

# Stunning Safe

Last month we worked with two shots from one pocket that come up often enough in nine ball to merit the practice needed to add them to your arsenal. Let's continue this month in the same vein with another technique so common to one pocket that a player could not hope to play the game without a comfortable hold on it. As with last month's shot, although it comes up most frequently in one pocket, learning the technique will improve performance in every game.

Sometimes we need to hit an object ball with speed and move the cue ball forward as little as a few inches. To get that kind of short, cue-ball movement with follow or even a rolling technique would require a very slow hit, one that works only with an object ball within a foot or so of its intended pocket. Shots where we need to drive the object ball a longer distance but move the cue ball forward a very short distance require what we call stun follow.

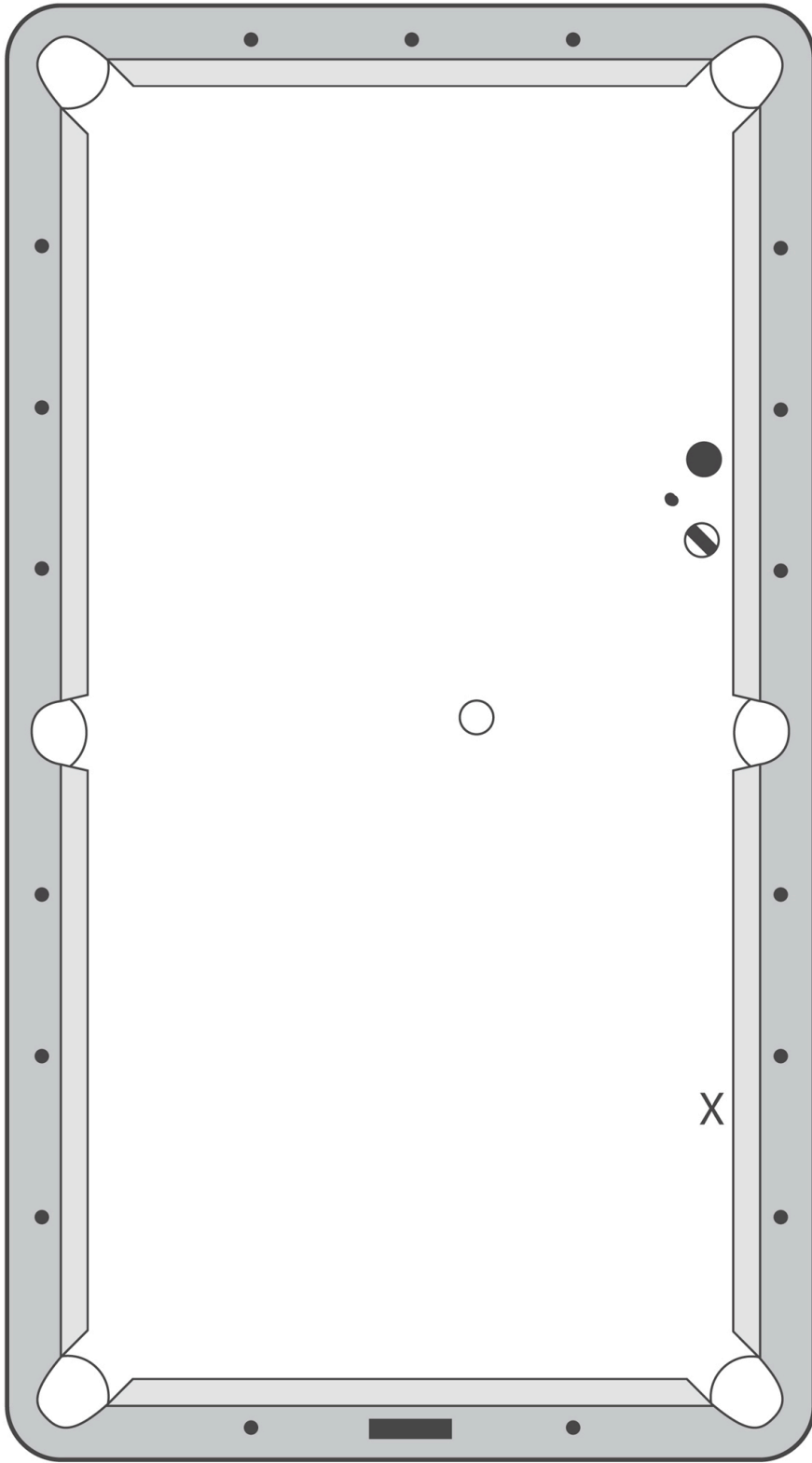
The stun-follow shot is played most often in one pocket to make the cue ball die on a rail or snug itself up to another object ball. One pocket, more than anything, is a defensive game and a player can wear down an opponent merely by forcing him to shoot continually from a rail or bridging over a ball. The profound limitations from those positions are often enough to neutralize all but the very best shooters. We shall examine the shot in the context of a safety play in nine ball to illustrate its effectiveness best and learn the technique fastest.

Look that shot in the diagram where the shooter can hit the eight ball but has no good offensive shot. When the eight ball is on the rail, as in the diagram, the most obvious safety play is also the most effective. Shoot straight at the eight ball with enough speed to move it three rails around the table to come to rest farther down the same rail near the X. If you stop the cue ball behind the nine, you will end up with a safety that should win most games. Practice leaving the cue ball snug on the rail and the nine ball to give the shot an added edge of difficulty. Even a very skillful kicker will be challenged if you leave him shooting at least two rails at the eight ball from the rail or, better yet, bridging over the nine ball.

Now move the eight ball out a couple of inches to the dot in the diagram to give you a shot at the eight but not enough of its edge to pocket it. A cursory look at the balls' positions shows that, although the same powerful safety is available, it cannot be executed this time with a stop shot because the cue ball would not wind up behind the nine ball. This time, to get the cue ball behind the nine ball, you must move it forward to the rail. Naturally that is easy enough to do with a soft hit but the eight ball would only move a couple of feet and land nearby where your opponent has a clear shot. What you need here is the same speed as the first shot with very short follow to move the cue ball into the desired position behind the nine ball.

The stun-follow shot is not terribly difficult but does require good touch and some practice to feel comfortable with it. To execute the stun follow, set up as you did for the stop shot and note where you place your tip on the cue ball for what you know is dead stop. Now make a slight upward adjustment with your tip, maybe a sixteenth of an inch, and hit the shot with the speed required to move the eight ball around to the X. Does the cue ball move forward? If you are practicing this technique for the first time you are likely to see some wide variation in the cue ball's movement; some shots may stop and others may roll well beyond your intended point of rest. The cue ball is very sensitive to slight changes with the tip near its center. It should not take long however before you are executing the shot with consistent success. Then you can work with the shot to find the best possible speed, one that moves the eight ball out of play but does not leave it close to a rail where it is easier to hit with a decent kick shot.

From that shot you can set up various others to experiment with controlling the precise degree of the cue ball's forward movement. You should have a good feel for the controlling that movement from a half-ball width to about a foot and a half at various speeds. The amount of time spent practicing this shot will pay off as, after you feel you know it, you will see its various forms, either for position or safety, come up in play frequently. When you do encounter a situation in competition that requires controlled stun follow, you will see it is not a shot that inspires a lot of confidence under pressure without having spent some time practicing it. On the other hand, after some practice and a few attempts in competition, you will begin to deliver the stroke with confidence as you employ a new, powerful weapon to win more matches.



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