

# 2019 World’s Mixed Doubles Curling Championship: The Rookie Report

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## 2019 World’s Mixed Doubles Curling Championship: The Rookie Report

On April 20, 2019, 48 nation flags paraded in the opening ceremony of the 2019 World’s Mixed Doubles Curling Championship (2019 WMDCC). This was the largest field ever seen in an international curling competition, and will be the last of its size for the foreseeable future. Mixed Doubles (MD) (one female and one male player) provides an excellent format for new and emerging curling countries to put together a team, and launch curling as a national sport. The MD format will very likely remain the preferred initial option for non-traditional curling countries to break into this Winter Olympic sport. But a change in rules that comes into effect this year has reduced the field for the 2020 WMDCC to 20 teams. Only the top 16 country teams from the last Mixed Doubles World’s will be seeded for the next MD World Championship, while the rest of the nations will have to qualify for the four remaining spots through a new World Curling Federation (WCF) event.

With the rules’ change, the 2019 WMDCC was the last realistic chance for new curling countries to simply register a team and experience World’s and curling at its highest level of play straight out of the gate. Five rookie nations recklessly dove in to make our debut at the last-chance-Mixed Doubles World’s: Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, Ukraine and Mexico. I played as the female half of the Mexican team, and in lieu of actual wins at World’s, we made out like bandits with invaluable lessons of what it will take to earn a spot in the 2020 Qualifier Event.

For the benefit of all those up and coming curlers from rookie or still emerging nations with World-class and Olympian-level dreams, in this report I cover how we rookies fared, what we learned, and what you’re up against in the Qualifier Event. This rookie report is written with the benefit of hindsight and informed by generous commentary from players of the other rookie countries that participated in the

Author: Adriana Camarena.

2019 WMDCC. While the report is written with mixed doubles in mind many of the lessons are applicable to new teams playing in other WCF championships for the first time.

### Intro to Rookie Curling: The Straight Poop on the Scoreboards

Here are the sobering facts on our wins and losses. The hard, brutal fact is that all rookie nations were demolished in our groups, showcasing blowout scoreboards, in which we were often conceding games in the 6<sup>th</sup> end. Except for Nigeria, we all went 0-7 on wins and losses.

The Rookie Report: Wins and Losses—WMDCC2019								
Group A	BLR	CAN	DEN	HKG	JPN	ROU	SWE	W-L
UKR	1-8	0-18	3-12	4-10	1-9	4-9	2-13	0-7
Group C	AUS	CHN	CRO	CZE	FRA	ITA	WAL	W-L
NIG	3-15	2-13	4-7	0-20	8-5	0-18	4-10	1-6
Group D	BEL	EST	GER	LTU	NOR	SCO	SVK	W-L
MEX	3-8	1-13	1-12	7-12	3-13	4-15	3-14	0-7
Group E	ENG	FIN	IRL	KAZ	KOR	NZL	QAT	W-L
KSA	1-9	1-13	2-14	5-15	1-12	2-14	3-17	0-7
Group F	ESP	GRE	LAT	POL	RUS	SLO	USA	W-L
KOS	6-7	4-7	2-12	2-10	1-11	3-8	0-11	0-7

Source: WCF, Source: <http://wmdcc2019.worldcurling.org/>

But here comes the bitterest truth of all to swallow: Our losses are attributable to our low performance on the ice. This nugget of obviousness brings up the first lesson we rookies got hammered into our heads by the World's experience:

### Lesson #1: If you want Ws on the scoreboard, you need consistent performance.

Performance in a World's championship is measured by statistics of shot effectiveness. The following table shows the final tournament accuracy percentages and standings for all teams. The medaling teams had an 80%-70% performance accuracy, while the bottom playoff qualifying teams had a 70%-60% performance accuracy. Our rookie teams' accuracy ranged between 44%-28%.

The Rookie Report: Final team tournament accuracy % and standing—WMDCC2019								
Group A	BLR #28	CAN Silver (Q7) #2	DEN #22	HKG #38	JPN (Q13) #5	ROU #36	SWE Gold (Q1) #1	UKR #45
	64%	81%	65%	57%	80%	54%	81%	37%
Group B	AUT #23	BRA #26	GUY #37	HUN (Q4) #9	NED #43	SUI (Q12) #9	TPE #31	TUR #17
	57%	55%	48%	70%	49%	68%	53%	66%
Group C	AUS (Q5) #4	CHN #19	CRO #41	CZE (Q9) #5	FRA #35	ITA #18	WAL #30	NIG #47
	69%	70%	39%	71%	53%	74%	53%	30%
Group D	BEL #40	EST (Q3) #5	GER #20	LTU #32	NOR (Q8) #9	SCO (Q14) #9	SVK #29	MEX #46
	45%	78%	64%	62%	71%	75%	48%	44%
Group E	ENG (Q6) #9	FIN (Q10) #9	IRL #34	KAZ #24	KOR #23	NZL (Q16) #9	QAT #42	KSA #48
	70%	59%	58%	62%	67%	61%	37%	28%
Group F	ESP (Q15) #9	GRE #39	LAT #27	POL #21	RUS (Q2) #5	SLO #33	USA Bronze (Q11) #3	KOS #44
	66%	44%	62%	58%	73%	58%	73%	43%

