

# Those Who Can, Teach

*Basic techniques to instruct those who need it, without getting too technical.*

by BOB JEWETT



IF YOU HAVE played seriously for more than a few months, you've probably already done a fair amount of instructing. If you find it fun to help others play better, this column has

some tips that will improve your instruction. On the other hand, if your game is not up to the level that you want to share it with others, just adopt the role of the student as you read the following.

Do you know a player who is all slam and no finesse? The drill in **Diagram 1** may help him tone down his "enthusiasm". It comes courtesy of Ed Nagel, a long-time instructor on the West coast. Starting from the position shown, the goal is to make the object ball in the side pocket, but it must take at least four soft strokes. The object ball must be driven towards but not to the far pocket on each of the first three strokes. This can be turned into a competition to see who can take the most shots to sink the ball; can you stretch it out to thirty? Many players are slow to develop the "soft" part of their game; this lack is usually most evident when they try to play soft safety shots.

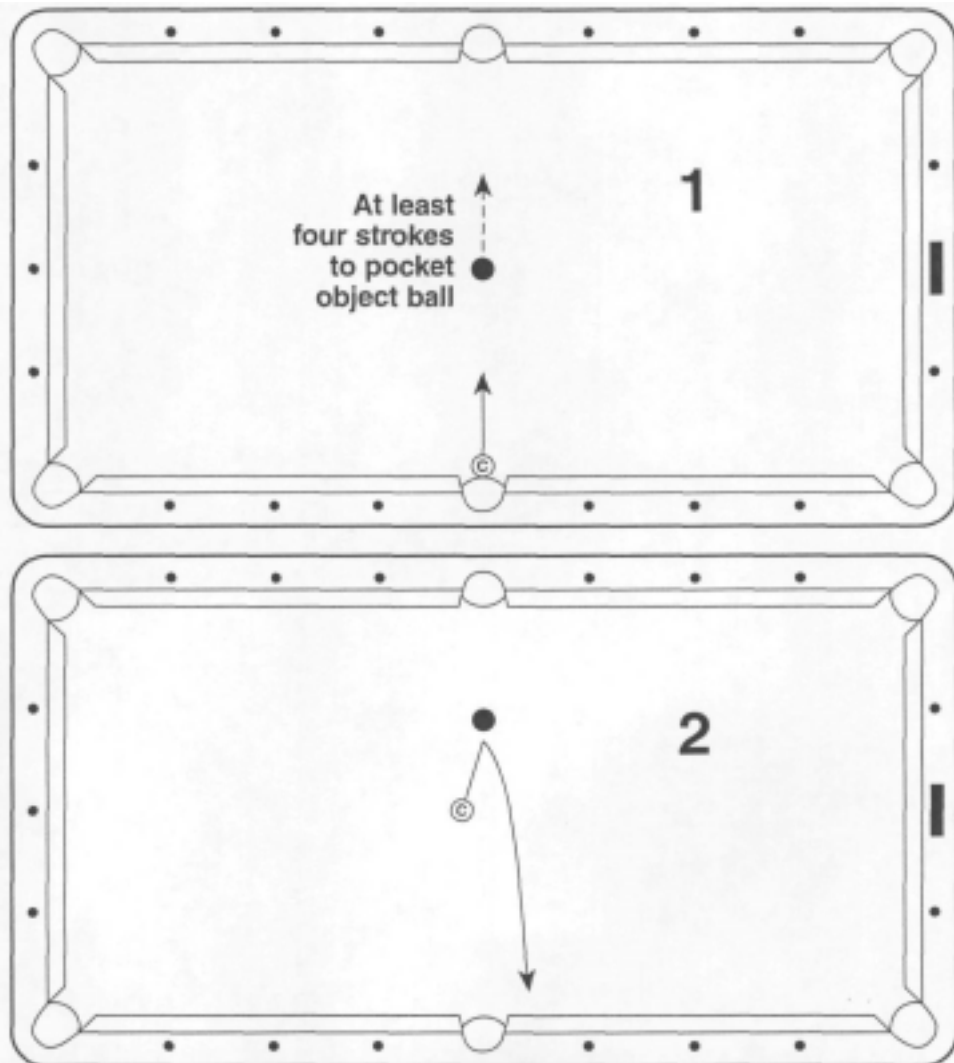
The shot in **Diagram 2** has given tremendous pleasure to many beginners, believe it or not. The idea is to get even the clumsiest tyro to draw the cue ball, a delightful result that all too many players have never experienced.

Although the diagram appears simple, there are lots of details that you as the instructor need to take care of to make sure the shot

comes off correctly. The position is very important, with the object ball one diamond straight out from the pocket and the cue ball on the center line of the table but just off line from straight in. The shot is easy, the aiming is obvious, and the slight angle keeps the cue ball from spinning directly back at the shooter, so he can stay down. Note also that the stick

will not pass over the rail at the pocket, so a high pocket liner can not prevent a level stick.

