



by Bob Jewett

# Close Calls

Let the roll of the balls settle disputes.

THE SCENE: YOU'RE playing well, the table is cooperating by not surprising you, your shots are scoring dead center, and your position play is pinpoint accurate. Nothing stands between you and certain victory.

Nothing, that is, except, "Foul!"

You look up at your opponent in disbelief. The shot he's complaining about was a little tricky, and you thought for a moment about having someone watch the hit, but you were in rhythm, and shot without breaking stride. There's really no question in your mind that the shot was good. Anyway, you were in a much better position to see the shot than your opponent, weren't you?

"You hit the wrong ball first," he continues, with a case-closed-get-off-the-table attitude.

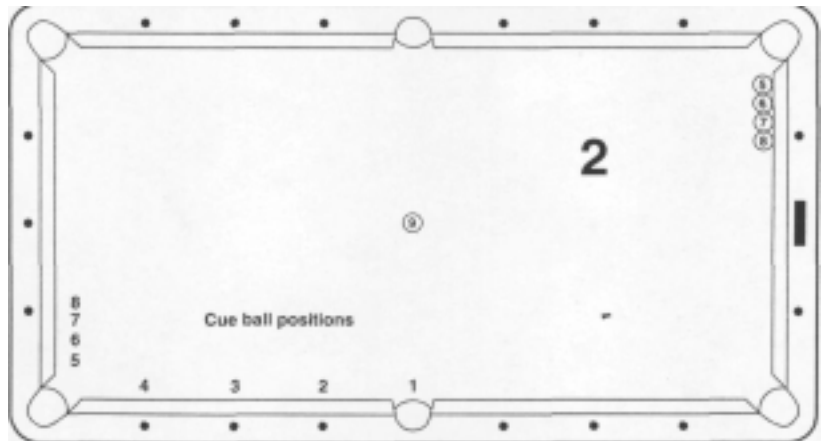
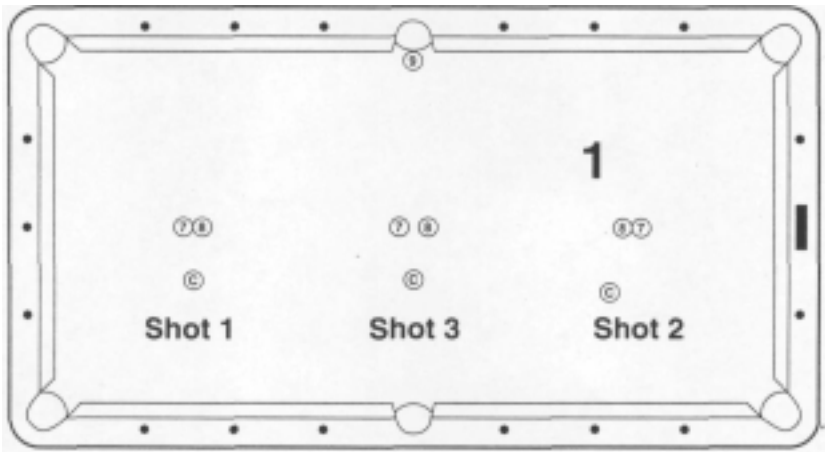
You wish the match had a referee. You wish you had stopped to have someone watch the hit. You wish one of the spectators would speak up, but they have all suddenly turned their attention to neighboring tables, leaving you alone with your adversary.

How could you have avoided this situation? The usual way is to call over a third party to watch the hit. With luck, he will be both competent and unbiased. Two other ways out are to play a safety or shoot some other shot.

Let's look at how the balls can be your impartial witness in one of the most common "close call" situations in pool: Two object balls are close and you must hit a particular one first. In Diagram 1's Shot 1, the 7 and 8 are on the line (foot string) with the 8 a ball width or two below the spot. The rules say to hit the 7 first and you plan to pocket it in the corner.

This case is pretty simple to judge. If the cue ball hits the 7 first, it goes to the right after the shot, while it goes to the left if the 8 is struck first. Also notice that the first ball struck moves faster than the second ball.

There is a third possibility: hitting the 7 and 8 simultaneously. In this case, the cue ball will come straight back at you. This is rare; you might see a simultaneous hit once in twenty shots if you try it from a fixed position with



small corrections each time. (Hint: If the cue ball always exits to the right, even if it looks like you are exactly splitting the balls, aim a little more to the right.) Whether a simultaneous hit is good or bad depends on the particular rules of the game and sometimes on the referee.

A more complex situation is in Shot 2, where the cue ball has been moved to make the shot nearly straight. In this case, the cue ball will stop almost dead with a good hit on the 7 first, but will scoot to the right after hitting the 8 first. The 7 can be pocketed either way, since hitting the 8 first changes the contact point on the 7 very little. If this shot came up in a game of straight pool or one-pocket, you might even try to hit the 8 first, perhaps to break up a

cluster close on the right, or to get away from the 8 for position. (If you find it impossible to pocket the 7, move the balls farther from the spot, or use left English.)

Finally, Shot 3 shows a position where it's impossible to tell from the action of the cue ball which object ball was struck first. The 7 and 8 are precisely 0.932 inches apart. If calipers aren't handy, use a quarter; it's just the right diameter. The cue ball will stop dead no matter which ball you hit slightly first. This can be worked into a trick shot, using follow to make the 9. If the balls are the wrong distance apart, either more or less, it's very difficult to pocket the 9.

Now that you are armed with some knowledge about judging this kind of

shot, how can it keep you from becoming the victim in the scenario above? A fourth way to deal with controversial shots is to discuss with your opponent whether it can be decided by the action of the balls before you attempt the shot.

There will always be border-line calls that rely on the judgment of the observer, but often the balls speak for themselves. Make sure they're heard.

### Side Pocket Practice

Diagram 2 shows a "progressive practice" drill that should really sharpen up your open-table side-pocket shots. For a general discussion of the "progressive practice" method, see the December issue.

The 9 ball always is placed on the center spot for this drill. Starting with the cue ball in position 1, pocket the 9 ball in the side pocket. Each time you make the shot, move up one position for your next. If you miss, move the cue ball one position down. For positions 5 through 8, place the cue ball so the corresponding object ball on the opposite end rail is exactly in line with the cue ball and the 9 ball.

Shoot 10 to 15 shots in each set. For the first set, place the cue ball far enough off the rail to make a comfortable bridge on the bed of the table. Then try the cue ball a few inches from the rail, and finally try the shot with the cue ball frozen to the rail.

After doing that, practice cutting the ball to the right by shooting the mirror image of the drill, moving the cue ball to the right after each successful shot, left after each miss.

Like other progressive drills, the cue ball position where you spend most of your time shooting from is indicative of where your pocketing average is 50 percent. To further fine tune your play try the drill again, but move the cue ball only a fraction of a step after each shot. The less distance you move between shots, the more accurate your x estimated 50-50 point will be.

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