

Mastering Follow

Almost all of our work so far has focused on developing feel for working the lower half of the cue ball. This month however we shall move upstairs to work on the follow shot and our feel for a cue ball that is behaving more naturally or rolling forward as it moves forward.

Despite that the draw shot requires more manipulation of the cue ball to apply the spin necessary to make the ball draw back, my experience shows that many somewhat accomplished players have more trouble executing a strong follow shot. One reason for this may be that from the first time someone sees a good player draw the cue ball over the length of the table, he begins to apply all of his efforts to imitating or reproducing what he has just seen. Everybody wants to draw the cue ball.

In their early attempts to draw the cue ball many beginners apply a great deal of unneeded effort, usually gripping the cue too tightly at impact and sometimes gritting their teeth and contorting their bodies to put a little backspin on the cue ball. This phenomenon of trying too hard is precisely what keeps many players from executing strong follow shots when needed. Consider now that making the cue ball follow requires no effort or force.

Without any balls on the table get into your stance and raise your bridge to put your tip just higher than the cushion; this is where the top of cue ball is. Relax your shooting hand until you can feel every thread of your cue's wrap in your fingertips. Now begin practicing a long, smooth, flowing, level stroke. Make sure to bring the tip all the way back to your bridge and then move it forward well past where the cue ball would be. Practice stroking smoothly with the same speed forward as back and no stop in front or back. Immerse yourself in the flow of this movement.

Is your cue level? Focus on your tip throughout the stroke; if its height over the table changes your cue is not level. Look back at your shooting hand; if it is moving up and down end that now. Check the clearance of your shaft over the rail; if it is more than a quarter inch your cue is not level. Ask someone if your cue is level. Find a carpenter and borrow his level. Make your cue level.

Put the cue ball in place now and shoot it down the table with a gentle, medium speed while focusing on your tip, which should stay at the same height over the table throughout the stroke. Without bursting any blood vessels shoot a few more with some speed, adding speed gradually but keeping the stroke smooth and level.

Now set up and mark the shot in the diagram with the obstructing striped ball in place as indicated. Pocket the object ball with a soft follow shot, rolling the cue ball forward inside of the obstructing ball. You will find that on soft shots you do not need to hit the top of the cue ball to accomplish this. As you add speed, your tip must move to the top of the cue ball, and more important, your stroke must remain very smooth and level while accelerating gradually. Any jabbing or punching the cue ball on this shot will cause it to drift sideways and hit the obstructing ball. The same goes for the slightest downward hit. Continue shooting the shot until you can hit it with enough speed to make the cue ball cross the table to the opposite rail.

If you are a beginning or intermediate player this exercise has arrived just in time for you to develop a strong follow stroke, which is completely different from the stroke used for draw and stop shots. If you are an advanced player you may be surprised to learn that you do not always apply a level, smooth stroke to your follow shots and you can use this exercise to hone your follow stroke.

Because the cue ball will roll forward naturally many players neglect to work on the follow shot concentrating instead on the flashier and more difficult draw shot. A powerful draw shot is very appealing and certainly worth working to develop. However a great player knows the distinction between the two strokes and owns both shots at equal strength.

