



# A Challenge to Improve

Bob Jewett has a little proposition for you.

In the billiard rooms of the 1700s, you might have heard, "I bet I can shoot from this table and make a ball on that table." Propositions and challenges are a time-tested part of pool. They offer opportunities for impromptu competition and insights into parts of the game that you might normally avoid.

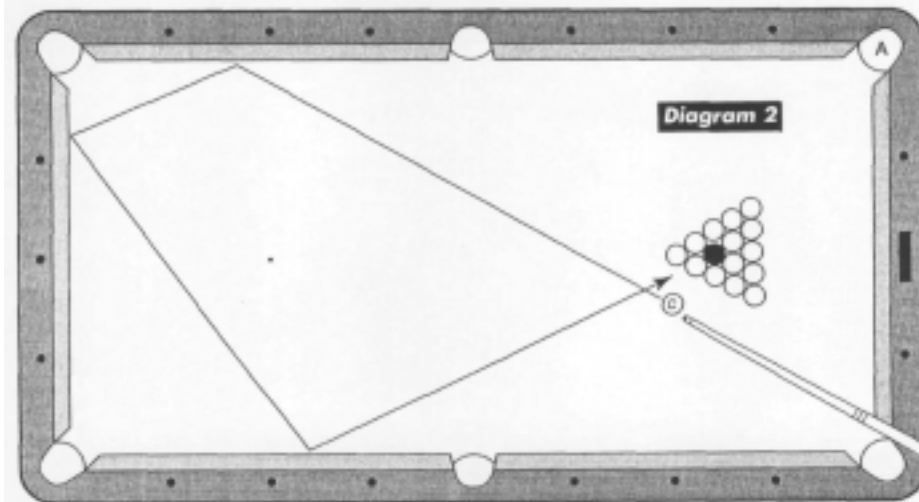
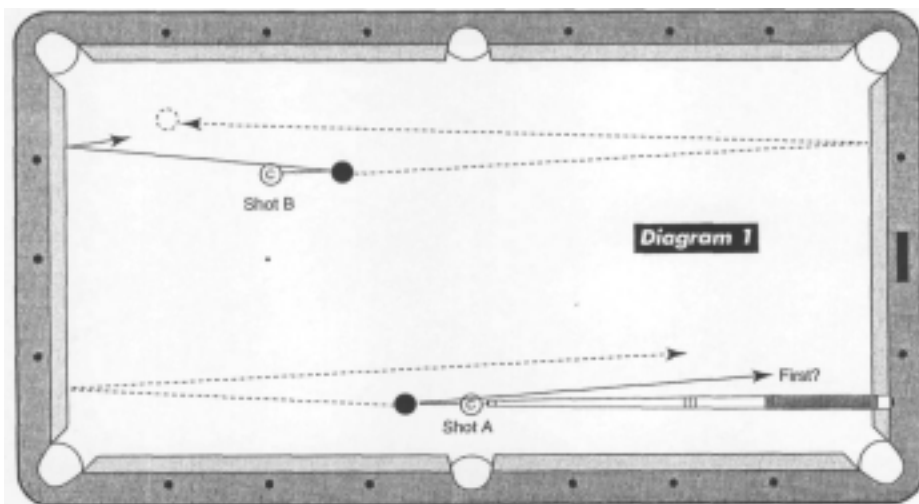
I've met players who dismiss these "trick shots" as useless sleight-of-hand, unworthy of their consideration. They probably pass over one of the regular gems in this magazine — Willie Jopling's column on trick shots, challenges and propositions. There is always something to learn there about how the balls work, and often something about how people work.

Here are some shots to illustrate why propositions are worthy of your consideration.

**Diagram 1** shows two shots that will help improve the quality of your draw. In Shot A, the goal is shoot the object ball straight up the table and draw the cue ball back to hit the end rail before the object ball gets there. No masse shots allowed. (If you can get the cue ball back without the object ball returning, either you need to fix your table, or we should go on the road.) The challenge is to see who can move the object ball farthest up the table and still do the shot. You will probably find that a medium stroke is best.

Shot B has been seen here before. It is a good test of your soft draw. Can you draw the cue ball back to the cushion without the object ball touching the same cushion? The knowledge you get from this shot seems especially useful at one pocket and straight pool. This shot depends some on the equipment — see how far from the line you can move the object ball and still make the shot. No masse.

