



# One Thing at a Time

This solid philosophy for life is also an effective way to practice.

**Bob Fancher** has updated his book on the psychological aspects of playing pool, "Pleasures of Small Motions." He makes many interesting points, but the one I noticed most was that learning pool works best if only one thing is learned at a time. Below is an outline of a procedure that I think puts Fancher's points into practice.

Fancher is a firm believer in separate practice time and play time. During practice time, work on developing specific skills and think about what you are doing. Moreover, notice how all aspects of the shot feel. During play time, thought is mostly a hindrance. You must rely on your feel (this will be scary for the overthinkers among you), and thought for the most part must be put aside during the execution of the shot.

Well, let's suppose you want to improve and are organized enough to practice, and you have a list of things to work on. What's the best way to wire up the circuits that must be in place in your brain/spine/arm to make one of the shots you're having trouble with? Isolate! Work on just that shot for an extended period of time, perhaps an hour. After your practice on that single subject, don't try to learn anything new. It's okay to play and run practice racks, but don't try to work on any new skills for at least six hours.

For example, your list of problem shots might include break shots, draw at a distance, open table cuts such as the spot shot, and precision stop/stun shots. You might want to fix all of these at once and put in two hours on each. Fancher suggests that this is a bad strategy, and that you should concentrate your time on just one aspect. <

Let's take stop/stun shots as an example

and work through it for a whole week, supposing you can get to a table three times in a week for at least half an hour each time.

Monday is league night, and you can arrive an hour early for practice alone. In Diagram 1 is your job for the night: progressive practice stop shots. The goal is to

During your practice, try to get a feel for the shot. Note your body position, the motion of your arm, the feel and sound of the tip on the ball, and the cue ball sliding down the table straight at the object ball. The goal here is to build up images of the shot to replay when it's time to play it in a

game. One thing that may help on this particular shot is to use a striped ball (or a training ball) as the cue ball, so that when you start the cue ball with draw — as you must — you can see the draw ebb due to friction with the cloth until the instant of contact.

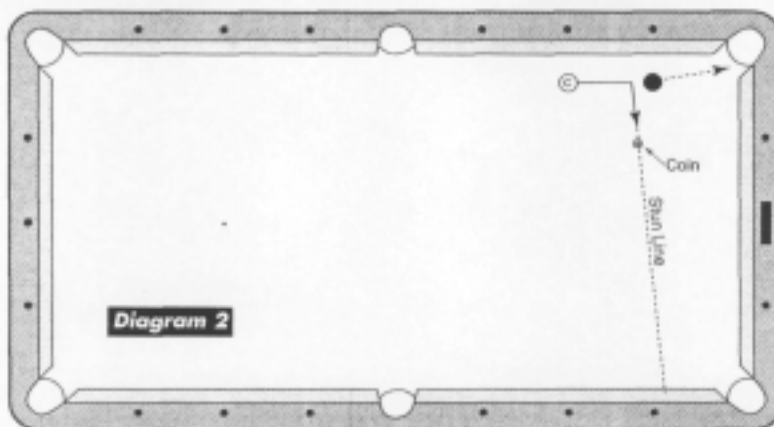
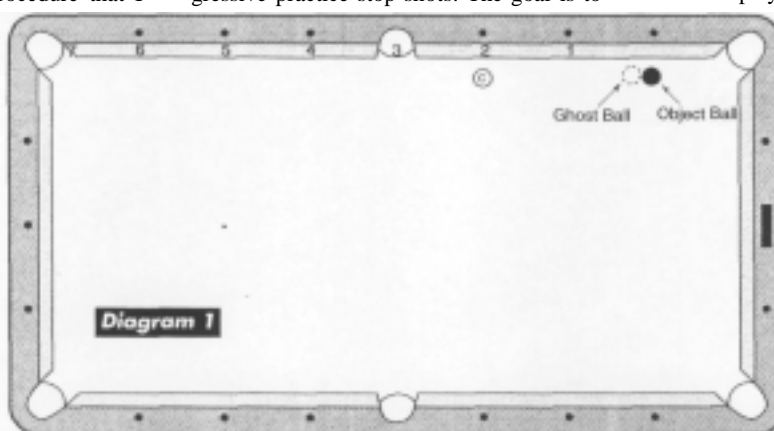
Score the drill by how far back you are starting the cue ball at the end of your practice. Since you have moved the cue ball position each time, this one number gives your score for the night. The cue ball is shown at point-value 2.

