Inside English and Deflection

After we gain proficiency with the most common shots on a pool table, shots that tend to come up in every rack, it's time to step out and learn the shots that we see less frequently in order to assemble a complete game. A lot of those uncommon shots merely require a little practice to become familiar with a previously unknown technique or unimagined cue-ball path, and a few successful trials will implant the new shot into memory where it waits until we need it competition. Some of the other necessary shots are a little trickier, perhaps even discouraging, and will require closer attention and a bit more work.
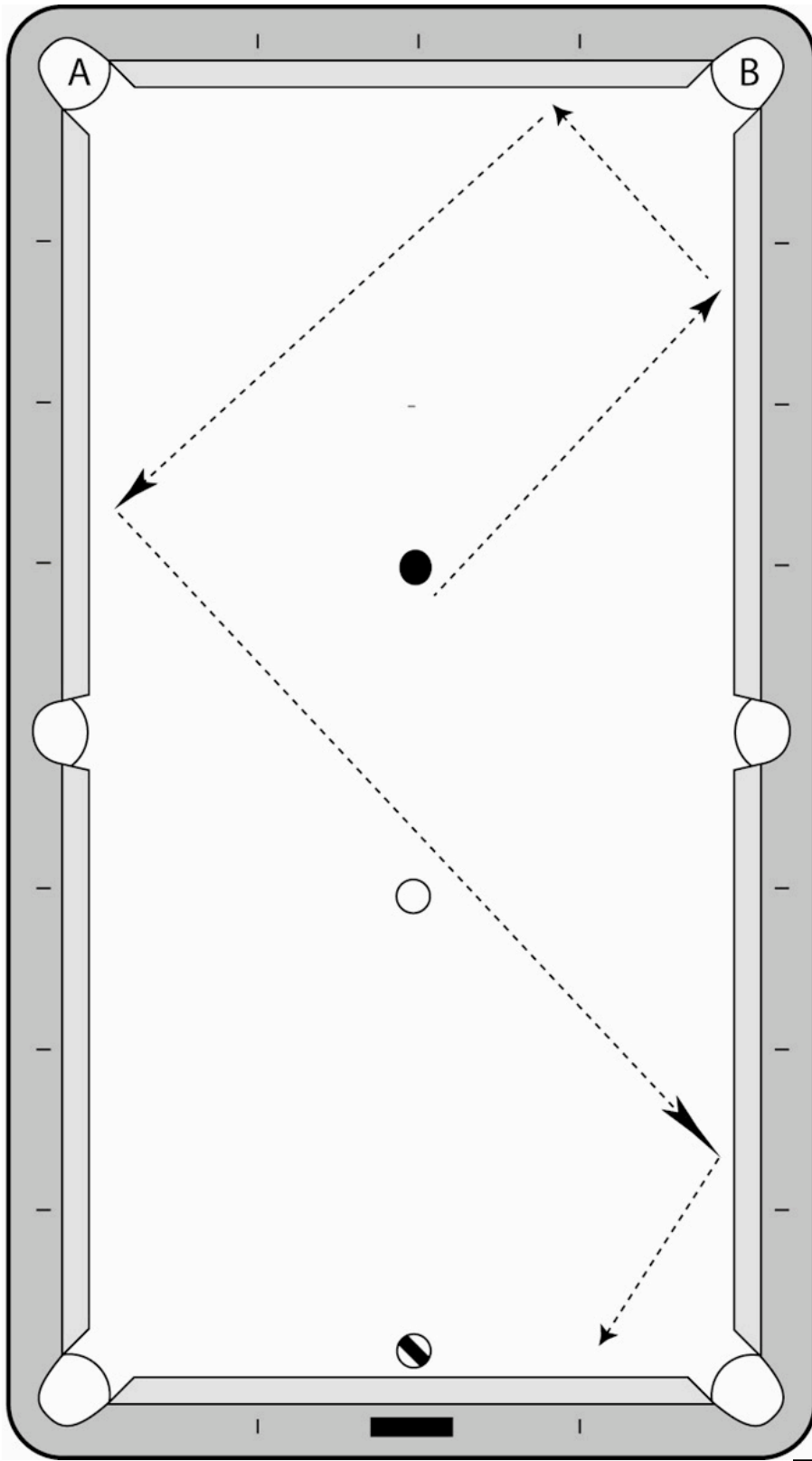
In the diagram we see a shot that is not so necessarily rare but one that may occur infrequently enough to go largely ignored in our practice. Unfortunately, since it is somewhat tricky and does not come up often enough to learn it in play, we must devote a little work to practicing it. And although it is natural and not so terribly difficult, the necessary inside english adds a challenge unique to shots of this ilk.

Set up the balls as shown in the diagram to shoot the solid ball into corner pocket A and move the cue ball around the table for position on the striped ball using high, inside (left) english. Because when we do use english, we are far more likely to use outside, most of us do not have enough experience with inside english to shoot comfortably when it's required and are often fooled by the cue ball's deflection. It's hard to say why since the shots we shoot with outside english also deflect and therefore require compensation. Perhaps we are not prepared for a cue ball deflecting away from the object ball as it does with the shot in the diagram. And even cues that boast minimum deflection are likely to push the cue ball too far right and over cut the solid ball.

Although repetition, more than anything, will lead to confidence and comfort with this shot, here are a few tips that will help cause greater success. When most players first look at this shot and the distance the cue ball travels, they feel compelled to hit it much harder than necessary. Despite that the cue ball may travel 20 feet, the shot does not require much speed since the english will work to keep the cue ball moving off of the cushions. Though even the smallest amounts of english introduce deflection, curve and throw to a shot, problems I would rather avoid, some shots cannot be made without english. On those shots, since I'm spinning the ball anyway, I often opt to use a lot of english, two tips in some cases, in trade for excessive speed, which always adds difficulty. Be sure to use a long, smooth, lazy follow stroke which will work to spin the cue ball and thus move it better, while deflecting it less, than a snappy punch stroke. If you're over cutting the object ball, do not hesitate to aim at what may seem ridiculously far from the intended contact point. Some cues call for an aiming point that is close to straight on for this shot.

Be sure, after finding success with pocket A, to practice shooting the object ball into the corner pocket marked B with high, right english to move the cue ball around the other side of the table for a shot on the striped ball into the bottom-right corner. Many shots with english require practice on both sides to learn the correct aiming points. After that you can move the object ball a little up table, toward the foot spot, to practice the shot with a setup that requires some draw to move the cue ball to hit the side rail first. You may find that the draw introduces more deflection and may require a harder hit since draw tends to kill some of the cue ball's speed. To help mitigate those challenges, think about a long, smooth draw stroke, what some players call "drag draw," instead of a short, snappy one.

In his workshops and books, The Monk presents two similar shots and calls them the "deadly pair." Though I'm not sure how lethal they are, a little focused practice with these shots will move you closer to becoming a deadly player.