

# Reach

Players who seek improvement never run out of things to work on toward the goal of playing the best possible pool. Yet most of us are prone to overlook a few critical shots in favor of practicing more commonly required skills that we know we need to win. For example, how many of us have spent a day studying balls that are hanging in the pocket to master the various, tricky position challenges that they can present? We don't practice those shots even though we know that certain kinds of "hangers" come up occasionally in competition and stump us. Another good example is the matter of reach and learning to identify exactly what lies in our range of comfort.

A few weeks ago one of my Thursday-night regulars raised the question of reach during the clinic and we examined it carefully. I admitted that I had not given the issue much thought even though I occasionally play position that looks good until I find that I cannot reach the cue ball to shoot the next shot comfortably. Last fall, while playing in a Scotch-Doubles tournament with Megan Minerich from the WPBA tour as my partner, the importance of the reach factor really hit home for me. Megan's a lefty and several times in our first few racks I left her with position that forced her to use the bridge on shots where I left the cue ball in my range but out of hers. Eventually I caught on but had to remember on many shots that my partner was a southpaw.

It's easy to imagine players that normally shoot on bar tables running into reach problems when they compete on nine-foot tables for the first few times. But even experienced, big-table shooters may not possess a complete knowledge of their range. Regardless of the equipment we typically use, it's a good idea to spend some time determining precisely what we can and cannot reach on a pool table.

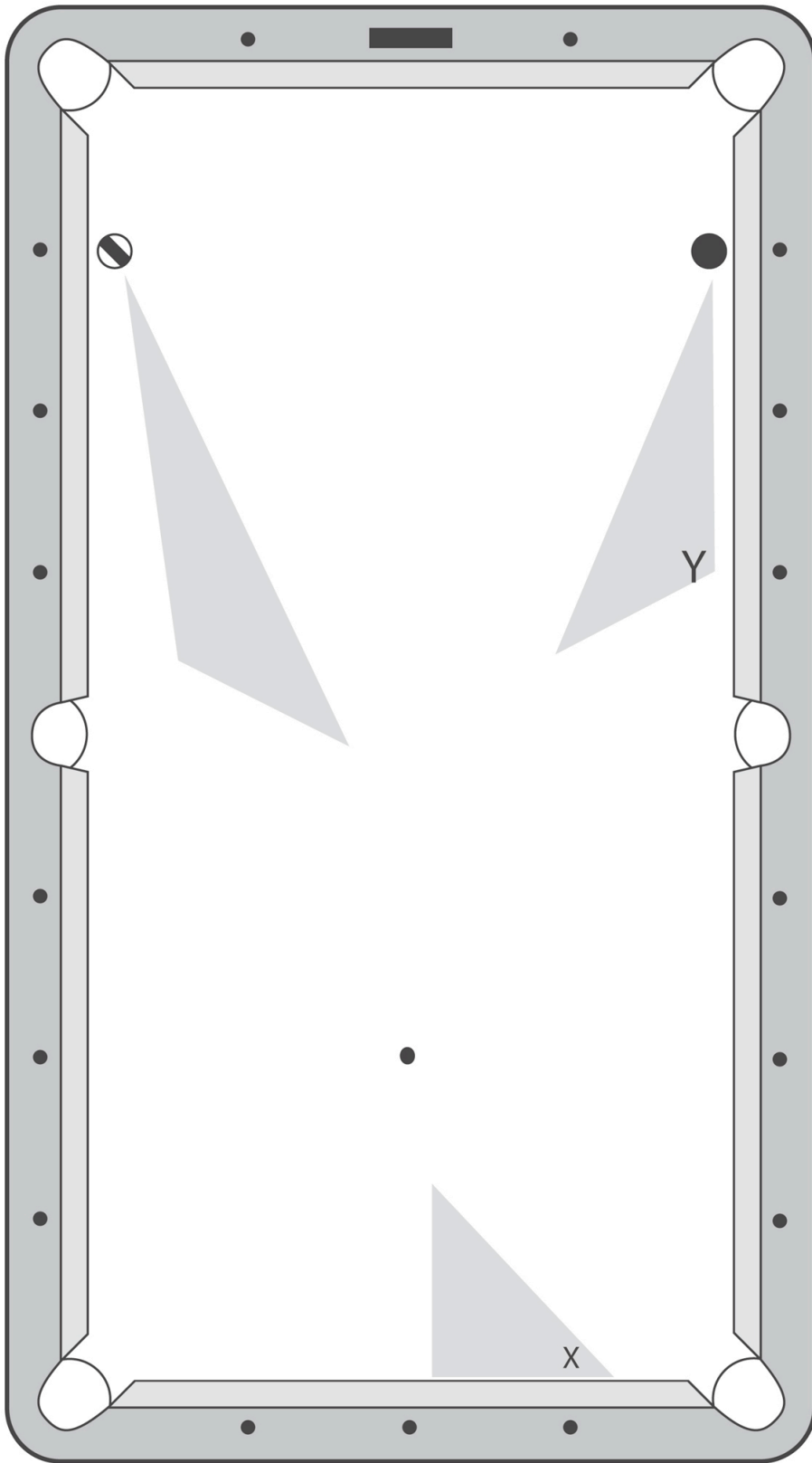
The first step is to determine how far along the table you can stretch. I know that my limit on a nine-foot table is a cue ball that's one diamond past the side pocket when I am shooting parallel to the long rail. When I'm shooting out of a corner along the table's diagonal, the center of the table is my limit. At the top of the diagram we have two balls, the stripe and the solid, on opposite rails in places where they can easily challenge our reach. Looking at them from a right-hander's standpoint we can locate the places on the table that we cannot reach.

