

Intermediate Shuffleboard Lessons – Topics

1a-c. Who Is Really Ahead?

Make this foundational. Teach players to stop equating the scoreboard lead with the strategic lead and quickly determine the predictive winner from score, hammer sequence, and upcoming hammers. For 75-point doubles, drill the -5, 11, 27, 43 and 59 brackets until recognition becomes nearly automatic. During games, occasionally ask before a frame: "Who's ahead, and why?"

2. Set a Goal for Every Frame

Before thinking about the first shot, determine what must happen in this frame: simply score the hammer, steal the hammer, prevent two scores, gain one bracket, create a kitchen opportunity, preserve the lead, etc. The key is to prevent players from making individually attractive shots that defeat the larger objective. This may be the single best bridge from intermediate to advanced strategic play.

3. The Four Game Conditions

Ahead with hammer, ahead without hammer, behind with hammer, behind without hammer. Have players learn the purpose of play in each condition rather than memorize a rigid shot sequence. Then let actual court situations force justified exceptions.

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

Compare two or three viable choices by chance of success, consequences of failure, and whether the risk is actually necessary. Hammer shots deserve special attention because there is no later disc available to repair the damage.

5. Don't Go on the Board When Ahead

Not merely "don't shoot an open score." Work through the temptations: unnecessary hides, kitchens, snuggles, Tampas and accidental scores. The underlying reason is simple: when you are mathematically ahead, your opponent needs the complication more than you do. This should generate excellent practice-game coaching because experienced opponents will constantly offer tempting violations.

6. Use Tournament Practice Within the Rules

Treat the official practice sequence as both a rules exercise and a court-reading exercise. Before games one and two, Florida rules allow up to two speed shots with no setups, followed by two full practice rounds on the assigned color; routine practice is not allowed before game three. Use the speed shots to learn basic speed and path, then use the full practice rounds to test drift, kitchen speed and important shot paths. Do not add extra warm-up shots or assume practice on an unused court is permitted without Tournament Director authorization.

7. Read the Opponent and Adjust

Use the first part of a game to identify what an opponent can actually do: Are they exceptional at clearing? Kitchens? Deep sevens? Hides? Do they chase? Do they automatically clear certain guards? Learn what the opponent is likely and able to do and vary your own play so you are not predictable. This directly addresses the advanced pros your players will encounter.

8. When to Break Book Strategy

Standard strategy remains the starting point, not an inflexible commandment. Teach players to identify a reason for deviating: opponent strengths or weaknesses, unusual drift, disc behavior, partner performance, your own shooting that day, or an unusual score relationship. Expert play may differ because players know one another's strengths and weaknesses, and there is not necessarily one correct answer to every situation.

9. Stealing the Hammer Without Getting Greedy

Focus on St. Pete, Tampa, fill-in, building a wall, hiding late in the frame, and simply limiting the opponent to one score. The lesson is not "how to block"; it is choosing the safest route to the actual goal. Establishing two guards can create multiple routes to stealing the hammer while avoiding unnecessary exposure.

10. Stop Chasing the Hidden Disc

Give players situations where an opponent has a difficult hidden score and ask whether clearing the guard, blocking, scoring their own hammer, or chasing is best. This is particularly valuable for intermediate players because shot-making confidence often seduces them into repeatedly attacking a difficult disc. Emphasize that the hammer should not be spent repeating a low-percentage clearing attempt unless the game situation truly requires it.

11. Kitchen Because You Need It - Not Because You Can

Teach the strategic trigger for kitchen play. When behind far enough, or when the opponent is threatening game, the risky kitchen may become mandatory; when comfortably ahead, the same technically available shot may be strategically foolish. Frame this as a risk-versus-reward decision tied to who is truly ahead.

12. Kitchen Bait, Sucker Hides and Planned Sequences

Go beyond one-shot tactics. With kitchen bait, decide what response you want, where to place the bait, and what the next shot will be after a clear, stick, miss or kitchen. With hides, remember that a useful guard may belong to either color and that an inviting hide may have been deliberately offered as a trap. Teach players to ask what the opponent will be able to do next before accepting any apparent gift.

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

Intermediate tournament players should know the procedures that can change a match. Practice how to handle close discs and appeals, what a doubles player may ask a partner, where factual information ends and coaching begins, when to stop play and call an official after interference, and how to avoid unauthorized phone use or unnecessary delay. The goal is not memorizing every penalty; it is learning to recognize situations where the safe action is to stop, avoid moving anything, and involve the Referee or Tournament Director.

14. Don't Rush the Win

Once the win is close, intermediate players often become more aggressive when they should become more disciplined. Focus on resisting the urge to manufacture extra numbers when normal upcoming hammers can complete the game, particularly in doubles. Pair this lesson with "game on the board" and "what does my partner need from me next frame?"

15. Endgame Thinking One Frame Ahead

Present scores where the important question is not "How much can I score?" but "What can I allow here and still give my partner the winning hammer?" Expand into two-frame sequences so the head player learns to play for what the foot player needs, and vice versa.

16. Pressure Decisions: Stop, Recalculate, Then Shoot

This is more mental than technical. Under pressure, complicated chains of reasoning can displace a simple winning shot. Teach a short critical-shot routine: Who is ahead? What is my goal? What do I need - not want - from this shot? What happens if I miss? Take a brief, deliberate reset when the situation truly warrants it, then commit and shoot without drifting into slow play or stalling.