

Create Your Own Drills

by BOB JEWETT



DO YOU HAVE the time and inclination for serious practice — but can't decide what you should work on? The suggestions below will help you develop drills to improve the particular shots that keep you from running racks. The method is explained for 9-ball, but can be applied to other games as well.

Let's assume you're an intermediate player with some chance to run out the table shown in Diagram 1, starting with ball in hand.

There are no clusters, but three shots require good position play to get on the next ball. These problem shots can be converted into drills that will help you to focus on your weak areas and quickly improve your run-out percentages.

For our intermediate player, I'd guess the three main road blocks are the 2 to 3, 4 to 5, and 5 to 6 position plays. Precise speed is needed to get position on the 3 ball because of the 8 ball. Accurate speed will also be needed to get on the 5 because of the very long run from the 4 ball. Maneuvering from the 5 to the 6 will likely take some inside English — a perfect angle is too much to hope for — and reasonable speed control. The other shots are easy if these three are done well.

Now that we have the problem shots — and these may be different for your own level of play — let's create the corresponding drills. The first is shown in Diagram 2, where the goal is to get from the 2 ball to the marked position zone. It helps to have something on the table, so the goal is clear.

First, find the cue ball location that makes the position (and the shot, of course) easiest. Now, turn the drill into a progressive practice by shooting from a more difficult position (more angle) until you miss the shot or the zone. When you miss, go back to an easier shot. By the time you have this drill wrung out, the position needed from the very first shot of the rack should be clear, and may make you choose a different shot with ball in hand on the 1.

Diagram 3 shows the drill for the 4 to 5 transition. To make it a progressive drill, start with a close target zone, and work up to the full length. Where's the best place for the cue ball to start? I like a 45-degree, cut since a large fraction of the speed will stay on the cue ball. Again, this will suggest how to play the previous shot.

Diagram 4 will help you decide how small the final target zone in Diagram 3 should be. As the cue ball gets farther from the rail, can you still reach one of the shaded areas? At how steep an angle do you have to send the cue ball to the other end of the table and back? Note that in Diagram 1, the 7 and 9 may interfere with an end-to-end shot. Use this drill to perfect your soft inside English shot. In Diagram 4, the acceptable target zone on the "long side" (nearer the side pocket) is larger than on the "short side" (closer to the corner pocket), since the shot is much shorter.

The drills above are just three examples of problem shots that you might need to work on. It's best to select problems to turn into drills from your own play; maybe you should pick a shot you often flub. Next, devise a way to make the practice progressive, so at the beginning it's easy, but becomes tougher. Two easy ways to do this are shown above: move the cue ball to a harder angle, or make the position harder to reach.

Bob Jewett is a former ACU-I billiard champions and trains BCA instructors.

