

## Using Obstacles

One of the best ways to end a run out or to create difficulty where none existed before is to allow the cue ball to hit other object balls when playing a shot. It doesn't take a lot to move a ball from a spot where it could be made into one where it can't, to move an object ball into a place where it blocks one that once had a clear path to a pocket or to nudge one ball into another and create a cluster. "Never let the cue ball hit another object ball," is one of pool's most reliable rules of thumb and a top priority among all experienced players. The fastest giveaway for rookies is their apparent lack of regard for a cue ball that moves around the table like a maniac on a bumper-car track.

We all know how important it is to keep the cue ball away from other balls because we've experienced the awful outcomes that usually arrive on the heels of ignoring such an important rule. Sometimes however, a collision with another ball cannot be avoided and we must, in those situations, learn to accept the extra collision and then make a prediction for its outcome to continue the run. I have seen many players study a shot with an unavoidable collision and then try something too heroic, attempting to move the cue ball off its natural path to the second object ball or choose another, much more difficult shot. Either option usually causes a miss by adding too much difficulty.

On those occasions where a collision with a second object ball is unavoidable, the first and most important step is to study the shot to determine exactly how the cue ball is likely to hit the second ball. After making that determination we can then make a decision for what to do to maximize the likelihood of another shot afterwards. In the diagram are two set ups that occur commonly enough to merit some practice. Even though there are a great many possible arrangements that offer a second collision, a little experience with a couple manageable ones, and some practice with using the second collision for position, will help a great deal with any similar set ups that may arise in competition.

Shot A shows an easy shot on the first striped ball but an unavoidable collision with the solid ball near the top rail. Without the obstructing solid ball, position for the second striped ball would be a piece of cake. The cue ball would move to the left, probably with some left-hand english to go two rails toward the foot spot for natural position on the second ball. Because that's what would happen with no obstruction, the shooter in this case is likely to make an attempt to move the cue ball on a similar path, perhaps trying to go through the solid ball with extra speed a lot of left-hand english. That might work but it's very unpredictable. And because the cue ball will rebound toward the right after hitting the solid ball, left english would oppose that movement and probably cause whitey to die on the top rail or thereabouts. The more natural choice for shot A is to use follow with right-hand english, in harmony with the rebound, to move the cue ball two rails out of the corner as shown by the dotted lines. And since that's the natural path it will not require much speed.



Variations of shot B arise more commonly and should not present a serious problem in most cases. Pocketing the solid ball in the upper-left corner and drawing the cue ball back for position on the second solid ball at the bottom of the table would be a very simple shot if the shooter had left a straight angle on the first shot. The cut angle to the left however introduces a rightward slide off the object ball and the inevitable

collision with the striped ball. In this case, because the cue ball will hit the bottom-left part of the striped ball, we can use the obstacle to redirect the cue ball's rightward movement back toward the next shot. If we hit the shot with straight draw, the back spin will take when the cue ball collides with the striped ball to move it backward to the next shot. The striped ball may in fact serve to make this shot easier by almost guaranteeing that the cue ball will stay on the left side of the table.

Shots with second collisions arise in an infinitely large set of arrangements where slight differences in set up can lead to vast differences in result. So, when setting up the two shots in the diagram, take care to adjust the precise positioning of the balls until you can produce the two indicated outcomes with ease and predictability. Learning the exact set ups to repeat these two shots will contribute greatly to your ability to predict the outcomes in many more of the arrangements that you will encounter.

