

So you want to be a skip?

HERE IS A QUIDE TO HELP YOU TO  
ACHIEVE THAT ROLE!

# The Role of the Skip

- Represents the team, leads the team
- Calls the game
  - Determines strategy for game, end and shot
  - Enables shot-making for the entire team
    - Analyzing the ice (and, less importantly, the rocks)
    - Knowing the team, analyzing the opponents
    - Understanding how rocks react when struck
- Quarterbacks the rock in motion
  - Calls line, specifies actual rock placement/striking
  - Switches the shot, when appropriate
  - Sweeps behind the tee line
- Throws (and makes) final two stones

# Secondary Duties

- Determines the pace of play
  - By example and by coaching
- Establishes systems for the team
  - Shot calls, weight calls, communication
- Speaks for the team to officials
- Keeps everyone on an even keel
- Educates the team on strategy, sweeping and mechanics (especially release mechanics)

# The “Chess on Ice” Myth

- Curling is a sport, not a board game
  - Strategy and shot-making are closely intertwined
- It’s not really possible to be “good at strategy” without also being good at making shots
  - It is, however, possible to be “bad at strategy” while being good at making shots
- An aspiring skip needs to be a complete player
  - That takes time, involves playing other positions

# Strategy

- Score more points than your opponent
  - If you're tied in the last end, you need only 1 point
- A winning formula:
  - Win more ends than your opponent
  - When you do lose an end, avoid a big loss
- What does it mean to win an end?
  - With hammer, take two or more points
  - Without hammer, give up only one point (or steal)

# Take two, give one

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Total
	2		2		2		2		8
4		1		1		1			7

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		Total
1		1	1	1		1			5
	2				2		2		6

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
3	1	1		1		1			7
			3		3		1	1	8

# How to Win Ends (First Try)

- Not so fast, to win ends you must make shots!
- Your shots are your strategic toolkit
  - Thus, everyone's strategy will be a bit different
  - Generally, you should not play shots you can't make (or are unlikely to make, or that are impossible)
  - Set up the end to make your last few shots
  - There are a few shots that every skip *\*must\** be able to make (since they come up all the time)
    - Draw to the (center of) the rings
    - Hit and stick
    - Hit (the desired) half of a rock

# Draw Shots

- You and your opponent should be able to:
  - Draw to the rings (or miss on the pro side)
  - Hit the 4-foot circle in the middle to later part of the game
  - Put up a guard (on relatively straight or normal ice)
  - Tap a rock back
- Draws are harder when:
  - The ice is unknown or heavy (e.g., the first end)
  - There are rocks to maneuver through or around
  - You are throwing to a very small target (e.g., the pin)
  - You have inexperienced sweepers



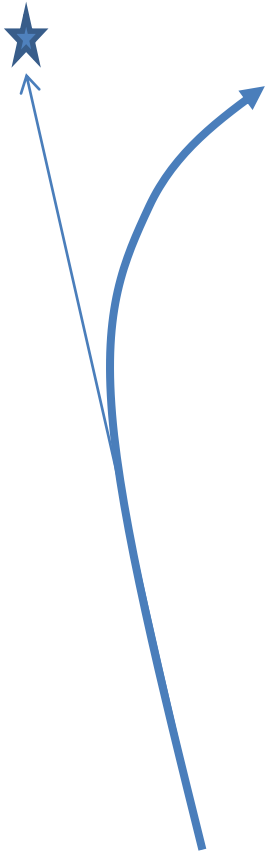
# Hits

- You and your opponent should be able to:
  - Hit a rock on the nose and stick
  - Hit one half of a rock or the other and roll in the desired direction
  - Hit a rock and roll off the sheet
- Hits are harder when
  - They curl a lot, even at high weight
  - The target stone is partially buried
  - You have to roll to a specific (small) target

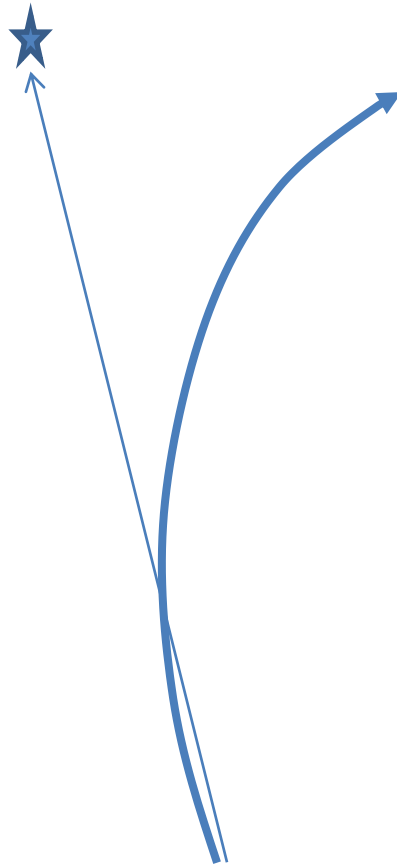
# Brooming Shots

- Putting the broom in the right place is critical to making shots
- Basic idea is to read the ice, and put the broom in the right place based on the weight required
  - Higher weight shots always run straighter
  - Each player should be broomed differently based on how their rocks generally curl

