

Bob Jewett



1.001 Banks

These Practice Drills Feature Precise Aiming Points On the Rails

Do you want to bank balls better? Here are some practice drills that are guaranteed to improve this complex part of your game.

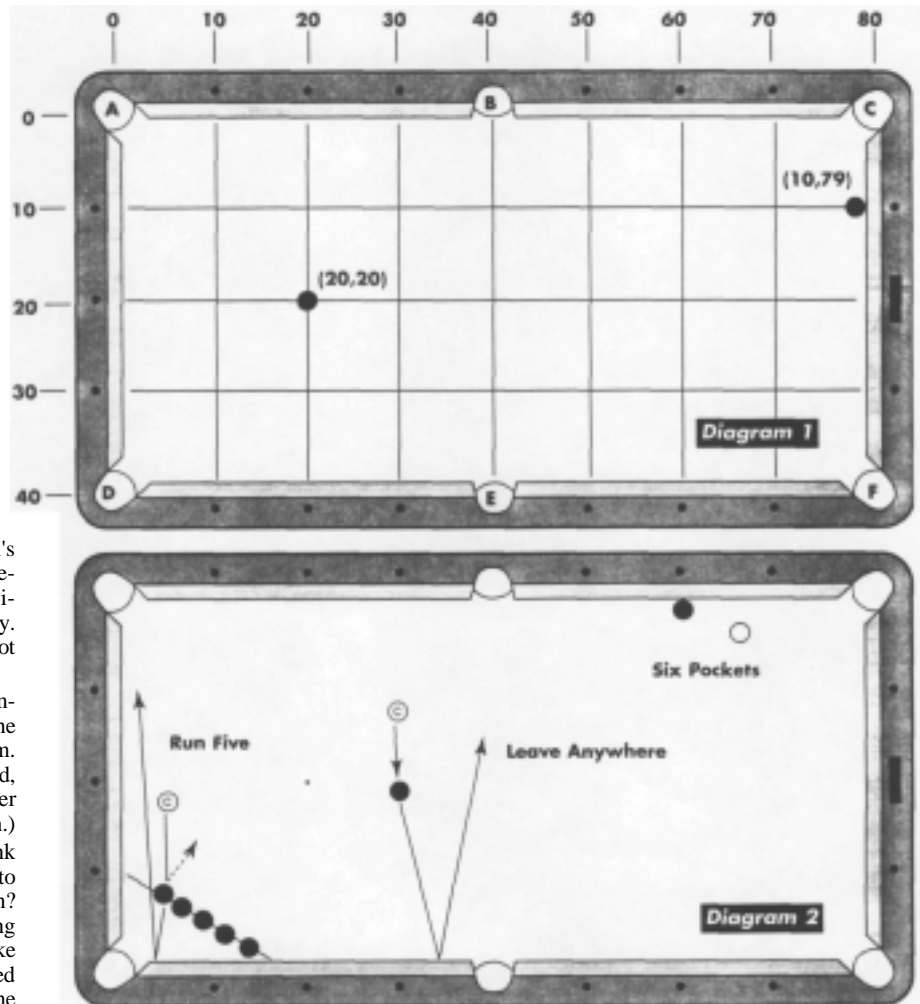
Diagram 1 reveals a system that will help you categorize shots and can be used to record intricate shots without a diagram. Standing at the foot of the table, imagine a grid as shown. The position of any ball or rail contact can be precisely stated as the distances from the left rail and the foot rail in the units shown. Notice that there are ten units per diamond, so the ball on the foot spot is at location 20,20 and the one on the head rail occupies 10,79. The latter is not 80 units up the table because that would put the ball at the nose of the rail rather than half a ball away; it is the center of the ball that matters.

One-tenth of a diamond — one of our units of measure — is close to half a ball's width. Most shots will not need more precise specification, but you could use decimals if you are fanatical about accuracy. Half a ball is exactly 0.9 units on a 9-foot table.

The pockets get letters rather than numbers to avoid confusion. A-B-C run up the top side while D-E-F are on the bottom. Let's call the rails H, T, R and S for Head, Top, Right and Shoe. (If you have a better letter for the foot rail, speak up; B is taken.)

Here's the first problem: Can you bank (20,20) one rail off the head rail (H) to pocket A, with a ball at (10,79) as shown? You have the cue ball in hand. The blocking ball is very close to where you would like to land for a simple bank, so you will need to get some transferred side spin on the object ball, either by spinning the cue ball or by the cut angle. If you barely miss the obstacle, either side should work, using left english on the object ball when landing to the right and vice versa. If the balls and rail are stickier than average, you can place two balls side-by-side on the end rail and still make the shot either way. (I didn't believe this until I saw it done.)

