

The Other Game of Curling

The following is a brief introduction to the game of Curling. It is by no means a complete description of the game, but should give enough background information for a novice to be able to use "Curling for Windows".

The Players

Curling is a game for two teams of four players each. The four players on each team are known as the Lead, the Second, the Vice, and the Skip.

The Play Area

The play area is a sheet of ice 14 feet wide by 138 feet long, optionally surrounded by boards. The most notable features of the play area are the concentric circles, or rings, marked on both ends of the ice. Several lines are also marked on the play area. The Help index titled "Play Area" will help you to identify the various features of the ice.

The Equipment

The main equipment used in the game is two sets of rocks, one for each team. The two sets are of different colours. Each set consists of eight rocks, two for each player on the team. Each rock is circular, a little under one foot across, and flattened on the top and bottom. They are carved out of granite, and weigh about 40 pounds. A handle is attached to the top of each rock.

Other equipment used in curling are a broom for each player, optional special gloves and shoes, and a scoreboard. There are two types of scoreboards, the North American and the International. The international scoreboard is also known as the European, or baseball-style scoreboard. This is the type used in "Curling for Windows". Each end, a score is calculated for each team, and placed on the scoreboard under the end number. A total for each team is kept at the far right of the scoreboard.

Before the Game

Before beginning play, the number of ends to be played must be decided. An "end" consists of all 16 rocks being thrown from one end of the ice to the other, as explained below. A game usually consists of an even number of ends, typically 6, 8, or 10, depending on the time available and the level of competition. The order of play is decided by a coin toss. The team that loses the coin toss throws first, since there is a strategic advantage to the team that throws last.

Order of Play

The end proceeds with the two teams alternating shots. First the Leads alternate throwing their two rocks, followed by the Seconds with their two rocks, followed by the Vices, and finally the Skips.

The Skip Determines the Shot

Strategy is determined primarily by the Skip, who stands at the far end of the ice. He looks at the placement of the previously thrown rocks, judges the possibilities, and indicates to his teammate throwing the rock what type of shot to make. First, he gestures with his broom, pointing to where the rock should stop, or any other rocks he would like hit, and what should happen to them. Then he places his broom on the ice, giving the player a target to aim at. This is a tricky judgement to make, since a rock will not go straight, but will "curl" to the left or right, by as much as several feet.

The "Curl"

The curl is determined by the spin put on the rock as the throwing player releases it. A clockwise spin will curl to the Skip's left, and counter-clockwise will curl to the Skip's right. The usual terms are "in turn" and "out turn", but I will avoid these terms, as they mean different things for left handed versus right handed players.

So, the Skip estimates the distance the rock will curl, and places his broom on the ice appropriately. He indicates the direction of the curl by raising a hand. If the rock is to curl to his left, he raises his right hand. If it is to curl to his right, he raises his left hand. This may seem complicated, but it quickly becomes second nature to a curler.

The "Weight"

The final aspect of the throw, or delivery, is the weight. This refers to the speed of the rock. A fast rock is said to have heavy weight, while a slow rock is said to be light. Each player is responsible for learning the weight as the game proceeds, and judges the weight for a given shot according to what the Skip has indicated the rock is to do. The condition of the ice will affect the weight. Ice which requires heavy shots is said to be slow, while ice which requires light shots is said to be fast. To complicate things, ice tends to "speed up" as a game proceeds, requiring lighter shots. This process is often uneven, speeding up more down the centre of the ice where more shots are played, and remaining slow at the sides.

The weight also affects the amount of curl. A heavier shot will curl less than a lighter shot, and fast ice curls less than slow ice.

Summary of the Shot

To summarize, the three aspects to the delivery of the shot are the aim, indicated by the Skip's broom on the ice, the direction of the curl, indicated by the Skip's raised hand, and the weight, judged by the player throwing the rock.

When it is the Skip's turn to throw, the Vice holds the broom for him to aim at.

Sweeping

Once the rock is released, no one may touch it until the end is over. However, its direction and speed can be controlled to some extent with sweeping. Using your broom to sweep in front of a moving rock changes the condition of the ice, warming it, and making it faster. This causes the rock to slide further, and curl less. There is no sweeping in "Curling for Windows".

Scoring the End

When both teams have delivered all eight of their rocks, the end is over, and the score for the end is calculated. If there are no rocks within or touching the rings the end is "blank", that is, there is no score, and the order of play remains the same for the next end. Otherwise, the team with the rock closest to the centre of the rings wins the end. To calculate the score, count the number of the winning team's rocks which are closer to the centre than the closest of the opposing team's rocks. A rock must be within or touching the rings to count. The team which wins the end will throw the first rock of the next end, giving the advantage of last rock to the other team.

Winning the Game

After all the ends are completed, the team with the highest total score for all ends is the winner. If the score is tied, a winner can be determined by playing extra ends, until a winner is determined.