

Intermediate Shuffleboard Lessons – Syllabus

Purpose: A lesson series for intermediate players who already know the basic playing rules, shooting technique and standard strategy. The emphasis is decision-making under competitive-event conditions. A targeted tournament-procedure lesson is included because practice limits, close-disc procedures, coaching restrictions, interference and other match-management rules can materially affect otherwise sound strategy.

Suggested lesson length: 15-25 minutes: 3-5 minutes to frame the decision problem, 7-12 minutes of board demonstrations and player choices, and 5-8 minutes of quick decision reps. The following practice games are used to reinforce the lesson rather than simply to win.

Lessons Coaching Method

- Do not try to correct every decision or every missed shot. Choose a few moments in each game that directly reinforce the current lesson.
- Ask the player to explain the decision before giving the answer whenever practical. A useful sequence is: Who is ahead? What is the frame goal? What are the realistic choices? Which choice best serves the goal?
- Treat shot execution and strategy separately. A good strategic choice can miss, and a poor strategic choice can succeed. Coach the decision independently from the result.
- When coached practice includes partner discussion that would be illegal in an actual tournament, say so explicitly. Periodically run tournament-simulation frames with no partner coaching so the legal communication boundary becomes habitual.
- For tournament-practice sessions, periodically use an exact pregame sequence rather than an unlimited warm-up so players learn to gather information under the same constraints they will face in tournament.
- Revisit earlier concepts throughout the lesson series. Later lessons add nuance and exceptions; they do not replace the decision framework established early.

Phase I - Decision Framework

Build the mental structure that should govern every later tactical choice.

Lesson 1a: Who Is Really Ahead? – The 75-Point Game.

Lesson objective: Make strategic lead recognition automatic so the player knows whether the game calls for protection or recovery before choosing a shot.

Teaching points

- Do not equate the raw scoreboard lead with the strategic lead.
- In 75-point doubles, use the -5, 11, 27, 43 and 59 bracket thresholds as a quick shortcut to determine which team will reach 75 points first if every player scores their hammers and nothing more for the rest of the game.
- In 75-point singles, the brackets thresholds are -5, 3, 11, 19, 27, 35, 43, 51, 59 – eight-point spreads instead of the 16-point spread used in doubles.

- At the beginning of any frame at the head: if both teams are in the same bracket, the team with the hammer is ahead; if one team is in a higher bracket, that team is ahead.
- At the beginning of any frame at the foot, in your mind add 8 to the score of the team with the hammer, and then: if both teams are in the same bracket, the team with the hammer is ahead; if one team is in a higher bracket, that team is ahead.
- Connect the calculation immediately to strategy: ahead generally simplifies the game; behind requires a way to change the expected outcome.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Clean board at the head with both teams in the same bracket.
- Same board and hammer, but one team has just crossed a bracket threshold by one point.
- Foot-end score where the team with more recorded points is not the predictive leader after the next hammer is considered.

Practice-game reinforcement: Before selected frames, ask the shooter to state who is ahead and why before discussing any shot.

Lesson 1b: Who Is Really Ahead? – The Frame Game.

Lesson objective: Make strategic lead recognition automatic so the player knows whether the game calls for protection or recovery before choosing a shot.

Teaching points

- Do not equate the raw scoreboard lead with the strategic lead.
- In frame-game doubles, use scoring-set brackets of 4 frames (everyone gets a hammer) a quick shortcut to determine which team will win at the end of the last frame of the game.
- In frame-game singles, the scoring-set brackets are 2 frames (everyone gets a hammer) instead of the 4-frame bracket in doubles.
- At the beginning of any frame at the head or at the foot, if play is at the first frame of scoring set, whoever has more points is ahead.
- At the beginning of any frame at the head or at the foot, if play is not at the start of the scoring set, in your mind add 8 points for every un-played hammer of the scoring set, and then: whoever calculates to more points is ahead.
- Connect the calculation immediately to strategy: ahead generally simplifies the game; behind requires a way to change the expected outcome.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Clean board at the head with both teams in the same bracket.
- Same board and hammer, but one team has just crossed a bracket threshold by one point.
- Foot-end score where the team with more recorded points is not the predictive leader after the next hammer is considered.

Practice-game reinforcement: Before selected frames, ask the shooter to state who is ahead and why before discussing any shot.

Lesson 1c: Who Is Really Ahead? – The Points or Frames Game.

Lesson objective: Make strategic lead recognition automatic so the player knows whether the game calls for protection or recovery before choosing a shot.

