. As a newcomer to the game, you will quickly learn that it also provides you with something to lean on, a crutch, while you get used to the slippery ice.



### **The Team** (each shot is a team effort!)

There are 4 players on each team - the LEAD, the SECOND, the THIRD (often called the vice skip) and the 4th player, the SKIP...the person who calls the shots for your team.

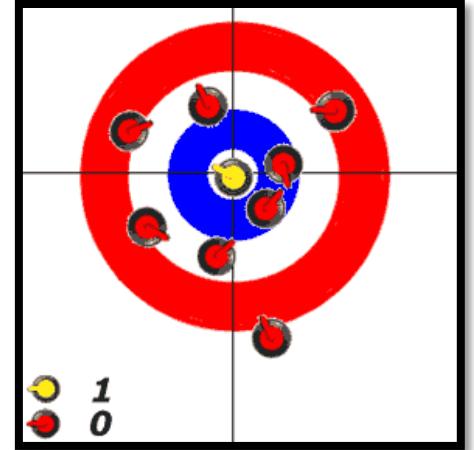
When you first start curling, you will likely play the lead position and throw the first 2 rocks. As you gain in experience you will get a chance to learn other positions that are a bit more complex.

## Scoring (how do you determine who wins and loses?)

First of all, there are 8 ends in a normal club game....10 in matches like the Provincial or Canadian championships. An end is similar to a period in hockey or an inning in baseball. Whoever has the most points after 8 ends is the winner.

To score points is fairly simple. Only rocks totally or partially in the circle (called the house), can score points. The rock that is closest to the button (small centre circle) gets a point. If you have 2 rocks closer to the button than your opponent you count 2 points. If you have 3 rocks closer to the button than your opponent you count 3 points.

If all of your 8 rocks are closer to the button than your opponent's rocks your team gets 8 points. But, that is as rare as a hole in one in golf. Remember, every time you throw a rock, your opponent will throw one right after – as they don't want the 'shame' of giving up an 8-ender, they will try to knock your rock out of the house so theirs will count.



## Strategy (yes, there really is a strategy to playing the game)

It may look simple but there is a strategy to the game. It's the skip and vice skip who make the calls. Of course it is your right to second guess your skip. However, I suggest you do it where the skip can't hear you or you will be looking for another team to join.

You will learn the strategy as you learn more about the game, but here are some of the basic things the skip must be aware of at all times:

The speed of the ice is not always the same. Sometimes you will have to throw the rock a little harder than you will at other times. Sometimes the rocks will curl (curve) more than other times. Part of the skip's task is to 'read' the ice. That is, to understand the speed and the curl. These can change throughout the game. This will help the skip determine where he or she will place their broom for you to aim at and how hard you should throw the rock.

When your team scores more points to win an end, they must throw the first rock the next end. There is a different strategy used when you throw first or you throw last. There is an advantage when you throw the last rock - called "the hammer". The opposing skip must employ strategy to take away that advantage.

Sometimes your skip will want you to put one (draw) into the house (the circle), or will ask for a 'take out' to knock an opponent's rock out of the house or may want you to place a rock as 'a guard' to protect a rock that your team has in the house.

But don't worry about strategy when first starting to curl. Let the skip worry about that.

**Social part** (some people think this is the best part of their game)

One of the nice things about curling is the social aspect. The two teams who have played against each other sit together in the lounge to have a drink. The winning team buys the losing team a drink then the losers usually reciprocate.

It gives the winning team the chance to brag about their win while the losing team will talk about the weather, politics, current events or anything else to change the subject. All is in good fun especially if you are on the winning team.



**Try it. You'll like it!**

The club has instructional sessions for those who want to curl at night and for those wanting to curl in the daytime. You'll be with other people learning to curl so you won't feel out of place.

It won't take long to feel comfortable playing the game – it could be after just a few sessions. I trust you to never mention this but, in many cases, you will soon be playing better than some of our current members who have never had formal training. Hey, forget that....I'm a current member.

Once the instructors feel you are ready, you could gain practice by filling in as a spare on a league team missing a spare. The next step would be to join a team in one of the many leagues at the club and to keep polishing your skills.

You will discover that the whole experience of curling provides you with much enjoyment.

