



# Chalk Marks, Cue Marks

The devil's in the details.

**My view is** that the game is 85 percent physical and 10 percent mental. In the physical part, I include knowing the basic shots, seeing the shot at hand, and bringing the stick through consistently enough to pocket the ball. In the mental category, I place attitude about the game, strategy, and the ability to concentrate on the shot at hand.

You may have a different opinion of the importance of the mental side of the game, and those of you who read Bob Fancher's interesting and informative views on this may have revised your estimates recently.

If you have the physical part right, you're going to make all but two shots out of a 15-ball rack, and maybe more. There is no substitute for physical ability. This lesson can be learned from watching excellent 9-ball players try their hand at straight pool. I watched a young Cole Dickson run 80, and he may have been on the right ball with the right angle once or twice. The mental aspects of patterns and shot selection are trumped by a good eye every time.

So, let's suppose that you have the physical part down well enough — see the shot, make the shot — the first 85 percent. Let's also suppose you have the mental part down, and you're in the right state of mind and you know the strategy and shots for the game you're playing — the next 10 percent. What is the remaining 5 percent? It's the fun part. It's the special knowledge or technique that will help you maybe one time in 20. It's the part I usually write about here.

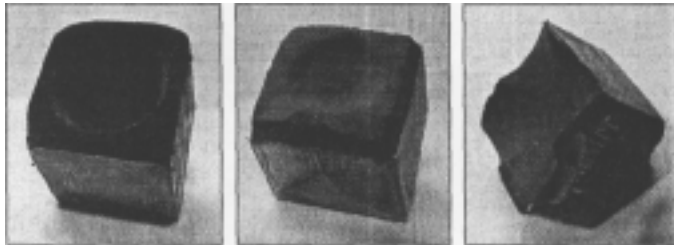
Is the final 5 percent important? Not if you routinely miss 30 percent of your shots. You should be spending all of your time — or as much time as you can stand and afford — on the first 85 percent of the game. You need to fix your arm.

But if you want to play at the top level, you need to have that 5 percent ready. The top players in good form miss so rarely that a 5 percent error rate would be a disaster. I remember a match between Mike Sigel and Louie Roberts at one of Terry Stonier's tournaments in the 1980s. In 21 games of 9-ball, there was one missed ball. Sigel missed it, and lost 11-10. Luther Lassiter was asked how he could tell if he could beat

someone. He would watch them play for an hour, and if they missed a ball in an hour, he knew he could beat them.

What is in that 5 percent? All the minor stuff after you get your arm to move straight and get your mind in the right place: special shots, special techniques, special strategies.

Here is a checklist of things in that 5 percent which I have covered here before:



Left to right: bad chalk, salvaged chalk, and correctly-worn chalk.

close-ball aiming and stroking; choosing the easiest shot; dealing with squirt; effects of dampness on banking and draw; speed, spin, and distance effects in banking, if bank pool is not your usual game; accurately predicting draw and follow angles; the special systems to use when balls are frozen; dealing with equipment defects; unusual safety plays; masse, swerve and jump shots; special reactions in combination shots; multi-rail position; and weird stroke techniques.

You may be saying that the above is surely more than 5 percent of the game. No, it isn't. Some of the above might come up only once in a month of play, and you're likely to play many racks in which none of them is important. Of course, if you play bank pool or one-pocket often, your arm needs to learn the right way to move to make banks for all conditions, spins and speeds. In my system, those considerations become a part of the physical aspect of the game. Similarly, if you play three-cushion billiards, multi-rail position must be made part of your nature, not something special to be used rarely. And if you play English Billiards, the precise speed and angle that gives a scratch with follow will be programmed right down into your spine and you will make those shots naturally.

These last three points make a general point: to move some of the 5 percent stuff

into your 85 percent area — that is to say, to put more shots into your arm where they are natural — you would do well to branch out and play a wider variety of games.

Two other items that I put in the 5 percent group are chalking and stick rotation. Let's look at those two in more detail.

Is chalking that important? It's been argued that most shots can be played with an unchalked stick, and if you have perfect speed control, you may be able to get through a few racks without any spin at all on the cue ball. I've watched beginners at the pool hall who never chalked. When they did get a rare miscue, they simply got another stick from the wall.