Teaching points

- Do not equate the raw scoreboard lead with the strategic lead.
- First determine which will be achieved first: 75 points or the end of the last frame
 - At the beginning of the game, if the number of frames divided by two is equal to or more than the number of hammers it takes to reach game point, then the points-game method to determine which color is ahead. Otherwise use the frame-game method.
 - Continue to use the same method unless one color gets far enough ahead (by scoring extra discs besides their hammers) that they will reach game point before using up all their hammers (then switch to the points-game method) or both colors get far enough behind (by kitchens or missed hammers) that neither color will reach game point before the hammers run out (then switch to the frame-game method).
 - When the game is down to four hammers or less remaining for each color, be sure to keep track of both methods at once for every frame. At any point, if neither color will reach game point before the end of the final frame of the game, the color that is ahead under the frame-game method is ahead in the game.
- Otherwise, whichever color is ahead under the points-game method is ahead
- Connect the calculation immediately to strategy: ahead generally simplifies the game; behind requires a way to change the expected outcome.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Clean board at the head with both teams in the same bracket.
- Same board and hammer, but one team has just crossed a bracket threshold by one point.
- Foot-end score where the team with more recorded points is not the predictive leader after the next hammer is considered.

Practice-game reinforcement: Before selected frames, ask the shooter to state who is ahead and why before discussing any shot.

Lesson 2: The Four Game Conditions

Lesson objective: Give players a compact decision framework for every frame: ahead/behind combined with hammer/no hammer.

Teaching points

- Ahead with hammer: protect the advantage; usually clear and score the hammer.
- Ahead without hammer: avoid giving the opponent useful board material; clear, block, or steal the hammer without risking the lead.
- Behind with hammer: use the hammer as an opportunity to gain more than a routine score when the score requires it.
- Behind without hammer: seek a way to change the expected outcome through a stolen hammer, extra score, kitchen, or difficult block.
- These are purposes, not rigid shot scripts; board position, drift and opponent ability can alter the best tactic.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Four clean-board starts, one for each game condition.
- Repeat with a usable St. Pete already on the court.

- Repeat with a strong drift that makes the normal percentage shot less attractive.

Practice-game reinforcement: When a player is unsure, ask for the game condition first, then the purpose of the frame, then the shot.

Lesson 3: Set a Goal for Every Frame

Lesson objective: Train players to decide what the frame must accomplish before attractive individual shots distract them.

Teaching points

- State a specific objective before the first shot: score the hammer, steal it, prevent two scores, gain a bracket, create a kitchen chance, force an opponent 7 hammer instead of 8, prevent an opponent 10 hammer, or preserve the lead.
- The goal is often narrower than 'win the frame'; sometimes allowing one opposing score is acceptable while allowing two is fatal.
- Judge later shot choices by whether they advance the frame goal, not by how impressive the shot looks.
- Update the route to the goal as the board changes, but do not abandon the goal without a strategic reason.

Board situations to demonstrate

- 59-53 points-game type situation with the opponent's hammer at the head: define what must not happen before the partner's next hammer.
- Comfortable lead with opponent's hammer: decide whether stopping the hammer is necessary.
- Behind by a score or a one bracket with your hammer: decide whether a routine eight is enough.

Practice-game reinforcement: At the start of several frames per game, ask the shooter to state the goal in one sentence; after the frame, review whether the chosen shots served it.

Lesson 4: Percentage Play: Best Shot vs. Best-Looking Shot

Lesson objective: Shift shot selection from 'what can I make?' to 'which choice most reliably serves the game objective?'

Teaching points

- Compare what is likely to succeed, not what might give the biggest reward.
- Consider the consequences of a failed shot.
- Hammer shots deserve extra caution because there is no later disc in the frame to repair a mistake.
- A lower-reward shot can be better strategy when it preserves the expected win.
- A risky shot becomes correct when the safer option no longer preserves a realistic path to a win.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Hidden opponent score versus an open hammer eight.
- Possible double that can risk the lead versus a simple score.
- Opponent has a bunny (a disc that wins the game) disc that must be removed even though the shot is low percentage.

Practice-game reinforcement: When two plausible shots exist, ask the player for the safe outcome, best-case outcome, and worst miss for each before choosing.

Lesson 5: Don't Go on the Board When Ahead

Lesson objective: Build the discipline to reduce unnecessary exposure when the player's team is ahead.

