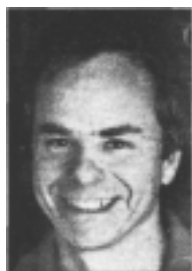


# Finding The Pocket

by BOB JEWETT



IRVING CRANE HAS said that the skill that set him apart from other top players was his pocketing accuracy — putting the ball right in the center of the pocket. When was the last time you worked on this part

of your game, and just how do you practice this? Below are some suggestions for getting your shots closer to the real target.

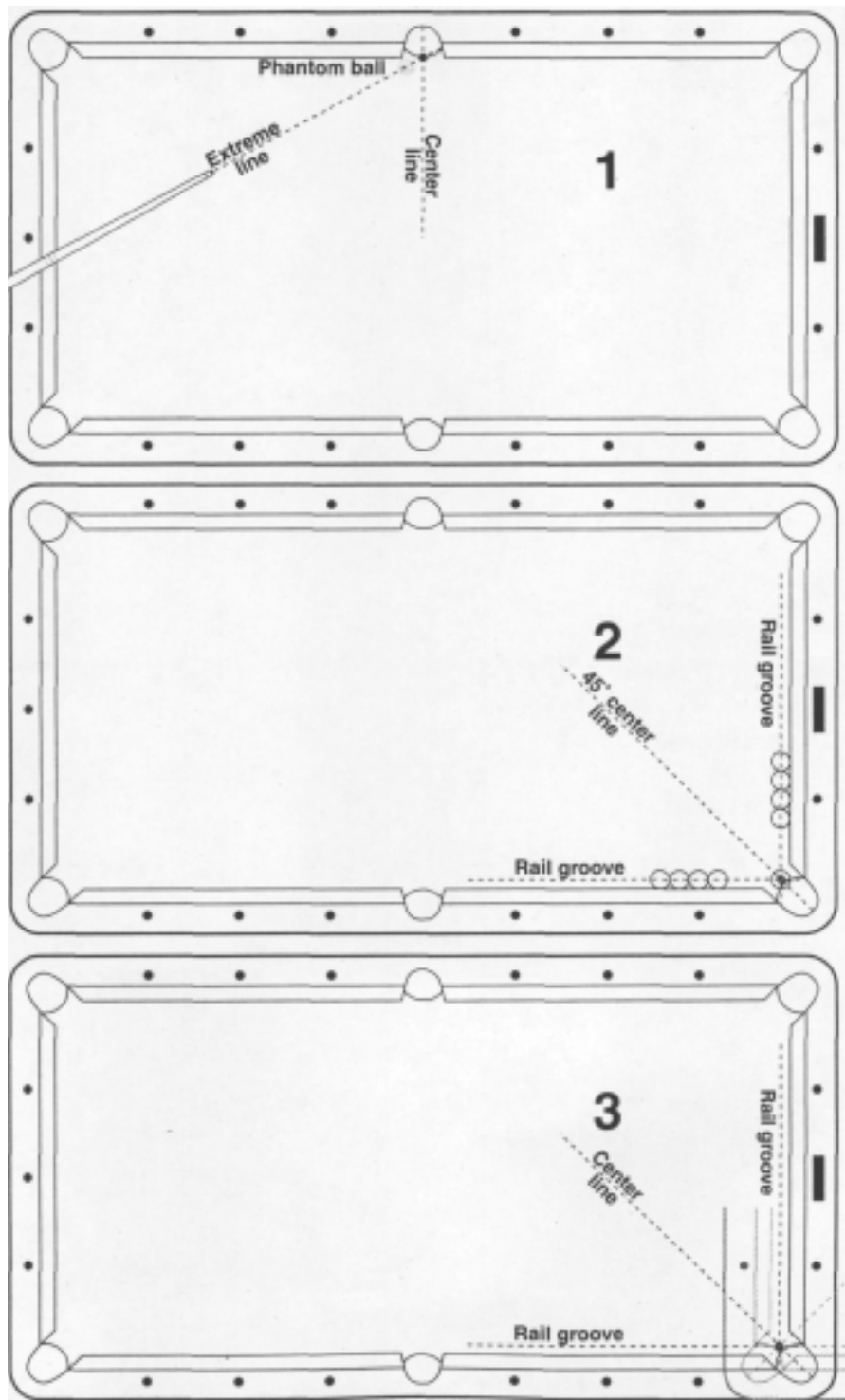
First we need to know where the pocket is. Obvious? Maybe not. Lots of players, and not just beginners, have trouble playing shots angled into the side pocket. The tendency is to set the target too close to the back of the pocket, so the object ball hits the cushion at the near corner of the pocket. As the angle of approach to the side gets more difficult, selecting the right target is more and more important. Where is the best target?

Let's first assume that there is a "single best target" for all angles of approach. Our goal is to mark that point to make practice easier, and to know that point to use during normal play. This point must be on the centerline of the pocket as shown in Diagram 1, as long as the pocket is symmetrical — the same on each side. Where on this line is the single point?

Consider the toughest possible angle into the side. At the limit, the object ball will barely miss the near corner of the pocket, and pass exactly through the phantom ball. Note the point on the short rail that the cue stick passes over. The point on the short rail and the center of the phantom ball give a line that goes through the center line. The "single best target" for the side pocket is that point on both the center and extreme lines.

Where this extreme line is will depend a little on how the pocket is made, but on most tables, a ball can be made from the centers of the short rails. On my table, this line crosses the center line exactly at the brink of the pocket where the slate starts to fall away. Try on your own table to find the limit using short, straight — in shots.

While the point we've found is clearly the best target for the two shots analyzed, is it the best target for all shots to the side? Try some experimenting to see if it is the best



target for shots between the center and the extreme lines.

Where is the "single best target" for the corner pockets? Since corner pockets are also symmetrical — the short-rail side is made just like the long-rail side — the target must be on the pocket's center line, which is the 45-degree line in Diagram 2.

Once again, consider the extreme case, which now is when a ball is coming right down the rail. Notice the rail groove — the line worn in the cloth where a ball sits when it is frozen to the rail. One easy way to find the target in the corner pocket is to freeze several balls together in a line on each rail by the corner — they are all sitting in the rail groove — and place a ball in the jaws of the pocket in line with the two lines of balls. The base of the ball gives the "single best target" point.

Again, you may want to try approach angles between the two angles to see whether the single point is really a good target for all shots.

Now let's apply the theory to practice. Get some self-adhesive donut-shaped white paper reinforcements. (The kind used on pages in a three-ring binder; they come in rolls of a hundred.) Place them on your practice table, one donut at each pocket's target point. If you can't find donuts, white chalk will also work, but tends to wear off during the course of a practice session.

As you go through your normal practice routine, strive on each shot to drive each object ball exactly over the target point. Be sure to note on each shot how much error you made to one side or the other. Over the edge of the donut is good, but try to roll the object ball directly over the center.

While using this practice aid you may find out, like I did, that on some shots the pocket isn't where it appears to be.

The rail groove is also the "reflecting line" that mirror banking systems depend on. If a ball starts slightly off the rail and is shot slightly into the rail, it will be reflected from this line. That means that if you could see the image of the pocket reflected in a mirror on the line, it would be the pocket for shots aimed a little too far into the rail. The important thing for us is that this "image" pocket (shown in gray in Diagram 3) provides another pocket, just like the real pocket, but for balls reflected off the cushion. The center of the combination of these two pockets is on the rail groove. This gives us our second line to find the "single best target" for the corner pocket. Note that it is also the intersection of the straight extension of the two rail grooves.

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