

Jump Twist

A couple weeks ago, one of my friends called to ask if I would help him with his jump shot. “Of course,” I volunteered without thinking, and then back peddled a little to tell him that I’m not much of a jump-shot player. Still, I thought, I ought to be able to offer some help. Later on when we met he explained that he sees other players shooting jump shots routinely while he struggles to get the cue ball into the air. Then he set up Shot A in Diagram 1 and asked me how to get over that 11 ball to sink the 8 ball. Did I mention that he didn’t have a jump cue?

For some reason, players who believe that they can’t jump the cue ball invariably set up impossibly ambitious shots to prove it. Maybe when they observe a shot like the one we see here, they’re too awed by the magic to remember the shooter going into her case and coming out with a jump cue. After I assured him that the shot he set up is beyond some of the greatest players’ hopes with a standard cue, we went to work on his jump shot in a more realistic context.

For a good introduction to jumping I like to grab a house cue and set up Shot B, an old trick-shot staple. While the shot is easy it’s also productively demonstrative since any attempt that clears the stick confirms the jump and reinforces success. To make this shot, hit the cue ball at or slightly above center with a sharp, firm stroke and about 30 degrees of elevation. Those players who only remember the most heroic jump shots tend to exaggerate the elevation for modest ones. After about 10 minutes with shot B, we took the house cue off the table for some jumps over the edge of an obstructing ball, augmenting the interference gradually until he was clearing half an object ball with consistency. But the fun was only beginning.

Once he was jumping the cue ball with control and confidence we returned to shot A for another jump shot, but not the one he had in mind. While getting the cue ball over the 11 to pocket the 8 with a standard cue is way beyond my ability, jumping the 11 over the 8 and into the corner is not. In fact, it’s a favorite shot of mine to demonstrate an outrageous possibility on a pool table and a beauty for showing off. While the shot described is extreme, the task of getting an object ball into the air is somewhat easy. Yet few players will attempt to do so when faced with the challenge, even on the easiest level.

If the cue ball is airborne when it meets an object ball, chances are that the object ball will leave the bed of the table after contact. Just as a tip coming down on a cue ball bounces it off of the slate and into the air, a cue ball coming down on another ball will do the same. To observe the phenomenon and learn the shot, let’s get the house cue back on the table and return to Shot B. This time however, place the 4 ball in the cue ball’s spot and move the cue ball back a foot or so. To jump the 4 ball over the house cue, play the shot with the same stroke, elevation and contact point on the cue ball as you employed to jump the cue ball over the stick. If the 4 ball is not clearing the stick, try adding speed. It takes a bit more energy to transfer jump from one ball to another.

After you're clearing the stick with consistency and confidence try some object-ball jumps that might arise in a game. Set up a straight-in shot with the cue ball and object ball about a foot apart. Now place a second object ball another foot beyond the first one so its edge blocks a clear shot to the pocket. Elevate moderately and jump your target ball into the pocket. If it's not working at first, the main obstacle is often nothing more than disbelief. While we routinely see extraordinary jumps with the cue ball, owing largely to a whole market segment of equipment tailored to that one shot, we rarely see someone jumping an object ball. Still, the shot is not too demanding.

Although jumping an object ball is just as easy as a simple jump shot, I find that its range of feasibility somewhat narrower. I would only attempt it on a ball within a foot or two of the cue ball and would not attempt to jump over a second ball that's more than a couple feet past the first one. Also, a cue ball traveling through the air with speed will almost surely end up on the floor if it meets an object ball with a glancing blow. So I only attempt the shot when the angle is straight or very close to straight. It takes full contact to absorb a flying cue ball's energy and keep it on the table.

Jumping the 11 ball over the 8 ball in shot A is a slight variation on an old trick shot that traditionally pops the 11 ball out of a triangle instead of sending it over another ball. Because I hate the sound of phenolic on wood, I opt for the easier version shown here, which seems just as impressive to most spectators. If you want to play the shot, place the cue ball close enough to the rail to get adequate elevation without having to raise your bridge onto your fingertips. Thirty degrees will suffice. Shoot down at the cue ball with a sharp stroke and a lot of speed. To keep the cue ball, which will also go bounding over the 8 ball, on the table, hit it low. Enough backspin will kill it quickly after it lands on the table.

The best way to play pool is to keep things simple and under control with one easy shot after another. And when that isn't working, do something outrageous.

