Bob Jewett



# Masse 102

## Execution of fancy shots can be enhanced with the proper equipment.

**In my last** column, I covered a system of aiming masse shots, suggested some basic techniques, and assigned some practice shots. Have you done your homework?

Outstanding! Let"s review a little and then discuss some equipment issues.

The aiming system described last time — the final direction of the cue ball is parallel to a line joining the resting spot of the cue ball and where the stick points on the cloth — applies to low-elevation English shots as well as more radical curves. On a typical side spin shot, the stick is elevated three degrees (about three inches from tip to butt) and the stick points to a spot on the cloth about two feet in front of the cue ball. However much off-center you hit the cue ball, that is how far from the initial path of the cue ball that the "aiming point" will be. and that determines directly how much angle the ball will curve through. For maximum side spin, you will hit about one-half inch off center, so the stick will be pointing at a spot on the cloth two feet ahead and half an inch over. That's almost one degree of curve, which is nearly a ball's width in a table length.

You may think you play with a level stick, but have a friend measure how far above the slate the center of your cue's bumper is when striking on the equator of the cue ball. Note that if draw is added to the side spin, the angle of the curve increases doubly. First, you will generally have more elevation to get the draw. Second, because the stick is lower on the cue ball, its line will reach the cloth sooner and the aiming point will be nearer the cue ball.

These general trends can be turned into a second system for aiming masse shots that's a little simpler than the one above. Note the angle you need to curve the ball through: first line your stick up along the final path you want the cue ball to take towards the object ball, then move your stick in line with the initial path of the cue ball that will allow it to clear the obstacle. The difference between these two directions we'll call the "curve angle." Now match your elevation angle to the curve angle — this part is by feel — and hit the cue ball with equal parts of draw and side. The angles are roughly equal; for a 45-degree curve, start with about 45 degrees of elevation, or maybe a little less.

Here's an alignment technique I learned from Tom Rossman when we were both taking a week-long course on masse and other fancy shots given by former European champion Hans de Jager. After you've planned your shot and you know the line the cue ball has to start along, hold your stick level along this line and carefully raise it. keeping it always in the same vertical plane. One of the main problems with elevated shots is maintaining the direction of the cue stick, and this is a good, methodical way of staying on the right line.

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So much for the theory and technique — on to equipment considerations.

Most easy masse shots in games can be made with your usual cue stick. For serious practice and study, you'll want to get a stick better suited to the shots. First, it should be shorter. My two masse cues are 47 and 50 inches long, which allows most of the weight to be well below the grip, increasing comfort and stability.

A standard weight will do for all but the slate-shattering shots, but get a 14mm ferrule. It will stand up better to the punishment and the larger tip will be easier on the cloth. Finally, you need a grip that will not slip. Bare varnish is pretty good, linen is bad but rubber is best.

The cloth has a huge influence on the action of the shots. On new. slippery cloth, it's easy to get great, sweeping arcs or to pull the cue ball back after sending it most of the way to the other end of the table. On old, dirty, sticky cloth the spin grabs too quickly and often the cue ball will fail to clear the obstacle before "breaking." Very dirty cloth will grab the bottom of the cue ball more strongly than the tip on some nearly vertical shots, and the action will be completely ruined. Usually a miscue will accompany such a result as the tip gives way before the cloth. Keep the cue ball and the cloth clean.

If you are stuck on old cloth, you can make it act more like new by waxing the cue ball. I use a paste wax. Roberto Rojas, the great Mexican fancy-shot artist, uses silicone to help his masse exhibitions, and he gets action that will make your eyes bug out and your brain boil.

For practice sessions, stay at the head end of the table. The cloth is generally cleaner there, and if you do nick the green, the divot will be less frequently bothersome than in the rack area.

Avoid practicing on slate seams — about $2^2A$ diamonds from the ends on most tables — or you may crack the sealing plaster. For power shots, protect the cloth with a small pad under the cue ball. I use a small square of clear, hard plastic, which also helps the ball slip out from under the tip. As you improve, the miscues and table contact will be less frequent, and you can eliminate this prop.

Can you hear the room owners' moans? I can. Here's a suggestion for them to make a little extra money from old cloth and help their players learn at the same time: When some tables are about to be recovered, advertise a masse clinic. Offer two hours of instruction and practice for about $20. Remember to use wax or silicone to get nice action on old cloth with old cue balls. The players will learn proper technique and have a little fun with the normally forbidden shot.

Then put up a sign: "No masse shots without instruction."

Next time we'll go over more shots — some practical and some just for fun.

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