

Bob Jewett



Weird Techniques

Get a better grip on hard-to-reach shots.

With perfect play, every shot is going to look the same: comfortable stance without stretching; smooth, straight stroke; easy position on the next ball using little or no spin; repeat. This can be dull. When players get into trouble, you get to see some interesting techniques. You should learn some of these — at least the legal ones — so you'll be ready on those rare occasions when you get out of line.

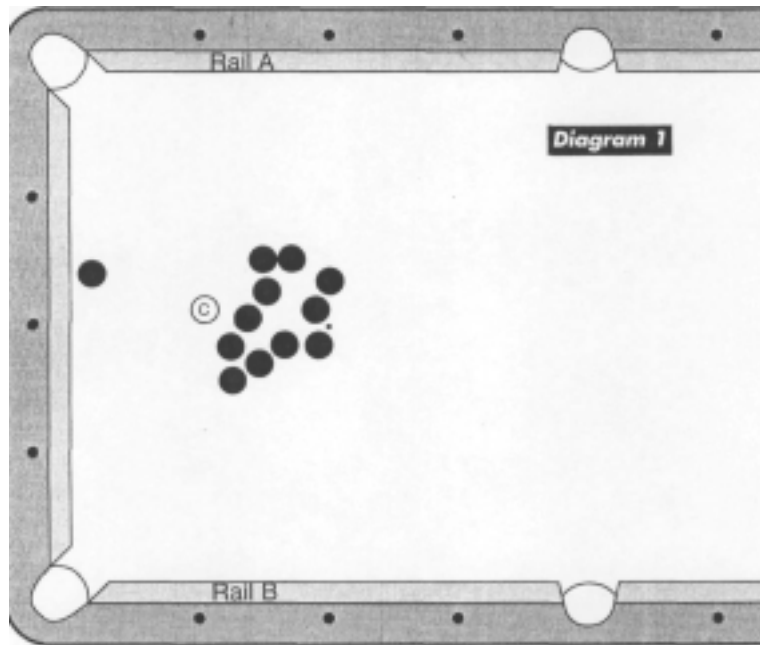
One common question is what to do when you can't reach a shot normally. The standard techniques are to use a mechanical bridge or shoot opposite handed, and both of these should be part of your practice. Suppose, though, that you're faced with the shot in Diagram 1, and your name isn't Shaquille. You need to hit the ball on the cushion, and most of the rack is in the way.

The standard method for this situation is to place one mechanical bridge on top of another to get added height — the top bridge's shaft goes in the slot where you would normally put your cue stick. It can also help to turn one or both bridges on their sides to get more height. If lots of balls are between you and the cue ball, the top bridge can be pushed forward to cantilever out over the obstructions. Be sure to grip both bridge handles firmly together for stability. As with most bridge shots, don't be ambitious about what you are going to do with the cue ball; easy does it. If you haven't practiced this one before you need it, good luck. It is illegal to stack more than two bridges. It's also illegal to rest your hand on top of the rack, even when playing by "cue-ball fouls only."

There are several bridges on the market that help with this kind of shot. At snooker, a bridge (snooker players call it a "rest") with a long "swan's neck" that arches out over obstructions is available. Another snooker bridge called the "spider" has feet wide enough and long enough to straddle a single ball — think bow-legged. On this side

of the pond, bridges are available that lock together for additional stability.

A more creative use of the bridge on this shot is to place the head on rail A and the butt at rail B. The bridge handle will be



high enough to clear the obstructing balls. Now place your hand on the bridge handle and form a more or less normal bridge for the shot. This technique seems to be legal.

Another technique is useful when you need to hit the ball pretty hard, and you don't trust the mechanical bridge for that much power. An example would be at billiards where you have to take the cue ball off the left side of the object ball in Diagram 1 and go six cushions for the score. The shot can be reached from the side of the table, but you can't get your head over the cue stick to sight. Raymond Ceulemans has been known to place the cue stick on the correct line while standing at the other end of the table, walk around to the side, carefully pick the stick up without moving it off line, and then stroke "blindly." Under Billiard Congress of America rules, this is legal provided that you maintain contact with the cue stick.

Jump shots are so common now that they hardly deserve mention, except for the wrong ways to do them. It is not legal to

make the cue ball clear an obstructing ball by miscuing (scooping the ball). It is not legal to shoot jump shots with just your shaft. Shaft jumping is effective because the resulting very light stick stops on contact

with the cue ball and lets it rebound freely from the table. It is not legal to use a very hard material such as phenolic for a tip. Such "tips" seem to help the cue stick stop faster, but can be hard on the equipment.

