

# Banking Safe

Throughout the progression of a player's improvement perhaps the biggest changes occur in relation to the choices that person makes. As a player moves from the stage of pushing colored balls around to the realm of real pool, he learns that he may not get a dozen chances to finish a game of eight ball because his new world is filled with players who can run out. Not everyone I know is a tournament contender and sometimes I want be there with a card and gift on the day when someone finally grasps the idea that the player with more balls on the table has the clear advantage in a game of eight ball. Eventually however, everyone learns that each shot comes with consequences in the event of a miss.

One strong indicator of a player's experience is the number of bank shots that person will attempt. After a few hundred misses most players begin to appreciate the difficulty of bank shots but may yet remain ignorant to the tactical implications that accompany every shot. Top players do not shoot at many bank shots, mostly because of their position play and ability to avoid leaving difficult shots for themselves. And when faced with all but the easiest bank shots, seasoned players begin looking for a safety to gain the tactical edge that's likely to slip away in a careless attempt at a difficult shot. On the other hand, we frequently find ourselves in situations where we can shoot the bank and satisfy any strategic considerations in case of a miss.

In the diagram we see a common set up with a cross-corner bank on the eight ball and the nine ball down at the other end of the table. Let's examine all of the possibilities for this shot when it comes up in either game, nine ball or eight ball.

If the game is nine ball the best choice is to shoot the cross-corner bank on the eight ball. When we cut that eight ball to the left, toward the desired corner pocket, the cue ball rolls to the right for natural position on the nine ball and the game winner. But we must play this shot a certain way. Because even the easiest bank shots are difficult, we cannot ignore the possibility of missing. The correct play here is to play the shot a little short of the pocket, along the dotted line, toward the X with controlled speed. The proper speed is that which sends the eight ball one and a half times across the table to the spot marked Y in the center of the short rail. In reality, the shot is a safety with one-and-a-half-times-across-the-table speed. Occasionally however we cut that ball a little thin or apply an extra touch of outside english and pocket the eight. The two game losers, when the shot is missed, are playing the shot with pocket speed, which leaves the eight hanging, or banking the eight ball wide to the short rail and out toward the center of the table.

If the nine ball lay at the same end of the table, shown by the dotted-outlined ball, the only option is a safety because pocketing the cross-corner bank would leave no shot on the nine ball, a distinct disadvantage to the shooter. The best safety option would be a soft, thin cut to send the eight ball directly to the Y, with a lot of outside english on the cue ball to move it all the way to the opposite short rail.

When this shot comes up in eight ball, the best choices reverse themselves. With the nine ball, your opponent's last stripe, at the other end of the table, playing the eight ball across corner would be worse than stupid since the cue ball would move to the right and serve up an easy shot on the nine ball in the event of a miss. In that scenario the best shot would be a very soft hit on the left side of the eight ball to leave it between the cue ball and the nine ball and a difficult kick for your opponent. If your opponent's last stripe is the dotted-outlined nine ball, then play the bank shot. Play it with pocket speed to leave it hanging if you miss and be sure to use enough right-hand english to move the cue ball all the way to the opposite short rail. A cue ball near the Z on the short rail with the eight ball hanging in the corner would leave a difficult, off-angle, long bank on the nine with virtually no safety option.

Far too often we find ourselves facing shots that are more difficult than the ones we want. Instead of giving in to frustration and the temptation to fire away, we can, with a little practice, learn to greet those shots as game-winning opportunities. Set up the shot in the diagram and practice all of its variations: the short hit with one-and-half-table-width speed; the thin cut halfway across the table to the middle of the short rail; and the bank shot with pocket speed. And remember that your job always is to win the game. Sometimes the best move is to let the victory wait one more turn.

