

Fundamentals – End of Story

By Roger Long

In the past few articles we covered good stroke fundamentals (Straight Alignment, Level Cue, Staying Down, Following Through), and also covered the most common mechanics used in achieving and maintaining those good fundamentals. Now I'd like to tie the two together (*fundamentals* and *mechanics*) and explain how they represent what is probably the only "secret" that exists in pool.

You know how it goes; everyone always wants to know the "secrets" of the pros. How do they do this, and how do they do that? Well, when it comes to many shots and strategies, there actually are a lot of things that pros don't necessarily like to share; but that doesn't make any of them secret. Anyone can find the answers to anything concerning the game of pool if they just know where to look.

But when it comes to the execution of good fundamentals, even most pros can't tell you what they're doing wrong on those rare occasions when they actually do mess up. Their shortcomings often remain a mystery to them because they cannot watch themselves play. They usually need someone else, someone with a knowing eye, to tell them things like, "You jumped up" or "You twisted your wrist." So whether they do it all on their own, or someone else helps them do it, the secret to success must be unlocked.

Now in unlocking this secret, everyone needs to be aware of a few certain things: It doesn't matter how many shots you know; it doesn't matter how many systems you've learned; it doesn't matter how many books you've read; it doesn't even matter how many years you've been playing – if you never develop a good consistent stroke (which means *consistently* applying good fundamentals), then you will never be able to consistently execute all that you know.

Therefore, the following becomes the order of development that good players generally adopt. They first develop a good stroke, and *then* they start learning all of the shots. And from that point on, they try to use a good stroke on each and every shot. Even when it comes to shots that require a deviation from one of the fundamental rules, good players will not allow themselves to stray any farther from those rules than what is absolutely necessary.

Take, for instance, the fundamental rule of the "Level Cue". If your cue ball is close to the rail, let's say, and you want to stop it on contact with the object ball in order to get position on another ball, you know that you will have to elevate the back of the cue stick in order to put some initial back spin on the ball. And just for argument's sake, let's say this particular stop-shot calls for an approximate elevation of 25°. Now the good player will not elevate the cue any higher than that (say to 30°), because that would be straying farther from the rule than what is absolutely necessary to get the job done. And as soon as this one-time excepted shot is finished, the good player will immediately return to following the rules.

And it won't matter to good players if a shot is worth \$10K, or worth nothing at all; it won't matter if they are up against champions, or playing their own kids; it won't matter if they are

competing in front of hundreds of people, or just practicing at home alone – good players will *always* strive to follow the fundamental rules.

So the concept of learning good fundamentals, and then applying them on a consistent basis – regardless of the import of the situation – is what separates winners from also-rans.

And *that* is the good players' one true “secret” to success.