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Jump Shots

Any beginner in golf who's receiving instruction is likely to hear the age-old but useful piece of advice, "Let the club do the work." We don't hear that about the cue so often in pool, but there are times when that same wisdom applies for us. I find myself offering that advice most frequently to players who are learning jump shots for the first time. For some reason less experienced players tend to attempt the most ambitious jump shots, which makes them try too hard to execute the shot with an elbow-dropping (or raising) swoopy scooper that does nothing to get the cue ball off the table. Sometimes a few failed attempts are discouraging enough to make a player put that jump cue back in the case for good while regretting its purchase. A lightweight jump cue, with its extra hard and wide tip, is designed to jump the cue ball easily with a normal, firm, straight stroke.

Before moving on to shots with a jump cue let's examine a very simple but instructive jump shot with a regular playing cue as an introduction to the technique for more advanced shots. In Shot A we have two solids exactly one ball width apart and the cue ball five to six inches from the cushion as shown. Because there is not enough space to roll the cue ball between the solids you must jump it to get through them. Doing so requires three basic elements—elevation, a medium-firm stroke and a light grip. Because this is a very small jump, not much elevation is required, perhaps 10-20 degrees. Placing the bridge hand on the rail makes achieving that elevation simple and natural. To find the spot you must hit on the cue ball imagine a line going through the cue ball's center at the same angle of your elevation, and then hit the cue ball about a tip below that line with your cue parallel to it. Then with a medium-firm hit and a light grip, follow your tip through the cue ball to the cloth on that line.

Shot B is somewhat more difficult and requires a jump cue, which gets the cue ball off the table higher and quicker because of its lower weight. Although this shot is more advanced it employs the same techniques and principles as the easier shot A. Because a jump cue can handle a wider variety of jump shots than a regular playing cue, we learn to adjust our elevation according the shot's setup. In a nutshell, when the obstruction is closer we elevate the cue higher to get the cue ball off the table more quickly with a tighter arc. To get over an obstruction that's farther away we lower the butt of the cue for a longer arc. In any case we find our spot to hit on the cue ball with the same parallel line technique we used for Shot A. Jump cues differ from one another and so we learn to adjust to our own cues according the shots we face. This shot calls for more elevation than Shot A, perhaps 45 degrees, made easy again with the cue ball near the rail. So, elevating from the rail and applying everything discussed so far, especially a light grip and a follow through that stays on the cue's line, you should be able to pocket that striped ball in the far corner comfortably.

Now, for some real fun, let's try Shot C, which is the same as Shot B except for that second obstructing solid ball just past the side pocket. So, it's time for the jump

masse' shot. To pocket the striped ball in the lower-right corner you will do everything you did to execute Shot B with the addition of two more elements. Because you must curve the cue ball around the second obstruction you will add some right-hand english with the necessary elevation required to jump over the first obstruction. Also, the landing area is critical for success on this shot, and I would begin shooting the cue ball to the X. A cue ball that goes too far will not curve in time to reach the stripe, and if it lands too soon it can curve into the second solid ball. This is not an easy shot but it is fun and a great source of experimentation.

Most jump shots are not all that difficult but they tend to feel foreign at first, which can make them a challenge to shoot comfortably. It's always best at first to practice modest shots with a focus on comfort and confidence while you feel the cue doing the work. It's also a good idea to ask an experienced player to watch you shoot a few with an eye on your form. For more instruction and detailed explanations consult Disc V of the Video Encyclopedia of Pool Shots where Dr. Dave and I offer extensive analysis for 37 different jump and masse' shots including Shot C, which serves as a coda for those two sections.