Source: WCF, Source: <http://wmdcc2019.worldcurling.org/>

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Many curlers grumble that curling statistics are not an exact science. This is because the statistician plays a heavy role in determining the stats. She or he deducts points by comparing shot called to shot made. To do that, they must decide, based on observation or assumption, what was the “shot called,” without the benefit of knowing the decision-making process of the team, or whether a different outcome was similarly acceptable (e.g. guard versus draw). Our rookie stats looked worse than we felt we might have played. Yet, I am sorry to say that despite any inaccuracies in the calculation of the stats, over the course of a competition, the stats don’t lie. Your performance rate will be represented accurately, at least, relative to other teams in that competition.

To even dream of nabbing one of the coveted 4 spots for World’s in the upcoming Qualifier, teams will need to show a consistent performance rate of at least 68%. Why 68%? Because to qualify, your rookie team or any team will have to beat more experienced teams that were playing at 74% (Italy), 70% (China), 66% (Turkey), 65% (Denmark) and 64% (Germany) in this past World’s and still did not qualify. These teams were serious playoff contenders, and just missed out as the final 16, due to some tough games or their last shot draws (LSD) averages that bumped down their final standing.

At the Mixed Doubles World Qualifier Event, yet to be announced, an expected minimum of 32 teams will be vying for those 4 spots. Arm yourselves: The Winter Qualifier is coming.

## Lesson #2: Consistent performance requires sound delivery mechanics

The good news is that I’m not here to kill your rookie dream of getting to the World’s Mixed Doubles Championship. I am here to support you with our hard earned rookie lessons from the 2019 World’s. Here is Rookie Lesson #2: A good performance record is achieved through consistently sound mechanics.

For rookie teams, keeping sound mechanics will take more discipline than you think. Most of your amazing new skills might not hold up consistently, because, well, they’re new skills. The same goes for those of us who have curled for some time, and developed bad habits. We’re probably more likely to revert back to those bad habits under pressure than the newbies. (Gah! Guilty.) You will need to fight to keep good mechanics on every shot. You will need to fight urges to push and pull on the rock, and trust your training. “Train it and trust it,” says sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella<sup>1</sup>.

Why is this so important? Because bad mechanics or inconsistent good mechanics make your shots unpredictable. Unpredictable shots mean that you cannot fulfill an end or game strategy. Unpredictable shots mean that you cannot read the ice in any meaningful manner, because you are affecting the rocks too much and too differently to know what the ice does on any line. Inconsistent mechanics also mean that you and your teammate cannot share the same line and weight calls for your shots, because each one is using a different weight, line, release point, and number of rock rotations. Championship curling punishes inconsistency: Before you know it, your poor mechanics will have you chasing the other team and struggling to stay in the game by the 5<sup>th</sup> end.

### The A-B-C’s

Okay, okay, you ask, so what are the delivery mechanics that must be mastered? It’s what you’ve already been told but only now will take to heart. You must be consistently good at the A-B-C’s of curling: alignment, balance, and curl (i.e. rock rotation.) Consistent A-B-C’s will help you hit the broom, teach you how to use your leg drive for weight (instead of your arm), slide with balance, follow through

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Rotella, *How Champions Think: In Sports and in Life*, (2015)

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on your release to the broom, and put sufficient rotations on your rocks. To qualify for the World's playoffs, you will need to do this consistently 68% of the time. Think on that.

### Rock rotation

On championship ice, rock rotation is especially important. If Team Mexico's coach and mentors had had a dollar for every time they told us this, and we failed to throw enough rotations, they'd be rolling in whiskey money right now. It wasn't until our first game when I witnessed Team Estonia's rocks curling in beautiful arcs to the button compared to our scraggly sliders, did I truly become a believer. Oopsie, too late!

