

Spot on the Wall

About two months ago my heart was broken. It happened when a friend and I wanted to shoot a little pool *and* eat some of the best Thai food in town, the perfect combo in my opinion and one that a person could enjoy in what was probably the only place in the U.S. with a nine-foot table and authentic Panang Curry. That place was China Doll and for those who don't know what I'm talking about, I'm sorry—almost as sorry as I was when I saw the sign on the door informing us that the business had closed. China Doll was more than a place to eat and shoot pool but was a unique environment which, despite its rough exterior, was as warm and welcoming as its owners, Rosie and Don Posri, who, until they find a new location, will be sadly missed throughout the Denver pool community.

That's the bad news. The good news is that I ran into Rosie and Don a few weeks later and learned that Don is now teaching pool. So I'd like to welcome him to the world of billiards education and share some of his superior knowledge with everyone. Although Don knows the game from top to bottom, his particular area of expertise lies in the art of kicking, specifically the employment of "spot-on-the-wall" systems to make kick shots from one to five rails simpler and more accurate at the same time. Don recently wrote a detailed book on the topic called, *Time Out For Billiards*, and has graciously allowed me to use it for this column.

To summarize, "spot-on-the-wall" systems can be used for all types of kick shots and are based on the mathematical premise that, for any type of kick shot, all lines that will pocket the ball converge at one point. The trick therefore is to find that point with a reference track and then match it up to something that we can use as an aiming point for any shot of the same type, regardless of the cue ball's origin. In order to simplify the learning I am including an illustration from the book for a basic, one-rail kick shot without english.

For the one-rail kick in the diagram, Don shows the reference track with the thick, black line that goes from the side pocket, through the center diamond on the opposite long rail and out to the point illustrated with the "time out" flag. In a poolroom, where we typically find a conspicuous absence of flags, we must look for other marks on the walls or furniture surrounding the tables. Generally it's not a good idea to choose a feature that's permanently attached to a person such as a kneecap or a nostril unless there is nothing else around and that person is extraordinarily sedentary. A sedentary person by poolroom standards might be someone who hasn't left his chair since the Nixon administration.

Once we have a reference track established and a spot along that line extended beyond the table, we can move the cue ball around the table and pocket the kick shot by aiming at the spot out on the reference track. The main features of “spot-on-the-wall” systems are their simplicity, their consistency and the elimination of calculations. One might assume that with simplicity we might have to accept less accuracy as a tradeoff, but in this case that is not true. In fact, “spot-on-the-wall” systems can offer greater accuracy since they give us a precise and small target on the first rail, while most calculating systems rely on large, fractional segments to make the calculations easier. There are two things to remember about these systems. One, always shoot the cue ball to find the reference track. Often a table does not play with the same sort of symmetry that we like to use in illustrations. Two, one must learn exactly how far the spot should be from the table for a specific kick shot. All lines will converge at a point whose distance changes with the number of rails. For simple, one-rail kicks, the spot will be exactly one table width out for a shot like the one in the diagram or one table length out for a one-rail kick that goes off the short rail. In the absence of that precise knowledge we can achieve good results by placing the spot about 8-12 feet past the table.

Although we’re looking at a simple, one-rail shot in the diagram, the same principles apply to multiple rail kicks. To experiment, find a reference track for a two or three rail kick shot and find a spot on that track beyond the table. Then move the cue ball to various places and repeat the same kick shot by aiming at the spot with the same stroke that worked on the reference track. While I am giving a very simple presentation here, “spot-on-the-wall” systems go rather deep and are used by top players everywhere for their reliability and mathematical consistency. Fortunately, Don Posri will be with us on May 15 as Dr. Cue’s guest to give a full presentation of his systems at the Kicking and Banking Workshop at Shakespeare’s on that day. Don’t miss the opportunity to learn these essential skills from two of the game’s great instructors.