That shot and this next one are very useful for one-pocket. Can you bank (20,20) off R and H to A? You may need to "twist" the ball a little on old cloth, but on slippery, new cloth, you can miss the shot long — hitting the S rail at (5,0). On very sticky cloth, the shot will always go short to rail T, and the



shot is impossible. If I'm playing a lot of one-pocket on a table, I test to see how far to the left or right of the spot the object ball is when this shot is barely possible.

Diagram 2 shows three more drills. I learned "Six Pockets" from Eddie Taylor when he was giving free demonstrations at a BCA Trade Show. The idea is to bank the ball at (1,60) into each of the six pockets in as few tries as possible. The ball always goes back to that spot, and you keep trying each pocket until you make it, with cue ball in hand each time. This is an excellent drill for learning both frozen-ball banks and how the ball reacts on the second and third rails.

One trick to use is an impromptu "spot-

on-the-wall" system. Suppose you want to bank to D with the balls as shown. Pick a spot at least six feet away along that line as your first target — perhaps a pocket on a neighboring table or the line between the mahogany paneling and the marble fireplace. If you miss, pick a new distant target until you are zeroed in. Once you have a good spot, try changing the speed — from barely hard enough to warp velocity — to see how the angle changes. For several of the pockets, there is more than one path; find the best.

The "Leave Anywhere" drill requires you to play position while banking. With the cue ball in hand, bank (20,30) into B. Simple

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enough? The rub is that you have to leave the cue ball within a "hand span" of a specific target — perhaps a penny — placed somewhere on the table. Select the spot for the target randomly around the table. Leaves in the lower half are much easier, since the cue ball doesn't have to cross the path of the object ball. You will definitely need to understand "cut-induced side-spin" for leaves in the upper half.

The "Run Five" drill teaches close position on bank shots. Place the object balls as shown, on a line between the two diamonds and with enough space between them to allow each shot. Bank all five balls into A. You get cue ball in hand only for the first shot; play the last four from your own leaves. How many times in ten tries can you run all five? If never, try four or three balls.

I'll leave you with a drill that will take several sessions to complete — a thousand and one different banks. The idea is to systematically pick ball positions, pockets and sets of rails such that you cover a wide variety of banks.

As an example, suppose you pick (20,20) as the ball position, and A as the pocket. How many different ways can you bank to that pocket? I can think of H (head rail only), R-H (mentioned earlier), S-T-H-R, R, T-R, and T-H-R. Any others?

If you're more impatient than methodical, pick one spot each practice session, and see how many ways you can bank into each of the pockets. If you're methodical, read on.

Prepare lined paper with three wide columns labeled A, B, and C for the pockets, and a narrow column at the left for a list of ball positions. The first nine lines are numbered (0,0), (5,0), (10,0), up to (40,0), which are positions along the foot rail half a diamond apart. The next nine lines are labeled (0,5), (5,5), (10,5), up to (40,5) which are similar positions, but half a diamond from the foot rail. Continue in nine groups of nine positions, so the last is (0,40), (5,40) ... (40,40) which is a line of positions between the side pockets.

Note that you don't have to include the D-E-F pockets, since for any shot to one of them, there is a mirror image shot to A-B-C that is already on the list, and you don't have to include ball positions in the top half of the table, since any shot up there has a twin on the lower half.

How many shots are there? There are 81 positions listed, but the four in the pockets, such as (0,0), should be excluded, leaving 77 object ball positions. For the two near pockets, A and B, I can usually find four shots to each, while for pocket C there is usually one additional cross-table shot, giv-

ing a total of 13 shots, on average, from each of the 77 ball positions. What is 13 times 77? A lot of practice possibilities.

You now have a blank form with 77 ball position lines and three pocket columns. Pick a column and line at random, place the ball on the table in the position, and choose a path to the pocket. Write the cushions in the chosen line and column — write small! — and try the shot until you feel that you understand it, even though you might not master it. Pick another line and column, and choose another set of cushions. If you happen to return to a pocket/position pair, choose a different set of cushions. If you fill up the sheet with all 1001 shots, send me a copy and I will arrange for a special certificate for you.

While the above describes many bank shots, it doesn't come close to all of them. Do you have a favorite set of bank drills? How about some good bank challenge/proposition shots? There's nothing like a little friendly competition to focus attention. A warning: If you hope to beat Eddie Taylor at the "Six Pockets" challenge, your average better be under 15 shots to make all six banks.

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