# Basic shot shapes



Normal release,  
good finish

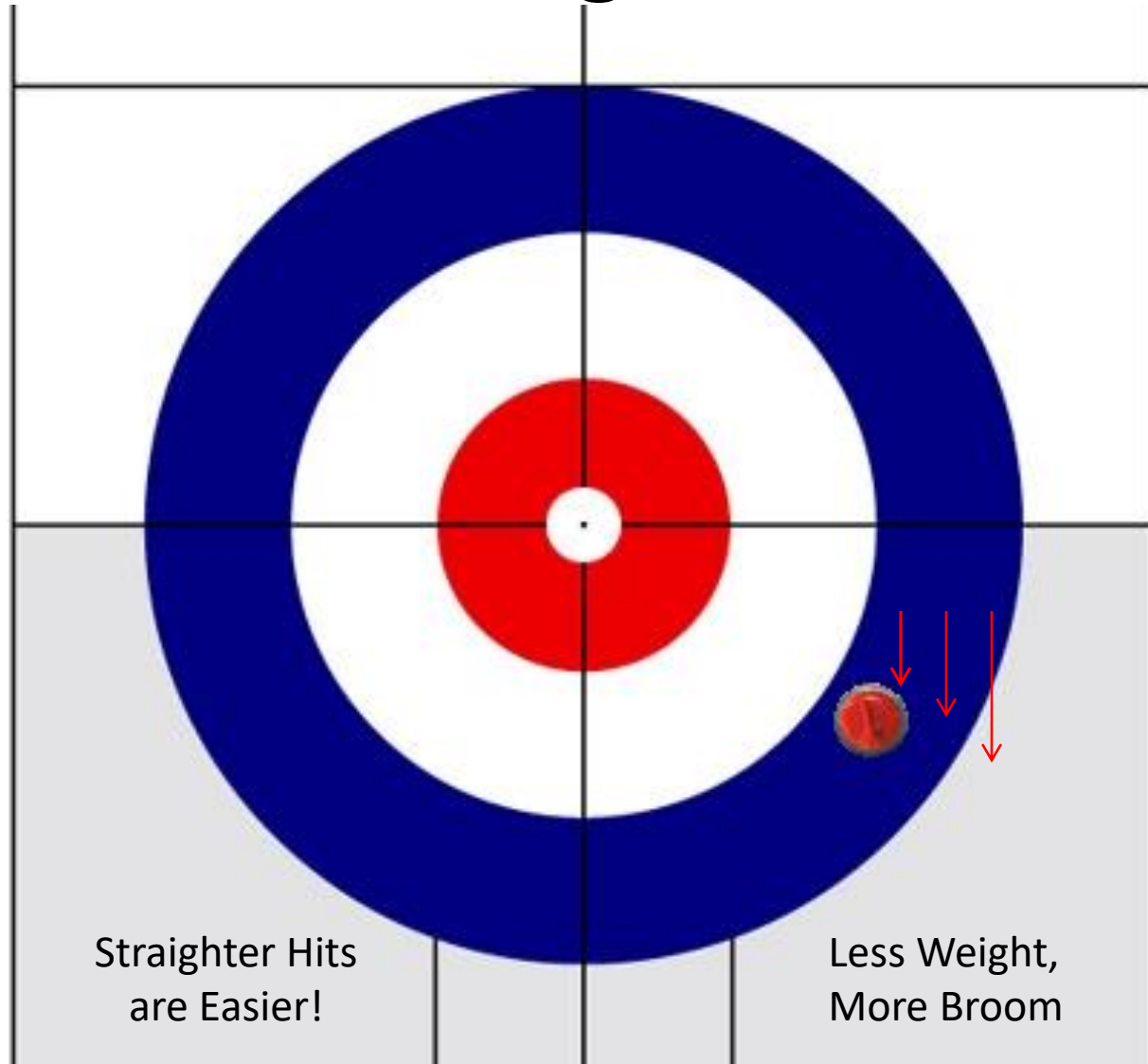


Started, on ice  
with curl



Set out, pushed  
against handle

# Brooming Hits

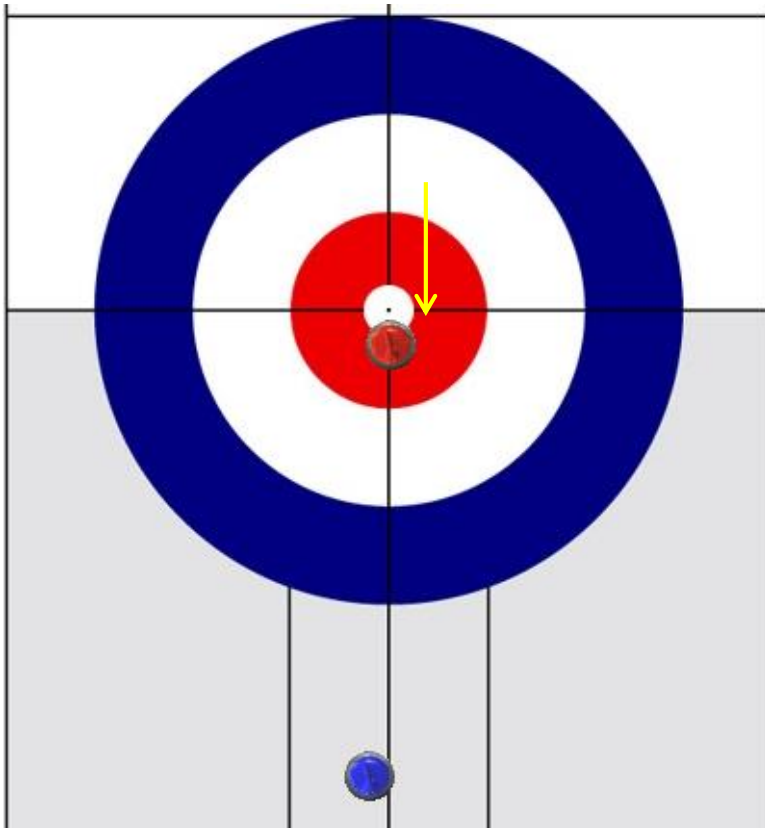


Straighter Hits  
are Easier!

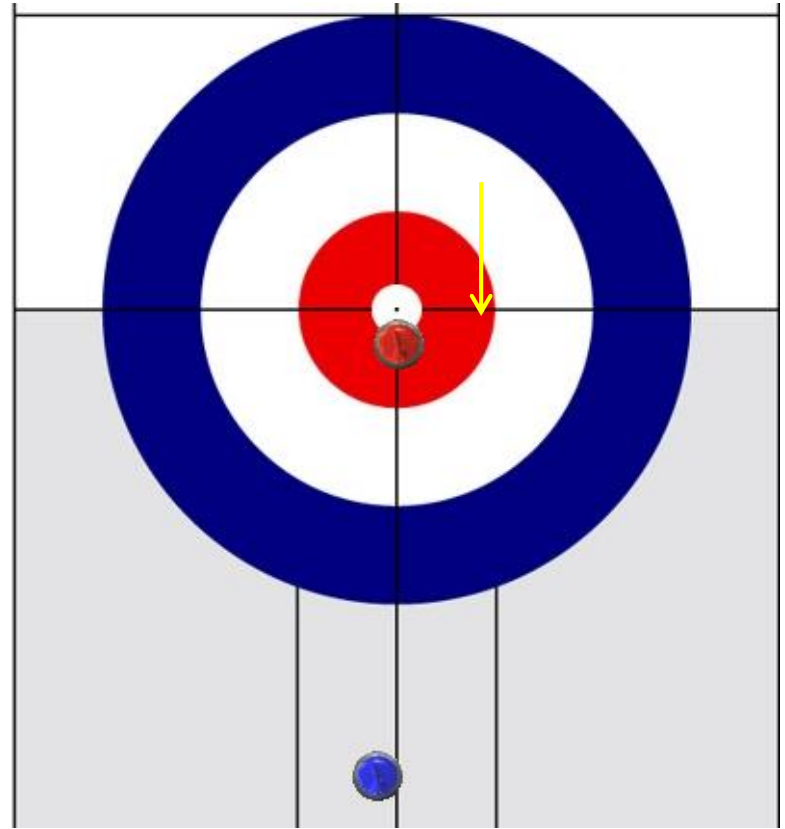
Less Weight,  
More Broom

# Hitting Buried Rocks

Harder (Peel)