If you have gone through a couple of racks of this shot, and there is still some practice time before league, try two other variations. You have probably been playing the shot with a medium amount of draw; instead try the maximum and minimum draw you can use and still get a stop shot. When hitting the cue ball as low as

possible, you will probably also have to reduce the speed for most shots. With the minimum-draw option, you will have to crank up the speed, so the cue ball doesn't have time to acquire follow on the way to the object ball.

Later that night during league, just play your regular game and let the practice sink in. If you happen to come up to a stop shot, remember how it felt in practice and try to duplicate the feeling.

On your second session of the week, practice the stun shot, which is a stop shot



shoot the straight — in shot and have the cue ball move no more than its own diameter after contact. Another way to say this is that the cue ball must come to rest overlapping the ghost ball. (The ghost ball is where the cue ball is at the instant of contact.)

As in all progressive practices, if you make the shot with all of the requirements, set the next shot up a little harder by starting the cue ball farther back. If you miss, make the next shot easier, adjusting the cue ball position in either case by half a diamond.

## Bob Jewett

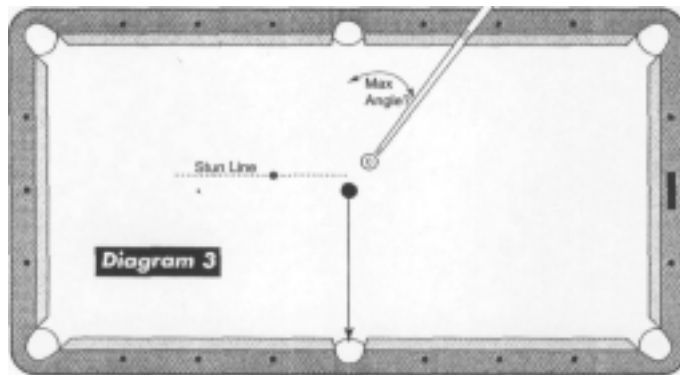
at an angle. Set the balls up as in **Diagram 2**, with each ball exactly a ball off the cushion, and place a coin straight sideways on the stun path. Pocket the object ball and move the cue ball to the coin. The precision required is up to you. Leaving the cue ball on top of the coin is best, but mortals will settle for a palm's width of space (about four inches) between the coin and the ball. Move the coin progressively farther away as your skill improves.

You will probably find that this shot feels a lot like the second part of the first night's practice. You are shooting a "stop" shot at various speeds. To get the distance, you need a certain speed, and to get the stop, you need a certain amount of draw for that speed.

If you have time in your hour of practice, try the shot with the cue ball starting a diamond further back. This is a much harder shot, since there is less angle to the pocket and you have to hit the cue ball harder to get it to move sideways. After the hour, challenge someone to straight pool.

For the final night of practice at stop/stun shots, try the shot in **Diagram 3**. The object

ball goes on the center spot — right between the side pockets — and the goal coin is placed along the kiss line starting one diamond toward the end. For that position goal, try various angles on the cue ball. Of course, nearly straight — in is what you



practiced on night two, but see how much cut you can have and still get the cue ball to the coin. You will probably find that this is easiest when you place the cue ball only a few inches from the object ball. Do you see why?

After you have tried moving the cue ball one diamond from various approach lines, move the coin another diamond down the table and try the various cut angles again.

Continue until the goal is to leave the cue ball on the end cushion. Suppose in a real game you had the shot to the side with ball in hand, and you had to move the cue ball to any position along the long string (the centerline of the table). Do you have a feel for the best starting point for the cue ball?

The third practice hour concludes your work on stop/stun shots for the time being. Play for a few weeks to let things settle in. You will probably have chances to apply what you've learned. Finally, take just a few minutes to give yourself an informal test. Set up five or six shots from all parts of the practice time, and see how well you do on the variety. Play them in shooting

mode — by feel — and not in practice mode with your brain turned on. How's your progress? Try the progressive drill again. Has your score improved?

It may seem like working on only one thing at a time is too slow with all the facets of your game that need polishing, but look at it this way: If you fix just one problem per week, in a year you'll be out of problems.