

Wishing A New Angle

As we progress through our pool education we make a lot of mistakes. When we play with awareness and pay attention to what we're doing, we can learn from them and learn to avoid them in the future. Often it only takes a few encounters with a specific challenge before we can identify the potential for error and apply a new solution to an old problem. Some common errors however are not so easy to leave in the past. And the unconscious temptation to play certain shots erroneously will dog most players, even some of the very best ones, throughout their careers.

In the diagram we have a shot on the 8 ball where we landed a little too straight to move over easily for position on the 9. If the cue ball had come to rest on the X, it would be an easy matter of playing a stop shot with comfortable speed to slide the cue ball into position for a good shot on the 9 ball. Instead, we face a real challenge to get the necessary lateral movement from the cue ball with such a straight angle.

When we face shots like this and miss them, we invariably miss by over cutting them. Why is that? The answer is pretty simple really. We know that if we did have a little more angle, such as position on the X, the cue ball would move over naturally toward a good shot on the 9. So, instead of shooting that ball into the pocket and taking whatever movement the shot offers, we give the cue ball too much attention and cut the object ball into the short rail for the position we want. I call that "wishing a new angle onto the shot."

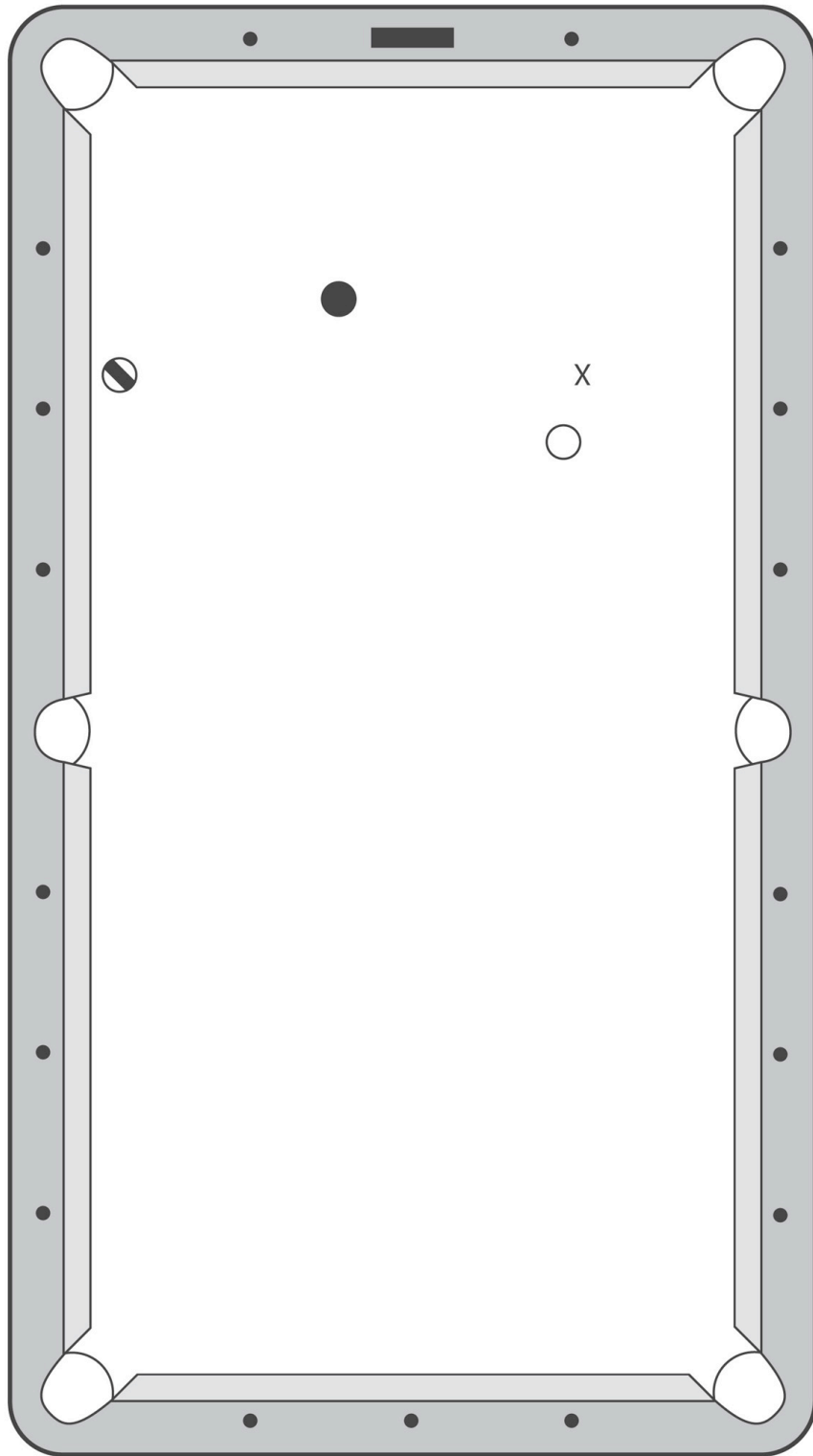
The place to begin an examination of the phenomenon is a brief discussion of that X, the position that we really wanted. It's common for many players to approach a shot with undesirable position and the inability to quit thinking about what was supposed to happen. Often I see a player hit a shot that sends the cue ball into a surprise location, and then tap the slate with his finger or the tip of his cue on the spot where it should have gone. Such antics only breathe life into mistakes and augment the challenge of the shot we must face. It's critical in pool to leave behind any thoughts for what we wanted so that we can face what we have, in the present, with a clear mind.

Shots like the one in the diagram require some practice if we're to handle them effectively in competition. Set up the shot in the diagram and mark the positions of the balls so you can repeat the exact shot. Shoot it a couple times with no concern for position, as if it were game ball. Get accustomed to shooting that ball into the pocket. Now, with your tip just below center and no english, repeat the shot with a long, punch stroke adding some speed each time you shoot it. To move the cue ball enough for a good shot on the 9 ball will require a hard stroke with a long follow through. If you

believe that left-hand english helps move the cue ball to the left off of the 8 ball, it's time to give up on that right now. One, it simply is not true. Two, using english for a shot that requires a lot of speed adds too much difficulty, in this case, unnecessary difficulty.

When shots like this come up, it helps to remind yourself that you will shoot the eight ball into the corner pocket. Each time you play the shot, watch the 8 ball go into the pocket. After you are pocketing the ball consistently with enough speed to achieve the desired position, you can refine your accuracy. The ability to use the entire pocket for this shot will allow you to take some speed off of your stroke and therefore hit it with more accuracy. Pick out a point in the right half of the corner pocket and practice shooting the 8 ball into that half of the pocket. When you can use the entire pocket consistently, try moving the cue ball slightly to the left to make the shot more challenging. Then practice it with the necessary speed and accuracy to shoot the 8 ball into the right half of the pocket, perhaps rubbing the right facing as it goes in.

Some shots come up repeatedly and challenge our ability to focus on what's most important. Sometimes, because we know how badly we want position for the next ball, we play the cue ball instead of the object ball, and sacrifice the shot itself to achieve position. It may help to remember that no matter how well you play, how much you know or how precisely you can handle the cue ball, when you miss the shot in front of you, it's your turn to sit down.



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