

Forgoing English

Sometimes, when trying to choose a topic, I will ignore a few that I believe are too elementary for anyone who cares enough about pool to read an instructional column. Recently I asked a weekly visitor to my Thursday-night clinic if there is anything that he would like to see addressed in print; and he raised one of the topics that I have dismissed on those grounds in the past. After discussing it with him, and then watching some players, I realize that the problem he talks about is more prevalent among intermediate shooters than I would have guessed.

When we first learn how to use english (right or left), most of us cannot get enough of it. It's important to shoot too many shots with english at first because, in order to gain the necessary experience with spin, we must use it for thousands of shots under a wide variety of conditions. Commonly, we start experimenting with english before we have any understanding of deflection or throw, not to mention how those phenomena change with different speeds, strokes and various amounts of spin applied. But after shooting, and probably missing, enough shots with english, we eventually become confident enough to use it when we must.

Unfortunately, many players never advance beyond that stage of applying english to every shot in order to learn it. After we learn how to shoot confidently with english, we must then learn when not to use it. Another stage in our advancement is reacquainting ourselves with center ball. The chief idea to understand about applying side spin to the cue ball is that, except in rare, special cases, english is used to change the cue ball's angle of rebound from a rail. For the vast majority of shots, the use of side spin plays no role in the cue ball's path from the object ball. In other words, unless the cue ball will hit a rail, there is no real reason to use english.

Considering how much easier it is to pocket a ball without english, that fact should come as good news to anyone who has never thought about it. Look at shot A in the diagram. Here we have a simple cut shot to pocket the eight ball and move the cue ball, with a little draw, over to the left for position on the nine ball in the side pocket. Many intermediate players, from force of habit, will apply left-hand english to this shot, believing that it helps move the cue ball to the left for position on the next shot. That habit is a leftover from the stage of learning to use english, where many of us become addicted to cutting balls in with outside english—left in this case. If you would look at that shot and, without thinking, shoot it with low-left, you must set it up and practice it with straight draw. After breaking the english habit, shoot the shot a few more times to track the cue ball on the different, dotted-line paths shown in the diagram. You will see how much easier it is to control the various degrees of draw, without english, and make the cue ball “bite” for the exact cue-ball track you want.

In the similar, but longer and tougher, shot B, we see that right-hand english is not only unnecessary, but that using it makes the shot much more difficult. With an almost straight angle on this eight ball we must hit the shot with good speed to stun the cue ball across the table for that nine ball on the top rail. Position for the nine ball is best accomplished with a firm, below-center punch stroke and good follow through. It's a difficult shot that would be made much more difficult by adding english to the mix. Shot B also refutes nicely the false idea that right-hand english helps move the cue ball to the right off of the object ball. The biggest obstacle with the shot is the nearly-straight angle, which makes lateral movement with the cue ball toward the nine more difficult. Since we know that using right-hand english throws an object ball to the left, using it in this case would effectively make the angle straighter and thus move the cue ball a shorter distance to the right with a given speed. If any english would help to move the cue ball to the right on this shot, it would be left since, because of throw, it would allow us to cut that eight ball a little more. But I'm opting for the firm, center-ball hit. Try the shot a few times with and without english to see which is easier.

If we want a complete set of tools for cue-ball control we must have a good, working knowledge of english. Those of you who shy away from using it will have to spend the necessary time practicing with it. Those of you who have been through that stage may have to spend some time practicing without it. Eventually you will know when it is needed and when it is not, the critical bit of knowledge in an english education.



