



by Bob Jewett

Close Quarters III

THIS IS THE third and last article on special problems to avoid, and techniques to use, when the cue ball is close to the object ball.

The first part presented an aiming system that's useful when the cue ball is about half a ball to two balls from the object ball. The second part covered stroke techniques that can prevent double hits. I discovered another technique recently that will let you execute Shot 1 of last issue's column without the rail-banging: Move your grip hand up the cue so your forearm is nearly horizontal when you hit the cue ball. Unless you drop your elbow badly, your stroke will barely penetrate the cue ball. This will avoid the soreness you may have developed by trying to cut a normal stroke short.

Now we're going to look at the most difficult aspect of "close quarters" shots: the rules. There are lots of rules, all different, and they've changed in the past six months. Here are some of the rules I've seen in rule books or tournaments, that now seem obsolete:

1. Any single stroke is fair, regardless of how many times the stick hits the cue ball. If you ever play by this rule, develop a foot-long follow through, and you'll be set.
2. Same as Rule 1, but the cue ball must start within a chalk cube of the object ball.
3. The referee can call a double-hit foul only if he can actually see the stick hit the ball a second time. Try this one yourself with a friend

as the referee. Use the stroke developed for Rule 1.

4. If the cue ball is still on the tip when it hits the object ball, the shot is fair. Do you know exactly how long or far the cue ball stays on the tip? Neither does any referee, so this rule is almost impossible to apply. The answer is roughly one hundredth of an inch to half an inch, depending on tip firmness and the shot's speed and acceleration.

Now for the current rules. The Professional Billiard Tour Association has just published its own rule book, and double hits are discussed on pages 53, 84 and 90. On page 54, in the General Rules section, the book says it's OK to hit the cue ball twice (or continuously, maybe) as long as you elevate the cue and use draw. Rather, that's how I interpret it, since the wording isn't clear. If I'm right, this isn't much different from Rule 1 above, except why the requirement for elevation? And how much?

Further along, in the sections on straight pool and one-pocket, we see the rule, "If at any time during the game the cue ball is hit twice during one shot, it is a foul." This would seem to take precedence over the General Rule, but only for 14.1 and one-pocket.

The Billiard Congress of America rule book also has some changes for 1993. Check out pages i, 41, 45, 98, 108, 114 and 115. An addition on page 41 states: "2.20 Judging Double Hits.

When (the cue ball and object ball are close), the following guidance may apply: if the cue ball follows through the object ball more than 1/2 ball, it is a foul." If you did your homework last time, you know that there will always be a gray area between obviously clean and clearly dirty shots. This instruction at least gives referees something definite to measure against.

The main BCA rule is on page 45. Unfortunately, the wording is again unclear, but it seems that it is a foul if the tip is still on the cue ball when the latter hits the object ball or if the tip hits the cue ball a second time.

It is especially difficult to apply this last rule when the cue ball is only a hair's breadth from the object ball. There is a special rule on page 98 that applies to snooker: "...where the cue ball and an object ball are almost touching, it shall be deemed a legal shot if the cue hits the finest possible edge of the object ball."

The rule is a little clearer for billiards (page 115), even if they've changed terminology: "A push shot is one in which the cue tip remains in contact with the cue ball after the cue ball strikes an object ball, or when cue tip contacts the cue ball after cue ball strikes the object ball."

By now you're wondering what rule to use. As with all rules, that's between you and your opponent in a private match or for the tournament director to specify. My own preference is for a combination of the billiard rule with the snooker "finest edge" rule.