Most players learn to chalk badly. They get some chalk on some parts of their tip some of the time, maybe. The most primitive chalkers belong to the Clan of the Borers. In the first picture is the result of their vile practices. Their goal seems to be to bore through the chalk to the back paper. When they are not chalking, you can recognize them by their sloped foreheads, vacant eyes, and open, drooling mouths. Surely no reader of this magazine is a member of the Borers.

A sub-clan of the Borers is the Squeekers. The more talented Squeekers can play folk tunes with chalk on tip. Some foreigners and children may squeak the chalk out of ignorance or carelessness — correct them gently.

The problem with the Borers is that they don't cover the tip evenly with chalk. They leave caked spots and bare spots. If they ever bothered to look at the tip, they would see this and perhaps reform.

An effective way to chalk is to bring the edge of the chalk across the edge of the tip. You don't really need chalk in the exact center of the tip; you do need chalk on the part of the tip that will spin the ball. The chalk shown in the left-hand photo could be used for this, except the edge of the chalk — the rim around the bored hole — is hard and shiny from age or oil from hands. Using this chalk with the proper chalking motion will remove chalk from the tip rather than add it. This can be fixed by filing down the top of the chalk. This is

## Bob Jewett

shown in the center photo, where fresh, clean chalk has been exposed. At the same time, you should wrap the chalk with cellophane tape to keep the paper from falling off.

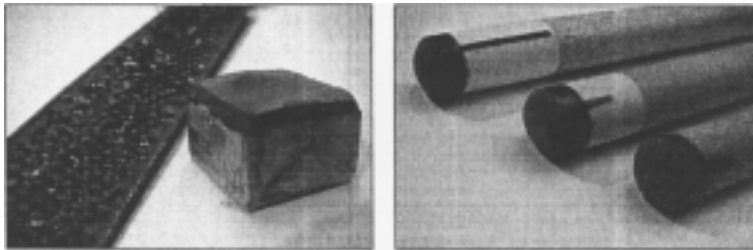
In the right-hand photo on page 24 is my own piece of chalk that I've been using for about three months. It started out as a normal, full piece of chalk. Notice that the edges of the chalk have taken on the shape of my tip. As I bring the edge of the chalk across the edge of the tip, a lot of surface is chalked simultaneously. I do have to worry about trimming the tape and paper as the chalk wears down. If left ragged, it will take the chalk right back off. Shown in the left-hand photo on this page is the file that quickly changed the useless, bored-out, shiny chalk into good chalk.

Are you saying to yourself, "Bob's late with his April-fools column"? No, I'm mostly serious about this chalk thing. If you need more convincing, go to a pro tournament and look at the use patterns on the chalk, then compare it to my used chalk. Or read what Jack Koehler has to say about not sharing your chalk in his 1995 book

"Upscale One-Pocket."

Many beginners never learn to spin the ball because they never learn to chalk well. They need to look at what they're doing.

Finally, here is a suggestion that you might put in the final 0.5 percent. Always shoot with your stick in the same rotation. That is, always shoot with the same side up.



A file and the bad chalk it fixed up (left); shafts marked for rotation (right).

The players who need the most precision — snooker players — do this already. A snooker cue has a flat bevel at the end of butt, so that it looks a little like a chisel. The back hand holds the end of the butt with the "flat" always held the same way, maybe in the palm. This means that the stick will have the same rotation on every shot.

If there is any slight bend in the stick, it will always be the same way. If there is any harder or softer spot on the tip, it will always be in the same place, for example

for draw. If the shaft is more flexible with or against the grain, that flexibility will always be the same way. The idea is that all of these effects will be learned and dealt with subconsciously.

Meucci Cues already has a solution for this. Their Red Dot and Black Dot shafts are marked to allow the player to choose the right rotation. The right-hand photo on this page shows the way I do it. With a permanent marker, make a sight on the ferrule just back from the tip. Always shoot with the sight up. After a little practice, it will be a natural part of your game. One advantage is that if I plan to shoot a draw shot, I only need to check for chalk on the part of the tip I use for draw.

Shown are three kinds of ferrule. From longer to shorter, they have progressively less squirt because ferrules are denser than wood. The one with the nearly invisible ferrule — about 1/16-inch long — is one I've played with for 20 years. Mike Massey has recently gone to a similarly short ferrule.

Should you worry about the final 5 percent? Only if you want to have fun or be the best. At the very least, don't be a Borer.