

## More Two-Rail Position

Last month we looked at a couple of position shots and discussed the value of two-rail shape for the next ball over choosing one-rail position to get there. In that discussion we uncovered some exceptions to a widely established rule which espouses the value of simplicity in our choices and discovered that sometimes the more complex choice works better. This month we have another example of the same principle, again illustrating that breaking the simplicity rule can work to serve up more accurate position play.

When we watch professionals, the one aspect of their play that tends to stand out most sharply is the accuracy of their cue-ball control and position play. And sometimes it seems that they're hitting every shot with perfect or near-perfect speed. Though they can and often do play with surgical precision, one reason that pros appear to possess such keen speed control is that they know how to make choices that will accommodate speed errors while still yielding the desired angle for the next shot. Often, the path for the required position angle on the next ball, regardless of precision with speed, is found using two rails.

In the diagram we have a shot on the 7 ball with the 8 and 9 at the other end of the table. Note that there are two 9 balls on the table, one that goes into corner pocket A and one that goes into corner pocket B. We shall examine position on the 8 ball for both shots and the most reliable way to get the position we need. Let's begin with the run out that ends with the 9 ball going into corner pocket A.

Before shooting the 7 ball, a careful player would look at the 8 to determine the best angle for that shot to move from there to good position for the 9 ball. In this case landing straight in on the 8 ball would work out fine since a soft follow shot would roll the cue ball forward toward the left side of the table for an easy shot on the 9 ball. That position track for the 8 ball is shown by the dotted line path along the right, side rail. Note that if the shot is hit well, the angle for the shot on the 8 ball is perfect from the time the cue ball rebounds off of the second rail and rolls toward the 8 ball on the desired position track. The shooter has a three-foot margin for error with speed if he hits the second rail in the proper spot. The shot is played with a near center-ball hit, a touch of right-hand english and a moderate punch stroke to move the cue ball to the right off of the 7 ball. If the shooter misses the straight-in track, he should err on the side of the line toward the right side rail where the angle will leave a slight cut to the left, allowing for a follow shot to the left side rail and a bounce from there toward the 9 ball.

If we have the layout with the 9 ball that goes into corner pocket B, the required position requires only a slight adjustment. For that shot we want the cue ball to come out of the corner a little shorter to move along the solid-line path for a cut angle that moves the cue ball off of the 8 ball and toward the right side rail. In order to make the cue ball wrap out of that corner closer to the pocket, the shot requires a lower hit, or a snappier punch stroke, or a little bit of both. Note again that the cut angle which moves the cue ball toward the right side rail off of the 8 ball is there from the time the cue ball hits the second rail, again giving the shooter a margin for speed error of at least three feet, a range that should be comfortable for a player at virtually any skill level.

Set up the balls as they are in the diagram and practice both shots. You will see that the difference between the two hits is slight, yet distinct enough to feel and remember. In both cases your target is the spot that you want to hit on the second rail. Study the shot until you know the two exact spots to hit on the second rail and then make a conscious and deliberate choice for the target on the second rail that corresponds to the shot you're playing. It should not take long to develop the necessary feel for both shots. After nailing down the two-rail position tracks, try each shot with one-rail position from the top short rail to see which is easier for the run out. Going one rail for either shot you will find that, since the cue ball crosses the desired position track, your speed must be nearly perfect to stop in the exact spot for the desired angle. And then, like the pros, you will see the value in choices that allow for variations in speed while reliably serving up ideal position.

