







Diagram Three

One Pocket by Bob Jewett

In over twenty five years of writing columns for Billiards Digest, I've somehow overlooked the most complex and challenging of all pool games. It requires you to know every shot used in the other standard games and adds in a bunch of shots that are rarely used otherwise. It requires precision, power, finesse, patience, and inventiveness. Of course I'm talking about one pocket.

First, here's a brief and informal overview of the rules. A rack of 15 object balls is used and all the balls are equal. The break is from anywhere above the headstring. Each player has one of the two foot pockets. If you make a ball in your pocket it counts one point and you continue to shoot. If you make a ball in your opponent's pocket, it counts for him. The first to score eight points wins. If you foul, any ball made on the shot is spotted up and you spot an additional ball from your pocket for the foul and lose one point. If you don't have a ball to spot, you "owe" a ball and will have to spot one from your pocket when available. A scratch is a foul and the other player gets ball in hand in the kitchen. Unlike many other games, there is never "ball in hand anywhere" as a penalty. Most of the other standard rules apply to one pocket.

Now, let's go deeper into the rules as we look at specific game situations. In Diagram One are two possible break shots. Shot 1 is the nearly universal standard opening shot. The cue ball is played with inside English -- in this case left -- to hit the head ball thinly, the second ball a little fuller, and then to follow to the end rail. The left side spin kills some of the speed there and adjusts the rebound angle to be more along the side cushion. The double hit on the rack tends to move a lot of balls into region P near the breaker's pocket, A. If the cue ball ends up near X, about two and a half diamonds from the foot rail, the opponent will have a hard time not leaving a shot on a ball in P.

The great fear of breakers is that the corner ball (C in the diagram) will come out of the rack far enough to leave a shot, even with the cue ball at X. Or, it might collide with the cue ball if their paths cross and cause a scratch or a sell-out. Most tournaments now have the breaker rack so there is no complaint of loose balls causing C to escape. A main goal when racking is to remove all gaps along the side of the rack from the head ball to C as gaps there tend to give C more speed towards the opponent's pocket.

With the breaker racking an additional rule is often used to protect the seated player: if the breaker makes a ball in his pocket on the break, it doesn't count and the breaker has to rack and break again.

Shot 2 is an alternative break shot that you can try if ball C keeps biting you. The goal is to kick to the side of the rack and hit the middle ball full to leave the cue ball frozen. This brings up a couple of rules. The breaker gets to choose which corner pocket is his, but usually does not announce the choice since the standard break makes the choice clear. The opponent has the opposite corner pocket. If a strange break is used, the breaker should specify a pocket before breaking.

Also, the break is not required to do anything special compared to any other shot in the game. You don't have to get a minimum number of balls to the cushion or send the cue ball to a cushion. If

you hit Shot 2 softly, you may not drive any ball to a cushion and that is a foul, but it is an allowed break. For the foul you would “owe a ball” which is usually indicated by putting a coin by your pocket.

Owed balls are spotted at the end of the turn in which they are pocketed along with any balls that were pocketed in extraneous pockets or driven off the table during the turn. Sometimes players forget that balls need to be spotted and then there is a problem deciding when to spot them. Because the exact position of every ball on the table is critical to leaving your opponent without a shot, the sudden introduction of a ball on the spot could be a game decider if it leaves the shooter a straight-in shot or a nice bank. The ball is not spotted until the turn after the current turn ends. If the mistake is discovered at the start of a turn or between turns, each player will have one full turn at the table before the ball is spotted.

An exception to the normal time of spotting balls is when the player at the table clears all balls off the table but still needs more to win. An example of this would be if his opponent already had seven balls, he began his inning owing three balls from early fouls, and he accidentally pocketed a ball in a side pocket during his run. After clearing eight balls off the table, he would spot four balls, three for the previous fouls and one for the ball that went into the side. He would then continue to shoot at the line of four balls.

A very common situation is where both players need the last ball and one player manages to leave it very near his pocket, as in Shot 1 of Diagram Two. The usual play for the opponent is to shoot the ball in and scratch behind it. The ball does not count due to the scratch, so it is spotted up along with a penalty ball from the fouler, and the shooter is faced with the “double spot shot” shown in Shot 2. With the ball on the brink as shown where it cannot be hit full, the normal scratch is impossible. Now the standard play is to elevate the cue stick, hit the shot hard, and drive the cue ball off the table while pocketing the hung ball. It is polite and prudent to warn nearby spectators before lofting the cue ball towards them -- perhaps you can even get a volunteer to be shortstop on the play.

One standard response to the double spot shot is shown in Shot 2. If the cue ball is placed a few inches from the head spot and drawn straight back from the first ball, that ball can be driven straight into the corner. At the same time the back ball will bank up and down the table and end up near or in the same corner pocket. If struck perfectly, the cue ball will draw straight back to the head cushion and freeze. There are several things that can go wrong with this shot and timid players will use more caution. If the two object balls are not touching, the shot will not work, so you will often see players tapping the object balls to make sure they are frozen.

Diagram Three shows another common situation. You are shooting and have pocket A. Your opponent has seven balls so any mistake can be fatal. Maybe Efren would see an offensive shot here, but you see nothing. One defensive shot is bank the cue ball to hit X and then roll softly to Y, maybe getting a ball to a cushion. If your speed or angle is wrong, you lose. For example if the cue ball ends up short of Y, your opponent can bank the Z ball to his pocket, knock the other two balls away from your side and leave the cue ball on your side cushion.

Instead, tap the cue ball to the long-rail facing of the pocket. Your opponent will not be able to hit any ball directly and will probably take a return foul. He will then need two to win and you have a much better chance to escape. What ends the foul-taking is the fact that three fouls in a row by the same player is loss of game.

What you are not allowed to do in Diagram Three is to press forward softly with your cue stick and trap the cue ball against the facing of the pocket. That technique is forbidden. You may not intentionally play double or multiple hits to gain an advantage.

That covers most of the common rules peculiar to one pocket. For a more complete listing, along with good discussion, visit the website onepocket.org which is maintained by Steve Booth, the world's greatest one pocket fan.