Teaching points

- An unnecessary scoring disc may create exactly the kitchen opportunity the trailing opponent needs.
- A hide is still going on the board; late in the game even a good hide can add unnecessary risk.
- Evaluate Tampas, snuggles and accidental scores by the same question: do they expose the lead to danger that is not needed?
- When ahead, the opponent usually benefits more from a messy board than you do.

Board situations to demonstrate

- A strong lead with an inviting hide available on the opponent's hammer.
- Your opponent gives you an accidental score when you don't need it late in a game.
- A Tampa versus a St Pete when the opponent is a strong kitchen player.

Practice-game reinforcement: When a player proposes going on the board while ahead, ask: 'What do we gain that we actually need, and what can the opponent do with this disc?'

Phase II - Court and Opponent Information

Learn to gather information and make justified adjustments without abandoning sound strategy.

Lesson 6: Use Tournament Practice Within the Rules

Lesson objective: Make every available pregame shot answer a question about the court or discs while building habits that match tournament procedure.

Teaching points (Based on Florida state tournament rules. Adjust for your locale.)

- Before the first and second games, a player may take up to two speed shots to check court speed. No setups are permitted during these speed shots.
- For the first game, the speed shots must be taken before the court is swept or beaded. Before the second game, sweeping or beading before the optional speed shots requires agreement of all competitors on the court.
- After the speed shots, two full rounds of practice on the assigned color are allowed before games one and two - eight practice discs per player/team in addition to the two speed shots.
- Routine practice is not allowed before game three. Rain-delay practice follows the separate FSA rain-delay rule.
- Use the speed shots for basic speed and path information; use the full practice rounds for targeted drift, kitchen-speed and shot-path testing.
- Practice on an unused court should occur only if the Tournament Director authorizes it.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Two legal speed shots with no setup: select simple reference targets and observe speed and the full path.

- During the full practice rounds, use four for setup to learn disc characteristics, court speed and drifts; and a four-across deep-seven setup to observe kitchen speed and drifts.
- Simulate the end of game two and have players explain why they do not take routine practice before game three.
- One repeated game situation where the initial practice read proves wrong and the player must update the court model during play.

Practice-game reinforcement: Run the pregame sequence exactly as it would occur in a tournament: speed shots first, then full practice. Ask what each shot was intended to learn and later whether the court is still behaving the same way.

Lesson 7: Read the Opponent and Adjust

Lesson objective: Teach players to use early frames as information about what an opponent is likely and able to do.

Teaching points

- Identify the opponent's strongest reliable weapons: clearing, kitchens, deep sevens, hides, blocks, doubles.
- Notice habits: chasing, automatic clears, preferred guards, favorite side of the board, risk tolerance.
- Separate what the opponent attempts from what the opponent consistently makes.
- Vary your own play enough that the opponent cannot comfortably predict every response.
- Use opponent knowledge to modify tactics without losing sight of the score-based objective.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Opponent repeatedly misses hard clears but kitchens well: decide what kinds of board positions to offer or avoid.
- Opponent automatically clears St. Petes: decide whether that predictability can be used.
- Opponent is excellent at deep sevens but weak at clearing center blocks: choose the better endgame obstruction.

Practice-game reinforcement: After each game, have the player name one opponent strength, one weakness, one habit and one adjustment they would make in a rematch.

Lesson 8: When to Break Book Strategy

Lesson objective: Teach players to deviate from standard strategy only for a concrete, defensible reason.

Teaching points

- Book strategy is the default because it usually reflects the best general percentage play.
- Valid reasons to vary include opponent strengths/weaknesses, unusual drift, disc behavior, partner performance, your own shooting that day, and special score relationships.
- Do not copy an expert's unusual shot without knowing the information or history behind it.
- A deviation should still serve the frame goal and match objective.
- Afterward, evaluate whether the reason for deviating was sound even if the shot itself missed.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Standard clear-and-score is correct by score, but the court makes the normal clear unusually dangerous.
- Opponent has shown an extreme ability to kitchen Tampas, prompting a different first guard.
- Partner is struggling at one end, requiring the other end to play for both ends.

Practice-game reinforcement: Whenever a player wants to depart from standard play, require the sentence: 'I am changing because...' If the reason is vague, return to percentage strategy.

Phase III - Tactical Applications and Tournament Execution

Apply the decision framework to common intermediate-to-advanced situations, then execute those decisions without avoidable tournament-procedure errors.

Lesson 9: Stealing the Hammer Without Getting Greedy

Lesson objective: Develop several routes to a stolen hammer while keeping the primary goal - preserve the lead - in view.

