

## Short-Side Position

Pool players who run racks and make the game look easy are the ones who know how to make easy choices that typically incorporate a wider margin for error. Playing the cue ball onto the position line rather than across it, for example, is one way that great players appear to play with consistent, near-perfect speed. As we play attentively and experience more problems to solve, we learn which options yield favorable results most often. One common position challenge that's smart to avoid is playing short-side position for a ball lying on a short rail. However, as with almost everything we encounter in our gorgeously complex game, there are no simple, hard-and-fast rules for every situation. And some players jeopardize their run outs by clinging too steadfastly to the idea of staying away from short-side shape.

In the diagram we see a straightforward, three-ball run out with the 7, 8, and 9. Many players would look at the 9 ball's position in this layout and start running down a mental list of ways to play position for it into its most logical pocket, the corner in the bottom right of the diagram. Almost every experienced player, with ball in hand on the 8 ball, would make the proper choice by placing the cue ball in the vicinity of the X to play position along the dotted-line path.

The problem with the layout as we see it though is the angle on the 7 ball, which is dead, straight in. Getting the cue ball over near the X would require cheating the side pocket to the right in order to move the cue ball leftward. Merely moving in that direction however would not be enough to get the job done. The shooter would have to choose between following to the right, side rail or drawing back to the left, side rail. And since the shot angle is so straight, a cue ball hitting either side rail so close to the side pocket would need some english to move it further left, toward the X and a good angle to play the indicated position. Anything that comes up short of that spot might require a two-rail, force follow out of the corner, or a one-rail path from the top rail, a shot that always invites a scratch and might, given this layout, require some inside english.

All of the above options introduce more complexity and difficulty than many good players are willing to confront. If we look at the 9 ball carefully, we should see that it is only a few inches past the center of the rail and therefore not much more difficult than a ball lying on the center of the bottom rail. Further, we must look at the big picture to make the proper choice here.

Beginning with the 7 ball, the easiest choice is a stop shot, which will leave a natural cut on the 8 ball to move two rails through the center of the table along the solid-line path. Even though that takes us to the short side of the 9 ball, and slightly tougher position, it's by far the correct choice here for a couple of reasons. First, we cinch the 7

ball into the center of a big side pocket with the easy stop shot, something we all know we can do under pressure. Following that we leave a standard position shot on the 8 ball that we know well and use often. If the 9 ball lay a few inches to the left, the experienced player would take ball in hand on the 8 ball very close to the shot I'm describing for the common and reliable solid-line, position path. And that's the primary reason that we must ignore the short-side challenge on this shot. The solid-line is so important and so familiar to experienced players that any B player should have no trouble hitting the shot consistently with that little bit of extra precision required for the 9 ball's position. Even if the 9 were two or three inches closer to the bottom right corner, the solid-line choice would still be best for the same reasons.

Sometimes we face a situation where the easiest, and therefore the best, choice is not immediately evident. In the situation described here we must be able to identify the best chance for success. Even though playing to the short side of the 9 ball may appear difficult, it's far easier than the unfamiliar and complex shot on the 7 ball to put the cue ball into the most desirable position on the 8. In cases that require precision, it's usually best to play for it with the most familiar and comfortable techniques.

