

# Professional Speed Control

At the conclusion of last month's column on speed control I mentioned briefly the importance of choosing an angle for the next shot to proceed from there to the following shot with manageable speed. That tidbit should not stand as something merely mentioned but begs for embellishment since many shots are missed because they force us to play outside the boundaries of controllable speed.

When you watch a professional playing great pool, note how slight the variation in speed is for most shots as that player cleans up rack after rack. The reason is that he is paying close attention to the angle that he leaves for each shot in his position play. Each different game places its own, unique position demands on the player who is working to run a rack. Nine ball, for example, often requires the player to move the cue ball long distances to get to the next shot, while a game with shot selection, such as eight ball or straight pool, typically offers sequences of balls that are grouped close together. An experienced player will employ different position strategies for most shots in the different games leaving thinner cuts when he wants to move the cue ball without excessive speed and straighter angles when he wants to keep the cue ball close without bunting it.

I want to offer two exercises that will help you learn to identify the angles that you need to play position with speeds in the range of control. First, find lag speed for the table on which you are playing. To find lag speed place the cue ball one and a half diamonds from the bottom rail in the center of the table. Now shoot it straight up to the top rail to come back and hit the bottom rail with enough speed to return to the spot from which you shot it. This is a comfortable shooting speed and a very solid reference.

For shot A place the object ball on the second diamond about a half-inch from the rail. Now, experiment with various angles until you find the spot for the cue ball from where you can pocket the ball with lag speed and move the cue ball one time across the table to hit the opposite side rail and rebound between a half-diamond and a full-diamond space to point Y. That angle should be near spot 1. Now find the angle from which lag speed works to pocket the ball and move the cue ball twice across the table to return and hit the first rail with the same half-to-full-diamond rebound; that should be somewhere around spot 2. Then find the angle from which lag speed with a punch stroke works to pocket the ball and move the cue ball away from the rail between a half-diamond and a full-diamond space; that spot should be near 3. Set up each shot now and practice it with another ball in a place where you can play lag-speed position for it. You can progress further with the exercise by choosing other places for the cue ball to land and finding the angles that work to get to those places with lag speed.

In shot B you will play the cue ball to the same place from various angles by altering your speed. Set up the shot as shown, marking the object ball about a half-inch from the rail and marking the five spots from where you will shoot. You can mark the target, X, by placing a sticky note there. Begin the exercise with the cue ball on the center spot in your group of five; pocket the object ball and roll the cue ball to the target. Repeat the shot until you are stopping the cue ball on the target consistently. Now do the same from the two spots adjacent to the center spot. Although the slight changes in angle for the first three shots will require noticeable adjustments in speed, success on all three should come rather easily. Move the cue ball now to the spot closest to the rail and play the shot. You will find that from this almost-straight angle the shot requires considerable power, a strong, center-ball punch, to move the cue ball the short distance to the target. Is it easy for you to hit the target consistently from there? Move the cue ball now to the fifth spot and play the shot. From here the shot requires an extremely soft hit to keep the cue ball from passing the target. Is that soft hit easy to control?

The last two shots in the second exercise illustrate the control problems that accompany shots played near the upper and lower limits of speed. Imagine the power shot four feet from the pocket on a tight table. Does that sound like an invitation to a miss? Now imagine the bunt shot from a few feet farther away on a strange table with dirty balls. Many great players would not attempt it fearing a bad roll or a skid. In either case however, it's possible to find yourself with no other options after leaving the cue ball in such a difficult position.

As you learn the angles that move the cue ball to your desired position with comfortable speed you will begin to see them in your play. Seeing them immediately or without looking closely for them can only come from years of experience. Although the professional may not appear to check each shot carefully to find the angle he wants for the next ball, he still identifies it for every shot. If you must look carefully at the next ball to find the angle you want for it, take the time to do that before shooting. Then look for rapid improvement in your game as you begin performing in the context of playing position to shoot with manageable speed.

