



# Playing Games

Renew interest in your favorite game by trying a few others on for size.

**Has your game** reached a plateau? Do you feel like you're in a rut? What you may need is a new game.

Pool halls are largely filled with players who know only one game. If they play 8-ball, they will refuse to play 9-ball because the shots are too hard and they don't understand the safety play. If 9-ball is their game, they won't shoot straight pool because they're confused by all the choices, and of course they don't understand the safety play. If they play pool, they'll never get close to those tables across the room that are 12 feet long or don't have any pockets.

Such stick-in-the-muds never stretch their minds, never learn new techniques, and will be playing the same game in the same way in 20 years that they have for the last 10. I hope you aren't one of them.

When I first started playing, I had an ideal situation to try different games. Pool, snooker and carom tables were all available at the comfortable rate of 40 cents per hour. There were fairly good players on all of those tables — at least they were a lot better than I was — and national- or world-class players could always be seen on a trip to "The City."

Among the games that I played during my first year or so were straight pool, 6-ball, 9-ball, 8-ball, cribbage, cut-throat, partners rotation (money ball), kiss pool, call-position 14.1, and one-pocket on the pool table; snooker, golf, pink ball, and English billiards on the snooker table; and straight rail, 3-cushion and fancy shots on the carom billiard table. Bank pool, bumper pool, bottle pool, cowboy, 21-ball rotation, equal offense, Fargo, line-up, pea pool, and pin billiards I played later as the opportunities came up.

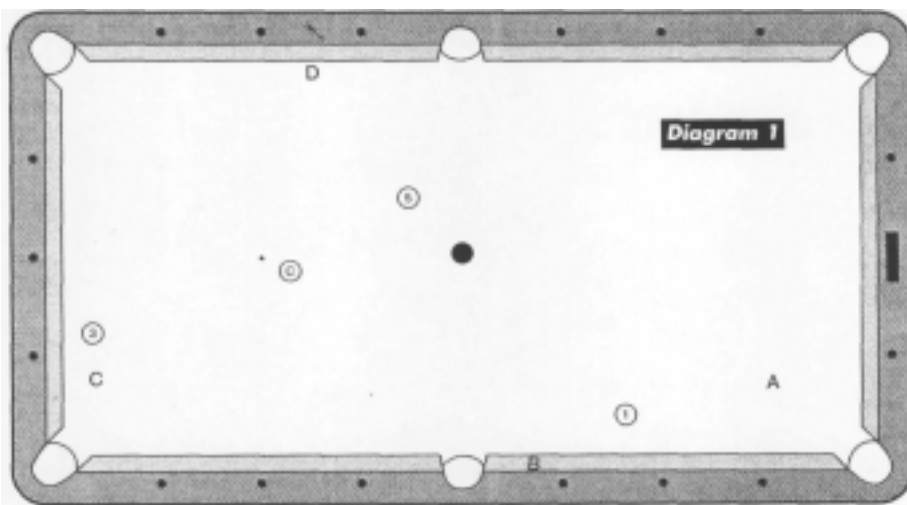
The first step to adopting a new game is to learn the rules. The easiest way is to play against someone who knows them already, or, if you're shy, to watch a game in progress. As important as the rules are the tactics and strategy. While watching an accomplished player, try to predict what he will do. If a shot really puzzles you, ask about it — most players like to show off their knowledge.

Another good source of rules, especially if you're striking out on your own, is the Billiard Congress of America rule book. It

contains the rules of over 30 games and is available for less than 10 bucks, shipping included. Parts of the rules are online at the BCA Web site, or you can use a search engine such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) to find other sites.

## Billiards.

A game rarely seen in the U.S. but definitely worth learning is English billiards. It is played with two cue balls and a red ball like carom billiards, but a snooker table is used. Points are scored by pocketing any



Many games will be valuable for mastering your favorite games because they make you polish particular facets that may get neglected in the normal course of play. For example, straight-rail billiards (on the pocketless table, just make your cue ball hit both the other balls to score a point and continue shooting) will teach you how to hit the ball softly, because once all three balls are close, soft shots will tend to keep them together. Straight rail also teaches you to control all three balls on each shot, which will do wonders for both your precision-banking game and your cue ball control. Allen Hopkins and Dallas West have both recommended straight rail to improve pool skills.