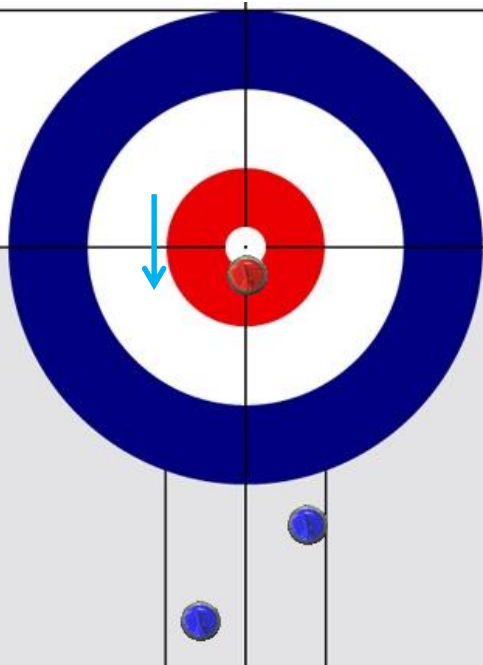
Easier (Board)



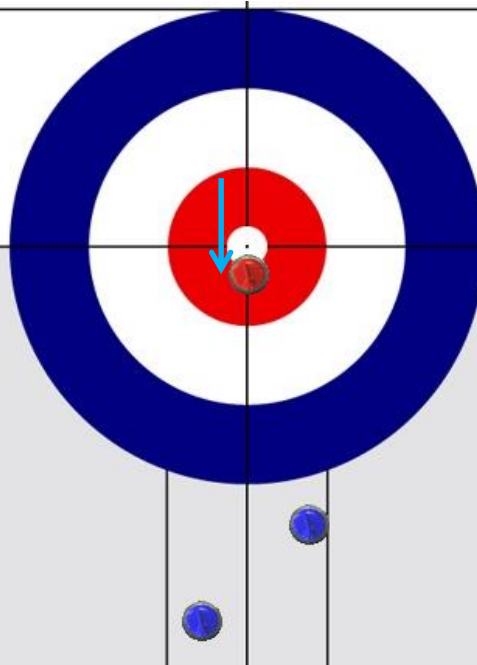
Note: When hitting a rock behind cover, the pro makes shot or removes the guard if he/she misses

# Hitting Rocks Through Ports

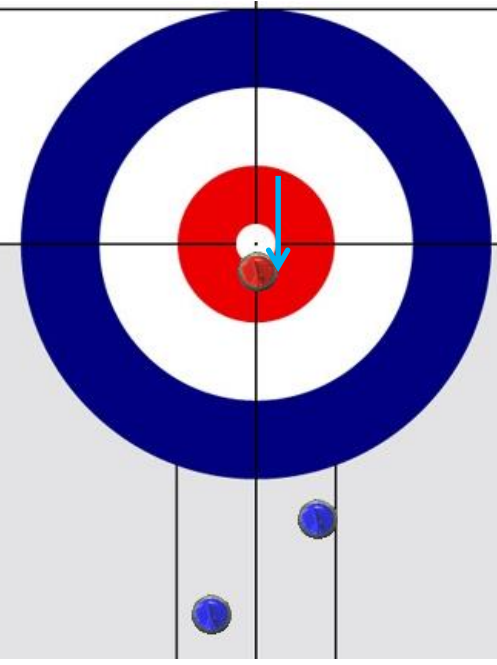
No (Board)



Easier (Firm)



Easiest (Firm)



Note: On high-weight, straight shots, the pro is never wide, and uses his/her sweepers

# How To Win Ends (Second Try)

- Determine a goal
  - Take two with hammer (dictate play)
  - Force one without hammer (dictate play)
  - Steal a point (take risks, dictate play)
  - Take three or more points (take risks, dictate play)
  - Score one point with hammer (make last shot)
- Structure the end with the lead rocks
- Set up a favorable situation
  - You need to set up a last shot you can make
  - Making the shot should achieve your goal, missing should not be a disaster
- Close the deal!

# Dictating Play

- Regardless of your goal for the end, your opponents should be responding to your shots, not the other way around
- If you do not dictate play, a good opponent with hammer will score two – you cannot prevent it
- If you do not dictate play, a good opponent without hammer will steal or force – you cannot prevent it

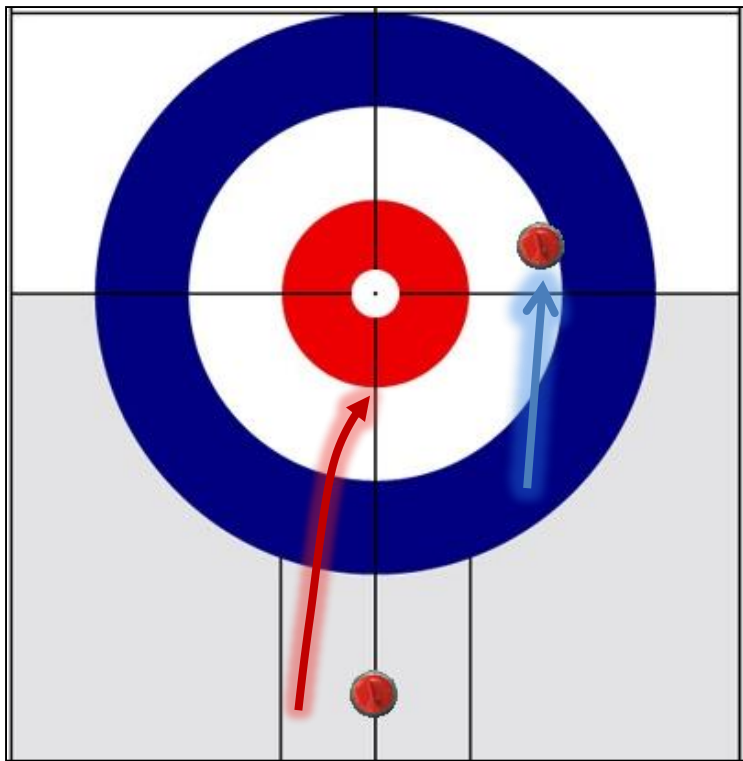


# How To Dictate Play

- Set up “good” rocks
  - A “good” rock is one that your opponent will have to deal with – now or later – since it helps you achieve your goal for the end
  - Good rocks can be any color, and the absence of rocks can itself be good
- Remove or move good rocks for your opponent
  - The best shots eliminate your opponent’s good rocks and create a favorable situation for you
- Ignore “bad” rocks
  - Chasing bad rocks is the top skip mistake

