



# Judgement Day

Answers give insight into game rulings and reactions.

**So you think** you're cut out to be a billiards referee? According to the results of my quiz, you'd be a pretty harsh one.

In *BD* May, I offered a series of 10 scenarios that involved shots attempted by my invisible friend Fred — a novice, at best — playing against you in various games, 8-ball, 9-ball, specifically. I then left it to you, the reader, to tell me how you would react or rule in each instance. The best set of answers sent in by readers would receive a free one-year subscription to *Billiards Digest*.

We'll get to the winners in a minute, but I thought I should clarify a few trouble spots that emerged during the judging. One major point that most respondents overlooked was Fred's inexperience in formal play. Does this make a difference in how the rules are applied? In a relatively relaxed situation like an unrefereed match in league play, I think so. If you keep springing rules on Fred that he's never heard of, he's unlikely to return to the game. If you try to make his introduction to the game as gentle as possible while maintaining the spirit of the rules, I think everybody can win.

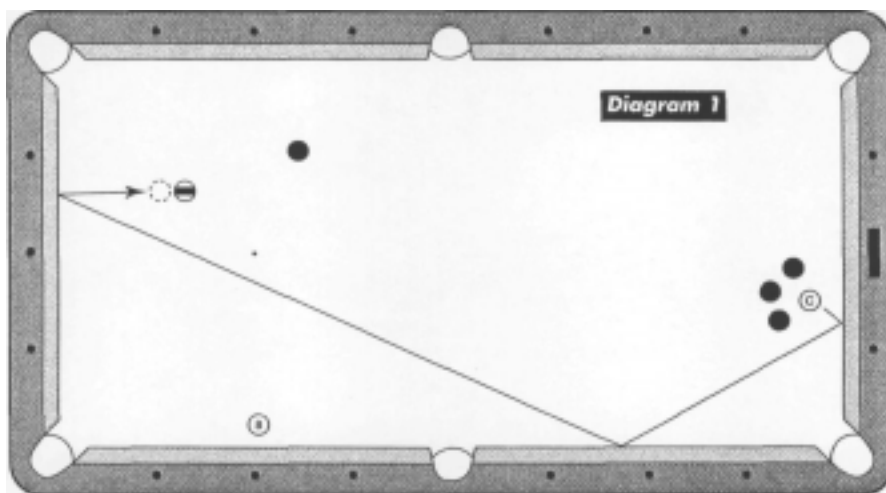
Contestants were also asked to rule as if they were the referee in the league finals. Here, you really can't cut Fred any slack — the ref must enforce all the rules to the best of his ability. A brief explanation may be in order for those cases where Fred clearly has no clue why he fouled.

Having noted these occurrences, here is my view of the calls:

**Scenario 1** Fred has just made the beautiful three-rail kick in Diagram 1 to hit his last ball in a game of 8-ball. But he played only hard enough to freeze against the ball. Fred's delight shows he doesn't know about the "No Rail" foul he just committed. As a referee you have to tell him that rails before the hit don't count, and he just gave up ball-in-hand.

As his opponent, you could give Fred the opportunity to try his shot again, unless of course, prior arrangements have turned this game into something more serious.

Of course, this path is entirely outside the scope of the written rules, and another player or the tournament director might object, but I don't think they have much reason to. You might also suggest that Fred ask about any applicable rules before any "strange" shot.



**Scenario 2** In a game of 9-ball, old Fred has just made the 9 on a smash shot, and it looked like the cue ball would scratch on a carom off the 8, until he raked the 8 and the other object balls down to the rack area. The rule here is clear: You must never touch any ball until the game is over. This is perhaps the most ignored rule at 9-ball. "Try again" is not an option here for the unrefereed case. Some might argue that under "Cue Ball Fouls Only" there was no foul, but they would be wrong. It is always a foul to intentionally touch any object ball when you are the shooter. As Fred's opponent, I'd be stuck for a middle path — one entry suggested playing the game over. As the referee in this case, the BCA rule you should apply is 2.19, "Illegally Causing Ball To Move." (Rule 3.20 refers to accidental contact.) The possible penalty is loss of game and/or match, as for unsportsmanlike conduct.

**Scenario 3** Fred grabs up the cue ball before it stops rolling on a winning shot that has no chance to scratch. I'd warn him of the rule while racking for his next break, but a referee would have to call the foul.

**Scenario 4** Fred rests his bridge hand on an obstructing ball for stability. Technically this is a violation of 2.19 again, but I'd try to get him to bridge properly before he shot. As the referee, I'd be reluctant to forfeit the game; ball-in-hand is a more appropriate penalty under the discretionary clause of unsportsmanlike conduct.

**Scenario 5** Fred pushes out at 9-ball

with the side of his stick. Foul! The only fouls condoned on a push-out shot are No Rail and Bad Hit. You are never, ever allowed to play with the side of your stick.

