



Bumping Balls

If Efren does it, shouldn't you?

Perhaps the best advice on how to plan your way through each rack is to keep it simple. In an ideal world, the cue ball never bumps into extra balls, cushion use is minimized, and stop shots dominate. The real world is different, and usually some complication creeps in, often as a need to bump into balls — either to break clusters or just because the carom can't be avoided.

A couple of years ago at the L.A. Billiard Expo, there was a concurrent invitational 8-ball tournament. I got up early one morning and found Efren Reyes at the tournament table about to practice. There were two noteworthy facts. First, I was the only spectator, in a building full of pool players, who seemed to want to watch one of the greatest position players in the world practice tough position play. For free.

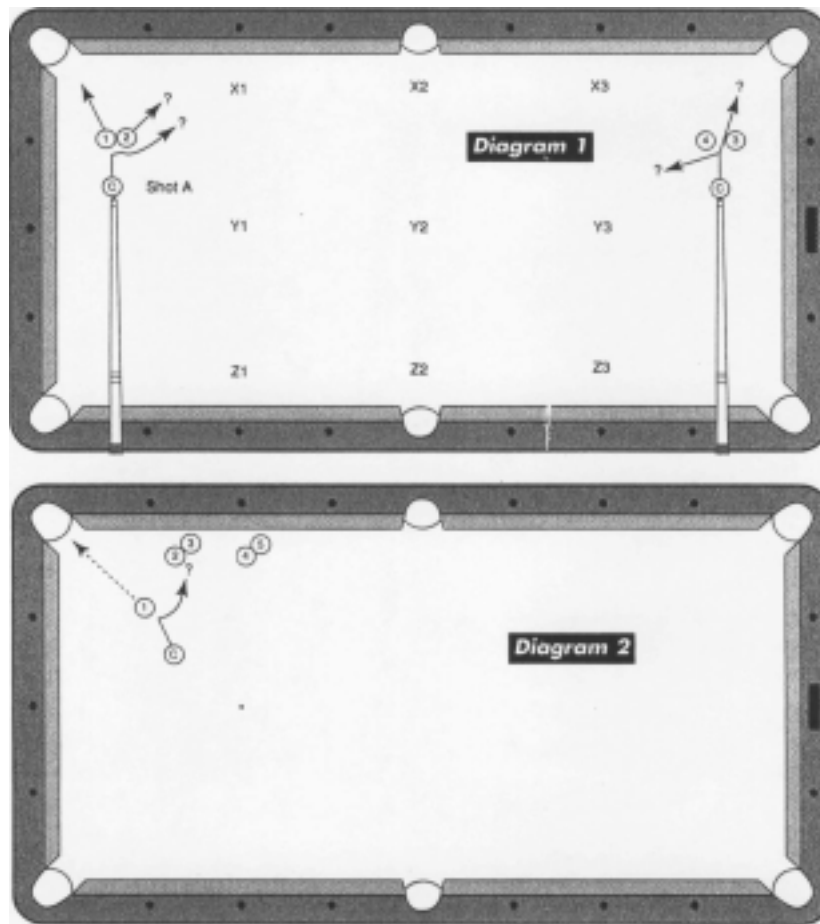
Second was the way Efren practiced 8-ball. He would carefully set up two or three clusters of balls near cushions, and then try to get through this tough layout. When he took the cue ball into clusters, it was with only enough speed to move the balls a little apart. How often do you drive half a broken cluster to the other end of the table for fear of getting stuck against one of the balls?

If Efren needs practice at bumping balls, maybe you do too.

In Diagram 1 are several good drills for learning how the cue ball reacts when it hits a second object ball just after the target ball. In Shot A, the object balls are frozen and aligned straight up the table. Place the cue ball as shown, more or less parallel with the short rail, so that you are forced to

touch the 2 ball a little. The first drill is to pocket the 1 ball and get position on the 2 for the same pocket. Try follow, draw and stop on the cue ball as well as different speeds. Once you are comfortable with a

second shot of Diagram 1, in which the 4 ball is about a ball from the 3. To make both balls, you may find it easier to use soft follow, and play the 4 up the table, depending on the line the cue ball takes off the 3.



In Diagram 2, the drill is to practice landing on clusters to get a second shot. Set yourself up with a pretty good angle to get to the pair of balls on the cushion, and then try to call your next shot. Does breaking hard or soft work better for you? It's not so easy to name which ball in a cluster is next, but it's even harder if you never try for anything specific. Of course, you would prefer to have a "safety ball" positioned in the jaws of a pocket for a sure next shot, but let's suppose the ducks are all gone.

