

A Sophisticated Long Safe

Mark Margaretten, *Inside Pool's* famous columnist and international playboy, was ranting recently about safety play and objecting loudly to any player who might hook an opponent in a social game. After he finally shut up and the veins in his neck returned to normal, he asked me what I think about safety. I explained that safety deserves a lot of the credit for pool's superiority over games like bowling or darts where players must stand by helplessly and watch their opponents with no hope of stopping them. Danny McGoorty, the legendary pool hustler and billiards champion, said that he tried golf once but didn't see the point since he couldn't snooker his opponent. Pool dwells at the pinnacle of the leisure sports and safety is the opposable thumb that put it there.

Because of the great variety of safety shots and the fact we often must apply some imagination to create new ones on the spot, it would be impossible to assemble a complete catalog. But there are types or categories of safeties that we see often enough to deserve our attention and practice. In December we studied a somewhat tricky safety shot that Karen Corr played against Allison Fisher in the U.S. Open final. Here we shall look at a setup that appears almost identical but demands an entirely different approach.

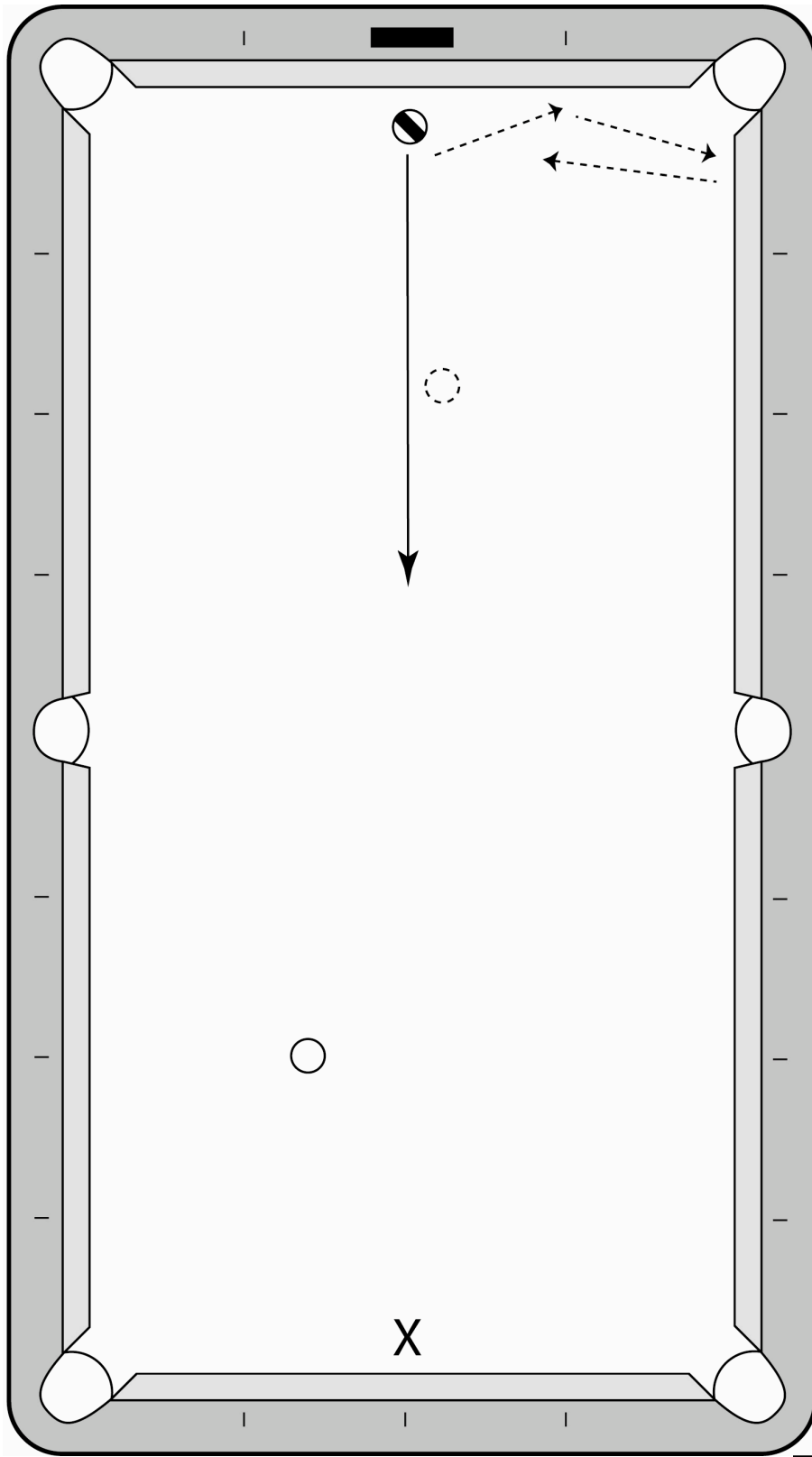
In the diagram we have no good shot on the striped ball and will therefore want to play safe. Back in December we examined a very similar setup with one important difference; the object ball was several inches farther from the rail, which allowed for shooting the cue ball into the cushion and hitting that ball from behind to send it down table. In addition, the cue ball stopped dead upon contact because the object ball sat in what's known as the slide zone. Here however, since there's no room to shoot the cue ball behind the object ball, we must use a different technique.

The safety that this layout calls for is one that I consider somewhat sophisticated, because of the precise demands it places on the shooter and for the fact that I had played competitive pool for some time before learning it. Another notable feature is that, unlike the kick safety from December which requires an object ball in the slide zone, variations of this month's shot can be executed with the object ball lying over a broad range of distances from the rail. For any setup, the shot I'm describing is one where we shoot directly at the object ball to bank it straight through the center of the table, along the solid line, to the X at the other end while keeping the cue ball near the top rail. For the shot in the diagram the shooter would use high, inside english—left in this case—to move the cue ball on the path described with the dotted lines.

Sometimes the object ball lies farther from the top rail, like the dotted outlined ball in the diagram. In that case we still want to bank it off the top rail along the same path through the center to leave it near the X. The major difference with the second shot is that, since the cue ball will hit the side rail first, the shooter must use high, right-hand english this time to help kill the cue ball and keep it up court. In either case it's critical to get the object ball close to the bottom rail, near its center while keeping the cue ball at the other end near the top rail.

These safeties are demanding and will require some practice to feel confident with them. Naturally they require very precise speed to get the object ball close enough to the bottom rail. Also, you must be able to bank the ball on that track through the table's center instead of shooting it wide and toward one of the lower corner pockets. Generally, the shot is only viable when the angle allows for crossing the object ball with the cue ball. In the diagram, we cross the object ball by cutting it slightly back to the left with a cue ball that lay to the left of the object ball. Crossing the ball in that fashion works to put a some right-hand english on the object ball to help hold it on a straight path down table.

In my conversation with Mark I tried to explain that a committed player always takes the best shot, regardless of the situation. In casual play we must play the same way that we would in a tournament match in order to prepare ourselves for more serious confrontations. Then he sprung his trap and asked me if I play safeties against my girlfriend when we shoot together. Of course I do not since I hate being lonely. I am however sometimes referred to as the guy who would hook his own mother. But I know that mom would never want me to play the wrong shot.



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