

The following was originally posted by Snimm on the CBT Forums. I've added it here with his permission. - Ralgith

"I want to see if I can expand on scJazz's advice, which is generally very good basic advice.

Controlling the center of the board, as mentioned before, can restrict your opponent's movement. By placing your units in the center, you can respond more quickly to any area of the map. You also might split your opponent's forces, and that usually works in your favor - divide and conquer. This can be especially useful if your units overall are slower than your opponent. Your opfor likely will want to run and gun in a circular fashion (the circling movement would be accomplished over several turns, the idea being avoiding short- or melee-range contact with your forces). When you hold the center, you will severely restrict his safe movement and probably, eventually, you can cut down his running space to a corner, or at the very least get off a short-range volley with your short-range units. You can do this because generally it's very hard to reverse direction without sacrificing movement modifiers once a lance is circling in one direction. Even if your opponent has jump jets, he won't be able to move as far in the turn he has to employ them, so you're probably going to get at LEAST one good round of fire at some point.

There are two main exceptions you might consider to the above guideline. The first is the high ground. What a lot of people fail to realize is that the high ground can be just as important in Battletech as in real combat. The high ground allows you to potentially negate a lot of partial cover opportunities for your opponent. At the very least, your first support units can benefit greatly by firing from a relatively safe position with a very good field of fire. This allows them to "stand and deliver," not only giving them good firing mods, but also giving you an "initiative sink."

An init sink is a unit that takes very little thought to move and basically safely burns a round of movement without giving your opponent much idea as to your plans (so a fire support unit that has slow movement is perfect for this). This, in turn, allows you to move your short-range units and faster units later in the turn when you can better see where are your opportunities to maximize the movement of such units (which are usually lighter in firepower but are more capable of hitting weak points on a target because of their mobility).

The second aforementioned exception is the need to keep your unit working as a cohesive whole. As usual, of course, no one plan is perfect for every map. You must weigh the usefulness of the map center and the high ground against the need to keep your units working as a cohesive whole. Fire support doesn't necessarily have to stay close to your other units to be effective, but at the same time, fire support usually doesn't protect itself well at short range. Therefore, there are many maps where you don't want to get your units too far apart from each other so they can have mutual support. This is absolutely VITAL in cities, by the way, since ranges are often SO short - you often want all your units to remain close enough to each other so that you can deliver multiple kicks in a melee situation (and remember, too, that LRMs and PPCs are still effective at 6 hex range!).

Notice how I haven't even mentioned the abilities of the opfor. It IS a good idea to analyze the opposition as a whole. Do they have a lot of long-range weapons and not much in the way of short range? Then rush those suckers and kick 'em down! Yeah, you're going to take some damage on the way in, but the rewards when you finally DO get there should be so great that it's well worth it.

Do they have a lot of short-range, but you outgun them at long range? Then milk the range for as long as you can. Put your fire support in useful overwatch positions, and use any short-rangers you have to

make a rush by your opponent risky by placing them in positions that will allow backstabs if your opponent tries to rush you.

Are you faster, and does the map have few obstacles (trees, level changes, etc.) that will slow you down? Then you might implement a "run and gun" strategy. In such cases it might well become an issue of who can better control or deny the center of the map.

Notice how I'm looking at this from a 30,000-feet, high-level perspective. Sure, it's important to understand the math behind the modifiers, and how to maximize your to-hits while minimizing your opponent's. But you can't implement good tactical (short-term) decisions without good strategic (long-term, or at least overarching) ideas.

Last thing I want to mention about winning and losing initiative. You do NOT have to consider yourself screwed when you lose initiative! There are several ideas you can employ to minimize the "damage" from losing init. First, when you lose initiative, think defensive movement - you might "turtle up" your units to some extent to minimize your opponent's advantage rather than extending your position for a backstabbing gamble. Again, it's a good idea to make relatively "safe" moves first. This means moving units furthest away from the fighting, or slower units, or long-range units first to minimize your exposure to backstabs and other dangerous units of the opfor. If the fighting is short-range and you know you can't avoid a backstab, you still have tactical resources you can employ.

One of these resources is to move a "meatball" first - a well-armored unit, or a unit with no ammunition to blow up. Ideally, this unit can take some punishment, even if it's backstabbed. Also, by moving such a unit first, you might encourage your opponent to make a foolish backstab which allows you to focus fire and focus-kick that backstabber into oblivion. Moving a meaty unit first can often open up space for your other units to move because its guns protect the hexes immediately in front of it - nobody wants to run into the short range of a HBK-G's AC 20, usually. So think of such a unit as creating a "bubble" of movement space within the effective range of its best guns.

Another idea is to retreat or move units who aren't going to be very effective that turn anyway - maybe you have an overheating unit like a Jenner-D which if used properly should be overheating a lot and using its jump jets to escape when necessary. In such a case, that unit might as well move first (jumping into a heavy woods, for example) because it isn't going to be contributing much anyway. You might also stand up a unit that got knocked prone that turn - he wasn't going anywhere anyhow, and yes, he's probably going to be a target - use that knowledge! You know your opponent would like to light up that unit! Can you turn that to your advantage? Can you set up multiple kicks or shots at optimum range for your units because you know where your opponent would like to go to shoot up or kick that already-damaged unit?

