

“Billiards on the Big Screen – *Pool Hall Junkies*”

Note: Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, and technical proofs (TP) can be accessed and viewed online at billiards.colostate.edu. The reference numbers used in the article (e.g., **NV A.12**) help you locate the resources on the website. If you don't have access to the Internet, or if you have a slow connection (e.g., a modem), you may want to view the resources from a CD-ROM instead. To order one, send a check or money order (payable to David Alciatore) for \$21.45 (includes S&H) to: Pool Book CD; 626 S. Meldrum St.; Fort Collins, CO 80521. The CD-ROM is compatible with both PCs and MACs.

This is the final article in my “Billiards on the Big Screen” series, where I illustrate and describe interesting shots from movies with major billiards themes. In my first two articles (August and September, 2004), I presented some shots from the classic billiards films “*The Hustler*” and “*The Color of Money*.” By the way, if you want to refer back to any of my previous articles and online resources, you can access them at billiards.colostate.edu. This month's article deals with the most recent popular billiards movie: “*Pool Hall Junkies*.” Originally, I had planned to do a fourth article on “*Donald in Mathmagic Land*,” an animated Disney short film with a major billiards component, but I decided to skip it because all of the examples are from 3-cushion billiards, which is not as popular as it once was. In fact, it can be difficult to even find a “billiards” table (without pockets) anymore. Also, because the movie was released in 1959 and because it was not a feature film, it may be difficult for many readers to find a copy to rent or borrow. As a side note, if you are interested in learning how to aim multiple-rail kick shots (which are ubiquitous in 3-cushion billiards), see my description of the Diamond System online at **TP 7.2**. I present the standard numbering and formula system along with a revised method that I use.

**TP 7.2** – Multiple-rail diamond-system formulas

“*Pool Hall Junkies*” (2002, Gold Circle Films) is the story of Johnny (played by Mars Callahan), a pool hustler with a lot of talent, many unrealized dreams, and a wealthy girlfriend named Tara (played by Alison Eastwood). His “mentor” Joe (played by Chazz Palminteri) has misguided him and taken advantage of his ability since he was a teenager. To make a long story short, Johnny breaks away from Joe, Joe gets Johnny's younger brother, Danny (played by Michael Rosenbaum), in trouble, and Johnny comes to the rescue in an exciting high-stakes match against a very capable foe, Brad (played by Rick Shroder), also mentored by Joe.

Diagram 1 illustrates a shot executed by Johnny early in the movie. The shot is a partial jump shot over the 3-ball and 9-ball. The gap between the 3-ball and 9-ball is not large enough for the cue ball to pass through, but the cue ball can easily clear the gap with a small height jump shot. You elevate the cue stick about 45° and strike through the center of the cue ball with a fast, throwing motion. **NV A.12** shows a demonstration of the shot. This shot is very similar to a shot from the movie “*The Color of Money*” I presented in last month's article (see **NV A.11**).

