

STRATEGY • RISK CONTROL • PLAYING AHEAD

Don't Go on the Board

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There is a simple rule of play that must be followed to win your games. It is perhaps the most difficult strategy concept to teach. And one of the hardest to follow. The rule is:

IF YOU ARE AHEAD, DON'T GO ON THE BOARD EXCEPT WHEN YOU ARE SHOOTING YOUR HAMMER DISC.

Simple enough. But there are a lot of temptations to violate this rule.

CourtShuffleboard.com scope note: The meaning of being “ahead,” late-game thresholds, hammer sequences, and the safest tactical choice depend on the game format and local rules. The examples here include common 75-point and frame-game situations.

To know when to apply this rule, you must be able to determine when you are ahead. “Ahead” has a very specific meaning, and it isn’t who has more points. “Ahead” means who will win if every player from now until the end of the game scores their hammer shots and only their hammer shots. See my Do the Math coaching article for more details on when and how to quickly make that calculation.

Once you have determined that you are ahead, avoid going on the board. There are many different ways you might go on the board:

SCORING IN THE OPEN

If you put up a score in the open, your opponent will try to kitchen you as they are behind and must find a way to get ahead. When they are behind it is almost mandatory for them to try to kitchen your open score, even on their hammer shot when you have a high scoring disc. Don’t score in the open, even to shoot a high score on your last shot when it is their hammer. When you are ahead, you can let your opponent score their hammer shot – you will still be ahead.

TAKING A HIDE

The ‘Don’t Go On The Board’ rule is a little modified in situations where you have a good guard to hide behind:

IF YOU ARE AHEAD, DON'T TAKE A HIDE WHEN IT IS LATE IN THE GAME.

“Late in the Game” is when:

- You are playing a frame game and have four or fewer hammers left (last eight frames of the game).
- You are playing a points game and your score is within four hammer 8s (32 points) of the win (e.g., 43 or above in a 75-point game).

When it is late in the game, you shouldn’t risk taking the hide. Your opponent is getting desperate to kitchen you. If your disc ends up exposed at all, they will make the attempt. If your disc isn’t exposed, they can attempt to do a combination shot to kitchen you. Or they may take the opportunity to use your guard as their own to make two scores on their hammer – in a points game, when the scores are close, sometimes this extra score is enough to change the calculation and put them ahead even when you also

have a scoring disc. And sometimes in a points game when play is at the head, scoring the two discs will give their partner a chance to go out on the next frame at the foot.

What do you do instead of taking the hide? There are three possibilities:

1. If it is not your hammer, put up another guard that further blocks the same side of the board to block your opponent from using the first guard to hide a disc, and to muddle the board for their hammer shot.
2. If it is not your hammer, put up another guard that blocks up part of the other side of the board to make their hammer shot more difficult.
3. Clear the guard to keep the board clear for the hammer shot, whether yours or theirs. You can let them score their hammer – you will still be ahead.

PUTTING UP A TAMPA

Although technically this isn't going "on the board", effectively it is. Many players will make the kitchen attempt on a Tampa, especially when they are behind. A properly placed Tampa is very close to the same position as a scoring 10. Players are often practiced at kitchening a 10, and many are also practiced at kitchening a Tampa. Some are also practiced at kitchening a Tampa and rolling their cue disc into their St Pete position, giving them a guard for hiding a disc after you clear your kitchen with your next shot. The Tampa is the wrong guard to place with your first shot on your opponent's hammer when you are ahead, most of the time (depending on the skill of your opponent and sometimes on the court drift).

PUTTING UP A ST PETE

While this also isn't going on the board, consider the usefulness of a normal St Pete when you are ahead. If it is late in the game, you should not be intending to use the St Pete as a hide as you shouldn't be going on the board, even behind a guard. The normal St Pete does block up some of the board for your opponent's hammer shot, but it also often gives your opponent the opportunity to use it as their guard for placing a scoring disc on the outside down suicide alley. Rather than putting up a normal St Pete, put up a wide St Pete, blocking your opponent's suicide alley. You can use this as the first of a series of blocks above the scoring triangle to keep your opponent from scoring the hammer.

THE ACCIDENTAL SCORE

Sometimes your opponent will miss their intended shot to kitchen you and leave you with a scoring disc. This disc is also a violation of the 'Don't Go On The Board' rule. Your options include covering it, scoring another disc, or clearing it. The correct choice is dependent on many different factors such as current scores, whether it is early or late in the game, court drift, and more. Keep in mind that clearing it is a valid option and may be your best choice, especially late in the game.

KITCHENING YOUR OPPONENT

To make a shot to kitchen your opponent you must shoot at kitchen speed, which is also the speed at which your disc will stop on the board when it strikes your opponent's disc. If you are ahead and it isn't your hammer shot, don't do it! You don't need to kitchen your opponent to win – you are already ahead. When you make that shot to kitchen, you have taken the bait! It's probably why your opponent has a disc on the board that can be kitchened in the first place – to bait you into going on the board. Even if you are sure that you can make the kitchen shot and be safely hidden or safely roll off the board, don't do it. You might miss what you think you can make, leaving their disc scoring, or your disc on the board at risk, or kitchening yourself. It's not the way to win your games.

SNUGGLING

Many players favor snuggling over clearing once they have a strong lead in scores, especially in a points game to advance more quickly to making game. However, when you attempt to snuggle you are taking an unnecessary risk. You may make a good snuggle, but you may not. You will have a disc on the board which may end up in the kitchen and cost you the game.

DOUBLING

Sometimes you will end up with a doubling disc on the board even when you are doing everything you can to stay off the board. Don't fall into the temptation to make the shot to double. Clear it. Or if it is your hammer shot, ignore the doubling disc and just score your hammer. You don't need the extra score to win. Doubling sometimes goes bad, leaving both discs on the line or one in the kitchen. If the majority of the doubling disc lies on your side of the line, you can use it as a backstop for your hammer shot – you may end up with the double but that shouldn't be your primary objective.

STICKING

Occasionally you will stick when you clear, leaving your disc on the board. It happens to every player, even the best. Your opponent will no doubt attempt to kitchen you. If you end up in the kitchen, your opponent's disc will likely remain on the board, usually either scoring or on a line but covering your kitched disc. If you don't have a clear shot at your disc and it isn't your hammer shot, shoot to clear both your opponent's disc and your kitchen, and to get your cue disc off the board as well. Don't fall into the trap of shooting the reverse when you are ahead (except maybe on your hammer shot) as even when successful, you leave another disc on the board to be kitched.

There are many ways to go on the board. Many of them are tempting. Many of them are fun to play. All of them are unnecessary when you are ahead. All of them risk the win.