On the flipside, obviously, winning initiative can be a huge help to you. In such case, it's okay to think more offensively, but again, be aware of overextending your position. You can do so, just make sure you have a good reason for doing it - sending a Jenner-D to backstab a HBK-G would be a good reason, for example. With the last move of the turn in hand, you can really maximize the high movement rate of your fastest unit, placing it in the most effective position. Alternatively (often the case in recon combats), you might move all your lightest units first, using the movement range of your heaviest unit to keep your opponent honest - usually you don't want to voluntarily let your light Mech get kicked by a 55-ton recon Mech. Again, creating a "bubble" in which your opponent has to respect the threat of your weight and kicks."

Snimm further expounds on a few points...

“And I didn't mean to gloss over the necessities of learning the modifier tables. Of course you need to learn those. But to my mind, it's easy to get lost in the minutiae of making your tactical decisions that might be sound for one turn, but might be damaging to your position in future turns. I can't count the number of times I know I made moves that were good for that particular turn, but left my units horribly out of position and/or vulnerable for the next three because I lost sight of the overall capabilities of both sides. Playing 3025 MekWars taught me that. I have found it much, much easier to focus on the larger developments in a game because a lot of the bookkeeping gets taken care of correctly by MM nowadays. That frees one to get a better handle on better overall strategies once you start to get a feel for the modifiers. You can never escape having to crunch numbers in your head, though. And my guess is if that bothered any of us, we would probably quit playing the game. Since we haven't, I assume we all understand the necessity of crunching the numbers.

But Felime has a good point. If you can get a veteran player to talk to you, you'll get a lot of insight in a hurry.”

“My usual advice on movement mods is this: Walk when you can, run if you must (or if it fits your strategy to close quickly). Jump only as a last resort (because jumping creates a lot of heat and high to-hit modifiers for yourself). Try to walk 3 or 5 hexes, or run 5 or 7 hexes to optimize modifiers.

If you think your unit won't draw fire or can take the abuse, stand still and deliver punishment!

Remember that the heavier the unit, the more likely it is to stand and deliver, or at most to walk and fire. For light Mechs, speed is life when you're in doubt: Choose a higher movement modifier for yourself (7 hex movement or 5 hex jump minimum) as opposed to moving slower just to make your own shot count.”

“It's the rare opposing unit that will be so solid that you can't find any weakness on it. Usually a unit will have SOMETHING you can exploit - ammunition to be blown up (especially if the ammo is the only thing in that location to hit), weak leg armor (kick from whatever side has the weakest leg armor), and rear armor is always a default point to attack if you can't find anything else (even against assault Mechs and even against laser zombies).

Understanding how to hit the left, right, or rear of a Mech can be important as well, as that's the whole point of movement: putting your firepower where it's most effective as much as you possibly can.”

“Another point I think I should expound upon a bit more: What exactly constitutes a good place to put your fire support? Answering this question can have a huge impact on how the game plays out because it can affect initiative turns (whether you win or lose), which in turn can make it easier or harder for you to make intelligent moves.

My general guidelines go something like this:

The best place to put your fire support, in order from best position to worst position.

1. In a heavy/light woods hex with partial cover, on the highest level of the map. This allows you to fire over any intervening terrain your opponent might try to use as cover, be it other woods hexes or partial cover on his side.

2. In a heavy/light woods hex with partial cover on a point that lets you fire over most intervening terrain. Remember that any woods hexes on the SAME level as your fire support will get in the way of shooting.

3. Heavy/light woods on high ground lacking partial cover.

4. Partial cover on high ground with no woods.

5. Bare high ground, AS LONG AS the opponent can't just shoot the snot out of you at range. Ideally you should be able to keep him occupied with your shorter-ranged units so he doesn't have time to shoot at your fire support.

5a. City caveat: On top of a building that supports the Mech's weight, and has a building of sufficient height in between you and opfor to keep him from shooting said building out from under you. You might actually only do this with scouting units to spot the enemy instead of fire support - jump jets get you around the city much more easily and let you evacuate quickly when you must. Realize that being able to spot the enemy does NOT mean you have to be in range of his guns to see him! You just have to be high enough to look over anything that might get in the way...

6. In a heavy/light woods hex with a decent field of fire that covers your other units somehow. What you want to avoid here is a lot of woods or buildings that severely restrict your field of fire. Destroy these (buildings especially) if you only have to clear one or two hexes to greatly improve your field of fire. If you can't do that, you might need to find a different hex.

6. Behind your other advancing units, covering their backsides no closer than 5-6-7 or 10-11-12 hex range depending on their main weapons.

7. Close behind your other units because they're going to need the mutual support and you might need the kick weight in a melee situation (this is much more important in a city). Remember that PPCs and LRMs are still effective at 6 hexes, though!

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