The bridge is absolutely critical on this shot: a fist bridge with all of the end knuckles of the fingers planted firmly on the cloth. A fist bridge is formed by making a fist, and then looping out the index finger barely enough to get the stick



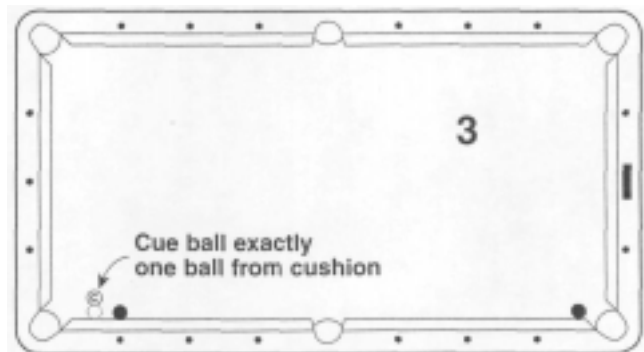
through the loop. The thumb should hold the tip of the index finger against the middle finger. Do not let the student uncurl the middle finger — its tip must remain touching the palm of the hand. The shaft should be off the cloth by exactly the diameter of the thumb. Most beginners can make a reasonable fist bridge even when the standard fanned-finger closed bridge is impossible for them.

Chalk! Do not trust the student to do this correctly; inspect their work. Stand in front of the target pocket so you can see the part of the tip that will hit the ball. Also, you can act as short-stop if there's a major miscue.

Once the student is down in position, have him adjust the length from bridge hand to ball to get a reasonably low hit, but not a miscue.

Now that the position is set, tell the student that you want to see nothing move except the stroking forearm until the cue ball stops moving. Remember to be in position for your short stop duty.

Most will draw the cue ball back to the side rail on the first



try. For those who don't, the most common problem is raising the bridge hand just as stick comes forward, probably due to fear of miscuing. In this case, set up the shot again, and say just before the shot, "Put a little pressure down on your bridge hand. I want to see all those knuckles touching the cloth."

If a lack of speed has prevented that soul-satisfying zippy draw, say just before the shot, "Shoot firmly." Do you agree now that there is a lot more to this shot than meets the eye? Once you get the details down, in just a couple of minutes you can get your student to draw like never before. Along the way you have taught a firm, closed bridge, minimization of body movement, the importance of chalk (is your stomach sore?) and the fact that amazing draw can be imparted without much effort.

In my column last time, I described a way to measure one of the three pitfalls of side spin — squirt. The next two diagrams describe how to demonstrate the other two — curve and throw.

Diagram 3 is a curve shot beginners can make with just a minute or two of instruction. The idea is to get them to do the shot themselves, rather than for you to demonstrate it. In the position shown, making the ball by the pocket is clearly impossible, since if the cue ball misses the near ball it must also miss the far ball. Point this out, and then tell the student, "Just use right English, and make your normal bridge up on the rail. Aim to just miss the first ball." The automatic elevation from being up on the rail guarantees curve if they can manage any significant side spin. You may need to suggest a little draw with the side spin to increase the effect, and a soft hit works better than

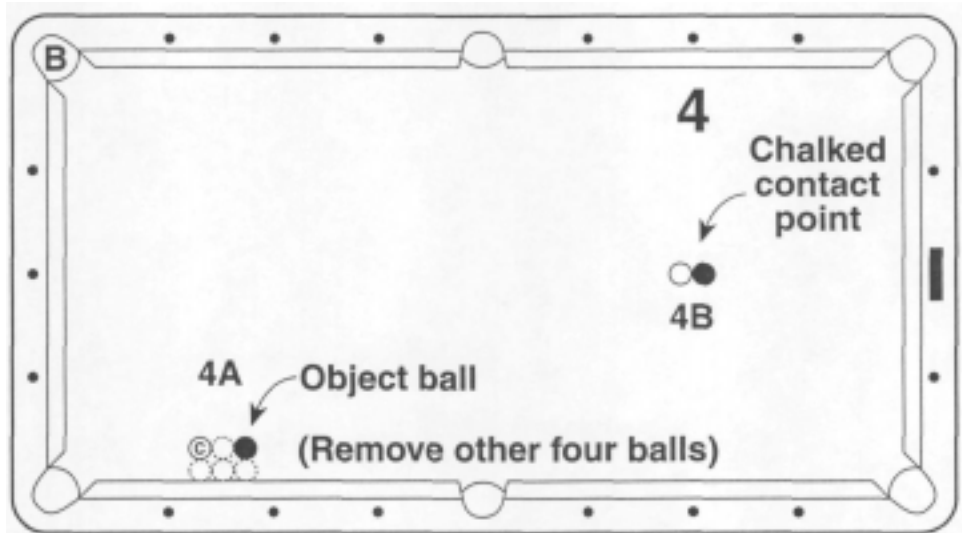
# TECH TALK

a hard one. Chalk! Most beginners can get too much curve after a couple of tries.

**Diagram 4** illustrates two aspects of throw. In 4A, the object ball, if struck straight on, will clearly miss the pocket. Have the student play straight at the ball, but with a little left side spin. Except with the cleanest new balls, the shot goes right in.

**Diagram 4B** illustrates an amazing shot. Again, even people who have never before picked up a stick can do it themselves. The point is to stress the importance of clean equipment. Spot a ball, and freeze the cue ball to it. Prior to placing the balls, chalk the contact point. A quick way to do this is to breathe onto the ball for condensation, rub your finger down in the depression in a chalk cue, and then roll your chalky finger print onto the ball, forming a thin layer of chalk mud.

Have the student pick a far corner pocket, and then tell him to shoot with the



stick pointed directly at the pocket and to use outside (left for pocket B) English.

If you would like to perfect your teaching technique, the BCA offers several levels of courses. If you have little teaching experience, I'd recommend the one-day course to become a Recognized

House Instructor. If you have extensive experience already, the three-day Certified Instructor course at one of the six or seven Master Academies may be right for you. Contact Bruce Baker of the BCA at 319-351-2112, or see the BCA Web page at <http://www.bca-pool.com/>.