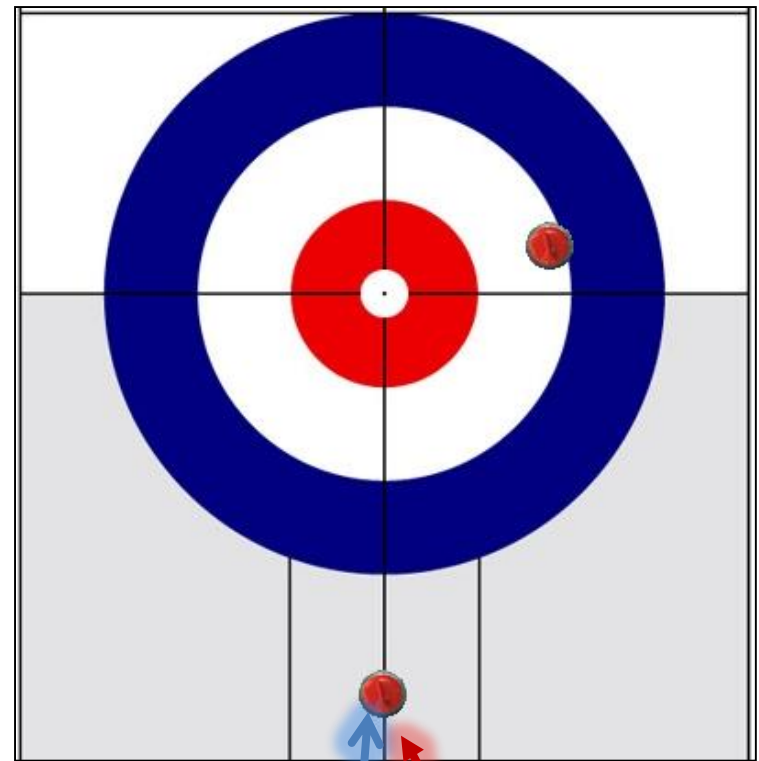
# “Bad rock” example 1

NO



Opponent ignores the hit, and draws in, furthering his/her goal

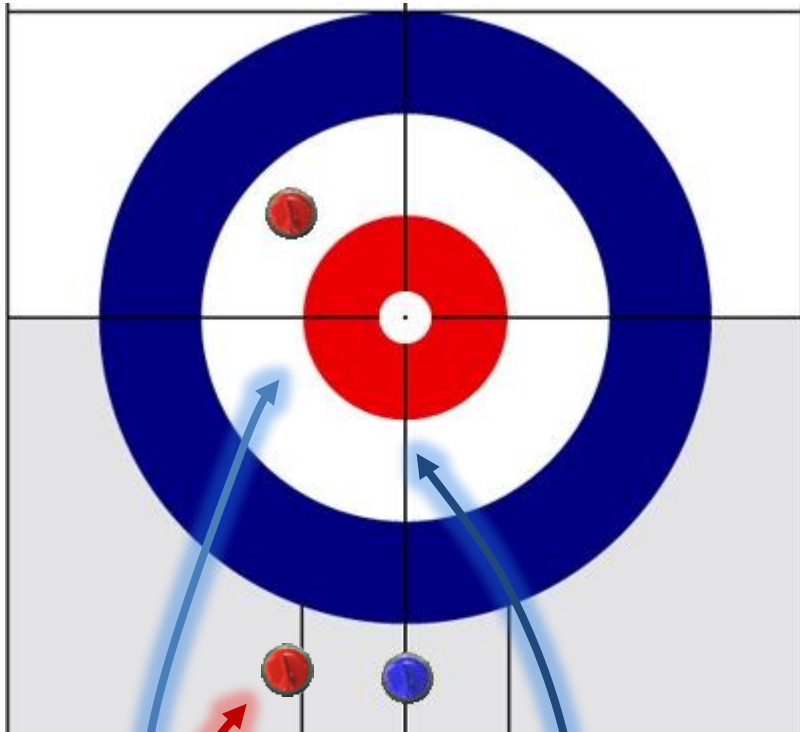
YES



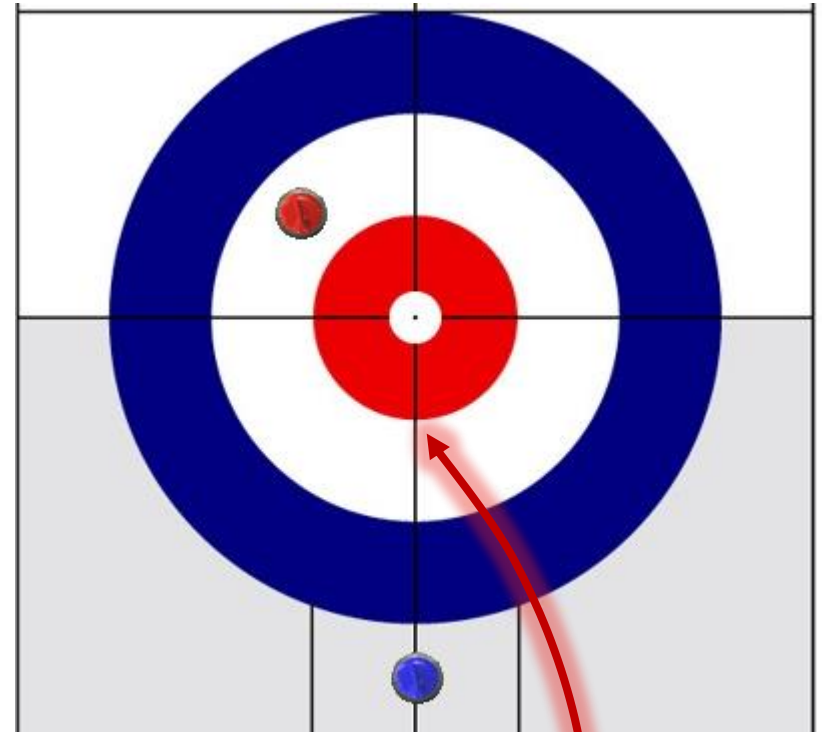
Removed guard must be replaced

# “Bad rock” example 2

NO



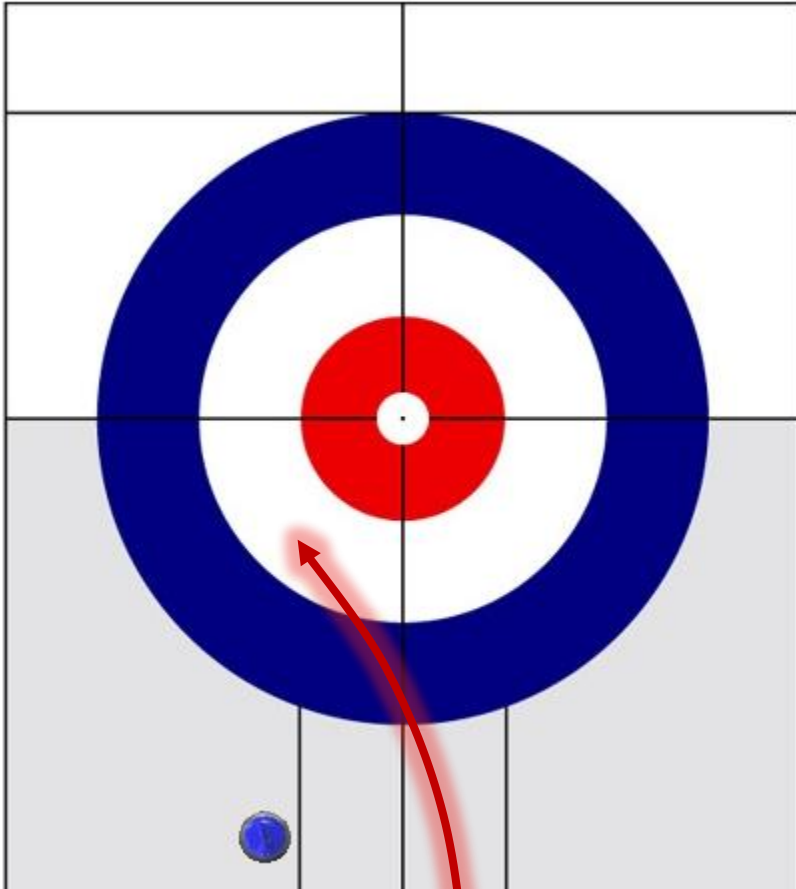
YES



Note how guarding a bad rock with hammer allows opponent two spots to come in – red rock will never score!

