

Precise Maximum Stun

One of pool's consistent challenges arises whenever we find ourselves too straight on a shot that calls for lateral cue-ball travel to get to the next ball. And shots of this type will always remain challenging since there's no secret or piece of knowledge that unlocks the solution. The answer never changes and the difficulty never goes away. The main problem springs from the fact these shots require excessive speed, which always makes the pocket smaller and the margin for error narrower.

In the diagram we see the more difficult companion to last month's stun-follow shot. Here we must pocket the striped ball on the top left rail and move the cue ball far enough away from that rail to yield a good shot on the next stripe. Looking at the shot we might wish for a cue ball in the vicinity of the dotted-outlined ball to cut that stripe into the top left corner and move comfortably across the table for the next ball. Unfortunately we're stuck with the position we see and a considerably more difficult run out.

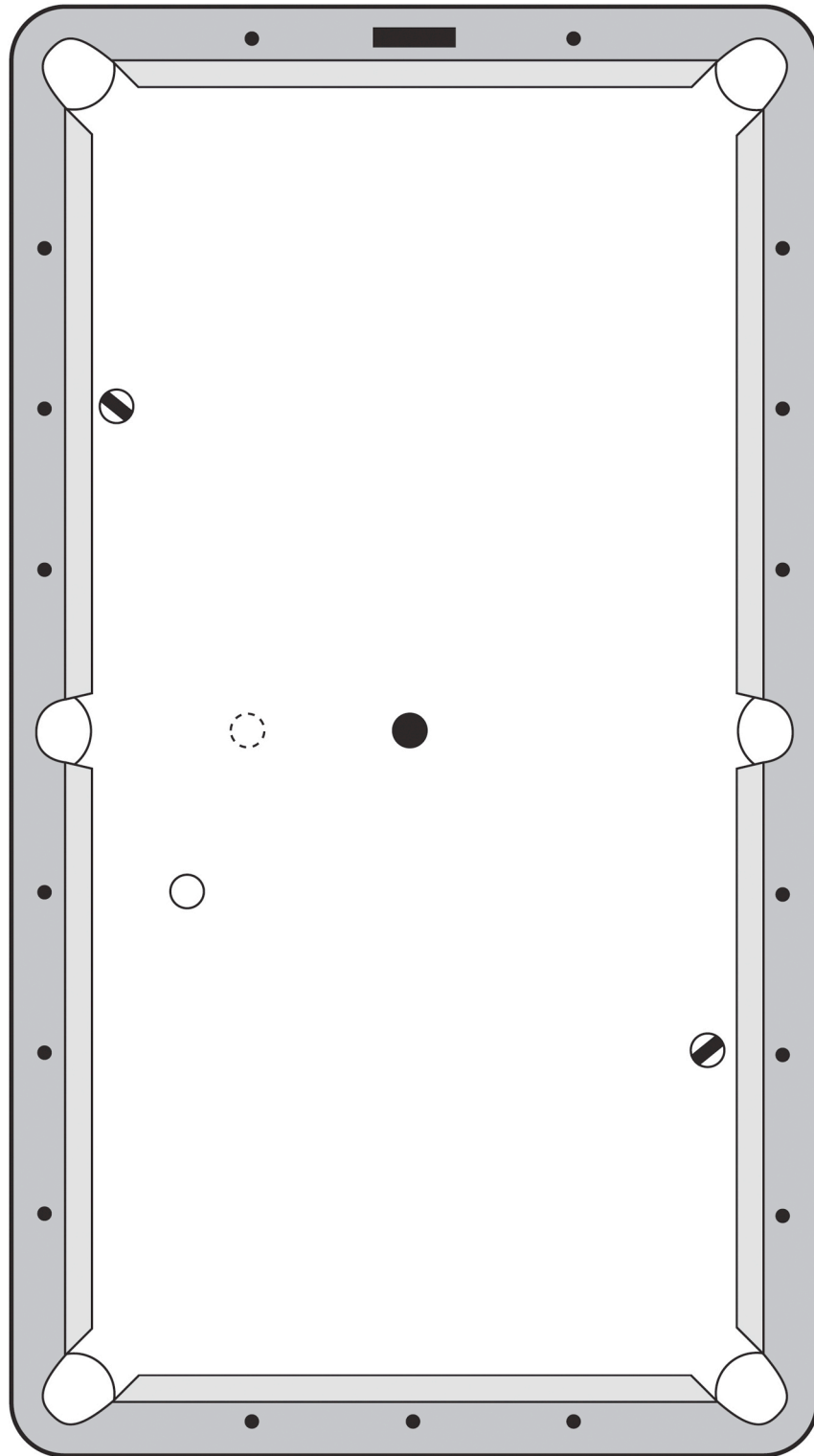
Set up the shot with the balls as shown making sure to place the first stripe near, but not frozen to, the cushion, about a quarter inch or so away from it. Place the cue ball two ball widths away from the cushion and three diamond segments from the object ball. The angle looks a little friendlier in the diagram than it will when you first see it on a 9-foot table. Your goal with this shot is to pocket the stripe and stun the cue ball far enough away from the side rail to leave a good shot on the next striped ball. Ideally the cue ball will leave the side cushion on a track perpendicular to it since any forward movement makes the next shot longer while any draw on the cue ball will make the obstructing 8 ball bigger. On most shots precise tip placement plays a secondary role to stroke in determining where the cue ball goes. This one's a little different however, and you will see how sensitive the cue ball is to slight changes in tip placement near its center at high speeds.

The shot requires a very firm stroke and absolute precision, especially on a table that's even a little tight. While the shot is never easy I have discovered an approach that makes it a bit less difficult. Even though conventional wisdom teaches us that a shorter bridge delivers better accuracy, and I agree—usually, this particular shot becomes a little easier with a longer bridge. With a normal bridge length of say six to nine inches, the necessary speed for position on this shot inspires us to hit it too forcefully to remain accurate. It turns out that lengthening the bridge two or three inches offers better control. It's the same technique I use for breaking and it works because the accelerating tip will reach the necessary speed over the longer stroke length at a more comfortable level of force. Back your bridge away from the cue ball to about 12 inches and apply a long, firm, center-ball punch stroke with long follow through. Though it should go without saying, make sure that your ferrule reaches your bridge hand on the final backstroke. Otherwise the longer bridge is pointless. Begin with manageable speed and increase it gradually, while maintaining accuracy and control, until you are stunning the cue ball out past the 8

for the next shot. As with most shots, we must eliminate trying in order to deliver the relaxed and controlled stroke we seek.

When the shot feels comfortable as diagrammed you can move the cue ball another half-ball width closer to the side cushion and shoot it from there. Then move it another half-ball width closer to a mere ball width from the cushion, which, depending on the table, is about the limit for success with this shot. An easier alternative for the layout we see is playing the shot with follow and right-hand english to move the cue ball forward and then toward the second stripe off of the top rail. It's not the technique under discussion, but as long as you're looking at this set up, you may as well explore other available options. It's wise to become comfortable with both techniques since you will confront many situations where only one is viable.

One might think of this shot as a big brother to last month's stun follow shot, only appreciably more difficult. So, if it's causing trouble, as it commonly does, especially on a tight table, you may want to revisit with the shorter, easier version from January to get a feel for stunning the cue ball with maximum speed. The one we see here can be discouraging at first but stay with it. The payoff for practicing this shot until it feels comfortable is razor-sharp precision in your stroke at normal speeds.



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