For the solid ball, since I know that I cannot reach past the Y, I would play to leave the cue ball near the side pocket for any shots where I want a straight, or close-to-straight, angle; it's a longer shot but preferable to using the bridge or shooting left handed. I want to keep the cue ball out of the shaded area for this shot. If I need to cut that solid ball for position on the ball that comes after it, anything to the left of the shaded area is easy to get to from the other side of the table.

The striped ball can be somewhat tricky. Right-handed players prefer balls on the left, side rail because straight shots there are handled easily with close position. But we must be very careful on these when we need position to cut that ball at certain angles. For example, playing for a good angle to draw the cue ball diagonally to the lower-right corner on the bottom rail could leave the cue ball out of reach. For me, anything in the shaded area would present some real problems. It's beyond my reach from the bottom of the table and may be too far from the left, side rail to shoot by stretching over that rail to my right. For shots where you must stretch out over a side rail to shoot at balls near that rail, the rule of thumb is that you cannot shoot accurately on a line beyond the position of your right shoulder.

B, in the bottom of the diagram, presents another class of shots that can challenge our reach. Again from the right-hander's viewpoint, object balls anywhere in the dotted area can present some stance challenges any time the cue ball is out toward the middle of the table. To find your limits in this area start by placing the cue ball on the foot spot and an object ball on the X. Can you reach that shot? Now move both balls around in this area and note the limits of your reach for every different shot. If you know where your limit is for each shot in this area you will remember to leave your cue ball on the close side of that limit when playing position. Finally, with the cue ball at the limit of your reach on one of these shots, place another object ball in front of the cue ball and note how shooting with elevation can change the limit of your reach.

Most of us probably have a good idea of how far we can reach but may lack an exact knowledge for the entire table. As we move up through higher levels of competition we learn, often bitterly, that every shot matters. Here is where we begin to refine our control over every variable on the pool table. Sometimes a routine run-out is stopped short when we play position for a ball that forces an awkward stroke and makes position for the next shot too difficult if not impossible. While we all desire to move up the competitive ladder we must remember that, at each higher rung, we will get fewer opportunities to perform. A short session to map out the table for various shots will hone your ability to keep the cue ball, and your goals, within reach.



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