

## Kicking Safe II

In the final game of this year's WPBA U.S. Open, Karen Corr makes a spectacular shot against Allison Fisher. With the score tied at six apiece in a race to seven, Corr, facing a difficult shot on the 1 ball and even tougher position for the 2, elects to go rail first behind the 1 ball instead of shooting directly at it. That sends it off the side rail while stopping the cue ball to leave the two balls at opposite ends of the table with the 1 hidden behind the 9 ball for the safety shown with shot A in the diagram. The shot is a good choice, especially early in the rack with a table full of potential blockers, and Corr hits it perfectly on this occasion.

Usually a good rule of thumb to follow is not to kick at balls that can be hit directly, something that many inexperienced players attempt too often until they finally realize its stupidity after giving away enough games doing so. However, in certain situations with an available direct hit, the rail-first kick can be the best option. Of course the primary element to look for is a ball that's close enough to the rail to make hitting it a sure thing.

I refer to shots like these as short kicks and will shoot a variety of them across a range of different set ups. Since a ball sitting that close to a rail is so easy to hit, we always have the option of going rail first on shots where, for whatever reason, we opt not to shoot the ball into a pocket. But there's another attractive feature with rail-first hits on balls that lie within about six inches of the cushion. In that area known as the slide zone, a ball that bounces from a cushion at angles between 90 and about 45 degrees will rebound with no spin at all for the first six inches or so regardless of any spin it had going into the cushion. So, whenever we can come in behind an object ball in that zone to hit it full, the sliding cue ball will stop after knocking the object ball away. Angle, speed and the age of the cloth all influence how far a ball will slide after rebounding from a cushion, so experimenting a little with a striped ball is a good idea to observe the principle in action.

Shot A in the diagram comes up frequently in 9 ball and merits some focused practice. Begin with the cue ball close to the object ball to get a feel for the full hit and stopping the cue ball. Then work with speed to leave both balls at opposite ends of the table as shown by the dotted-outlined balls in the diagram. With the full hit and a feel for speed you can move the cue ball farther away to practice the shot from longer distances. When the cue ball gets far enough away from the object ball, half a table length or more, I find myself hitting the shot with a high ball since drawing the cue ball over a longer distance would require too much speed. Another thing I find useful for stopping the cue ball is a little english away from the ball, right-hand spin in the case of shot A. Finally, we can examine the shot from different angles. If the cue ball moved toward the center



of the table on shot A, it would begin to require some left-hand english for the full hit from behind, which demands a dead-on straight hit to stop the cue ball. It's a little more difficult but not impossible.

Now, look at shot B where shooting directly at the solid ball might knock it into the stripe, making the rail-first hit the best option. Beginning with the cue ball in the vicinity of the dotted-outlined cue ball from shot A, practice hitting the solid ball on the side rail and stopping the cue ball right there. For shots this close I tend to use draw and, from the angle described, a little left-hand english or spin away from the ball to make stopping the cue ball easier. After mastering the hit, find the speed that sends the solid ball twice across the table and back to the same side rail for a tough safety behind the striped ball. As with shot A, practice this one from different angles to learn the stop hit, and try different speeds to vary the solid ball's destination.

Although we rarely want to kick at a ball that we can hit directly, in situations like the two shots in the diagram it can be the best choice. And, even though Karen Corr plays her shot perfectly in every way—hit, speed and outcome—Allison Fisher answers with one of the three best pool shots that I've ever seen in competition. Since the match in question is televised throughout the first half of this month, I won't spoil the ending by giving it away. Check the ESPN listings for this must-see pool match and two incredible shots.

