

Advanced Inside

After we assemble a set of foundational skills, most of a pool education consists of dedicating the necessary time to refine, hone and master those skills. But there's another, sexier part of the learning process where we learn some oddball shots that arise so infrequently we might never guess their secrets. These are the ones that old timers share with one another as they introduce them with strange setups and the words, "Whattya do here?" A few years back I wrote about one such shot that I learned from Grady Mathews, a shot that comes up about once a year in competition. My 2007 opportunity popped up two weeks ago in a match and I missed it. So, merely knowing these shots is not enough. We must keep the inventory up to date and devote some regular practice to each one in order to save the day with a little magic when the chance arises.

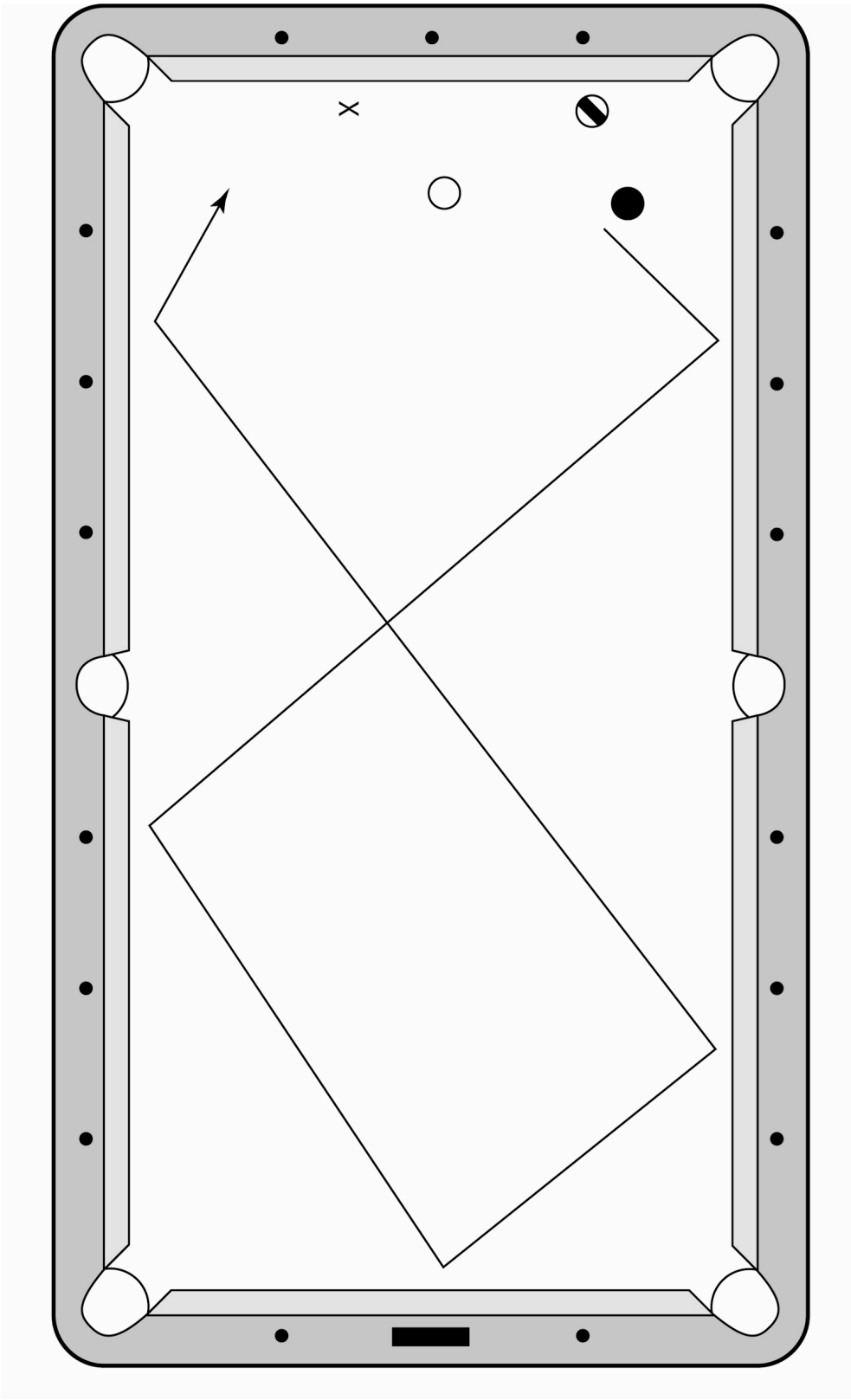
Certain shots occur commonly in some games while rarely appearing in others. In the diagram we see a shot that every 3-cushion player learns as a novice but one that comes up infrequently enough in pool to exist beyond the awareness of many players. In the setup we see an easy shot on the 8 ball with difficult position for the 9 owing to the cue ball's unavoidable swing toward the other end of the table after cutting the 8 ball into the corner. Now, if the 9 ball lay on the short rail near the bottom corner, say in the vicinity of the X, it's a shot that nearly everyone knows and plays frequently. That would employ outside, or right-hand, english for a natural three-rail trip around the table and back toward the same pocket where the 8 went for a shot on the 9 ball into the bottom-left corner.

The 9 ball's position in the diagram however precludes that choice since a cue ball coming around the table toward the upper-left corner would need perfect speed and direction to nestle itself into the tiny position area on the short side of the 9 ball. But we have another option. Instead of right, or running, english, the spin that we always use when moving the cue ball, this time we're going to use inside or reverse english to bring the cue ball around the table for a shot on the 9 ball into the same pocket.

Set up the shot as shown and visualize the cue ball moving around the table along the route indicated in the diagram. Now, shoot the 8 ball with firm speed and maximum left-hand english. If the cue ball is still spinning when it reaches the second rail, the initial reverse english becomes running english on that rail to bring it around as shown. Because the reverse english will take away much of the cue ball's speed upon contact with the first rail, the shot typically demands a firm hit. Of course, the precise amount of required speed will vary from table to table. And on some slow, dirty tables the shot may be next to impossible. If you find that to be the case, it's worth the trouble to find a fast table for practice.

Also, in order to gain a full understanding of the principle at work on this shot, you should adjust the balls' positions to give yourself different versions of the same shot. In doing so you will find that changing the degrees of draw and follow can cause wide variations in the outcome. And the ultimate results that you observe relating to draw and follow may seem counter intuitive. While draw will cause a bit of a wider initial track off the 8 ball, its overall effect will shorten the cue ball's path as the draw causes a tighter rebound from the first rail, especially with the inside english. And by the same token, follow will move off of the 8 ball on a slightly tighter track, but will widen the cue ball's rebound from the first rail. Keep in mind that, if you're cutting the 8 ball thin, the difference between the draw and follow tracks off of the ball will be slight, while their effects on the cue ball's rebound from the first rail will be significant.

Here's a shot to learn and practice for the day when you encounter it in a meaningful match. If you play one pocket, it should become an essential part of your arsenal. And, if you have the opportunity to set it up on a billiard table, place the third ball near the lower-left corner to see why it's indispensable among 3-cushion players. After you learn this cutie, remember that sharing is a great way to practice certain pool shots. And then you can be the one saying, "Whattya do here?" as you enlighten your friends.



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