Championship ice is made to curl 4 to 6 feet both ways. This is often referred to as swingy ice. While the ice is flat, the expert pebbling job makes the house ice behave as if you just hit a bowl. In Stavanger, the ice tended to run straight from hogline to hogline, and suddenly broke like mad near the far hogline. In Mixed Doubles, the icemakers also consider that there is usually only one sweeper, and may make the ice swingier. To take advantage of the professionally pebbled ice, and predict where your stone will end up, players need to put sufficient and consistent number of rotations on the rocks. Rotating rocks grab the pebble that the icemakers have so carefully developed to finish curling in a nice predictable curve. Without sufficient rotation (e.g. 1.5 to 2.5 rotations), rocks will run straight or linger out or change handles or slide in, *unpredictably*.

Team Mexico decided that 3.5-4 rotations was acceptable, because we were having difficulty putting on 4+ rotations without getting off line. More rock rotation allows for less broom on draws and hits (i.e. rocks will run straighter for longer) on swingy ice. By taking less ice to get into the house, you also avoid playing out in the frost. With sufficient rotation, your sweeping can more effectively influence a rock, since the rock will turn until it stops. This is important for finishing a rock.

The downside of this is, that if you place too much rotation on your rock, you will make it run straighter than you intend. I missed a wide open takeout for four against Norway to tie the game at the 4th, because I put too many rotations on my hack weight takeout. We got 3 but I missed a milestone opportunity to score four and tie the game at the half.

### Release

The good teams "set" their stones. In other words, they give a slight push as part of their release to keep their rock running straighter for longer before the rock starts to curl. This technique takes time to learn and it is not recommended for "rookies." Rookies are better off learning a smooth release (such as a handshake and follow through release) to make rocks consistent. What this means, though, is that rookie teams and top teams will be playing different lines to get to the button. Team Mexico aimed for the edge or middle of the 12 foot ring to get to the button, while the top teams that we played (Estonia, Norway and Scotland) were using edge of 8 foot. It's important to be aware of this because you will not be able to make decisions on line calling based on their lines. You will be using different styles of release, and different release points for that matter. As a team, you will be better off if you can learn to release similarly and at the same point.

### Weight

To throw consistent weight calls, the best you can do is practice with a laser timer on the ice or time each other's stones during practice so that you develop a body memory for throwing, say a 3.5, 3.8 and 4, from backline to near hogline. It is also a good idea for the players to try to throw the same weight for

Author: Adriana Camarena.

up weight shots or take-outs: hack, bumper, control, normal, peel. If you cannot throw the same weights, then at least be consistent in the weight for each of those shots. This is important for deciding how much ice you will take, and what equivalent weight your teammate needs to throw, in case she or he needs to repeat that same shot you just threw. Timing during a game will also let you know if the ice is changing, and how much you need to adjust the weight you need to be throwing.

### Sweeping

On sweeping, here is my sole advice for the rookies: For the love of the curling gods, sweep in front of the stone. Sweeping on championship ice *will* impact the rock path, that is, *if you sweep in front of the rock!* If you master that, then find the best way to put more weight on the head of the broom, while maintaining a vigorous sweep. I asked a very good sweeper in my club for tips and it helped a lot. Sweeping on your slider is also not the most important skill to master, either. It's helpful in Mixed Doubles for distribution of tasks, but if push comes to shove, sweep on your gripper if it makes you a more effective sweeper. Even some top mixed doubles pros opt to sweep on their gripper, just like some opt to deliver with a stabilizer. Play to your strengths. Just keep track of where you need to leave your gripper or stabilizer so that you do not waste time going up and down the sheet to fetch it.

Once again, the hard lesson about being inconsistent is that each rock will give you a different outcome each time. And, you realistically can't begin to call any end or game strategy, if you are missing your shots, due to line, rotation or weight!

Here's the best news: You can start working on your personal delivery and sweeping mechanics today! Find a summer camp, join your club's free clinic, and find a patient and knowledgeable mentor who will help you get those mechanics pat down.

### Lesson #3: Follow a purposeful preparation plan

Let's double down now on what else you will need to do to prepare for the World's Mixed Doubles Qualifier. The first Qualifier is in October 2019, so you need to make a plan with your teammate for how you will mindfully prepare for the event together.

Aaaah-yep, I said the T-word, teammate: That other person that you desperately need to make your rookie dream of playing in the Qualifier a reality. If you just realized that you can't simply bulldoze your way to World's without another compatriot of the opposite sex agreeing to "your" plan, please skip right on down to **Lesson #5: Be an excellent teammate!**

Now.

Like right now.

I'll wait...

Nice to have you back, and committed to being an excellent teammate!