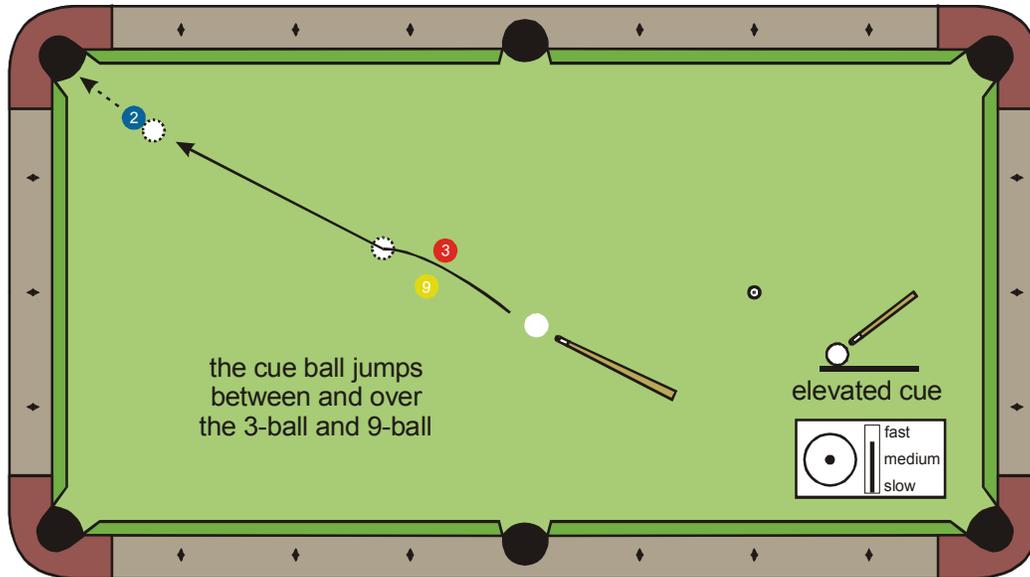


Diagram 1 Partial jump shot



NV A.12 – Partial jump shot

NV A.11 – Partial jump, dead-on combination shot

Diagram 2 illustrates a shot used by Johnny, and Tara’s uncle Mike (played by Christopher Walken), to hustle Tara’s boss at a party. The cue ball is frozen to the 8-ball, and both balls are frozen to the rail. The goal is to cut the 8-ball with just enough angle to have it stop in front of the side pocket. In the meantime, the cue ball kicks off the opposite rail to pocket the 8-ball. Notice the aiming line of the cue stick in the diagram. You aim toward the opposite side pocket to get the resulting cue ball motion. You might need to experiment with the aiming line, ball placement, and speed, depending upon your table conditions, but the shot is easier than it looks once it is set up properly. **NV A.13** shows a demonstration of the shot. This shot is reminiscent of the frozen 8-ball bank shot from the movie “*The Hustler*” (see **NV A.2**). In both cases, the shots are set-up trick shots used to play a hustle. Both shots also occur in defining scenes of each movie. **Principle 6** summarizes a common theme with shots that actors execute in the movies. The shots are usually either easy to execute because they are set-up shots with an easy stroke (e.g., the shot in **Diagram 2**), or there is a large margin for error (e.g., the shot in **Diagram 5** presented later in the article). Despite this, it is still very impressive that the actors take the time to learn and make the shots, given how valuable their time is.

