

Bob Jewett



# A Rusty Game?

Are today's players out of stroke when it comes to 14.1?

When the Billiard Congress of America U.S. Open 14.1 Championship was revived in New York City in April of this year, I had the pleasure of watching the stellar field for the final three days of competition. I first attended a U.S. Open in 1969, when players like Irving Crane, Danny Gartner, Jimmy Caras, Luther Lassiter, Joe Balsis and Steve Mizerak were the ones to beat, and 14.1 was the game to play.

While watching this year's edition, I noticed something that was echoed by my fellow spectator Ned Polsky, who has been watching straight pool even longer than I have. Many players in the 2000 Open failed to do the "right thing" in various situations. That is, they played safety or position in a way that the stars of the last millennium would never have considered. This made me wonder whether the secrets of playing 14.1 "properly" were being forgotten, perhaps because it has been so long between tournaments.

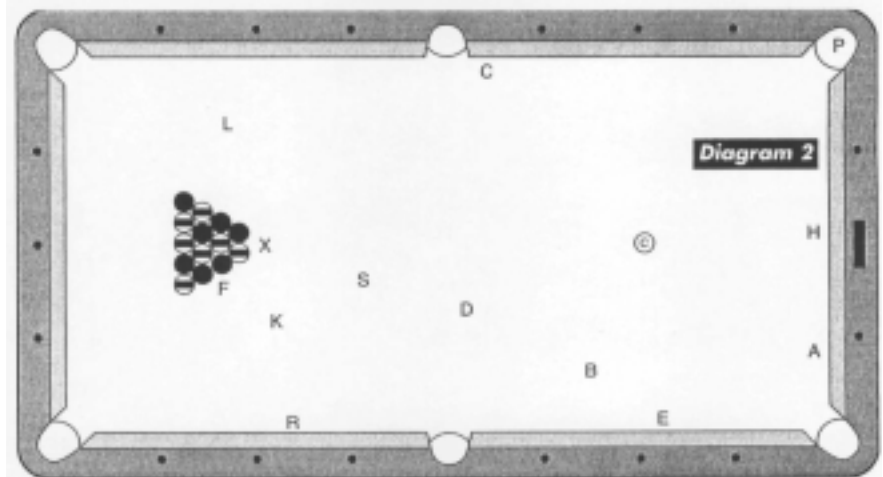
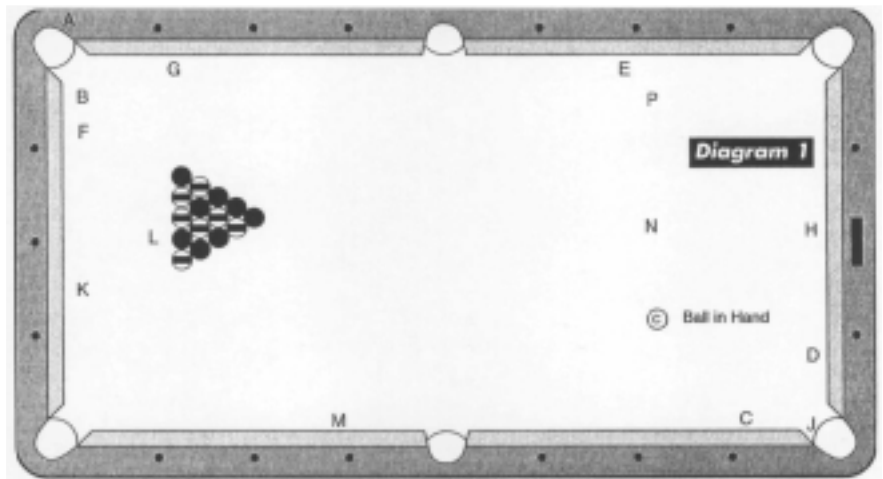
Below are some situations for you to figure out, along with some suggested solutions. Try to find your own answer before reading mine.

Diagram 1 is from one of the semi-final matches at the Open. Player A was on a run and Player B was not on a foul. Player A scratched on the break shot while pocketing the break ball and missing the rack entirely. The result for Player B is shown, shooting at a full rack with ball-in-hand behind the line. What is the best play?

The correct play is one no top player would normally have missed, but Player B did miss it. Player B placed the cue ball about as shown and shot to the rail at K to hit the rack at L, with the intention of taking a scratch while knocking a couple of balls slightly out of the front of the rack.

A much better play is to shoot from the kitchen to F and G leaving the cue ball at H. This is a foul, but your opponent is on the first foul and three in a row will cost him a 15-point penalty and he must shoot an opening-break shot with a new rack. Some players like to get the cue ball to H by shooting to E with right spin to go to C and then H, but the standard F-G-H path is much more predictable.

