

Pace of Play

I, for one, am very happy with our new home in Carlsbad. The ice is better, Wednesday is far superior to Saturday, we have five sheets, and we've got a bonspiel coming up (!). All great things. There is, however, one aspect of curling in Carlsbad that has been disappointing, and that is the length of our games.

We used to get quite a bit of slack late on Saturday nights from friendly zamboni drivers who had nowhere else to be, which meant we routinely ran late in order to finish games. This slack is no longer available, and for the past couple of leagues, the most common game length I've seen is six ends. I'm sure nobody is happy with this state of affairs, but I have good news. We can do something about it!

Increasing the time available is not an option, so the tool we're left with is pace of play. There is no reason we shouldn't be able to easily play eight ends in the two hours available. Here are a couple of simple things that everyone can do to make this happen:

1. Several of our members have competed in playdowns with timed games (where your team loses if you use up your own time allotment). Ask any of them how to play faster, and the first thing they will say is that the person throwing the next rock needs to be ready to throw **before the opposing team's shot comes to rest**. Just doing this one simple thing dramatically increases pace of play.

In practice, what this means is that after your team is finished delivering, the lead, second and third have exactly one job: to get ready to deliver the next rock as quickly as possible. The next thrower should retrieve their stone, clean it, be in the hack, *and looking at the skip* before the opposition's stone comes to rest. Sweepers can help with this - if you're closer to the hack (which is often the case after you've thrown your second stone), bring your teammate's next stone to the hack for them. After that, be in position, ready to sweep, *and looking at the skip* before the opposition's stone comes to rest. This single step is so important that it alone will easily add an end to every single league game.

Skips should be ready to make a call as soon as possible after taking control of the house. Most of the time you should have a pretty good idea of what you're going to do even before the opponent's stone gets where it's going. So step into the house, make a quick survey of the landscape, and make your call. You can do this immediately because your teammates are at the other end looking at you and ready to go. If you find yourself waiting for them to look up at you so you can make your call, encourage them to be ready quicker. They have plenty of time while the opponet's stone is sliding!

When all is said and done, the time between one stone coming to rest and the next stone being delivered should be between 10 and 15 seconds. I encourage everyone (especially skips) to grab a stopwatch and mime your way through the process. I'm serious, grab a stopwatch or phone right now and do it. The exercise will give your an idea of what it should feel like.

You're standing behind the house watching your opponent's shot. You've already thought through what you're going to do if they make the shot and if they miss it, so you're ready to go. The shot comes to rest [start the stopwatch]. You step forward and make sure everything is as expected. Your shot is clear, draw behind the guard. You make eye contact with your team, tap

the spot, call out the shot, and move to the side to put the broom down. Your shooter settles and delivers [stop the stopwatch].

This is how nearly every shot should feel.

Occasionally something unexpected happens, or you need a few more seconds to decide on a shot. This is ok. As long as the majority of your decisions are quick and you aren't taking 15-20 seconds just *deciding* on every single shot, you'll be fine.

As noted, this is the single most important aspect to speedy games that go eight ends. I have a couple of other minor tips that can help get us a little more buffer time below:

2. At the start of each night, pebbling is the last bit of ice prep to finish. There is no reason why the entire league has to wait for the pebblers to be ready before they can start. Everyone should already be on the ice and ready to go as pebbling is happening. Wish each other Good Curling and flip the coin while pebbling is going on so that you're ready to go when the ice is. As soon as pebbling is done and the ice is ready, get started!

3. After an end finishes, everyone's job is to start the next end as quickly as possible. Thirds, decide on a score quickly. Leads and seconds, start moving non-scoring rocks behind the hack (note: there's no need to arrange rocks nicely in ordered rows, just put your color to one side and go). Skips, you should be the slowest to get ready because you have to walk 150 feet. Since everyone is waiting on you, hustle down there and make your first call of the next end as soon as possible.

4. Think about your equipment (delivery aids, sliders, etc...), and develop a routine that ensures it's with you at the near hack when your turn to deliver comes up. A little bit of thoughtfulness and preparation can save a lot of time looking for equipment when you should be throwing.

That's all I have for now. Let's make a concerted effort as a club to play faster and more complete games. Challenge yourself to be ready. Challenge your teammates to be ready. If you see someone taking excessive time with something that could be done more efficiently, politely speak up and call it to their attention. Let's change our club culture so that two hour, eight end games are the norm, rather than an exception.

Thanks for reading, and good curling!