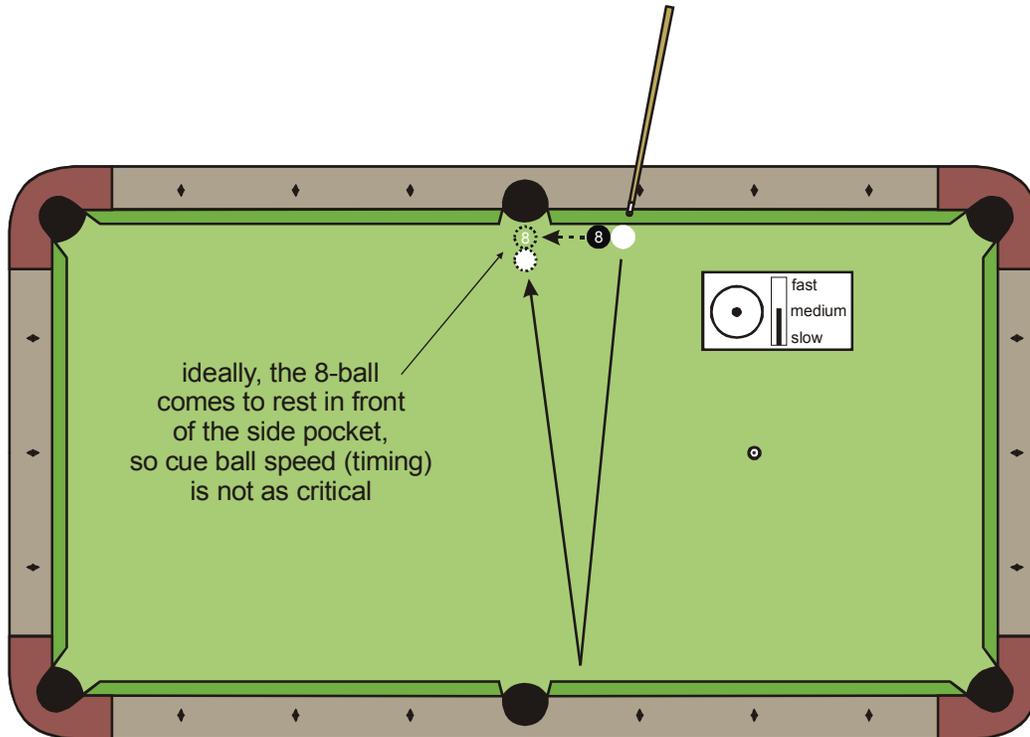


Diagram 2 Frozen cue-ball carom-kick shot



normal video

NV A.13 – Frozen cue-ball carom-kick shot

NV A.2 – 8-ball bank hustle shot

Principle 6 Hollywood actor billiard shots

Shots made by actors (and not pro stand-ins) are usually easier than they look or have wide margins for error.

- An example is the shot in **Diagram 2** from “*Pool Hall Junkies*” (see **NV A.13**), executed by both Christopher Walken and Mars Callahan (who executed the shot one-handed).
- One exception to this rule is Mars Callahan, playing Johnny in “*Pool Hall Junkies*.” He is obviously a good pool player, and makes several difficult shots during the movie (without the use of a pro stand-in and fancy video editing).

Diagram 3 illustrates a shot executed by Brad (Joe’s new hot talent) while sharking one of Danny’s friends. Danny’s friend thinks he has a huge advantage because Brad is letting him take four balls off the table after the break. Unfortunately, as Danny points out to his unsuspecting friend, this is a classic hustle. Removing the balls only allows Brad to more easily run the table, because there are fewer balls to get in his way. **NV A.14** shows a demonstration of the shot. There are two ways for the shot to work, as shown in the diagram. The 2-ball can hit the rail twice (**Diagram 3a**) or just once (**Diagram 3b**), still deflecting off both the 7-ball and 5-ball into the pocket. The producers of the film liked this shot so much, they replayed the exact same footage later in the movie, when a sequence of shots is being shown. Look for this money-saving video-editing trick when you watch the video.

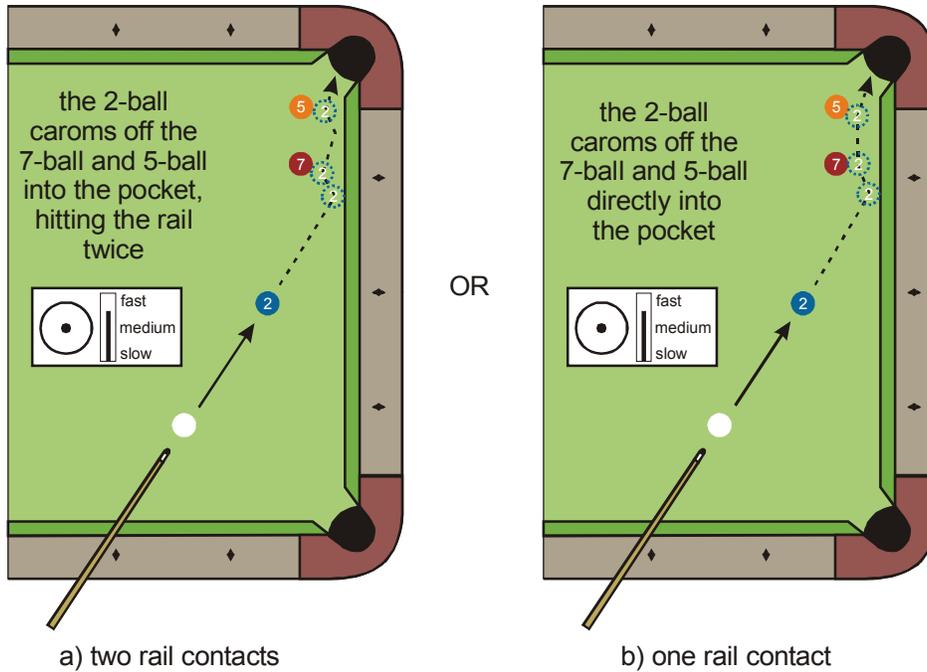


Diagram 3 Double bank-carom shot



NV A.14 – Double bank-carom shot

Diagrams 4 and 5 illustrate shots shown during the movie-ending match between Johnny and Brad. For the shot in **Diagram 4**, the cue ball is in the jaws of the top corner pocket, frozen on the near wall, so the direct path to the 2-ball is blocked. The only reasonable option to pocket the 2-ball is to kick the cue ball off the opposite wall or point of the pocket. As described in **NV A.15**, it is easier to kick off the wall. To kick off the point, your aim must be perfect. Left English is required when kicking off the pocket wall to have the cue ball rebound toward the 2-ball. Top-left English is shown in the diagram because you must cue over the rail. You must also lift the stick a little during the follow-through to prevent a double hit of the cue ball.