Some players with ball-in-hand try to place the cue ball at J and just tap it so it is frozen to the jaw of the pocket, thereby "corner-hooking" the other player. Do you



know which rule forbids such foolishness? It's the one that requires you to drive the cue ball over the line when it is in hand.

Suppose you are Player A, and Player B has left you at H with the orthodox safety. What should you play now?

Never shoot to the head ball in hope of driving one of the far corner balls to a cushion. Nearly always you will leave an easy shot. Instead, take a second foul by shooting to M-K-L, hitting the rack just hard enough to send one or two front balls up the table and leave the cue ball stuck to the back of the rack near L.

Let's suppose your opponent has played M-K-L, but has shot too softly, and no ball is loose from the rack. What should you shoot? Note that your opponent is on two

fouls at this point and you are on one.

The standard shot is along F-G-C-D without hitting any ball. Now your opponent is in the deep rough with no easy safe, and in peril of losing 15 points on a third foul. You are quite likely to have an open shot soon. If your opponent had shot the previous safety hard enough to move balls out of the front of the rack, your lag shot to D would be too dangerous.

Let's back up a minute and suppose that the cue ball is at H with a full rack and neither player has fouled. Another safety to consider that's far more aggressive than M-K-L is to play the cue ball to G and B to skim the side of the rack and then hit C to stop at D. This shot is in Willie Mosconi's *Winning Pocket Billiards* and is a favorite

# Bob Jewett

of Irving Crane's, who has said that if he couldn't get a good safety along that line in three tries, he deserved to lose the 15 points.

If you want to try Crane's shot, you need a target that will get the cue ball to B reliably. Location B is as close to the pocket as possible without danger of hitting the jaw. From that spot, the cue ball sees a rather wide target of the edges of all five balls on the side of the rack. In contrast, if the cue ball hits G-F, only the back corner ball can be struck and a disaster is the sure result. The point A on the rail is the target you need in order to get to B. Try it from various points between N and P, and increase the running English (left) as necessary to get the right angle from B to the side of the rack. This is a fun shot to pull off, and not as hard as it looks, providing you've practiced.

You may wonder how the cue ball could be at H with a full rack and no one on a foul. Well, suppose a player has left the 15th ball (the 14.1 break ball) at D and had intended to leave the cue ball at N for a possible rack breaker. Instead the cue ball came to rest at H, leaving a straight — in shot. What is the orthodox play? Call safe, and pocket the ball with draw, returning

the cue ball to H. Your opponent will need to play M-K-L and lose a point on the safe, and may leave a shot if he shoots too hard.

Diagram 2 shows another common situation. The 15th ball was in the rack area, so it moves to the head spot. Of course, this is hardly the optimum break shot no matter where you put the cue ball, but how can you make the most of it?

There are two good positions in which to leave the cue ball. The easier to achieve is D, so the cue ball will go along A-E-F after pocketing the ball in P. There is quite a large area for the cue ball from which this path will work. Don't power the ball; you want to land fairly softly on the rack to knock a few balls out of the back while the cue ball slides down to the foot rail for position.

The second way, which requires more precision in placing the cue ball, is at B. Pocket the ball in P with left follow, and the cue ball will spin off C and hit right between the two front balls at X. With practice, the cue ball often goes to R and then to S for position. Crank up the speed on this shot, but not to where you miss the object ball. This shot is also a favorite of Crane's.

Suppose you try for D, but leave the shot

nearly straight instead. What should you do?

One possibility is to call safe and send the cue ball to our old friend H. Boring but effective. If you have an angle to draw straight to the rack, try it, but remember that too much speed will likely end in a scratch, as the natural angle off the side of the rack from mid-table is into the corner pocket. A safer play is to draw the cue ball to K. Playing on the ball at F will send a ball to the end rail and also something to the vicinity of L. Your opponent will be left with no good response. Practice this safety so that you can leave the cue ball frozen to the rack every time. Find the best angle and English.

I hope this has whetted your appetite for straight-pool strategy battles. If so, you are in for a treat; a major new book on 14.1 has just been published, *The Straight Pool Bible* (The Lyons Press, \$19.95, [www.lyonspress.com](http://www.lyonspress.com)) is by Laurence S. Moy and Arthur "Babe" Cranfield. The latter is a Hall-of-Famer, and may have more runs over 200 balls than any other player in history. My copy is on order.

*Bob Jewett is an Advanced Level Billiard Congress of America certified instructor.*