If you have trouble locating a carom table, visit the United States Billiards Association Web site at [www.uscarom.org](http://www.uscarom.org) for a list of all known rooms in the U.S. that have tables. The best explanation of ball-to-ball caroms is in *Daly's Billiard Book*, which was first published over 80 years ago, but gives far better general cue-wielding instruction than many modern books. An excellent modern book that covers a lot of straight rail in a few pages is Robert Byrne's *Wonderful World of Pool and*

ball (three for the red, two for the opponent's cue ball, and three or two for your cue ball depending on whether you hit red or white first. You also get two points for making a "cannon," which is what the British call a simple carom. It's possible to score 10 points in one shot by pocketing all three balls, but this is a bad idea, as your opponent's cue ball stays off the table until his turn, and scoring with just two balls on a 12-foot table is quite a challenge. When red is pocketed (they say "potted"), it comes back to the seven or black spot (they say "billiard spot"). Many turn-of-the-century British books go into detail about the strategy and such of English Billiards, and you can often find these in on-line auctions. The full rules for the game are online at [www.wpbsa.com](http://www.wpbsa.com).

A game similar to English billiards but designed for the pool table is cowboy. The game uses a shared cue ball and the 1, 3 and 5 balls. Points are scored by pocketing the object balls (score: the number on the ball) or by caroming from one object ball to another (score: one point for hitting two, two points for hitting all three). The game is to 101, with some details. You must land exactly on 90 points, or the shot that takes

you over 90 is a foul. On a foul, all points of that inning are lost, but there is no other penalty. Points 91 through 100 must be scored by caroms only, and it's a foul to pocket a ball. Point 101 must be scored by a called scratch off the 1 ball. The 1 spots on the head spot, the 3 on the foot spot, and the 5 on the center spot. The full rules are in the BCA rule book, and a good search engine will find several unofficial rules sites on the Web.

In **Diagram 1** is an example position from cowboy. Your score is 85. What should you play? Fairly obvious is the 5 ball in the side which brings you to the required first step of 90 points, but you have to start planning for the carom shots that are required after 90. Play the cue ball off the end cushion to end at A, and you should have an easy carom shot from the 1 ball to the 5 when it is spotted on the center spot (where the shaded ball is). But that shouldn't be the end of your planning. Since your last 10 points must be scored by caroms, you want to gather the object balls together to make scoring easier. Play the 1 ball to hit the cushion near B and to come to rest near C. If the 5 ball after the carom ends up near its starting location, and the cue ball is near the center spot, you can

shoot the 5 towards D and take the cue ball towards the 3. The 5 should bank over to join them, if your speed is correct. With all three object balls together, your run-out is assured.

The games you try should fit your skill level. Of course, if a game is fun, stay with it, but I'd recommend that beginners start with cowboy, cribbage and straight rail. If you've never run out a rack of 9-ball, why not play 6-ball instead? When I first played, 6-ball was the rotation game of choice, while 9-ball was considered too hard for most players in the room.

Advanced players should try more challenging games such as snooker, 3-cushion, bank pool and one-pocket. These will in turn help you work on pocketing accuracy, cue-ball control with spin, cushion reaction and precise speed control.

Good books are readily available for most games — does anyone know of a good one on bank pool? Byrne covers many "alternative" games in *Wonderful World* as well as his *Advanced Technique* book, and his *Standard* book is the best available on 3-cushion billiards. George Fels and Jack Koehler each have two or three books in print on strategies and techniques.

If you have a favorite "other" game you

would like to see discussed, please drop me a line in care of this magazine.

In the August issue, I proposed a puzzler involving Herr Hertz and billiard-ball kiss angles. A billiard instructor was telling a student that the angle is a right angle or 90 degrees, and Hertz stated correctly that it is less. The first question was: how did Hertz know that the kiss line is less than 90 degrees? The big hint here was that Hertz was drawn into to the room by the clicking of the balls and didn't even see the collision. That sound is energy being lost in the collision, and from George McBane's guest column last February you know that lost energy means the angle between the cue ball and the object ball will be less than the ideal 90 degrees. The second question asked what Hertz' error was. The answer to that is that he should not have corrected the instructor in front of the student. Of the correct answers, Anthony DeAngelo had the most complete response, so he'll be getting a year's subscription to *Billiards Digest*.

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