An Extraordinary Shot

Those who've worked in poolrooms know that, regardless of one's position or level of interest in pool, the job comes with inevitable and frequent requests to settle disputes over rules. And although I fantasize sometimes about throwing some of my own rules into the conversation, like the penalty for failing to smile after making a bank shot, I do my best to steer people in the right direction. A common theme in those inquiries involves time and the matter of what happened first as in, "I made one of his but mine went in first." When those conflicts arise I always explain very firmly that, in pool, it never matters which event occurred first as the shot played out. Well, I've found a shot where what happens first is of critical importance—number 57 from Ray Martin's classic work, *The 99 Critical Shots in Pool*.

In the diagram we see three balls set up with the stripe ball frozen to the solid and also frozen to the 8 ball behind it. Look at the solid and striped balls and imagine the line that goes through the centers of both balls, known as the line of centers. Most of us know that when the perpendicular to that line of centers goes through the contact point between two frozen balls and meets a pocket—the dotted line in our diagram—we have a dead kiss on our hands. So, because the stripe and solid satisfy those conditions, the stripe would be a dead kiss into the top, right corner if not for one glaring problem, that 8 ball standing squarely in its way. Incidentally, the solid ball, with nothing in its way, is also a dead kiss into the same corner pocket. For our purpose however, let's assume that we're shooting stripes.

Just about any experienced player who sees this shot would probably also see the dead kiss relationship between the stripe and solid balls. But then, because the 8 ball clearly blocks the stripe's path to the corner pocket, the shooter would have to let go of that dead kiss possibility and search for an alternative. Well, fantastic as it may seem, the striped ball is still a dead kiss into the corner and, depending on where the cue ball is for the shot, will go into the pocket as if the 8 ball weren't there.

Set up the balls as shown with the cue ball in the vicinity of A. Make sure to apply care during the setup, checking that all balls are frozen and that the line perpendicular to the line of centers for the stripe and solid goes to the pocket. Then, with medium speed and a naturally rolling cue ball, hit the stripe where you see the dotted-outlined cue ball in the diagram.
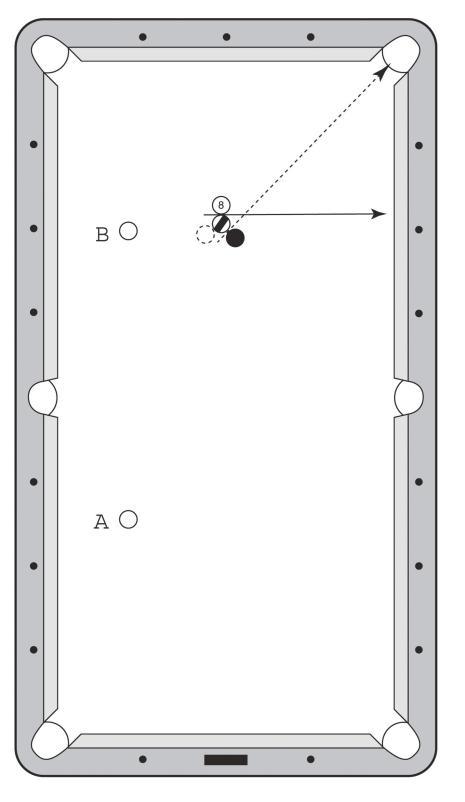
Apparently what happens on this shot is that the force coming from down table moves the 8 ball forward and off of the stripe before the stripe moves to the right for the kiss action off of the solid. Try playing the shot from position B, making contact with the stripe in the same place as before. From that direction, the force pushes the solid forward before moving the stripe to the left for a kiss off of the 8 ball. When shooting from position B, the striped ball moves along the solid line, which is perpendicular to the line of centers for the 8 ball and the stripe.

TOM ROSS POOL

I learned a few more things about this shot while studying some variations. The line of centers for the stripe and 8 does not have to be exactly parallel to the side rail as shown in the diagram. The 8 ball can move around a bit without affecting the shot's outcome. However, the 8 must be frozen to the stripe to get out of its way in time. In fact, the shot can still go if the stripe and solid are separated slightly but will not go unless the stripe and 8 ball are frozen. Also, the shot will not go if there is another ball frozen to the 8 on the same line or close to it. In that case it seems that there's too much weight to move out of the way. Thus far my research is far from exhaustive, and so you may discover additional principles in your own experiments.

Clearly this shot is of greatest use for straight pool. Imagine surrounding the three balls in the diagram with a few more that hold no bearing on the outcome and then making a ball pop magically out of the stack and into the pocket. Despite its great value to straight-pool players, everyone can benefit from spending some time studying this setup and learning this mesmerizing shot.