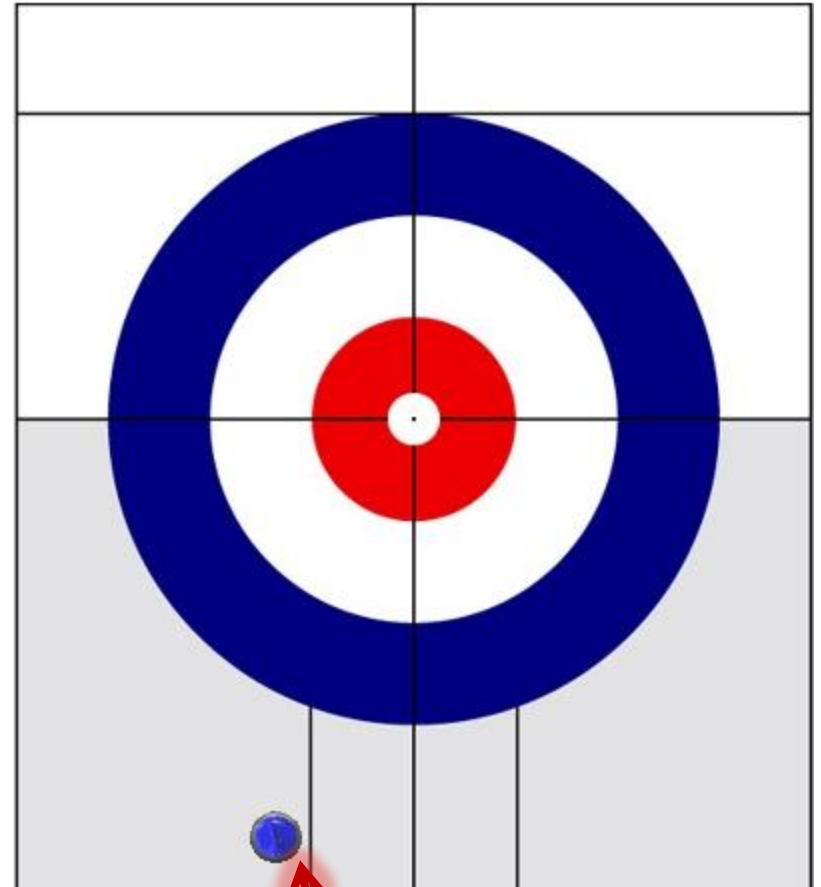
# “Good rock” example 1

NO



Drawing under cover risks giving up two if it's not perfect

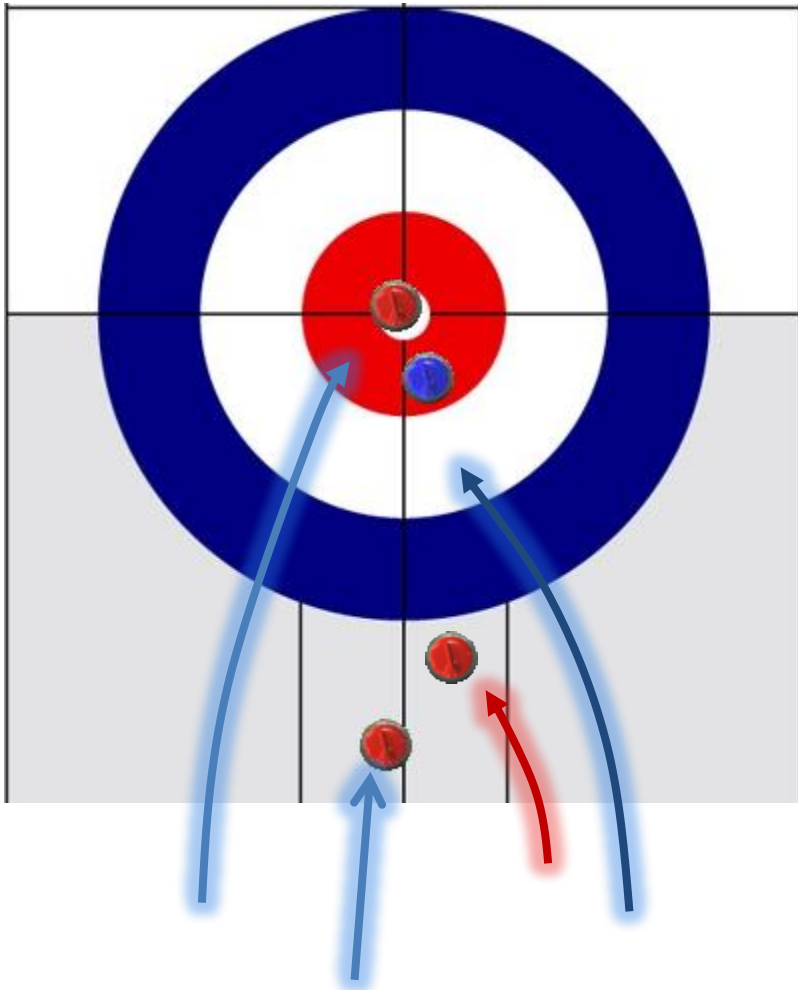
YES



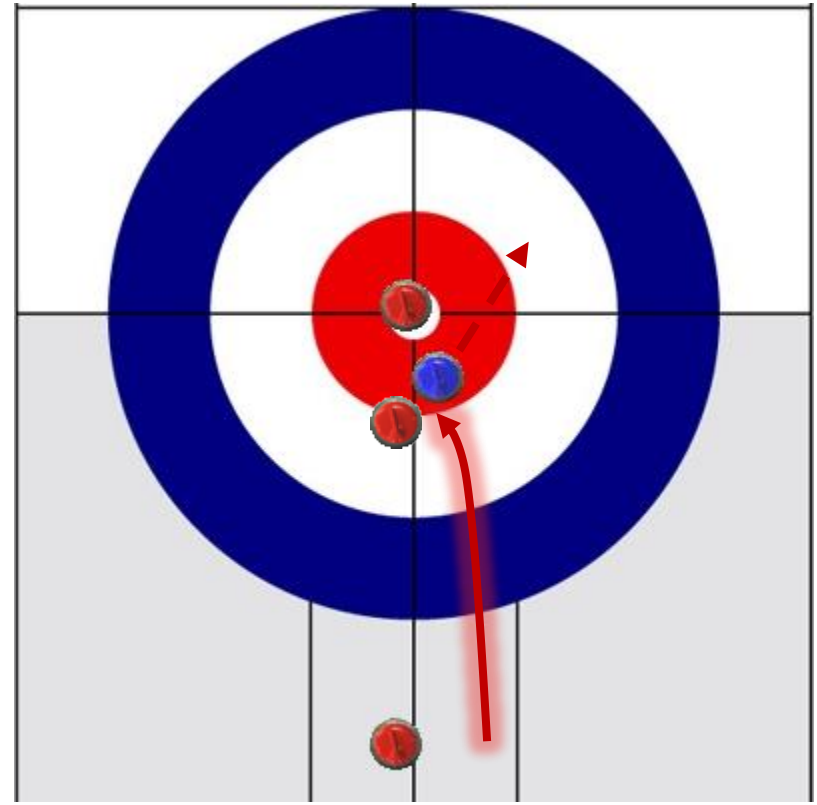
You won't lose the end if you peel

