

## Useful Mistakes

One thing we probably can't eliminate from our playing and part of the game for everyone is the occasional mistake. When one occurs, we are so likely to become too wrapped up in heartbreak that we often close our eyes to the possibility of applying what just happened in a useful context under different circumstances in the future. One common error on a pool table is an unintended cue-ball jump that results from being forced to play a shot with speed and elevation.

Throughout more than a few years of playing competitively there were a number of times when, for whatever reason, the shot I was playing required a firm hit with an elevated cue. On many of those occasions, when I hit the shot a little too ambitiously, the inevitable jumping cue ball wound up on the floor for a foul, then, in my opponent's hand. And until Grady Mathews showed me the shot in this month's diagram, I never made the necessary intellectual leap to see the mistake as anything but a problem that should be avoided at all costs.

In the diagram we have an easy shot on the nearby striped ball with natural position for the second striped ball except for the obvious obstruction of those two solid balls lying right there, on the natural, cue-ball track. In many situations, when it's impossible to avoid hitting other balls with the cue ball, there are ways to predict its rebound from obstructing balls—follow through them or draw back off of them for example. In this case however, I can see no reliable way to hit the obstruction and come up with reasonable position on the next ball. The solution is to play the first shot with an elevated cue to jump the cue ball off of the object ball and over the solid balls to land on the natural position track leading to the next ball. Although many of us have perhaps never played the shot intentionally, it's hard to imagine a pool player who has never caused the cue ball to hop inadvertently after hitting a shot.

While the shot may dwell beyond some of our imaginations and may even seem a bit outrageous at first, the stroke is remarkably simple to execute. Elevate the butt of the cue about 25 degrees and shoot down on the cue ball just above center with the same snappy punch stroke you would use for a firm stop shot. Moving the bridge hand a little closer to the cue ball facilitates delivering the somewhat explosive acceleration required for the shot. Most players hit the shot too firmly at first and send cue ball flying off the table. That's okay. From there it's simple to take the speed down a notch or two while remembering to retain the required snappy acceleration. I have never met an intermediate player who could not attain a good feel for this shot in ten minutes or less.

Once we execute the natural shot in the diagram, we can experiment with various setups and other cue-ball techniques. After the jump, the cue ball will hit the table with any spin that we apply to it. So we can jump over obstructions with a cue ball that follows or draws back after touchdown. Some one-pocket players play a straight-back bank that brings a ball back toward home while the cue ball hops over the rack and dies where it lands to block the pocket with the stack. Another application comes up in straight pool where a shooter might hop the cue ball into the center of a cluster to break it most efficiently. When that shot works, it's beautiful to watch the balls spread around the cue ball like flower petals, offering shots into every nearby pocket. The famous, over-and-under-the-bridge shot is a trick-shot version of this technique for hopping the cue ball off of an object ball.

When I first saw a useful application for something that I had only experienced beforehand as a mistake, I felt pretty dumb for never realizing that an error might come with a benefit. To make matters worse, I could remember times when I jumped right over a cluster that I was trying to break open. Fortunately, instead dwelling on my own stupidity, I jumped into a rewarding practice session with a useful and enjoyable new shot. In a game with so many possibilities we don't have time to kick ourselves when we might fail to see something right under our noses. There's too much fun to be had for that.