To make a Practice Plan, you will have to first take stock together of your current skill level; access to training, individually and together; commitment constraints that either of you might have (e.g. available time, budgets, etc.), and capacity to on board a coach or mentor with good technical skills and background. This initial accounting will help you develop good expectations of what is achievable and what is not at World's.

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As you can see in the table below, we rookie teams all made extraordinary efforts to train together! It also contains a summary of the skill level and training conditions our rookie teams had going into World's:

The Rookie Report: Skill level and training conditions—WMDCC2019							
Team	Years/mos curling		Time training together for World's	Access to and type of training ice	Access to regular coaching or mentorship	MD competitions or bonspiels prior to World's	Special level of effort
	Female	Male					
UKR	1 yr.	2.5 yrs.	8 mos.	Plainfield Curling Club, DI ; Summer in Bucks County, PA	Club skills clinic, initially  3 months with Coach Mark Mooney	A few MD bonspiels in US	Taking 10:30pm to 1:00am practice ice because that's what was available! Ouch!
NIG	3 yrs.	3 yrs.	1 yr.	Denver Curling Club, DI	1 month with Coach Ellery Robichaud	Club leagues and local bonspiels	Teammates are spouses! Working on communication was key!
MEX	8 yrs.	3 yrs.	12 weekends over 3 mos.	Camarena: Hockey ice in the San Francisco Bay Area, once a week;  Cohen: Seattle's Granite Club, DI	3 months with Coach Barry Ivy in the San Francisco Bay Area  Sunday skill clinic in Seattle with Miyo Konno	A few MD bonspiels in US  MD Sunday Winter League in Seattle	Strangers who became teammates!  Camarena flew up every Sunday to practice in the DI facility in Seattle.
KSA	7 mos.	7 mos.	1 mo.	A 20 meter long ice skating rink in Riyadh, KSA, once every other week for 1 month	3-day skills camp in Prague, CZK  1 month with Coach Alastair Fyfe	None  First full length MD match was at World's	Teammates are spouses! They also made it work with constraining ice and time conditions!
KOS	1 yr.	23 yr.	1 yr.	DI in SVK, once a week for one month before World's.	Team member P. Andersen's experience  Coach Meriton Zeneli's prior intl' soccer coaching experience	A few exhibition matches in Bratislava, SVK	Driving 1,000 Km to Slovakia in search of DI practice ice!

Source: 2019 WMDCC Rookie team member responses to survey

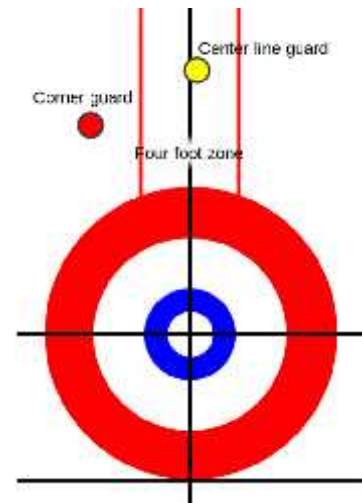
We assume that future rookie nation teams will face similar training constraints, which means you will all have to develop unique practice regimes that respond to those constraints. In any case, practice should be purposeful. Focusing on mastering a few specific and useful skills is better than being mediocre in a variety of skills. Below is a list of the bare bone minimums that you should practice in your training to tackle basic Mixed Doubles challenges:

1. **Practice your A-B-Cs.** This is discussed above in “Lesson #2: Consistent performance requires sound delivery mechanics.” Alignment, balance and curl. Pursue this individually and together as a team. Remember, you will need to fight for your good mechanics under the pressure of the Qualifier.
2. **Practice your 9-minute pre-game practice.** Before each game, you will have a 9-minute practice. If you have access to practice ice, practice the 9 minute pre-game practice, including throwing your Last Shot Draws (LSDs) at the end of the practice. What you are really practicing is getting comfortable with a process that you'll repeat before each match. The event experience is

already overwhelming. Do yourself a favor and get comfortable performing your 9-minute pregame practice. If your team gets first practice, you will also have to break the ice (take some frost off) first by throwing a bunch of takeout weight stones to the other side. You can start figuring out lines on these. On your return throws, take note of where the ice breaks, and what is the right line to the button. Have your partner time your final rocks to know the weight for your LSD shot. That way they'll also know how much they'll need to sweep. To favor a good result on the LSD, during the practice time, each player of Team Mexico practiced only on the side of the ice that we would be throwing our LSD for that game. By doing this, at the end of the practice we had a good idea of what line and weight each of us should be throwing for our LSD. Team Kosovo also chose for each player to throw the same turn for the first three games in a row and then throw the other turn for the last four games, as a way to make themselves comfortable with that turn and to fill the requirement of throwing an equal number of alternating turns.

