

Bob Jewett



Progressive Progress

In order to improve your game/ you must constantly challenge yourself.

In columns in December 1992 and October 1995,¹ I discussed a form of drill that I call "Progressive Practice." The basic idea is that you set up a particular kind of shot, and make it harder if you make the shot and easier if you miss it. This practice technique keeps you at the edge of your comfort zone, and hopefully lets you push back its frontiers as your game improves in the area you're working on.

Here is a sort of final test to see if you're ready to challenge Buddy, Efen, Earl and Nick. It is the fifth level of Progressive Practice drills from the BCA's Instructor's Manual. Like the first four levels, it tests you with four basic kinds of shot: stop, follow, draw, and cut.

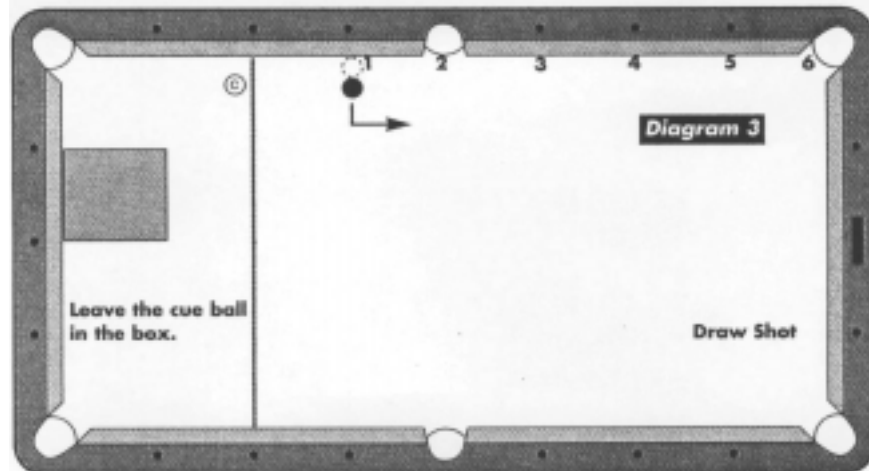
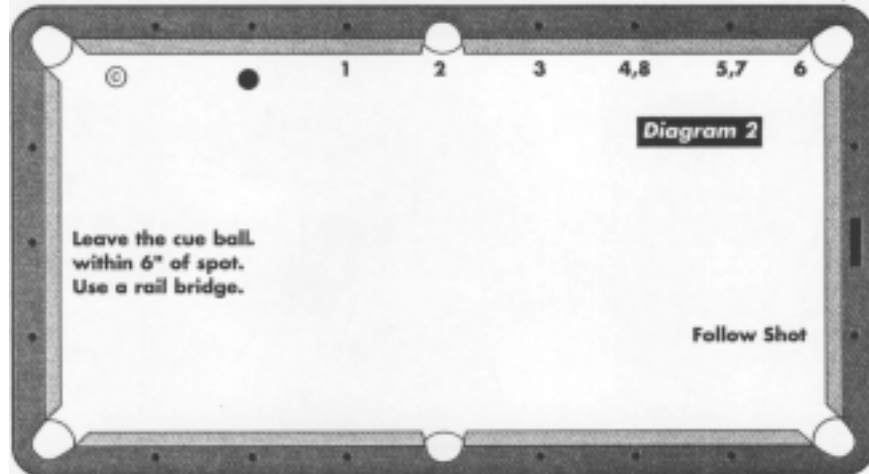
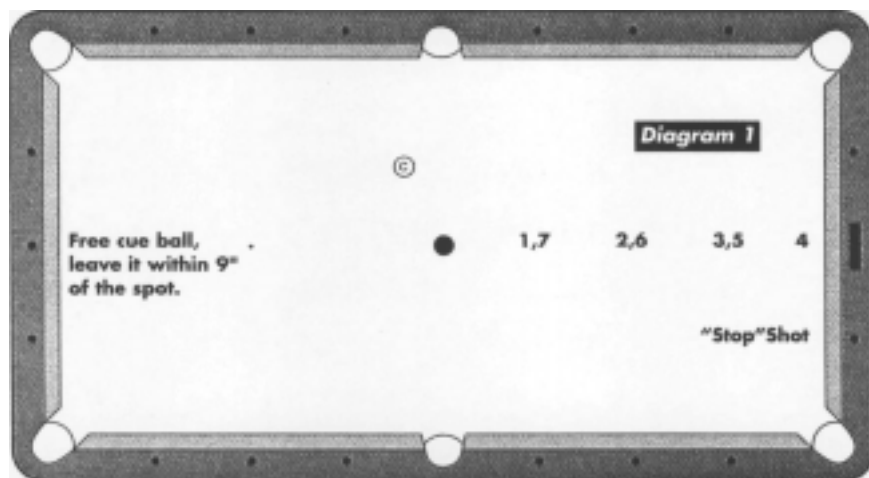
Diagram 1 is a "stop" shot drill. It's really stop at an angle, which is often called stun — the cue ball should travel at right angles to the path of the object ball when struck properly. The object ball is placed in the center of the table on every shot, and the cue ball is placed roughly as shown, but you can take more or less angle as you choose. The goal is to make the object ball in the side and leave the cue ball within nine inches (roughly a hand-span) of the current target.