Teaching points

- A stolen hammer can be achieved by blocking the scoring area, by creating a safe late hide, or by forcing a difficult hammer shot.
- St. Pete, Tampa and added blocks are tools; the correct sequence depends on score, drift and what the opponent leaves.
- Two useful guards can create more than one path to the goal and reduce the need for an early risky hide.
- Do not turn a hammer-steal attempt into unnecessary board play that puts the lead at risk.
- Sometimes allowing the opponent one routine hammer score is strategically acceptable.

Board situations to demonstrate

- First St. Pete survives; decide between hiding immediately and adding a Tampa.
- Two guards remain late in the frame; choose between wall-building and taking a protected score.
- Opponent has already opened a large scoring lane; decide whether a block or a late hide offers the better percentage.

Practice-game reinforcement: During opponent-hammer frames, ask the player to state the hammer-steal route they are building and what result they will accept if the steal fails.

Lesson 10: Stop Chasing the Hidden Disc

Lesson objective: Break the habit of spending multiple valuable shots on a difficult hidden score when another path better serves the game.

Teaching points

- One failed clearing attempt is information; two failed attempts may be a strong signal to change plans.
- The hammer should rarely be spent repeating a low-percentage chase when an open score is available.
- Consider clearing the guard, blocking the board, scoring your own disc, or accepting the opponent's score as the best option.

- Exception: if the hidden disc gives the opponent the win or a decisive next-frame opportunity, the risk may be mandatory.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Opponent has a deeply hidden ten and you have hammer with an open eight.
- Two previous shots failed to uncover a hidden score; decide what to do with the hammer.
- Hidden scoring disc is a the winning disc.

Practice-game reinforcement: When a player chases a hidden disc, ask what happens if it remains there and whether the game truly requires removing it.

Lesson 11: Kitchen Because You Need It - Not Because You Can

Lesson objective: Make kitchen attempts a score-driven strategic choice rather than an ego-driven display of shot-making.

Teaching points

- Kitchen play carries risk: miss, self-kitchen, leave the opponent scoring, or create a useful board for the opponent.
- When behind enough, the kitchen may be the best or only realistic way to change the expected outcome.
- When ahead, the reward from a kitchen is usually smaller because the lead already provides the winning path.
- A kitchen attempt can still be good while ahead when it is also the best hammer score or clearing shot and the downside is limited.
- Evaluate risk versus reward for the actual effects on the game outcome, not in isolation.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Behind late with an exposed opponent score and a viable kitchen path.
- Ahead comfortably with the same exact board.
- Hammer shot where kitchen speed can both score the cue disc and remove the opponent.

Practice-game reinforcement: Before every voluntary kitchen attempt, require the player to answer: 'Why do I need this kitchen now?'

Lesson 12: Kitchen Bait, Sucker Hides and Planned Sequences

Lesson objective: Teach baiting and inviting hides as multi-shot situations: plan the opponent response, recognize traps, and decide from the score rather than from the attractiveness of the immediate shot.

Teaching points

- Choose kitchen-bait placement according to hammer, score, drift and the result you want from the opponent.
- Plan the next shot before placing the bait: know your likely response to a hard clear, stick, miss, self-kitchen, or useful backstop.
- A useful guard can belong to either player; color alone should not cause an automatic clear.
- An inviting hide may be a sucker hide deliberately offered to tempt you onto the board or into a kitchenable position.

- Before accepting any apparent gift, ask both 'What does this do for my frame goal?' and 'What can the opponent do to me next?'

Board situations to demonstrate

- Place bait with the opponent's hammer and compare seven versus eight placement.
- Opponent sticks on the bait; choose among kitchen, reverse, cover, or clear based on score and drift.
- Opponent's misplaced St. Pete creates an inviting scoring lane; compare taking it versus clearing.
- Purposefully misplaced guard invites a score that can be kitchened on the next shot.

Practice-game reinforcement: After bait or an inviting opponent guard appears, pause and ask the player to predict the opponent's likely next responses before committing.

Lesson 13: Tournament Match Management: Calls, Coaching, Interference and Pace

Lesson objective: Make tournament procedures automatic enough that players do not lose points, shots, or concentration through avoidable rule mistakes.