In **Diagram 2** the goal is to shoot the cue ball three cushions (or more) and eventually pocket the 8 ball in pocket A. You can reset the cue ball after each shot. The far cushion must be the second cushion you contact. The break shot is shown. This illustrates one aspect of proposition shots — since you often repeat shots, you can find special landmarks on the table for certain shots. Note that the cue stick passes



over a particular part of the corner pocket, and is pointed towards the first diamond from the opposite pocket. This works on my table, but your table may need a different starting point.

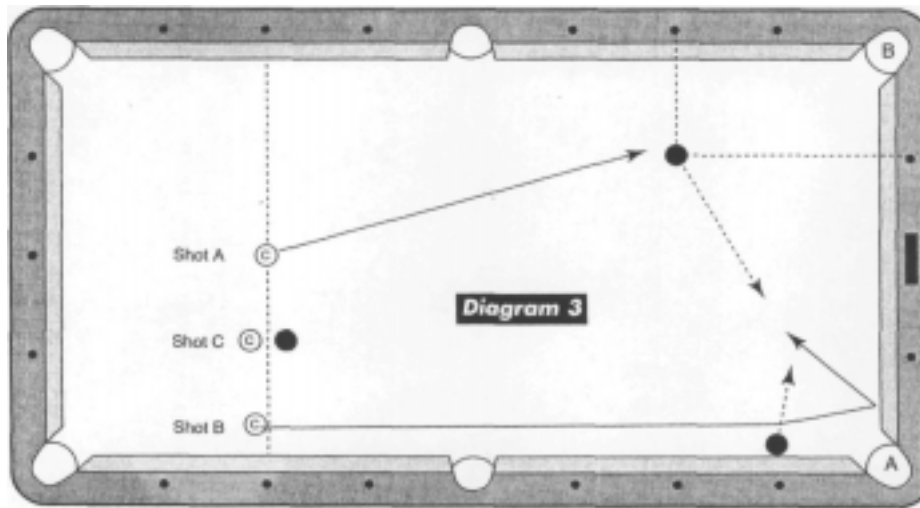
After the break shot, place the cue ball where you want, and shoot again. As a competition, try to make the black ball in fewer shots than your opponent. As a proposition, don't give the shooter more than 15 shots.

I've seen two great finger-pool artists do this proposition by hand — throwing the cue ball rather than shooting it. Cue Ball

Kelly would try it in a dozen throws on a pool table. On a 6-by-12-foot snooker table, I saw Canadian Alain Robidoux try and succeed in 25 shots. The amazing thing about Robidoux's performance was that every throw improved the situation, either by moving balls out of the way or advancing the black towards the pocket.

A simpler version of this shot is to place a single object ball on the spot. Five shots is par to sink the ball in pocket A. You should quickly learn the best spin to get the most consistent path for the cue ball; I recommend that you start with equal follow

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and running English — left follow for the path shown.

**Diagram 3** shows three more "I bet I can and you can't" shots. Shot A is a simple cut shot. The cue ball is on the head spot and the object ball is at the intersections of the diamonds, as shown. Your goal is pocket A. When you set the shot up, it looks absolutely impossible, but you can even over-cut the ball. This is a good shot for English experiments. Does outside help you on this

one, or is it better to aim with center ball?

Shot B is a handy shot to have at one-pocket. Can you bank the object ball into pocket B? Again, at first glance, it looks impossible, but with a little practice, you should be able to over-cut the shot and still get the object ball across the table. On this shot, experimenting with outside English to help may get a different result than for Shot A. You will surely note during your tests the effects of squirt, swerve and throw.

Finally, Shot C is an old friend. The goal is to make the object ball hit the foot rail without the cue ball going over the line. Mr. Jopling recently revealed a trick to make this one: run your grip hand into the rail to stop the stick. If your mark — I mean "client" — knows that trick, you can propose the next step up: make the object ball go up and down the table two more times so it hits the far cushion twice. The stroke needed is called *fouette* and is a standard part of Mike Massey's exhibitions. Studying this shot will teach you a lot about double-hit fouls and how to avoid them. It is also possible to play the one-cushion shot by moving your grip hand forward very, very far on the butt. This technique is easier on the knuckles and doesn't require a conveniently-placed rail.

I hope that Willie releases a new edition of his book of trick and proposition shots. In the meantime, review his past articles, and get a copy of Byrne's *Treasury of Trick Shots*. Some of the shots in each of these are multi-ball setups of kisses and combinations, which those pooh-poothers mentioned before will ignore, but look at each one for long enough to understand where each ball will go and why. Some of the "obvious" shots will have you scratching your head for a while.