# “Good rock” example 2

NO



YES

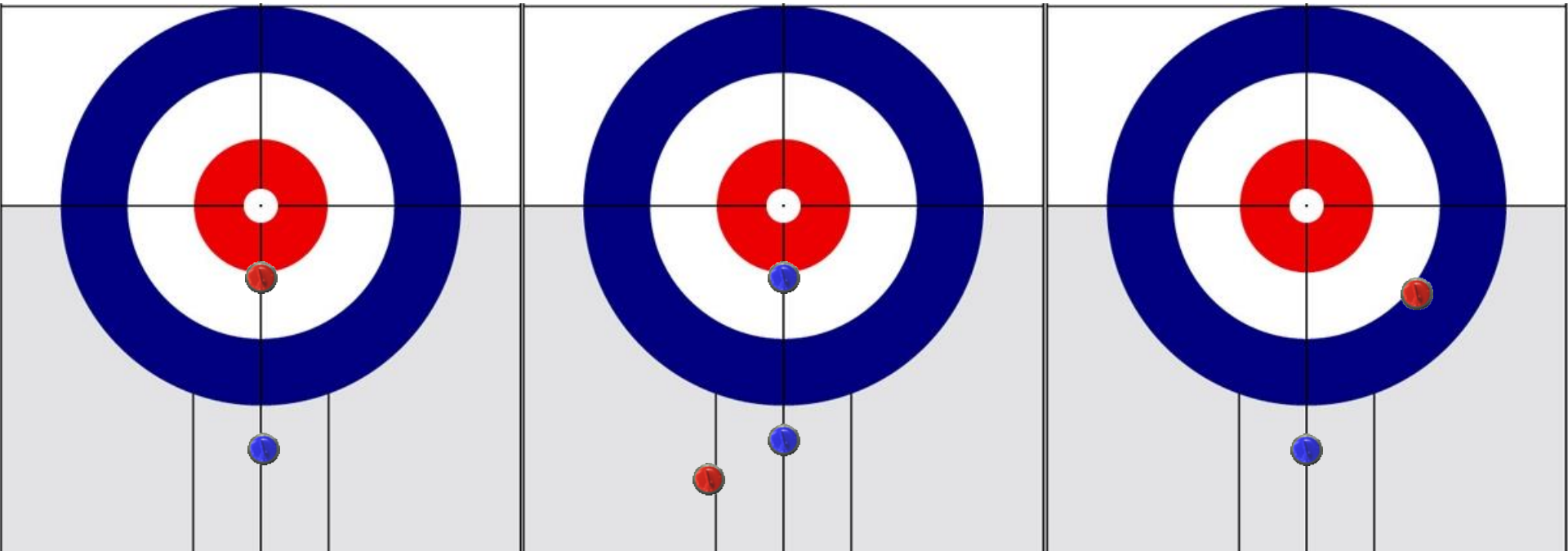


# Lead rocks

Battling to dictate  
play – force one vs.  
score two

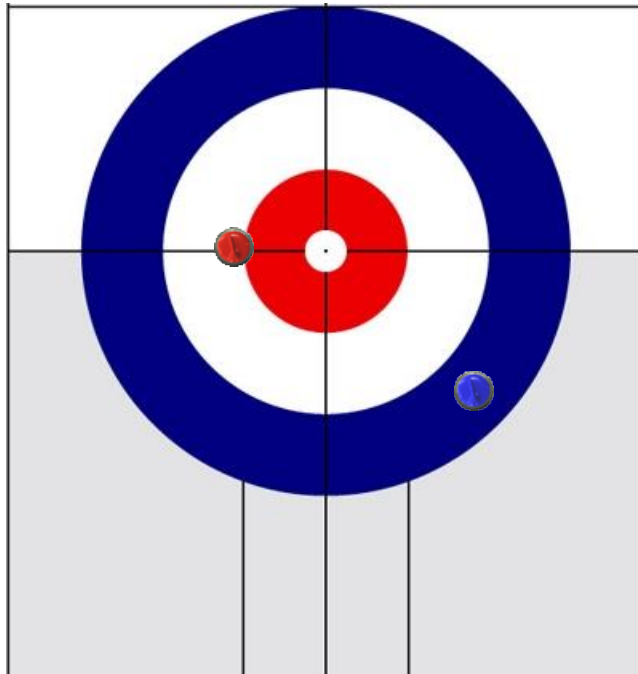
Playing to force one  
with a lead

Pros and cons?

