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Equal Offense One Pocket

It seems that every couple years a new pool movie comes along and, as avid players, we hurry to see it. By now we've learned to lower our expectations regarding their cinematic quality, but still, we must investigate films about our game, regardless of how deeply into mediocrity some may sink. I would bet that other sports and activities suffer the same problem since bad movies significantly outnumber good ones across the board. Still, Hollywood has produced a number of great films centered on a specific activity, such as *The Hustler* and *A River Runs Through It*, two films that pass my simple test for determining the quality of an activity-oriented movie. When you hear that the movie extends its reach beyond the devotees of its central activity to gain widespread appeal among viewers from outside the world of that activity, chances are good that it's a quality picture.

Recently a new pool game arrived in Denver and quickly took hold of a small handful of us. It's a derivative of one pocket that can easily reach out past that game's relatively small sphere to seduce all pool players who give it a try, even the one-pocket haters. The fact that it's new to me does not necessarily make it a new invention, but I suspect that it is and would like to trace it to its origin. I learned it from Bret "The Iceman" Icenogle, a one-pocket-only player and probably the most committed student of the game that I've ever known. He picked it up from everyone's favorite rising star, Samm Diep, who brought it home from Minnesota. Samm learned it from the North Star State's standout instructor and player, Mike Fieldhammer, who also happens to be a world-class tree-climber. The trail ends with Mike, who cannot remember where he learned the game but thinks it might have been Bob Jewett who introduced it to him. If that's the case, Bob, please share what you know about this game's origin with me.

As far as I know the game has no name, but since it's played like Equal Offense, we can call it Equal Offense One Pocket. Each rack begins with a ten-ball triangle racked as shown in Diagram 1. You can rack the balls with a triangle by raising its rear side up and onto the cushion. Or you can put them in place with your hands. Either way a tight rack is essential for a good break, so take care to get all the balls touching their neighbors and the row of four touching the cushion. For the break you can place the cue ball anywhere and hit the rack any way you wish. But because you must pocket a ball on the break to continue shooting, hitting the 4 ball first to make the 2 in the upper left corner is virtually mandatory. So far, the break that works consistently best for me to spread the balls and send the cue ball to the destination we see in the diagram calls for a glancing blow off the right side of the 4 ball with a tip of center, right-hand english on the cue ball. There are other ways of breaking the rack and players should explore variations. After the break, the fun begins and your objective is simple. Run the remaining nine balls into the upper-left corner pocket. A miss or a scratch ends the rack.

If you're a one-pocket player here's the tool to isolate the offensive game and improve your ball-running skills. Too often in a game of standard one pocket we get a

layout that offers a good run-out opportunity only to make one or two balls before losing position and then playing a safety. Safety may be the distinguishing element of one pocket, but, given a chance, it's always better to win the game without allowing the opponent back to the table. Many non-players of one pocket quickly appreciate the position accuracy that this game demands as they learn how small the difference between good and bad position can be under tighter constraints. Along with sharper cue-ball control for each shot, the game teaches precise planning and the value of making exact position choices. The area where I've gained most improvement is the art of accurately breaking open small clusters, a requirement in most racks. Typically, when doing so in other games, we tend to send the cue ball into the problem balls and hope for the best. Here, the shooter must study the cluster to determine exactly how to hit it so that, when the smoke clears, every ball sits for a good shot into the target pocket. Then comes the challenge of executing the breakout as planned.

The game's rigorous demands work to sharpen our focus in the important areas of shot making, position play and planning and to pull those elements together into a tighter package. Also, because the game is 100% offense and we find ourselves in trouble so often with no apparent shot, we get to exercise our creativity and go for some outrageous shots. Legitimate shots from standard one pocket such as bank combos, along with two and three-rail bank shots arise frequently enough in this game to teach us how to identify them and expand our proficiency with them. And finally, even though this is my new favorite practice routine, I prefer playing with others. Because scoring a 10 is so difficult, we find ourselves rooting for one another and cheering on our opponents, something I can't recall doing in any other pool game.

A good way to play with others is to set it up the same way as equal offense with a 10-frame format and shoot for the highest total of balls pocketed. If you practice in that format and save your score sheets, you can chart your improvement. I encourage everyone to try Equal Offense One Pocket and then report any feedback in the BD forum. I'm curious to learn what others think of my new favorite game. And I'm hoping to hear from the game's inventor so I can congratulate that person for such a significant contribution to everyone's improvement.