3. **Practice your Last Shot Draw (LSD).** The LSD takes place right after the end of your practice. The LSD defines who gets hammer. Having hammer in the first end ups your chances of scoring. Prior to World's, practice both LSD turns. You and your partner will have to throw a similar number of each LSD turn, that is, alternate turns, over the course of games. LSD averages matter for final standings. Even if you don't have the stats to be a final Qualifier contender, a team goal could be to have a good LSD standing in your group. Some of us rookie teams did not have the worst performance stats in the tournament, but we all ranked last in our groups and had the worst LSDs in our groups—(i.e. except for Ukraine that took the second bottom LSD average in their group. Good job Ukraine!) Practicing your LSD also helps with the next lesson.

4. **Practice your draws to the 4 foot control zone in front of the tee line.** The MD three rock rule demands that you develop a consistent draw to the button and the four foot control zone. The 4ft control zone is the area in front of the tee line within two feet of the center line. Most scoring takes place here. As a rule of thumb, rocks behind the tee are absolutely useless to you, because the opposing team will keep on piling on in front and tapping you back, out of scoring range. When team Nigeria won their game against France in the 2019 WMDCC, they were



following a very simple game strategy laid out by their coach: He didn't want to see a rock that went past the top 8 or top 4 foot. They did that and France struggled to get in the house and get them out of the house. When you miss your first draws (i.e. rocks end up as very long guards or past the tee), a better team is bound to capitalize on your error and you'll find yourself calling a lot of take-outs to clear the front of the house or get into the house, which diminishes your possibilities of scoring. Remember that you are only throwing 5 rocks per end in mixed doubles! There's not a lot of room for error.

Once you feel you have a good grip on these basic skills, then decide with your coach and teammate which additional skills to prioritize in your training. For example, establishing same release points and weights for calls, practicing taps, practicing take-outs with different weights (backline to normal); line

Author: Adriana Camarena.

and sweep calling from the hack; calling weight as a sweeper; sweeping; setting up the house strategically, etc.

Rookie teams also recommended, if it is within the range of your possibilities, to:

5. **Play competitively as preparation:** In the month or months before World's, if possible, attend a mixed doubles tournament to work out the bugs in playing together in a competitive setting. For us, Team México, playing in the Sunday mixed doubles league at the Granite Curling Club was a fantastic opportunity to test ourselves against better players, and learn how to communicate on the ice. It's difficult to establish team preferences for playing together, unless you actually play. If you can't play a match beforehand, mock game practice exercises are helpful, such as the "perfect game" in which you attempt your shots as a team, and place the opposing team stones where a team playing perfectly would make a shot.

Some of us attended a few bonspiels. In these competitions, winning was not the goal. Our coach asked us to focus on delivering with good mechanics over trying to win. We didn't always listen, because we would get carried away with trying to win. But our coach was right: You cannot win with bad mechanics, unless of course, you are playing someone worse than you. And in that case that game is not a useful preparation for World's. In your preparation for World's, winning a game is not more important than practicing good mechanics in a game. If you want good performance stats, this is how you achieve them.

6. **Play timed games.** In Mixed Doubles, you have 22 minutes total of thinking time. None of us lost to the clock, but it got dicey a couple of times. Playing timed games means that you must learn to surrender the sheet to the opposing team by both of you stepping on to the walkway or behind the backlines or to the courtesy lines, after your rock comes to a rest. This requires mindfulness about where you are on the ice. You should also practice quickly getting into the hack for your first draws in every end to save time, and learning where to leave your gripper and stabilizer. You also need to learn to trust your teammate in making shot calls to save time moving up and down the sheet. It's a complete drag to have to throw your last shots under time pressure. Playing when you are trying to make up time means that you will rush crucial shots, and dig yourself into trouble instead of staying focused on securing your shot. It can cost you an end, or even a win.

Ok, rookie curlers, in whatever time you've got before the Qualifier, make it work.

#### Lesson #4: Set reachable measurable goals for the Qualifier event

You followed your preparation plan, and now you are heading to the MD World's Qualifier! Begin practicing walking onto the ice with your flag held high in the inaugural ceremony. (Practice fighting back the tears, because I was not prepared for that one.) Make sure they put your country's flag right side up on the pole (#TrueStory). Give it a few practice waves before you march in. Your home country federation will be supported by your participation, and you are kicking off a new winter sport in your home country! You are already winning! Woo hoo!

