

Rail Shots Part 2—Adjusting the Reference

Last month we began working with a common but challenging shot to place you in the foundational stage of control over it. We shall continue working in the same area for three more months to complete your mastery of this critical shot.

Set up the balls beginning with the cue ball at position A and the object ball about an inch from the rail as shown in the diagram. Although we have moved the object ball one diamond down the rail from its position last month, all of the same principles will apply as we work through this month's exercise. With the cue ball at position A, let's begin where we left off by shooting the object ball into the corner and moving the cue ball across the table on the perpendicular track to hit point X. While we examined reasons for the importance of mastering the perpendicular track last month, we did not discuss the larger purpose of such rigid control over the cue ball.

Pool players have a number of solid benchmarks in their toolboxes--the stop shot is one--which they use as reference points in planning the execution of position for the next shot. An absolute knowledge that you can execute several key elements of position play will become your source of confidence under pressure and your source of freedom to employ feel for moving the cue ball beyond your reference points. Play the shot a few more times in the context of the perpendicular track becoming one of your benchmarks. From this base we can proceed to moving the cue ball onto different tracks by making adjustments from the reference point.

From point A let's begin to move the cue ball away from our reference to hit the opposite rail one diamond closer to the side pocket, point Y. You can do this by looking at the spot on the cue ball you would hit for the perpendicular track and feeling, with your tip, a one-diamond adjustment downward on the cue ball. Play the shot and observe the results. With no thought for correctness, continue playing the shot and observing what you are feeling on the cue ball as it relates to your benchmark. When you nail down one diamond you can try a two-diamond adjustment for a scratch in the opposite side pocket. Make a strong note of where that scratch resides on the cue ball for the speed you chose. Your awareness of the usual scratches for many shots will become another set of benchmarks.

From here you have myriad options and shots to explore in this exercise. While still shooting from point A you can continue with one-diamond downward adjustments on the cue ball to hit each diamond on the opposite rail including the scratch in the lower left corner. Continue in this fashion until you are hitting your very best draw shot and have found the limit of control with draw alone. After you have placed every track on the cue ball with once-across-the-table speed repeat the exercise with enough speed to go twice across the table. Observe how the spots on the cue ball change as you find the same tracks with added speed. Note also your new draw limit with more speed.

You can repeat the exercise from points B and C playing for all of the same tracks again. Find your tracks on the cue ball and allow them into your memory. You will find some profound differences from the new cue ball positions such as a narrower range from point C and the need for power to get across the table from point B. After this of course you will want to move up on the cue ball to find the tracks you can hit below the object ball beginning with a one-diamond move to point Z. Next month we shall push forward to observe the effects of various strokes on these shots and then finish with a discussion of english.

This exercise is not designed to bury you in hard work and discouragement even though that possibility exists. You can have fun doing this work if you are willing to give up your concern for correctness and explore your feel for the cue ball instead. Imagine yourself as a great musician who remembers a tune with his fingers rather than working it over with his brain. You will experience a huge breakthrough when you begin to feel the desired track on the tip of your cue.

