

Curling



Curling is a sport where many skills have to be mastered to reach elite levels, however only a few skills are required to reach basic skill requirements associated with SO competitions. SO competitions are held in the same curling rink, using the same stones as elite generic curlers. Curling requires skill to deliver rocks, sweeping to control distance and curl and a sound understanding of game strategy. Coaches are not allowed to help during the game unless a time out is called, SO athletes are allowed 2 time outs and will have to be prepared to make the majority of decisions during a game themselves.

Curling is a difficult sport to practice away from the curling arena. Delivery slides, ice speed and sweeping efficiently are of little value to practice on other surfaces, and this makes SO programs dependent on ice time. Most programs run once a week and will require at least 20 weeks to acquire each basic skill. This is why so few SO curlers can achieve 50% shot successes.

SO curlers have a low shot percentage (well under 50% between what is planned and what actually happens), they seldom sweep with purpose and possess minimal strategies throughout the game. Most SO curlers have difficulty sliding to deliver rocks, and as a result they often fall or “throw” the rock without sliding (from the hack). Such a level of proficiency makes consistency impossible, reading ice speed irrelevant and sweeping unnecessary.

Shot percentage is a critical part of generic curling where all top performers succeed in over 80% of frequently difficult shots. High shot percentages are dependent on consistent rock deliveries, correct ice speed assessment, sweeping and precision. Being able to consistently put rocks in the house (with out and in turns) and hit a particular mark on 40% of attempts are the most important basic skills to acquire. SO curling allows stick deliveries, this is an option that could easily improve shot percentages for many athletes at basic skill level compared to the intermediate skill of slide delivery.

Skills required for consistent deliveries are listed in the Curling basic skill (upcoming pages). These sheets can be used as a guide, and when all skills are marked “yes”, curlers can consistently place rocks in the rings and are ready for intermediate skills.

Guidelines for using the skill sheet (next page) for curling (using stick deliveries)

1. Consistency starts with counting steps and controlling walk speed.
2. When consistent deliveries are acquired (it can take many hours), the athlete is asked to deliver stones in the rings. Basic skills are achieved when he or she can have 2/5 stones ending in the rings.
3. Follow each step of the skill sheet (next page) until all basic skills are acquired. Progress will be mostly dependent on how many focused training sessions an athlete does.

Changing Expectations in Special Olympics

Curling Basic Skills

Basic Skill: Stick deliveries **YES** **NO** **Comments**

Number of steps (hack to hog)
(Same on 5 tries)

Arm extension at delivery
Similar on 5 tries

3 Out turns and 3 In turns

Basic Skill: Rock Delivery **YES** **NO** **Comments**

Rock Out turn (2/5 in rings)

Rock In turn (2/5 in rings)

Basic Skill: Basic Sweeping **YES** **NO** **Comments**

Pressure (body leaning on)

Sweeping speed (2 per second)

Basic Skill: Basic Strategy/Precision **YES** **NO** **Comments**

Hitting Rock in the house Take outs
(2/5 with in and out turns)

**When athletes achieve all “YES”, they have acquired basic skills.
Expectations are critical to skill acquisition.**

20-hour acquisition

Skill Breakdown: Examples of priority elements to focus on during practice

Spend time on each one until acquired

Shot consistency is the first basic skill to learn. Using slide deliveries will require the full 20 hours (or more) just to have a consistent slide and many SO athletes will struggle for a long time with this skill. Stick delivery is much easier to learn within the 20-hour program. In either case, this is where basic skill training starts.

- 1a. Delivery stick: Walk – Stick and body positions – Delivery
2. Sweeping: Hands position – Leg action – Pressure – Sweeping action
3. In and out turns: Arm delivery – Reading ice – Accuracy – Rotation speed
4. Game Strategy: Stealing – Covering – Angles - Raises

These skills require 20-hour program for each one of them. The most important one, slide or stick delivery is acquired first. The other ones will follow later.



Home skill practice is almost impossible for curling:

A few flexibility exercises are used to practice basic delivery position at home but sliding training is difficult if not impossible. Many curlers slide on ice (without rocks and broom) during winter on frozen surfaces to get balance and glide control.

Curling Example: Focused Basic Skills Session on ice (1 hour)

Practice only one skill at a time: Example “ Stick Delivery” (15' = 15 minutes)

15' Warm up and stretching (before curling)

5' Stick Delivery warm up

- No rocks

40' Stick Delivery (with video and examples, slow down the demonstration when introducing a new skill, use hands to guide movements when necessary)



- Walk with same number of strides to hog line (no rocks)
- Walk with rock to hog line (same number of strides)
- Walk with rock to hog line with same number of strides, deliver rocks aiming for a target 10 m away
- Walk with rock to hog line with same number of strides, deliver rocks in rings (in and out turns)
- Walk with rock to hog line with same number of strides, hit a rock in front of the house (in and out turns)

15' One end game

Try to do as many as you can with the same number of steps.

Conclusion:

Unless consistent deliveries are present, SO curlers will continue to struggle and achieve only low shot percentages. Efforts should be made to increase ice time for SO programs, as off-ice practice is not possible. Stick delivery is recommended for basic skill acquisition while slide delivery is considered a more advanced (intermediate) skill that can be started when curlers have acquired basic skills if so desired. Using the skill sheet is an excellent way to learn basic delivery skills and will encourage athletes to practice often.

It is possible to have consistent deliveries with a focused approach program. More advanced sweeping skills, reading the ice, slide delivery, accuracy and strategies will be acquired in the intermediate skill program.

Lesson Plan
Basic Skill Acquisition Program
(weekly or monthly)

Sport _____ Athlete Name: _____

Program Expectations

1- Weekly Practice (attend all practices)

Day (S) _____ Time _____

Location _____

“What the group is working on”:

2- Club Fit 100% attendance (Including Functional Testing exercises)

Day _____ Time _____

Location _____

“What you need to concentrate on”:

3- Basic Skill Development Homework (4 times per week - 1 hour per day)

Skill _____

“Individual Home Practice Objectives”