

Manipulating Follow

Last month we looked at a draw shot that arcs the cue ball around an obstruction. To complete the discussion on this topic we shall examine what can be done in the same vein with follow. First allow me to digress for a moment.

I spent last week in Las Vegas competing—briefly—in the Conlon Cup 3-cushion tournament and then watching the world’s very best billiards players in action for the rest of the week. After the final match Semih Sayginer, the world’s artistic billiards champion and one of the world’s top three players, put on his show. Watching Mr. Sayginer perform will alter anyone’s conceptions regarding the cue ball and its behavior on the table. Without gushing too much let’s just say that his cue ball does not move in straight lines. His greatest fans are the game’s best players who, despite their talent, are often seen watching him with jaws somewhere around their belly buttons.

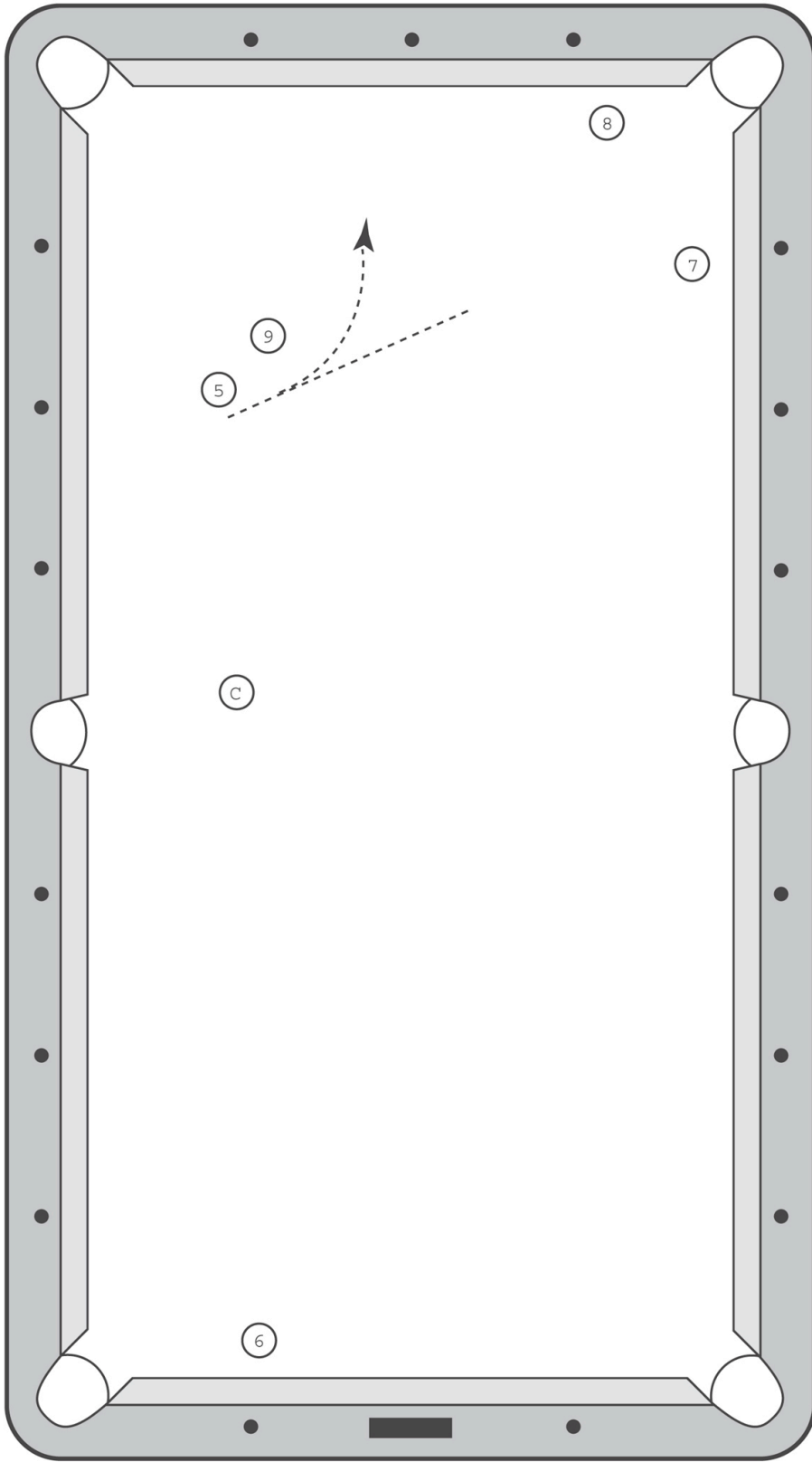
Remember last month’s shot and how we learned that spin combined with the proper speed can move the cue ball around an obstructing ball before drawing it back to the desired position. The same dynamics hold true for follow. A little experience and practice with arcing shots will put some very powerful tools at your disposal.

Look at the shot in the diagram and the problems that the shooter faces trying to get from the five ball to the six to continue the run. If the angle on the five ball were closer to straight, drawing the cue ball back down the right side of the table would be fairly easy. Without the obstructing balls near the upper right corner another good choice might be to hit a firm shot to the top rail with some right-hand english and spin the cue ball two rails to point X from where it would drop down to the bottom rail near the trademark. And note the nine ball, which appears to lie in the path of a cue ball hit with straight follow.

The nine ball does lie in the path of a normal follow shot but does not eliminate every possibility. If you recall that the cue ball always begins its movement on the dotted tangent line and that added speed will keep the cue ball on that line longer, then the solution here is to hit the follow shot with enough speed to move the cue ball past the nine before it drives forward to the top rail. From there it will rebound straight down table for a shot on the six ball. The equipment that you are using may require some experimentation to find the exact spot to hit on the cue ball. Because the cue ball will pick up some right-hand english from the five ball you may have to add a touch of left to keep the cue ball from spinning off to the right when it hits the top rail. Some tables will demand that and some will not, depending on the rails.

When you play this shot, the desired cue-ball action will be a definite arc as the cue ball moves a foot or so to the right before diving straight to the top rail. If your cue ball is only moving to the right and not making that dive to the rail, you will need to spend some time working on your follow and force-follow strokes. A good follow stroke hits the cue ball with acceleration that builds gradually over the course of its movement. If you snap or punch the stroke you will not produce the necessary topspin. To improve your follow stroke set up a shot that is almost straight and hit the cue ball top center for a follow shot. Begin hitting the shot softly and watch the cue ball drive forward close to the line of the object ball's path to the pocket. Continue playing the shot and adding speed with each attempt until you can hit it firmly without losing the cue ball to side drift. The challenge is to maintain the smooth follow stroke with added speed and not allowing the extra force to introduce punch or snap. It may help to use the image of keeping your tip on the cue ball. I have seen some good players who lack the ability to hit follow shots effectively with speed.

The first successful executions of the shots in this and last month's illustrations always cause a breakthrough in a player's game by offering a new view of what is possible. Although the shots themselves are not difficult, the ability to conceive the curving cue-ball paths before seeing them may dwell beyond most of our imaginations. Go to www.accu-stats.com to order a Semih Sayginer exhibition video. Then spend some time as you await its arrival imagining what you are about to see. If your imagination approaches his reality, consider hanging up your cue in favor of a new career. You may be the next Walt Disney.



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