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The Half-Ball Hit

Because of pool's complexity and the vast number of possibilities there's no way to learn a unique solution for every individual problem we encounter on the table. What we do instead, as we assemble a personal library of shots and techniques, is master a relatively small set of reliable references that we employ when appropriate. And, because we can master a manageable set of references or benchmarks, we're able to shoot confidently when the situation calls for something that we know we know. In other cases where the reference shot itself does not work, we simply make an adjustment to the shot we've mastered.

In Shot A you're playing 8 Ball and shooting stripes with one stripe left and the opponent's 8 up table on the left side rail. Because either offensive shot, the bank cross corner or cross side, is too difficult and therefore likely to sell out the game, you would look for an effective safety that leaves no shot on the 8 ball. Here you would employ a basic yet effective safety principle with a half-ball hit on the stripe. Whenever a rolling cue ball makes perfect, half-ball contact with an object ball, both balls will roll the same distance after contact. So, Shot A calls for a soft, half-ball hit on the stripe to move the balls into the positions that we see with the shaded stripe and the dotted outlined cue ball to block the opponent's shot at the 8 ball. To execute a half-ball hit for Shot A, aim the center of the cue ball at the left edge of the object ball. When the hit is accurate, both balls will move the same distance as shown. When the cue ball moves farther than the object ball the hit is too thin, and when the object ball moves farther, too full.

For Shot B, where the 8 lies up and across the table, you must make an adjustment to the half-ball hit for a good safety. Because you want the cue ball to stay closer to the rail while the object ball moves farther you will hit this one a little more full than half a ball. In other words, you will move your aim point on the stripe in from the edge toward its center. And here is where the half-ball hit works as a strong reference for you. You may not have an exact idea for where to hit the stripe, but you will know in which direction to adjust the shot that you know precisely. With a proper hit and good speed you can execute the safety shown with the shaded stripe and dotted-outlined cue ball. And, although it may appear as a difficult shot, my experience shows that most players acquire a feel for the necessary hit and speed rather quickly.

The half-ball hit can also work effectively when both players are shooting at the same ball. Imagine Shot C where you and your opponent are shooting at the 8 ball, or imagine that shot in 9 Ball where both players are always shooting at the same ball. Here, a half-ball hit on the 8 ball's left side can bank the 8 ball to the top rail while the cue ball moves out the same distance from the side rail to leave a tough shot on the 8 and the possible added difficulty of a long reach for your opponent. Players also use the half-ball technique to bank an object ball from a short rail to the center of a side rail while the cue ball goes to the center of the opposite side rail for an effective safety. Another notable element of the half-ball hit is that a rolling cue ball with no english will move both balls

off the rail at 45 degree angles, a principle that experienced 3-cushion billiard employ to bring reliable simplicity to a broad range of seemingly difficult shots.

When teaching safety play the half-ball hit is always my starting point because it's simple and easy to learn. In the process of learning this one basic principle, players soon develop a sharper awareness for the way that balls react with each other in collisions and a keener ability to send both balls exactly where they want them. And, despite its simplicity, it remains one our deadliest safety tools.