Start with the balls all fairly close to the pocket, and as you get a feel for the break-outs, move the balls for a harder shot, or so the cue ball has more travel to get to the cluster, such as the 4-5. You will want to review the half-ball follow angle to find the best place for the cue ball. (That's when you hit the first

little bump, move all the balls farther from the pocket so that you will bump the 2 harder. Finally for this drill, move the cue ball for a thicker or thinner shot on the 1 ball, for several positions of the object balls.

As a second drill, start from this same set of positions but try to move the cue ball to various spots on the table after bumping into the 2, such as XI, X2, Y1, Y2 and so on. Perfection is hard on this drill, but if you end up on the wrong side of the table, rethink your method.

Next, try the very similar situation in the

ball about half-full, the cue ball has follow at the time, and the resulting angle the cue ball takes is the most predictable and repeatable in pool.)

These kinds of close bumps and break-outs are more common in full-rack games than in 9-ball. In the early stages of a rack of one-pocket, position from a second contact is often vital.

You may run into situations like those shown in Diagram 3. You have a shot, but you're guaranteed to hit a ball near the cushion, and you have to move the cue ball

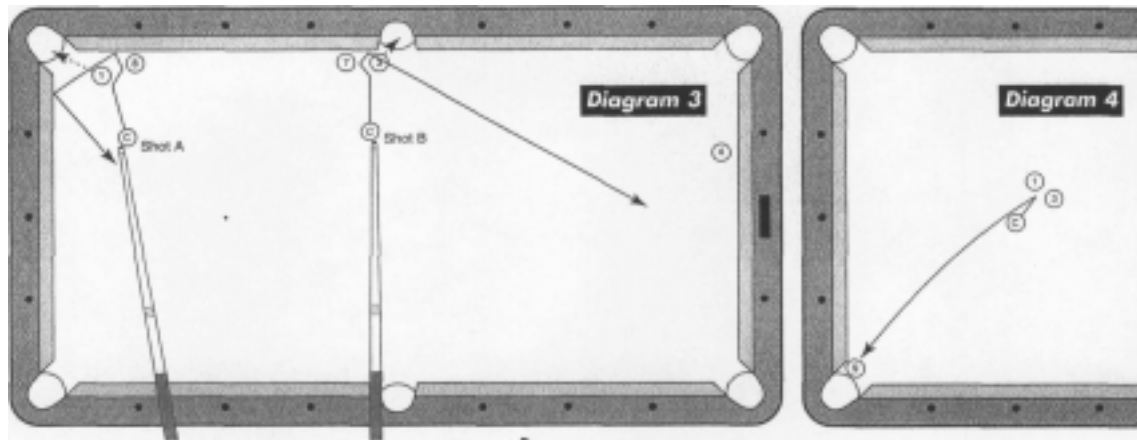


Bob Jewett

a fair distance. In Shot A, the goal is to get to the other end of the table using left English. In Shot B, you have an easy shot in the side, but the 7 ball complicates position on the 4. Use right English and make sure you hit the 7 on the right side. Several plays like this are shown on

Robert Byrne's latest tape, "Game Breakers."

When controlling the path of the cue ball off a second ball, it's critical to know where the cue ball will land on that ball. Usually you can judge close shots by the simple kiss-line (or tangent line, or perpendicular) principle: The cue ball comes off the object ball at a right angle to the path of that object ball. If you can visualize the cue ball at the instant of contact (the ghost ball), you should be able to estimate fairly accurately how it will land on a nearby ball. If you can figure that out, just apply the principle to



the second collision as well to find the initial path off that second ball.

This "path planning" is easier when the balls are close together as in Diagram 1, Shot A. Since the cue ball travels only a few millimeters from the first to the second ball, you know exactly how the second ball will be struck. For Shot B in that diagram, things are not so clear because of the larger distance between the balls. If you play the shot with soft follow, the cue ball has time and space to bend forward some before it hits the second ball. With soft draw, you might be able to avoid the second ball

entirely, depending on the cut angle.

While it's much better not to bump balls, if you practice the above shots for a few minutes each, you'll be better prepared for the next time you can't avoid it.

For a little fun, in **Diagram 4** is an interesting proposition based on hitting two balls. With the balls as shown, can you shoot between the pair and draw the cue ball straight back to make the hanger? The shot is duck soup if the pair is just the right distance apart, and near-impossible if they are much closer or farther apart. Can you find that distance?