Informally, try again. Refereed, ball-in-hand, foul, and warn Fred that a second such foul will be loss of match under rule 3.28.

**Scenario 6** Fred is so frustrated by this scenario that when he misses an easy 6 ball at 9-ball, he sweeps up the easy run-out and concedes the game. Under Rule 1.14, a concession is permitted, but throwing in four balls borders on unsportsmanlike conduct. I might say nothing to Fred as he racked, or I might point out that I really need the practice. The referee should warn him not to disrupt the game or he may be subject to a forfeit. Warning: In some tournaments, if you forfeit a game, you forfeit the next one as well. It may seem strange, but some players have perfected the concession as a sharking technique. My advice: Never concede the match; the psychological ramifications are enormous.

**Scenario 7** While playing 8-ball in Diagram 2, Fred tries a draw shot on the 3, but the cue ball jumps clear over the 3 and softly bumps against the 5 ball which was frozen to the far rail. I didn't say whether anyone had called the 5 frozen before the shot. If not, it counts for the rail contact.

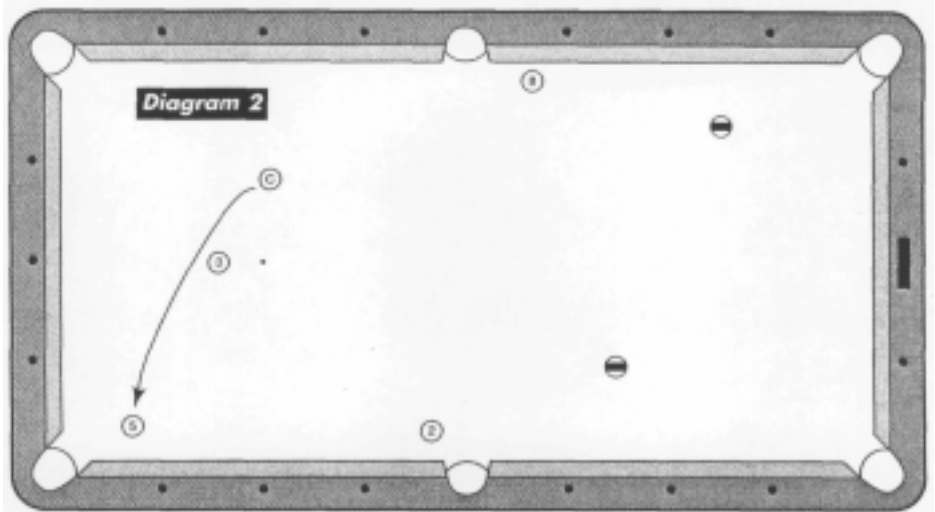
Was the miscue-jump a foul? I don't think so, because Fred wasn't trying a jump shot. It's always risky to include a player's intentions in a ruling, but I would in this case. As

the opponent, I'd explain why my failure to call the 5 frozen cost me ball-in-hand, and that when playing a jump shot, any miscue is a foul (Rule 3.26). Of course the referee would have called the 5 frozen, and it would be a No Rail foul.

**Scenario 8** Fred barely nudges the cue ball on the warm-up strokes for his break shot. This is not a foul unless the cue ball is driven over the head string. As an opponent, I might point out the rule, but the referee should not offer this advice.

**Scenario 9** Fred played an obvious double-hit shot to pocket the nearly-touching 8 ball. As the opponent, I would have tried to anticipate the shot and have a third party come over to watch the shot after an explanation. After the fact, I suppose "try again" will work, but I'd be tempted to take the win. The referee must, of course, call the foul and loss of game.

**Scenario 10** Fred banked the cue ball off a couple cushions to make a good hit on a ball near a cushion, but because he was in the way, you didn't see whether any ball went to the rail after contact. As opponent or referee, the first thing I do is kick myself for being out of position. The next is to ask someone whether the contact was rail-ball or ball-rail. (In the problem statement, I gave the final directions of the two balls,



but depending on the spin on the cue ball, the rail may still have been before or after contact.) As the opponent, I'd ask Fred, and I'd take his word for it. As the referee, I'd ask anyone in position who's opinion I trust. If there is no one to ask — Fred might not have noticed — you cannot call a foul that may or may not have occurred.

And the winner of the 12 great issues of *Billiards Digest* is ... a two-way tie between Erik Franklin of Colorado, and Thomas "Q" Ball of New Jersey. Several others,

including Eric Oudsema, Rick Malm, and Tom Tidd, were close behind. Eric gets special mention for the most accurate list of rules references.

The main thing I noticed about all of the submissions is how little slack Fred got on the calls. He's a beginner, for Pete's sake! You sure play hardball out there. I can hardly wait to catch you with Rule 1.22.

*Bob Jewett, a member of the BCA Rules Committee, will be happy to discuss Rule 1.22 with anyone who cares to debate it.*