Speaking of miscues, Shot A in Diagram 2 shows where some players are tempted to use an intentional miscue. The cue ball and object ball are pointed straight at a pocket, but are only a quarter of an inch apart. The problem is to avoid hitting the cue ball a second time as the cue stick follows through. If you aim to hit the cloth and the ball at the same time, a miscue will result, and the cue ball will hit the

object ball and jump straight up in the air. Players who try this in tournaments protest the resulting foul call because they say they were not playing a jump shot, but the shot is ruled a foul nonetheless.

A legal technique for 2A is to move your grip hand forward so that it will be at the rail just before the tip hits the ball. If you stroke with the stick rubbing the rail, your hand will smash into the rail and stop the stick before it hits the cue ball a second time — correct placement of the grip hand is critical to getting power without a foul. This technique was said to be a favorite proposition of Luther Lassiter. With practice, it doesn't hurt much.

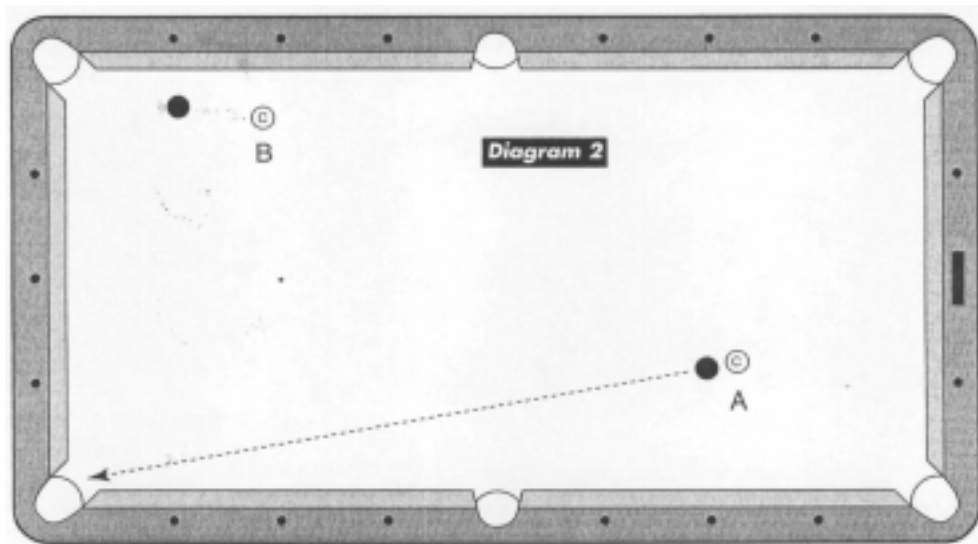
Diagram 2B shows a straight — in shot that requires draw. Being right-handed, you can't reach it, and the mechanical bridge is missing in action. Jerry Briesath has the cute solution: lay your stick flat on the table with the tip nearly at the cue ball. With your left hand, pinch under the stick just a little at the joint so the tip is the right height on the cue ball. Now jam the heel of your right

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hand into the rubber bumper on your stick. Jerry can draw the cue ball the length of the table. Can you? I suppose a pencil under the stick would also work to raise the tip to the right height, but that would be Illegal Use of a Device.

One technique for getting a lot of side spin is to aim as if for no English and then swerve to the side on the final stroke. Some players claim this works but I doubt that it gets more spin that coming straight through, and I can't think of a better way to destroy consistency. Semih Sayginer and Mike Massey seem to get enough spin without this technique. The only benefit of this method is that it can compensate for squirt under some conditions.

A related technique some professional players use is to always set up at the bottom of the cue ball and then hit high, low, left, right, center or anywhere. The rumor is that old-time players used this to baffle their opponents. There is one thing it will help with: If you have a problem seeing where the center of the cue ball is, starting at the bottom is the best place to see if you are



centered.

Masse shots give plenty of room for "interesting" techniques. Grips include the regular, the "dart" grip, and "The Claw." For this last grip, get into full masse position, and make a "V for victory" sign with your grip hand, palm down. Put the stick into the V and then curl your two fingers to grab the stick between them. You can get surprising power with this grip. If the

owner of the table asks, you don't know me.

Have you seen something really strange on the pool table? A technique, that is. If so, let me know about it, in care of this magazine, and I'll describe it in a future article. In the meantime, perfect the above tricks. You won't need them often, but they're interesting to try, and it's good to be prepared.