Ok, now what else would you like to achieve at the Qualifier? Is your performance so consistently amazing that you can dream of being in the top 4? No? Not so much? Excellent! Because I have a



Author: Adriana Camarena.

treasure trove of alternative goals and measurable milestones contributed by our rookie teams that will allow you to represent your country proudly.

Team Ukraine was particularly good at tracking measurable historic milestones that they reached game by game, such as scoring the first point ever for Ukraine in an international competition. Below are some similar progressive measurable milestones that your coach can help you track. Do as Team Ukraine did, and strive to acquire as many of these souvenir achievements during your games in the Qualifier. There will be enough losing, so it's really important for team morale to establish some very do-able wins that you can check off.

Measurable goal or milestones per game, tournament	Checklist ✓
Win hammer with your LSD	
Score in one end with hammer	
Score in two ends with hammer	
Score in three ends or more with hammer	
Force to one	
Steal an end	
Steal two ends or more	
Score one in the power play	
Score two or more in the power play	
Set an end strategy and follow it	
Set a game strategy and follow it	
Call a timeout before making a game defining shot	
Call a timeout when you are running low on thinking time	
Spend max 2-3 minutes of thinking time per end	
Improved your performance stats from last game w/ sound mechanics	
Win a game	
Win 2 games	
Win 3 games or more	
Score better-than-bottom LSD in your group	
Create a team dynamic ritual, e.g. regardless of good or bad result, high five your partner after every shot	
You smiled, laughed, played with joy, even though you were getting trounced, because you are playing in the World's Qualifier	
Collect selfie with opposing team after the game (crucial win!)	
Give a WCF media interview	
The President of the WCF thanks you for growing the sport of curling around the World! You are welcome, ma'am!	

Each team met significant milestone accomplishment commensurate to our experience and preparation. Here are some cool milestone wins that the rookie teams achieved:

- Team KSA scored in each and every one of their games, even though KSA prepared on a 20 meter ice-skating sheet that featured a remarkable camel hump in the middle that their rocks had to overcome to reach the button, had no prior match experience, and Suleiman played with an injured knee throughout.

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- Team Kosovo also scored in all of their matches, and they prepared by making extraordinary border-crossing efforts to reach DI for a minimum training experience before World's. Peter also played the last games with a dislocated shoulder.
- Team Mexico stole 2 in the first end against Scotland, and we were only one down at the half against Norway. If you start meeting some of your basic milestone goals, you might end up surprising yourselves.
- When Nigeria earned its unexpected W against France in their final round robin game, we rookies were banging on the boards, celebrating as if they'd just won gold...*for all of us!*

### Lesson #5: Be an excellent teammate!

Let's talk about the hardest part of curling: Team dynamics.

This here is Pandora's Box. Open the lid and you'll have to confront a swarm of issues that come into play in mixed doubles team dynamics: personalities, gender dynamics, age dynamics, couple dynamics, asymmetric skill levels, communication and conflict management skills, game strategy preferences, commitment and priorities, financial capacity, location-based distance among teammates, team management and fundraising, and even personal values and politics. You find these issues on every team, but in mixed doubles, it's only the two of you, and it spells double the trouble.

If you are a MD rookie team, you may literally be the only two eligible and available curlers in the entire world for your country to play in the Qualifier. If you choose to play with this person, you have to be at your best behavior to make this work, because you are stuck with each other.

This leads us to Rookie Lesson #3: Be an excellent teammate! Being excellent towards your teammate requires a commitment to work together like responsible adults.

**Develop common goals and commitments in writing.** Draw up a set of common goals with your teammate (and coach if you have one), and establish both broad and specific commitments towards meeting those goals, individually and collectively. Keep yourself and, if necessary, your team accountable to these. Set aside time off the ice to talk about whether you are meeting your goals, commitments and preparation plan, or schedule a regular check-in call or conversation.

Now, if you can't even sit down and participate equally in setting basic common goals, you are in for a world of pain. This brings us to a key practice in excellence as a teammate: Good communication.

**Practice good communication skills with each other.** Good communication (e.g. listening, using non-aggressive language, expressing needs clearly, negotiating, etc.) is a technical skill that you can learn and practice. Mousing around issues or throwing passive-aggressive shade or talking behind each other's back will not help you reach agreements or overcome problems; neither will acting like a bully towards your teammate.

If you are lucky, a coach or third person will be willing to help you two mediate problems. Hopefully you will also have a good support system (e.g. family or friends) that can let you blow off steam harmlessly. This is especially important if you are spouses, because on top of everything, you can't go home and vent about your curling partner!