Teaching points

- Close discs: the shooter may ask the Referee to have their partner check a close disc; if there is no Referee, the shooter may ask the partner directly. In Doubles, someone at the shooting end asking for a First or Second Call is considered coaching and carries a 10-Off penalty.
- Partner communication: any remark or motion that indicates coaching is prohibited. Glenn Monroe has interpreted factual distance information when a partner checks a disc as permissible, but strategic advice such as "you have enough room" or a deliberately false distance as coaching.
- Do not volunteer frame-count or "last frame" signals to a partner as a tactical cue; Monroe has interpreted that as coaching.
- Cell phones: unauthorized use on the courts carries a 5-Off penalty. If a player wants to view stored drift charts on a phone, obtain explicit Tournament Director permission; Monroe allowed such use through practice shots but not during the game.
- Interference: if another court, cue, disc, or outside event interferes with a shot, stop and involve the Referee or Tournament Director. The proper remedy depends on whether live discs were contacted; do not move discs or award yourself a re-shot.
- Pace: intentional delay or stalling carries a 5-Off penalty, and Tournament Directors have authority to address slow play. A high-pressure routine should be deliberate but brief.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Shooter wants a partner to inspect a close disc: role-play what may be asked and what the partner may report.
- A player at the shooting end wants to challenge the close-disc call: identify the coaching problem and the correct route through the officials.
- A fast disc from another court interrupts the stroke: freeze the situation and identify what information the official needs before deciding a replay or re-shot.
- Player wants to consult a phone-based drift chart during a game: identify why permission and timing matter.

- Critical game-point shot: perform the mental reset quickly enough that it does not become slow play.

Practice-game reinforcement: During selected practice games, insert one rules situation without warning. Require the player to state the safe procedural response before returning to strategy.

Phase IV - Closing Games Under Pressure

Protect winning positions and make clear decisions late in games and matches.

Lesson 14: Don't Rush the Win

Lesson objective: Teach patience when victory is already reachable through normal upcoming hammers.

Teaching points

- Near game, extra aggression can increase risk without materially improving the winning path.
- In doubles, remember the partner's upcoming hammer; you may not need to manufacture an extra score now.
- Do not confuse the ability to go out sooner in a points game with the need to do so.
- Keep the board and score simple when the expected hammer sequence already wins.
- Rushing often changes a controlled game into a volatile one that favors the trailing opponent.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Team needs two normal hammer scores to win and is already ahead; an early hide appears.
- Player can attempt a second score now but failure opens a kitchen chance.
- Partner has the next winning hammer; current shooter must decide what result to protect.

Practice-game reinforcement: Late in close games, ask: 'If we simply score our next normal hammers, do we already win?' If yes, require a reason for any added risk.

Lesson 15: Endgame Thinking One Frame Ahead

Lesson objective: Train doubles players to make the current frame serve the partner's next frame rather than optimizing only their own immediate score.

Teaching points

- Calculate what the next shooter needs before choosing the current frame's final shots.
- Sometimes the key requirement is preventing a second opponent score, not maximizing your own score.
- Know when one score is harmless but two scores change the predictive winner, or allow the opponent to go out in a points game.
- Think in two-frame sequences: current end plus partner's upcoming hammer.
- Use the scoreboard continuously; endgame strategy is more sensitive to one-point and one-disc changes.

Board situations to demonstrate

- 59-53 style example where preventing two opponent scores is more important than doubling your own hidden disc.
- Partner needs one hammer eight to go out; determine what current shooter can safely allow.

- Opponent can reach game on the next frame if given one extra score now; decide whether a low-percentage clear becomes mandatory.

Practice-game reinforcement: In the last third of every practice game, periodically ask the player to describe not just this frame's goal but the next partner frame's expected job.

Lesson 16: Pressure Decisions: Stop, Recalculate, Then Shoot

Lesson objective: Give players a repeatable mental routine for critical shots so pressure does not distort simple strategic reasoning.

Teaching points

- Pressure can cause players to keep processing old assumptions after the board or score has changed.
- Before a critical shot, deliberately recalculate the score requirement rather than relying on the previous conclusion.
- Use a short routine: Who is ahead? What is the frame goal? What result do I need? What happens if I miss?
- Once the choice is made, stop debating during the stroke; indecision harms execution.
- A brief extra moment for a truly critical tournament shot can prevent a strategic error, but the reset should remain efficient and must not become intentional delay or slow play.

Board situations to demonstrate

- Winning double available, but a more complicated carom appears attractive.
- Game-point situation where the player mistakenly thinks an extra point is required.
- Two viable shots remain; one is simpler and meets the goal, the other has a higher ceiling but greater miss risk.

Practice-game reinforcement: When a genuine game-turning shot appears, have the player step back, state the four questions aloud, commit to one shot, then shoot without further strategy discussion.