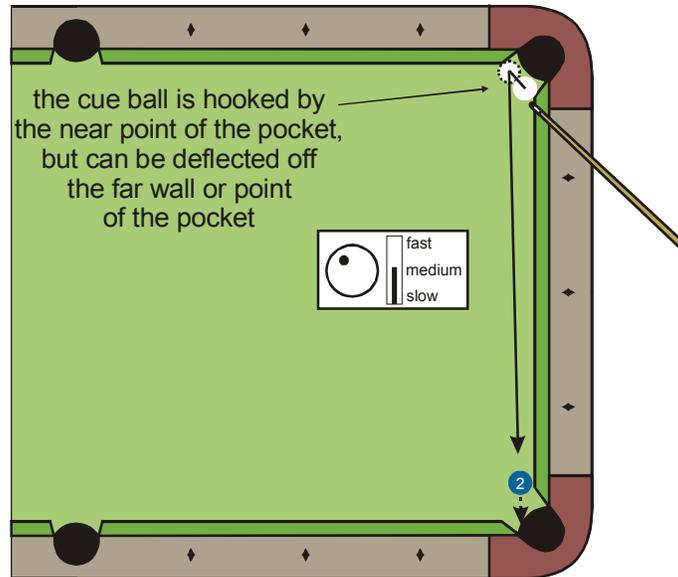


Diagram 4 Kick shot out of the jaws of a pocket



NV A.15 – Kick shot out of the jaws of a pocket

The shot shown in **Diagram 5** is a rail-assist jump shot, where the cue ball is jumped off the rail cushion, clearing the 2-ball and 3-ball, to hit the 1-ball and pocket the 9-ball. Several things make this shot easier than it might look. First, the cue ball is close to the rail allowing you to jump the cue ball off the edge of the rail cushion. Only a little cue ball height is required to get much more height off the cushion. Second, there is a gap between the 2-ball and 3-ball. The gap is not large enough for the cue ball to fit though; but as with the partial jump shot in **Diagram 1**, you don't need a large cue ball height to clear the balls. Finally, because the 1-ball is frozen to the 9-ball, there is a very large margin for error. You can hit almost any part of the 1-ball, and the 9-ball will be pocketed. **NV A.16** shows a demonstration of the shot.

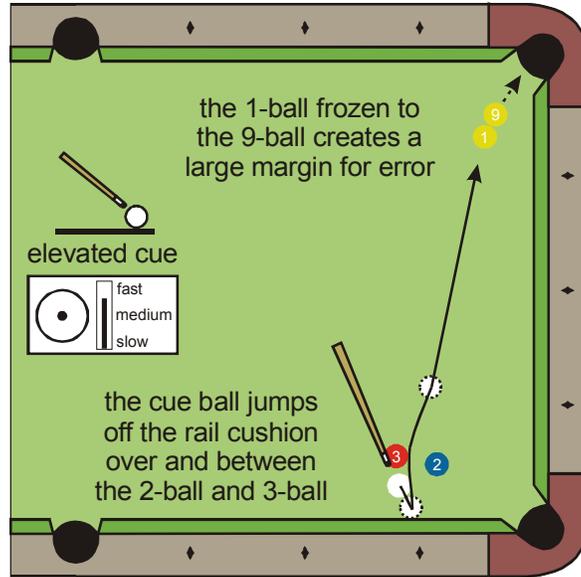


Diagram 5 Rail-assist jump shot



NV A.16 – Rail-assist jump shot

I hope you have enjoyed my “*Billiards on the Big Screen*” series. Good luck with your game, and practice hard,
 Dr. Dave

Dr. Dave is a mechanical engineering professor at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. He is also author of the book: “The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards” (2004, Sterling Publishing).