A Unique Kick Shot

As we play and study the game of pool we build a library of knowledge for the hundreds, maybe thousands, of different shots we encounter. We learn various principles and how to apply them in the situations where they're needed as every bit of knowledge serves to provide another piece of the overall puzzle. Occasionally however we face a shot that may appear familiar based on what we know, but does not behave accordingly. In those situations we usually need to set aside any notions we have about logic and then approach the shot counter-intuitively. That applies whenever we throw a frozen combination or reduce speed to move the cue ball farther, both common yet curious techniques. A subset of that category contains shots that will conform to logical expectations up to a point. Then, after crossing that limit, the demands change and we stand logic on its head to execute successfully.
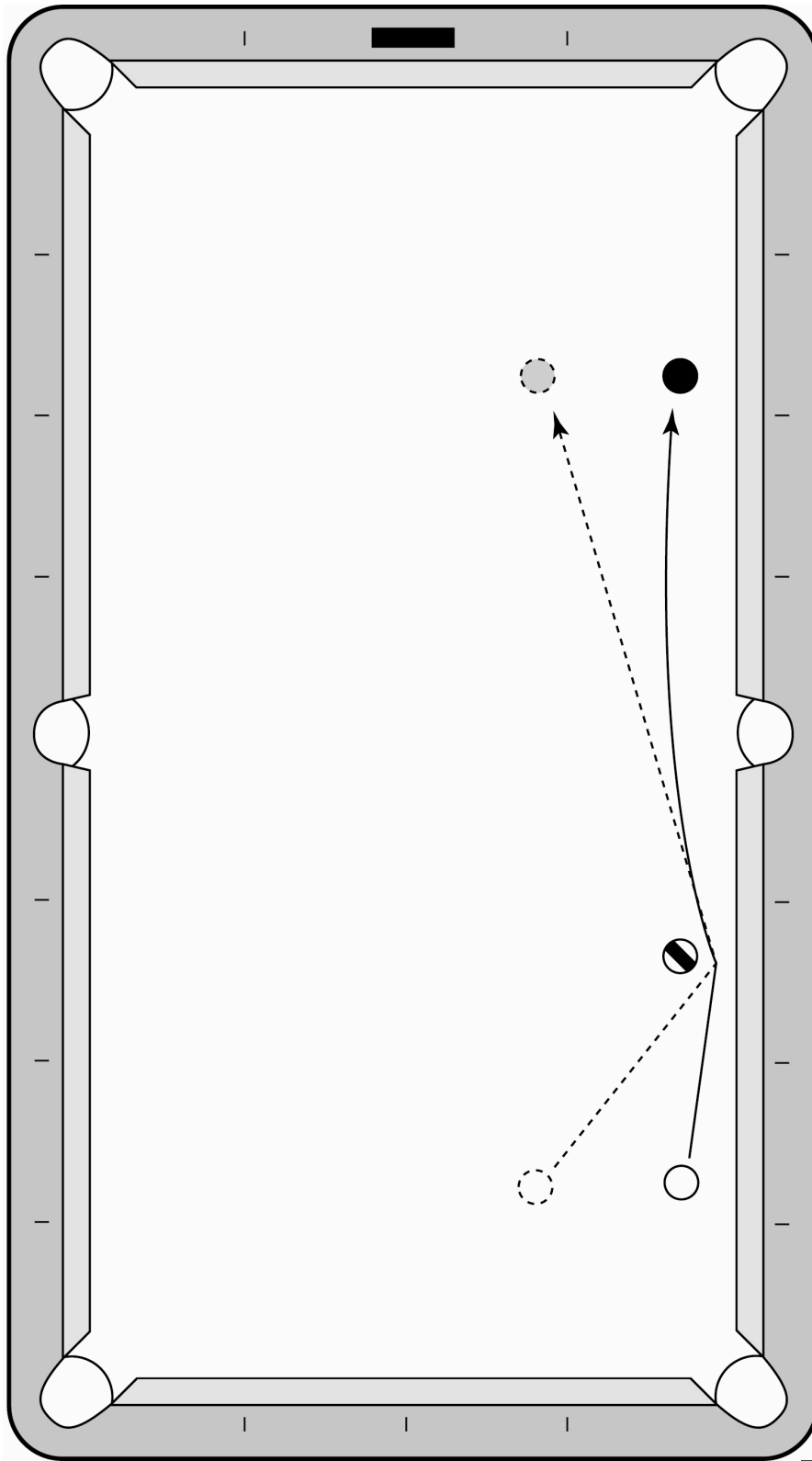
In the diagram we see a shot where we must hit the solid ball but have no clear shot with that striped ball blocking the cue ball's path. Even though the drawing does not include enough obstructions to force the choice indicated with the solid line, we shall imagine it as the only option for the purpose of illustration. With the balls so close to the cushion we have a very narrow range of contact on the inside of the striped ball as we attempt to hit the cushion as close as possible to the solid ball. However, in this setup the best possible cue-ball track with no english will rebound too sharply and miss the solid ball to its left side. So, in order to hit the solid ball we must widen the rebound track to keep the cue ball close enough to the right, side rail for the hit.

That should not be a big deal since widening a one-rail rebound track is something we learn when we first start messing around with english. To see the principle in more familiar terms, look at the dotted-outlined cue ball and the dotted-outlined, gray object ball and imagine shooting to hit the gray ball by making contact with the right, side rail in the same place that we will hit for the shot in question, as shown with the dotted lines. We see clearly that hitting the gray object ball from that contact point on the cushion requires altering the rebound angle with english to widen it or, in other words, rebound on a track that stays closer to the side rail after the cue ball hits it. And doing so is a simple matter of applying some running english, left in this case, for the wider rebound track. It's a common shot that's well managed with common knowledge.

When we face an almost identical setup closer to the rail, experience may initially tell us to employ the well-known rule from above: To widen the cue ball's rebound track, use running english. But in this case, any attempts to hit the solid ball with left-hand english will cause the cue ball to rebound too sharply and miss that ball to the left side. Something occurs to change the rule with the balls lying so close to the rail. To

make a good hit with this shot we must use reverse or right-hand english to hold the cue ball close enough to the side rail for a hit on the solid ball. Set up the balls as shown and try the shot with left and then right-hand english to observe their effects for this unusual kick shot. Adding 20 to 30 degrees of elevation to the right-hand english will help further to keep the cue ball snug to the cushion as it makes its way to the solid ball. Here's an ostensibly common shot that's handled best with an uncommon technique.

As the cue ball moves closer to a rail, a physical change takes place to reverse the rule that we usually invoke when we want to hit that rail and rebound on a wider track. I don't know exactly what changes or precisely where in its movement toward the rail that the change occurs. That probably depends mostly on the physical properties of the rubber itself. In any case, here is a shot that I learned after many unsuccessful attempts with what I "knew" was correct but now savor as another problem solved in our mysterious game.