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Cue Ball Tracks Drill

On a few occasions I have touched briefly on what I believe is the process that great players employ for accurate position play. This month we shall explore that process in depth with an exercise that almost always produces amazing results for my students when we work with it.

After watching years of pool I have observed that most players get trapped in a cycle from which few emerge to handle the cue ball with the kind of precision that they desire because of the way that we first learn position play. Like any physical skill we learn how to make the cue ball move in various ways by learning how to alter its spin. Some players remain stuck in the how-do-I-do-this phase and, when faced with position demands, are conditioned to wrap themselves up in wondering how they will solve the problems. That fosters a belief in one correct solution for each shot and awakens, especially with spectators around, the fear of playing the shot incorrectly. This may be why most champions began playing at a young age; kids tend not to worry about looking bad.

If you can hit draw, stop and follow shots you know *how* to play position. It will not hurt to declare that fact aloud. Just to make sure that we are playing the same game let's review the elements of position play. Hitting the cue ball low makes it come back; high makes it go forward. If it will bounce off of a rail hitting it on the right side makes it go to the right while hitting it on the left side makes it go left. If you followed along it's confirmed that you know how to play position; there really is not much more to it.

The shot in the diagram is only one of many shots that would work for the exercise; I like it because it's easy and offers enough distinct cue-ball tracks to illustrate your skill. Set up the shot and place another object ball anywhere past the side pockets. The spot I chose for the second ball is a good one to start with because it offers a lot of possibilities. What you will do is pocket the first object ball and hit the second object ball with the cue ball.

There are several cue-ball tracks in the drawing and you will hit all of them before you are finished. Here is a list of hints for each track. #1 is above center with some right. #2 is high with more right. #3 is below center and maybe a little left.

Choose any track you like and step back to look at the shot. Now take a good look at the second object ball until you feel that the cue ball will go there. Then, forget the whole matter and get with pocketing the ball. Make your stance with focus on the first object ball and shoot it in when you are ready. Work with these steps and observe that the matter of *how* you will make the cue ball hit that second ball begins to vanish as it is replaced by the knowledge that the cue ball will simply go there and hit it. As you learn to choose exactly what you want the cue ball to do and forget about how to make it happen you will begin to trust yourself or, more specifically, trust your shooting hand to carry out the deed. After you experience repeated success with the shots in the diagram

you can set up any shots you like to play them in this manner. When this approach becomes a natural part of your game you will experience a profound breakthrough in your position play so be willing to spend some to make it such.

We use another object ball as a target to focus our attention to a specific place on the table. After working with the exercise and hitting the target ball repeatedly and effortlessly you can apply this method to your playing by choosing a very small spot on the table for the cue ball to land on and simply sending it there. Often the main reason that we cannot get past agonizing over how we will play position is that we have not decided exactly what position we want. It's in the process of choosing "what" that we can shed our concerns for "how." As in anything, when you know exactly what you want, the way to get it usually comes out and occurs on its own. This is the process that great players employ for great position.



