

Force Follow with English

“Be careful what you ask for,” people say, “because you just might get it.” Strange advice perhaps since we shouldn’t make requests for things we don’t really want, but sometimes we should take a moment to consider exactly *how* we word those requests. In pool, we devote considerable time to learning position play only to discover that, once in a while, we do it too well. Occasionally, in lingering dreams, I shoot one straight-in shot after another endlessly—or at least until the phone rings. In reality however, sometimes I land too straight on a ball when a cut angle is required for easy position. And completing the rack from such nice position can be difficult.

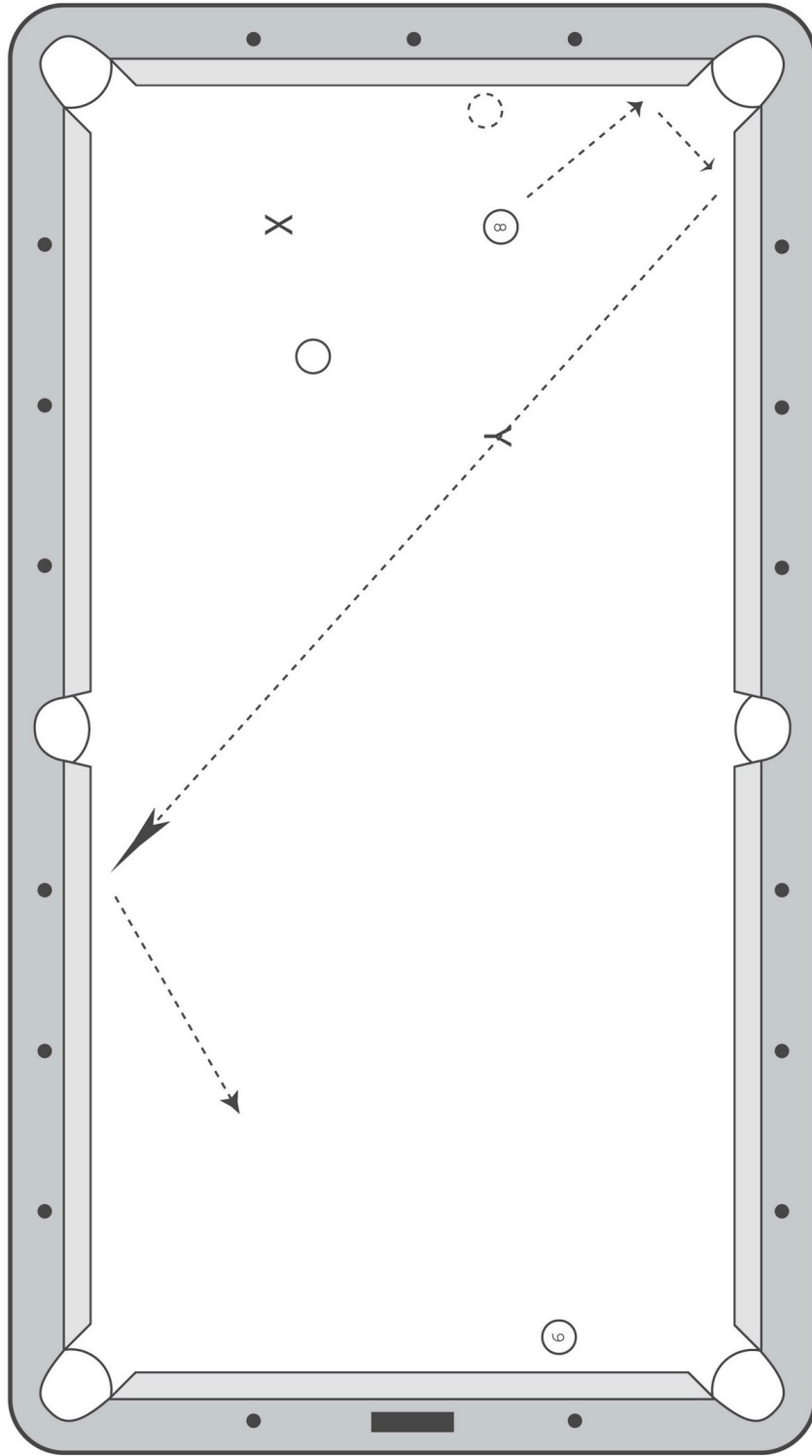
A typical problem that arises from landing so close to straight-in on a shot is shown in the illustration. Ideally, in this situation, the cue ball would have come to rest near the X for easy, one-rail shape through the center of the table to the 9-ball. Instead, the shot has a slight cut angle to the right, which demands force-follow with right-hand english out of the corner to move the cue ball to the other end of the table along the dotted-line path.

Before discussing the shot itself let’s spend a moment to distinguish how we wind up with the kind of position that calls for force-follow with english. Most commonly, when we play well, we begin performing with very little thought, often referred to as “being in the zone.” While in that zone it’s easy to look at the next ball and automatically move the cue ball to great position for it. In a situation like the one diagrammed, it’s very easy to glance at the 8 and, without thinking, send the cue ball into the best spot to pocket it easily. Also, if the shot on the 7 ball lies at the other end of the table, it’s very easy, in that glance at the 8 ball, to misjudge its distance from the short rail. Usually a ball that we view from the other end of the table looks closer to an end rail than it really is. In any case, it’s a good policy to walk down, take a careful look at the next ball and make a definite position choice before shooting the ball that precedes it.

Regardless of how we wind up with shots like the one in the diagram, they will come up, and we must know how to handle them. The most common error on this type of shot is shooting too hard. In order to move the cue ball along the required position track, the shot must be struck with a very long and smooth follow stroke. Adding extra speed makes it difficult to follow the cue ball to hit the short rail close enough to the corner and move it along the dotted-line path. When billiard players coach someone on a shot like this, they typically say, “Keep your tip on the cue ball.” Applying speed to a follow shot invites adding punch, or extra acceleration toward the end of the stroke, which will make the cue ball bounce left off the 8 ball instead of following forward.

To practice the shot, set it up as shown with a slight cut angle to the right on the 8 ball. Place an object ball on the rail where you see the dotted-outlined ball in the diagram and make sure that your cue ball hits the short rail inside that ball. Most important is your stroke, which must be smooth—almost lazy. Now, with a high, right hit on the cue ball, practice spinning it out of the corner, softly at first, perhaps only as far as point Y. Add speed gradually while still following the cue ball forward. If the cue ball hits the ball that you placed on the rail, the extra speed is bringing punch to the stroke. Also, learn to play this shot with maximum right-hand english to move the cue ball to the other end of the table. On some shots that require english, it's often best to use maximum english, which may add more difficulty to the shot. But the trade off is that we can hit the shot with a lot less speed because the spin works to move the cue ball off of the cushions. In other words, as long as the shot requires english, why not load it up so that we don't have to hit it too hard?

It's hard to imagine getting too much of what we want, and for pool players, harder still to imagine too much good position. It will happen occasionally though, and when it does, the force-follow shot with english may be the only technique that will keep a dream from becoming a nightmare.



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