**Don't be a bully.** As we left for World's, one of our mentor's in Seattle, Lyle Sieg, gave us a valuable piece of advice: "Remember, no one misses on purpose." Keep these words close to your heart. There is

Author: Adriana Camarena.

no use in ragging on a teammate during or after a game for missing their shots, or playing the blame game for a loss. Instead, prepare for games that can go wrong by asking each other what helps get you back on track. Perhaps it's a fist bump at the end of every shot, or an agreed upon password that reminds you to focus on good mechanics (e.g. "Play like in practice!")

**Never give up on your shot.** If it's you who is having a bad day out there, do everything you can so that your partner has a great day. Our coach Barry Ivy, often reminded us that the only shot that matters is the next one. If the game is going to hell, fight to apply your good training in your next shot, and then the next, and the next. Never give up on your mechanics. *You are Rocky Balboa on the ice!*

**The reputation you create for yourself as a teammate will follow you in your curling career.** In Mexico, we have a saying regarding gossip and reputation: Small town, big hell. Clubs are like small towns. World curling is just a bigger village. There are no teams of one in curling, and you can kill your competitive curling dreams all on your own by your behavior. Word-gets-around about good and bad conduct.

**Work on game communication.** During practice and competitive games work on game communication and team dynamics. This might be as basic as deciding what language you will use (e.g. English, Spanish, Albanian, Arabic?) to make calls, and what words you will use for basic commands (e.g. Hard! Sweep! Whoa! Just weight!). If your partner sweeps your stones, how will you let them know that you are narrow or wide or "line's good!"? Sounds pretty basic, but it takes practice to sort all of this out.

**Establish pregame processes.** Set time aside prior to the game to discuss how you will handle your next game. In 2019 in Stavanger, Norway we were very fortunate to have additional rental practice ice in a nearby facility. Many teams took that opportunity to fine tune and set some important goals, strategies or tactics to apply in the next game. Often though, we were just trying to practice good mechanics as the number one strategy.

Remind yourselves again of your game goals, strategies and tactics in the minutes prior to hitting the ice.

**Establish debriefing processes.** As a team, and especially if you have a coach, decide what your post-game processes look like. Team Nigeria debriefed fully after each game with their coach. They looked at every shot played. Team Mexico had a 15 minute postgame talk during which we self-assessed about what we did well, what we could have done better, what we committed to work on. We gained our coach's input, and then we did not talk about the game again. Each team will process a game differently. Find what works for you.

**The Wall.** Every team hits "the wall" in a championship event! It's the moment when all the things about your teammate that have been getting under your skin burst out like a dynamited dam. It could be triggered by anything: physical tiredness, underperforming to your abilities, losing and losing over and over again, an injury, a hangover, whatever. If you don't practice good communication and behavior before heading out, the likelihood of achieving good understandings at the World's Qualifier is very low, especially after you hit that wall.

**Worst case scenario.** Ok, so let's look at the worst case scenario: By the time you are at the World's Qualifier, you've realized that you are playing with someone you intensely dislike, and every word or interaction is like nails on a chalkboard. Well, here is the hardest part of the deal: You can't quit. You could have quit the team before World's or you can quit after World's, just not during World's. There are not substitute players for MD World's. During World's, you will suck it up, on the ice, and even off

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the ice. Just focus on your mechanics, and count your lucky stars that you are representing your country at World's!

**Remember, you are representing the best your country has to offer!** Make yourself proud and take the high road in a conflict. As a rookie team, the impression you leave of your country-team might be the most important thing you do at World's.

### Lesson #6: Stay coachable! Stay teachable!

Your rookie team is lucky: Some poor soul has agreed to be your mentor or coach. In return, you have one obligation: Listen, and stay teachable.

If you have the luxury of receiving coaching during your preparation of the event, please don't waste your coach's time by asking for and then resisting coaching. Your resistance is a distraction to your team as a whole. It takes precious time away from working on skills that will keep your head above water at the Qualifier.

All of our rookie teams agreed that having a coach was crucial to surviving our inaugural World experience. Even if you don't have the benefit of a coach during your training, having one at the event by your side is still very helpful. A coach who is knowledgeable will observe your mechanics during games and point out ways to improve. She can provide advice in your game timeouts, and help the team establish do-able game strategies. She may even act as a great sports psychologist or neutral mediator in your team relationship.

Your coach is part of the team. Like with your curling partner, you should begin your relationship by stating clear common goals and commitments including to good communication. Depending on their experience and goals, rookie team coaches may even be willing to cover their own expenses, but this is something that you'll have to discuss and agree on as part of your team agreements.