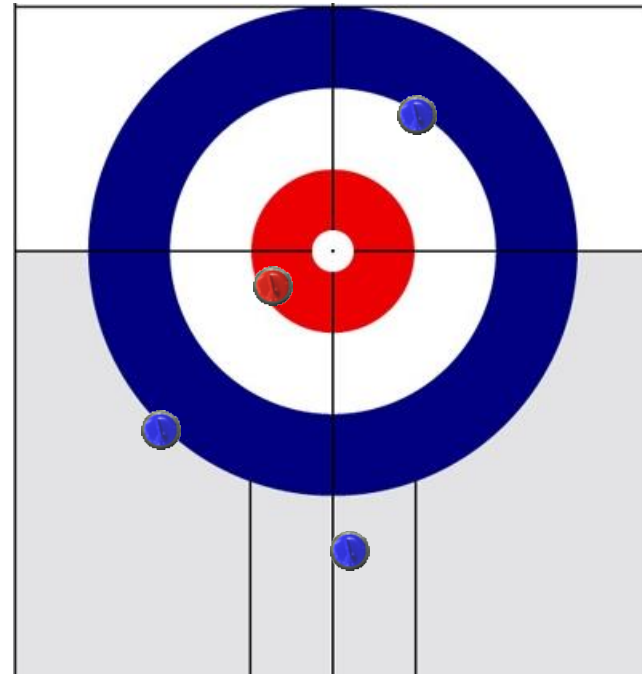


# A few common middle game issues

You have the hammer. Hit and stick, split the house or guard?



You don't have hammer. Hit and stick, split the house, guard, draw?



Note: when splitting the house with hammer, the pro misses light, setting up a side guard

# How to become a skip

- Become a better curler
  - Be observant
  - Make more shots
  - Learn from wins and losses
  - Recognize what \*could\* have happened
- Convince someone to play with you
  - The Savage Fact of Skipping: You're as good as the team that will agree to play with you!
  - Corollary to Savage Fact: If you think your third is crummy, then you're (probably) crummy



## **Basic Strategy - What Are Your Goals for the End?** (Written by Bill Tschirhart of True North Curling Inc.)

Basic curling strategy – as a general rule:

With the hammer – score 2 or more or blank the end and keep the hammer.

Without the hammer – steal or force you opponent to take one.

There are numerous exceptions to these rules of thumb but they are a good place to start your thought process.

Knowing which of the dozens of shot options to call is dictated by your goal for the end. These goals help determine what strategy to employed. These goals and the related strategy may change while the end is in progress, depending on the other team's strategy and shots that are made and missed by both teams.

## Remember “HI SEA”

In addition to basic goals for each end, the shots that a skip will call should take several factors into consideration. It’s called “HI SEA Strategy.”

**Hammer** – which team has the hammer? You can be more aggressive if you have the hammer. Be more cautious without it. Generally speaking, try for two or more with or, in the alternative, blank the end and keep the hammer. Without the hammer, steal or force them to take one.

**Ice** – is the ice quick or heavy? Is it straight or swingy? Is it consistent or are there spots that are tough to play. If the ice is a factor, use it to your advantage. Use early ends to “read” various parts of the ice. Watch for changes as the game goes along.

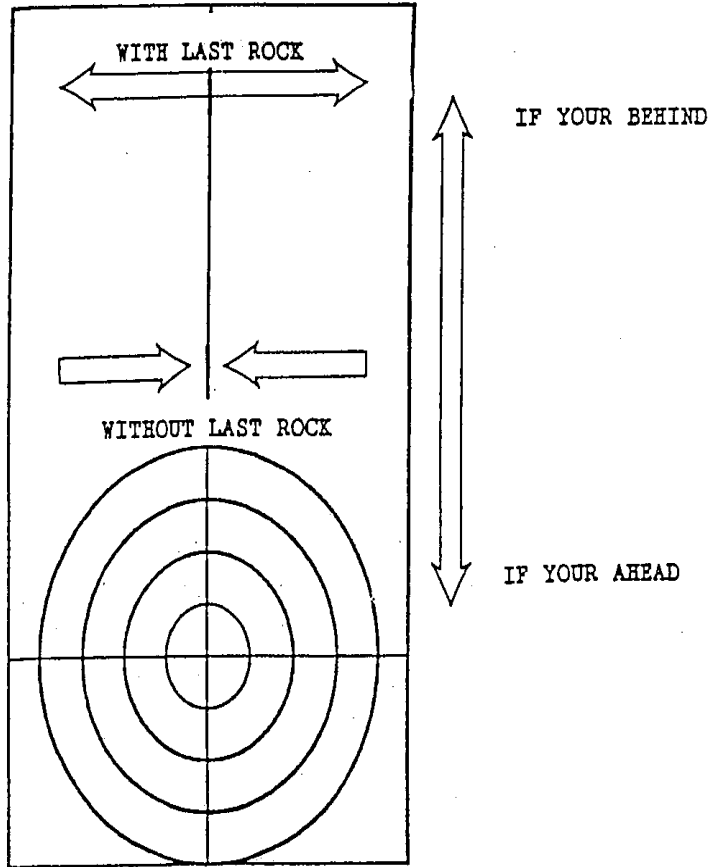
**Score** – the score, in combination with other factors, helps dictate your strategy. If you are way behind late in the game, you may have to be overly aggressive. If you’re way up – be especially conservative.

**End** – strategically, curling games are typically divided into three segments – early, middle, and late ends. Teams often try to accomplish different things and are more or less conservative or aggressive, depending on the end. For example, early ends may be used to learn the ice, get teammates loosened up, assess the other team’s strengths and weaknesses, etc. Conversely, a team may be more inclined to take a single point in the 7<sup>th</sup> end if they are already up by 2.

**Ability** – the strengths and weaknesses of your team and those of your opponent help to determine what strategy is being played and what shots are called. With a beginner at the lead position, you may play more draws than you would otherwise. Conversely, if you are a good hitting team, you may decide to play more aggressively early in ends since you can bale out later with big weight hits. Abilities often dictate playing styles, shot selections, and strategies.

# Understanding & Using the Free Guard Zone Rule

## Basic Curling Strategy



**Free Guard Zone** – area between hogline and tee line and outside the house. When playing first five rocks of end, opponent's stones in FGZ may not be removed from play. If a FGZ stone is removed, all displaced stones go back and shooter is removed.

**Aggressive / Offensive** – a style of play geared to stealing a point(s) or scoring two or more with the hammer. Lots of rocks in play, center guards (without the hammer), raises, finesse shots, fewer takeouts.

**Conservative / Defensive** – a style of play that is used when scoring a big end is not the objective. Your goal is to blank the end, score one, or maybe even give up one. You just don't want to give up two or more. Use this style of play early in the game to learn the ice and let players get comfortable, when trying to get the hammer for the next end, or when trying to protect a lead late in the game. Few guards, lots of take outs. With the hammer, keep an open path to the four foot for your final shot, if needed.

