

Curling Strategies

General Principles

One of the important aspects of curling is essentially the strategy chosen by the skip and his or her team. Strategy is a series of decisions and shots made to reach a goal. A curling team will generally opt for a general game plan, but the strategy shall be adapted to each end based on the results achieved.

Strategies can be divided into two general categories:

Offensive

The team will attempt to count points by putting many stones in play. The use of guards, come-around draws, freezes or raises will be preferred. The Five Rock Rule is very useful for teams with this type of strategy.

Although this type of strategy can bring you vital points, it also comprises a certain level of risk that needs to be evaluated since the opponents may also profit from the stones in play.

Defensive

The team will attempt to limit as much as possible the chances for the opponents to count points. Take-outs or unprotected draws in the house will therefore be favoured to keep the game as open as possible.

Strategies – Natural Concepts

To master the various curling strategies and to know how to use them requires experience. However, certain concepts are developed quite naturally.

For example:

- At the beginning of the game: use caution
- With the last stone: use this advantage to count points
- Without the last stone: steal the point by complicating the opponent's task on the last delivery
- In the lead: protect or accentuate the lead
- Behind: catch up to your opponent

Strategies – Influencing Factors

Curling strategies are numerous and complex and depend on many factors:

Strengths and weaknesses of both teams	Players' capacity to adequately execute draws or take-outs.
Whether the team has the last stone or not (hammer)	The team with the hammer (last stone) will attempt to count at least two points whereas the team without the hammer will try to steal or limit the opponent to one point.
The course of the game	The beginning of the game allows you to adapt to the ice and to the opponent's reactions. Depending on results obtained, the team will adjust its strategy according to the course of the game.
Scoring	A team in the lead will try to keep it (defensive) whereas a team that is behind will try to count many points (offensive).
Ice conditions	Ice conditions may favour certain types of shots. If there is not much curl, take-outs or raises are favoured. If ice conditions allow for more curl, guards and come-around draws will be favoured.

Basic Strategies

Having the hammer (last rock) or not will greatly influence the strategy to opt for.

Without the Hammer

The team wants to steal points and will try to fill the front and center of the house. The goal is to make it difficult for the other team by not leaving an easy shot for the last rock.

Giving one point to the opposing team when you do not have the hammer is in fact not a failure.

With the Hammer

The team wants to count numerous points. At the beginning of the end, the team will try to consolidate one or more points before using the advantage of the last rock to count an additional point. They will also try to leave openings for the last rock.

Beginning the End

Here are a few guidelines concerning the various strategies to choose from at the beginning of an end:

Without the Hammer – Offensive Strategy

Place the first stone in the Free Guard Zone in front of the center of the house. The goal is to use this guard to hide behind in the hope of stealing points.

For example, the next stones to consolidate this strategy would be:

- Another guard
- A come-around draw in the house behind the guards
- Raising a stone positioned in front of the house

Without the Hammer – Defensive Strategy

This option is generally used at the beginning of a game when the ice conditions are unknown or when the team is leading and wants to keep this lead.

The first stone will be in the house. This will incite the opponent to throw take-outs and therefore adopt a defensive style of play.

Depending on the opponent's reaction, the team without the hammer will continue with take-outs or draws in the house. The goal is to not let the other team put many stones in play and try to count numerous points.

With the Hammer – Offensive Strategy

If the opposing team puts its first stone in front of the house, the team with the hammer choosing an offensive strategy may:

- Come-around the center guard to occupy the center of the house. This option has certain risks such as the fact that the opponent will also try to use the guard to steal points

- Place a corner guard with the intention of coming around it eventually while avoiding blocking the center for the last rock.

If the opposing team puts its first stone in the house, then an offensive strategy will be preferred:

- Ignore the stone and put up a corner guard
- Freeze to the opponent's stone

The team with the hammer will try to "divide" the house by placing stones on each side of the house. This could lead to counting numerous points.

With the Hammer – Defensive Strategy

Here, the team with the hammer will avoid placing guards and will try to eliminate them whenever possible. The stones will preferably be put in the house, inciting the opponent to execute take-outs.

The team with the hammer will generally decide to count a point or to blank the end on the last rock.

If the opposing team puts its first stone in front of the house:

- Play in the house on the sides
- Try to move the guard without taking it out completely to free the center

If the opposing team puts its first stone in the house:

- Take it out

Source: <https://curlingdescollines.ca/index.php/en/41-curling-info/304-strategies> and <https://curlingdescollines.ca/index.php/en/41-curling-info/307-strategies-continued>