If you are a hot shot new curler, who thinks you've got the game all figured out, including what's best for you and everyone else on your team, please revert back to Lesson #5 on being a good team member. Making a great takeout or fab draw every other shot will get you nothing at the Qualifier. You don't believe me? Go back and look at the rookie scoreboards and stats above.

Remember, rookies. You will be learning on the job at the Qualifier. Stay humble and listen to your coach.

### Lesson #7: The Kitchen Sink: The other stuff that tripped us up!

We've covered the bare bone basics above, but the rookie teams still had a lot to say about what to expect when you are playing on a World stage. Below are some of the things that required an effort to stay on top of our game.

**Running the gauntlet.** Low- and non-ranked teams (aka rookie nation teams) will be pitted first against the highest ranked teams in your group. This is both good and bad. The bad news first: You are the warm-up guinea pigs for the good teams, and they are going to go to town on you. You are going to get trounced, and the scoreboard won't be pretty. The good news is that, in these first games, you have nothing to lose. Focus on delivering with good mechanics and try to check off some of your do-able milestone goals, like getting hammer on your LSD or scoring one with hammer. Playing the best teams first is also good news because if you practice your good mechanics against those teams, when you get

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to teams that are ranked a little bit lower, you can achieve other milestones goals, such as striving for a better performance stat or even a win. But check this out: The teams “ranked a little bit lower” are still better than you. Do not relax, ever.

**Knowing the rules and procedures.** As a team and individual player, commit to reading the full rulebook. Discuss how to call a timeout, a technical timeout, playing with rocks with sensors, knowing where to stand on the ice to stop your clock after a shot, interacting with umpires, rules on broom heads, which color uniforms to wear, rules on the LSD, etc. You’re going to be pissed if you are disqualified on something dumb that you forgot to read.

**Mental resilience.** Losing on ridiculous blowout scores sucks, especially if your country media or social media picks up on it and flat out mocks you. Now the critics live in your head. Or perhaps, that isn’t what gets you. What gets you is that you missed an open draw for one or handed the other team a big end by missing a hit. This is what is amazing about this opportunity: You will have to learn to play like a pro. You will have to learn to remember only your good shots, and forget the bad ones, *immediately*. You will learn to develop tunnel vision during your game, so all that matters is your partner, your level of effort and the next shot that you’ve already visualized. If your game is televised live worldwide, you’ll even forget the cameras in front of your face and mic at your neck. Exercising mental resilience will be exhausting.

**The Arena environment.** The Sjømarka Arena in Stavanger, Norway where the 2019 WMDCC took place was huge and airy, and shockingly warm for us rookie players accustomed to playing in very cold clubs or rinks. It was really weird to feel warm on the ice. The arena also never filled with spectators, possibly because we were just around the corner from the North Pole and it was Easter weekend. But the next championship arena environment could be entirely different. It could be cold and loud and full of spectators, and overwhelming in a different way. Also pay close attention to the shuttle system that will run back and forth from the arena and the host hotel. The shuttles are not always reliable. Some teams even prefer to rent their own car to get to the arena before games whenever they wish. In any case, “take the earlier shuttle” is what we all learned to do.

**Travel bummers.** Ah, the list goes on because we all have *needs*. Some can’t get over the jet lag. Others are running on such tight budget that sitting down to socialize over drinks is stressful. Or maybe the local food ruined your stomach. No use complaining. Some teams bring on an extra team member just to manage some of the team’s travel logistics and most important needs. We rookie teams should have teamed up to hire a beer runner to beat the 8pm dry law in Norway.

**Decompressing.** You are now back home. And you are in the craziest mood swing of your life. You wake up in horror over a missed shot. You wake up in glee over that amazing double. You remember all your new cool friends. Your significant other thinks you’ve lost your mind, and your parents don’t want to talk to you right now. Figure out what you will do to decompress from one of the most amazing experiences of your life. My tip is to be kind to yourself and those around you. .... And then immediately start planning how you are going to get back to the Qualifier, because you are no longer a rookie, and the stakes are higher.

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### Lesson #8: Last but not least, play with joy!

Try to keep the big picture in mind as you work through your games: You are really lucky to be here. You are representing your country in a World Curling Federation event, and you are breaking into a winter sport on behalf of future generations for your nation.

We rookie and emerging country teams have significant skill level limitations to overcome. There is no doubt about it. But if we plan to be around long enough to contribute to the sport on behalf of our countries, then we will need to learn to stay in the game. To do that, we need to learn to play with joy, even through the trouncings. This could well be the best lesson to learn from playing in a high level competition like the World's Qualifying event.

Borrowing another saying from our Coach Barry Ivy—→ because listen to coach←—he likes to say, “Learn to love the game. Next learn to master it!”