There are factors that mitigate against one strategy over the other and one tactic over the rest. The list can be long indeed and the subject of discussion in the curling lounge over a beverage of your choice but there are three that clearly stand out. They are END, SCORE and LAST STONE ADVANTAGE. They are always factors that need to be considered. Hey, when you talk about a game situation, what do you say? “It was the ninth end. We were down three and didn’t have last rock.” But, to be sure, there are other factors. The list below is a partial list. As situations and venues change, so does the composition of the list of factors.

- Ice conditions.
- Stone conditions.
- Opposition skill level.
- Your team’s current skill level (you don’t always bring your “A” game!).
- Number of stones to be played in the end.
- Fatigue.
- Momentum.
- Time of day.

These factors will shuffle in importance. They constantly change as the game progresses. Being aware of the factors that are at or near the top of the list is a skill onto itself and clearly is one of the characteristics that set one person apart from others as skip material. And, since we’re on the subject of responsibility, let’s get one item off the table right away. **All members of the team should be aware and participate in the strategies and tactics a team employs.** That does NOT mean that there’s a committee meeting on the ice prior to the calling of every shot. But all members of the team, as you’ll see, will play a key role in the process that goes into creating the strategic plan and the tactics to be employed.

It's a simple four step team process !

1.DISCOVER YOUR TEAM'S STRATEGIC D.N.A.

2.FORMULATE A GAME PLAN.

3.CREATE AN END PLAN.

4.CALL THE SHOT THAT COMPLIES WITH THE FIRST THREE STEPS.

## STEP ONE – DISCOVER YOUR TEAM’S STRATEGIC D.N.A.

It is amazing that a high number of curling teams have never had a discussion among their members as to how they wish to play the game. Teams talk about ice, stones, bonspiel dates, uniforms, food & equipment etc. but rarely about how they want to play the game. Amazing!

Every team has a built-in philosophy of how the game should be played. It’s the result of four individuals’ collective skills and experiences. It’s one of the factors that should bring four curlers together in the first place (oops, you DIDN’T consider that when you formed the team? Yikes!).

There are but three types of teams, ***offense first***, ***defense first*** and ***blended attack***. Your team will naturally prefer to play the game based upon one of the three types.

**Offense First** – Notice the adverb “first” (and with the second type, defense “first”). That was not placed there haphazardly. It’s key to the understanding that an offense first team, when considering its strategy and tactics possibilities, will always look for the offensive ones “first”. It may not ultimately choose that course of action but it’s clearly the first consideration!

**Defense First** – On the other end of the spectrum are the teams that will consider the defensive options first. Like their offense first cousins, they may not choose the defensive path for a variety of reasons, and choose to play quite offensively.

**Blended Attack** – As the term implies, this is a combination of offense and defense and, as I will illustrate, can be the most challenging way to play.

In each case, there are three key components that are required for a team to play effectively and the first component is the same for all three. You either want to play like an offense first team, a defense first team or a blended attack team or you feel a necessity to play like one of them. You never have to justify your desire to play in one of the three styles.

## STEP TWO – FORMULATE A GAME PLAN

This is the one aspect of strategy that most curling teams “attempt” at least. Usually there will be a discussion about how they plan to play various stages of the game taking into account a variety of factors. That’s a good thing so I’ll simply help you streamline that process. Drum roll please! Here’s another definition.

***A Strategic Game Plan serves as your team’s general blueprint to start the game, previewing your basic objectives along with your intended progression from the first end to the last.*** (Full marks to my friend Rob Krepps for this one.)

The operative words here are “general” and “start”. Here is some new terminology to help. If, you decide to start the game playing like an offense first team, then you intend to ***pursue*** scoring opportunities. That might change quickly but that’s OK. Remember, it’s only a plan to “start” the game. On the other hand, again due to reasons known only to you and your team mates, you may feel that it’s best to ***protect*** against scoring threats by your opposition in the initial stages of the game. You may discover rather quickly that you have your “A” game and your opposition is struggling and decide to take advantage of the situation and switch to offense and therefore begin to pursue scoring opportunities. Lastly, you may decide to play a more wait-and-see role and play shots primarily to see the reaction you get from the opposition. As a result, you ***probe*** in the early portion of the game.

## STEP THREE – DECIDE UPON AN END PLAN

***A Strategic End Plan serves as your team’s specific blueprint to start an end, clearly defining your outcome priorities along with the tactics that you will use to achieve them.***

Notice this time it’s not a “general” plan, it’s a “specific” plan but again, it’s only a plan to “start” the end. That plan can switch on just one shot. You might decide, again for a variety of reasons, to pursue a scoring opportunity. Therefore you will play the end as an offense first team would play it. On the other hand, again for a variety of reasons, you may feel it’s more prudent to protect against a scoring threat from the opposition and therefore begin the end playing like a defense first team. If you believe that it’s in your best interests to simply place stones in potential positions waiting to see how the end unfolds, then you start the end playing like a blended attack team.

The terminology adopted for an end plan includes colours, ***green, red*** and ***yellow***. Yes, it’s like a traffic signal! Green means “go”, red means “stop” and yellow signifies “caution”. And here’s where a little team dynamics comes into the picture. Team dynamics is all about effective and efficient communication both on and off the ice.



## STEP FOUR – CALL THE SHOT

If you have done steps 1, 2 & 3, the shot to be called will literally bubble to the surface. In some cases there may be more than one shot that fits the bill. In that case take a look at the player who will be playing the shot. Duh, choose the one that he/she is most likely to make and with a tactic to match (wow, this is cerebral stuff isn't it?)!

## SUMMARY

STRATEGIC DNA	GAME PLAN	END PLAN	SHOT
offense first	pursue	green	finesse
defense first	protect	red	up weight
blended attack	probe	yellow	potential

There is no “risk free” strategy regardless of the type of team you are (offense first, defense first or blended attack). An offense first team risks having a big end scored against it. By the very nature of the way an offense first team plays (lots of stones in play) it creates potential scoring opportunities for BOTH teams. Occasionally your opposition will take greater advantage of that situation by simply playing at a higher level in an end or, again due to the fact there are so many stones in play, get a lucky “tick-tac-toe” shot leaving you up to a particular body part in alligators, a situation from which your noble “last rock chucker” cannot bail the team. When that happens, you can't fold you tent! On the other hand, that defense first team that's constantly protecting against scoring threats will give up scoring opportunities in doing so. And, I think I've already established that the nice, safe role of blended attack is fraught with risks, not the least of which is the strain on team dynamics in addition to miscalculating those odds.

Lastly, don't blame strategy when it's tactics that are your problem (now that you know the difference between them). This is all about “making curling shots!”