

# Shooting With Elevation

The first big challenge for most players, once they decide that they want to play well, is shooting with a level cue. Despite the hundreds of times that I have encountered it, I have no explanation for the natural impulse to raise the butt of the cue for every shot. Perhaps that back hand goes up to ensure that the stick does not touch the rail. Of course a 1/8-inch clearance handles the job as effectively as a five-inch one, but maybe such fine-tuning is difficult to manage in the early stages. Most accomplished players can remember learning the importance of shooting with a level cue and maybe some effort to manage the task naturally and comfortably.

Soon after we achieve a natural, level stroke and begin to enjoy the benefits—more accurate shot-making and more precise cue-ball control—we learn to appreciate the difficulty of shooting jacked-up. It does not take long to realize that once we have that shooting hand down where it belongs, we want to keep it there for every shot. It's impossible to imagine someone, no matter how good, approaching a shot that requires elevation without some concern. Each added degree of elevation adds more difficulty to every aspect of a controlled pool shot. But, as much as we may dislike it, some shots call for an elevated cue and we want to greet those shots with some confidence.

When we face a shot that requires elevation, because the cue ball is either near the rail or behind an object ball, we must first examine the shot. Typically we have to accept some limitations since, when we are forced to elevate, our options diminish. The top priority on any offensive pool shot is to keep the table and it helps to remember that fact when shooting with elevation. Sometimes the most desirable position for the next ball is too difficult to achieve with elevation. A good way to examine that question is to ask how easy good position would be with a level cue. Unless the answer is “very” it will be a good idea to shift all priority to pocketing the ball and dealing with more difficult position for the next shot with the cue ball in the clear. Even if the next shot will be a safety, something that usually requires precise control, that shot will be easier to accomplish with a level cue.

A great rule of thumb on all shots, and a must for shooting with elevation, is that difficult shots become much easier with a short stroke. The most common pitfall among intermediate players when shooting with elevation is attempting to shoot with a long stroke. Set up some easy, straight-in shots with the cue ball about two inches from the rail and the object ball about two feet away to practice a few stop shots. The lower hit required for the stop shot will require you to elevate the back of your cue. You should see immediately how much easier the shot is with a short bridge and a two-inch stroke with a short follow through. A long stroke is more difficult to manage and keep straight with any shot; it becomes nearly impossible with elevation. Another thing that works to make the shot easier is to elevate a few more degrees for a lower hit on the cue ball.

The extra elevation may add some difficulty with aiming but that is offset by the benefit of shooting with less speed and thus more control. Keep working on the shot until you are hitting perfect, soft stop shots with a short punch stroke. For greater accuracy, practice using your standard, closed bridge, propped up on the fingertips if necessary. Using a closed bridge instead of an open one helps to keep the tip moving straight at the cue ball instead of tracing an arc that moves it upward as the back hand starts to drop on the forward stroke.

Dropping the back hand as it comes through is a natural tendency for most shooters and, if you are missing shots with elevation, that is the likely cause. When a right-handed shooter drops the back hand, the cue ball usually goes to the right of where he aimed it, causing the object ball to miss left of the pocket. Keep practicing the shot above with increasing speed to see if your back hand is dropping. As you add speed you may have to focus on keeping that hand up while the tip moves through the cue ball. On a well-hit shot, the cue tip will follow through to the cloth, instead of moving upward at the end of the stroke.

When you want to shoot a draw shot with elevation remember that speed will make the cue ball jump. So, as with the stop shot, it works much better to elevate higher for a lower hit on the cue ball and play the shot with less speed. You may be amazed by how low you can hit the cue ball without miscuing when the shooting hand stays up. Practice the draw shot with a low hit and the same short punch that works for the stop shot. Because extra speed makes the cue ball jump, we have to practice going low with a rapidly-accelerating, short stroke. Observe that the short stroke combined with a shooting hand that stays up on the follow through works better to keep the cue ball on the table. Adding right or left-hand english to a shot with elevation makes the cue ball curve and the shot becomes so difficult that we won't even discuss it here.

Even the best players have a strong distaste for shots that require an elevated cue. But it's a necessary evil and a skill that requires some practice to learn. Most great players devote a segment of their regular practice to shooting jacked-up shots in order to keep their skills sharp and their confidence high for when these shots come up in matches. As with any difficult shot we do our best to avoid it but work hard to be ready for it.

