The Shot of the Year

I think I've mentioned here before that Grady Mathews once taught me a shot that made me turn to him and say, "Now I feel like I've been playing pinball for all those years." Cory Deuel played a longer and more difficult version of it in last year's Mosconi Cup; and *Billiards Digest* called that one the "shot of the year." While watching a pool match on TV last week, I saw Allen Hopkins demonstrate the shot in his Tip of the Day. And two years ago in a Vegas, tournament final, I used the shot to come from behind and win the match. After I hit it, my opponent, with eyes fixed on the crazy cue ball, stood up and muttered, "Holy S- - t."

So, if it's such a cool shot, why has it taken me so long to write about it? Well, it has nothing to do with stinginess or any desire to keep others from knowing it—I'm too much of an incurable showoff for that. No, what has stopped me in the past is that the shot is kind of weird and requires a hit on the cue ball different from anything we do on a pool table. And it's hard to describe. But here goes.

Look at shot A in the diagram with the cue ball and eight ball lined up with a very slight cut to the right required to pocket the eight in the side. Note the nine ball over on the middle of the short rail. How do we pocket the eight ball and move the cue ball over for a good shot on the nine ball? Drawing back will not work and trying to force follow around the table is too difficult with the balls that close and the angle so straight. What we need to do is spin the cue ball to the right directly off of the eight ball.

Throughout our pool experience, for every shot we play, we hit the cue ball from behind. There are some novelty shots that call for shooting over the top of the cue ball for freakish forward spin but they're rare. Even on massé shots with maximum spin, we still hit the back of the cue ball. To pocket the eight ball in the diagram and move the cue ball straight right for a shot on the nine ball we must approach the shot in a new way.
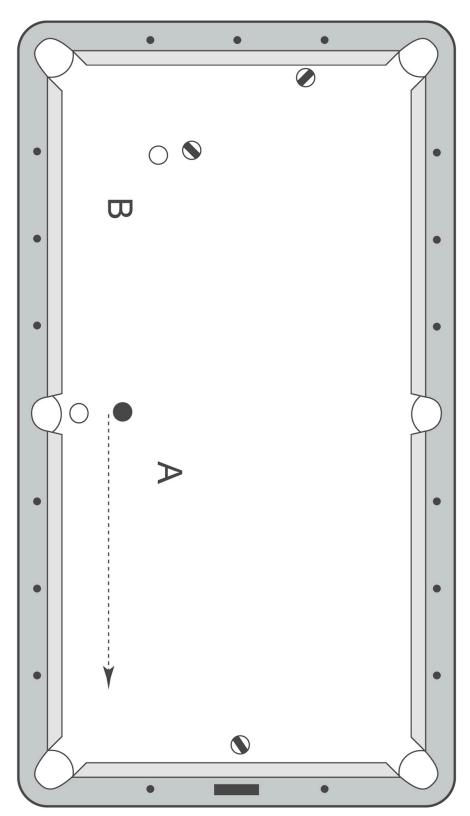
Elevate the stick to almost ninety degrees and shoot straight down on the right side of the cue ball, not the back right, but the right. If you look at the cue ball from directly overhead, the spot that you want to hit is slightly below three o'clock. Hitting the cue ball there will spin it with almost all right and very little, if any, forward spin. It will take a little practice to propel the cue ball straight forward to pocket the eight ball with the sidespin. Interestingly, the spin does not throw the object ball, so practice shooting straight to pocket it. When struck properly, the cue ball will move toward the rail along the dotted line. This shot is best played with a short, sharp stroke and does not require much speed at all. If you're tip is making a loud noise on the slate when you first try it, you're hitting it too hard.

This technique is the only one I know for lateral cue-ball movement from a straight-in shot. It also works in the opposite way to stop lateral movement on a cut shot. Look at shot B in the diagram. Here we have a shot on the striped ball and want to play position for the other striped ball on the rail. Imagine traffic on the table that makes it impossible to go up table and come back down for position. The shot is played the same as the first shot but with left hand spin. Elevate to almost ninety degrees, hit a spot on the cue ball just behind nine o'clock and cut the ball in. If played properly, the cue ball will stay right there as if you hit a stop shot despite the thin cut angle.

Here is a shot that deserves some practice. The opportunities to play it do not come up very often but when they do, it can be the only option to run out. The first time I saw the shot, I thought had been playing enough pool to believe that I had seen just about anything that can be done on the table. And, had I not seen it, I'm sure that I never would have dreamed it up. But that's why we love the game. We'll never see everything or stop learning.

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TOM
ROSS
POOL