Begin with 1 as your goal, and mark it with a coin. Shoot the shot, and leave the cue ball as close to the coin as possible. If you make the shot, move the coin to 2 and try again. Continue moving the coin a diamond further away until you fail either in the position or in pocketing the ball, and then move the coin to a position half a diamond easier. After your first miss, each movement — easier after a miss or harder after a good shot — is by half a diamond.

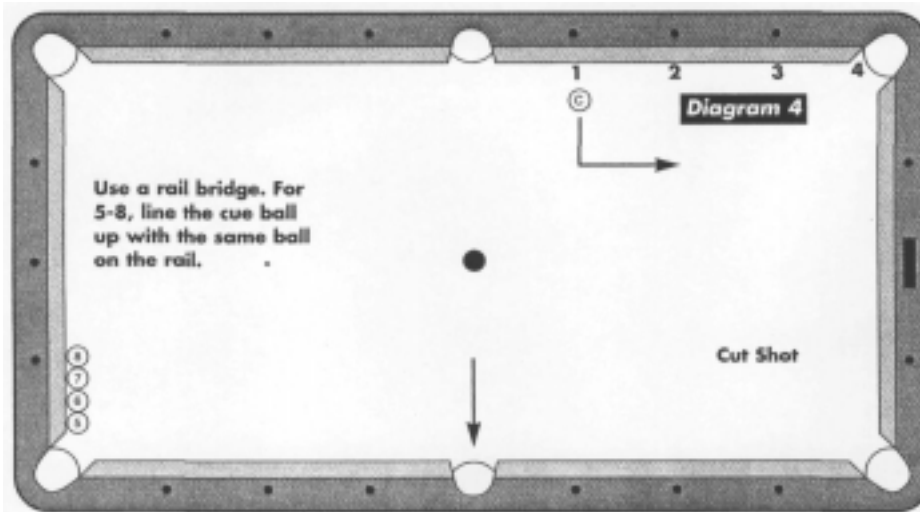
Positions 1 through 4 are clear enough, but 5 looks a lot like 3. The trick is that for 5, and also 6 and 7, the cue ball has to return off the end rail.

Remember to move the coin after every shot. If you want to score yourself, shoot the shot ten times, and note the position of the coin after the last shot.

Diagram 2 is a follow shot. The object ball always starts in the position shown, and the cue ball is close enough



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to the rail to need a rail bridge. (The exact position is up to you.) The goal is to make the object ball and leave the cue ball by the target. In this case, put the coin up on the rail or out from the rail far enough that it won't interfere with the object ball. Once again, the last positions include bouncing off the far cushion. See where the coin is after ten or 15 tries.

Most players find **Diagram 3** the most challenging of this set. The goal is to draw

the cue ball back to the one-diamond-square box. The object ball moves away from the cue ball to make the shot tougher. If you want to start with a somewhat easier drill, the Level 4 set has a target zone clear across the end rail (one by four diamonds in extent). The exact positions are not critical, but the object ball should be somewhat off the rail, and the cue ball is in-hand behind the line. Don't use the side rail with English; the shot is a straight-back draw

with just a little angle.

Diagram 4 is my least favorite in this set: cut the object ball into the side pocket. The object ball goes back to the center of the table, and the cue ball moves up the rail to make the cut harder. At the corner (position 5) there's a problem because if you went a full diamond around the corner, the difficulty would take too big a step up. For positions 5 through 8, note the four balls frozen on the other end rail. The cue ball should be near the opposite end rail, far enough off the rail to form a comfortable rail bridge, and with the corresponding ball making a straight line with the cue ball and object ball. The goal will still be to cut the object ball into the side pocket.

To make these shots a regular part of your practice routine, keep score. All you have to do is note where the coin is after ten or fifteen tries at each shot. As your basics improve, you can watch your score rise. You will probably find that you advance to a certain level (such as 3 for the draw shot) and then oscillate back and forth between two or three neighboring levels. That is your 50 percent point for that shot, which is good to know when facing it in a game situation.

Bob Jewett is a BCA—certified instructor.