

A “Simple” Shot

One of pool’s nicest ongoing pleasures comes in the moment when a previously unknown and seemingly impossible shot becomes easy and familiar. And, as an instructor, some of my most gratifying experiences occur when I can help a student grasp a new technique to break through and add another dazzling shot to his or her bag of tricks. In most cases the shot in question does not require extraordinary skill but only a different way of looking at what’s required. On the other side of the same coin we have a less exciting group of shots that seem mundane in comparison to the flashy crowd pleasers. These are not the shots that bring the crowd to its feet or inspire stories. They’re the workaday shots that merely win pool tournaments.

In the diagram we see a shot on the solid ball along with three different position tracks indicated by the arrows. Set up the shot with the object ball somewhere between a half-inch and an inch from the cushion and the cue ball about a diamond segment back and far enough out from the rail to offer a 30-degree cut angle. Note the solid ball’s placement a half ball width past the top rail’s center diamond. With that setup, a cue ball that rebounds from the cushion on a perpendicular path will roll over the foot spot as it moves down table.

For a reason that I don’t quite know, this shot is a lot more challenging than it looks. Set up the balls as shown, mark their positions and begin shooting. Shoot a few at first without the striped balls on the table to get comfortable with pocketing the solid ball consistently. Be sure to shoot the solid ball into the far facing of the corner pocket so it does not touch the rail on its way to the corner. With that in mind it may be a good idea to practice this shot on a regulation pool table rather than a coin-op, where balls that hit the leading rail on their way into a corner usually receive a warmer welcome than they deserve.

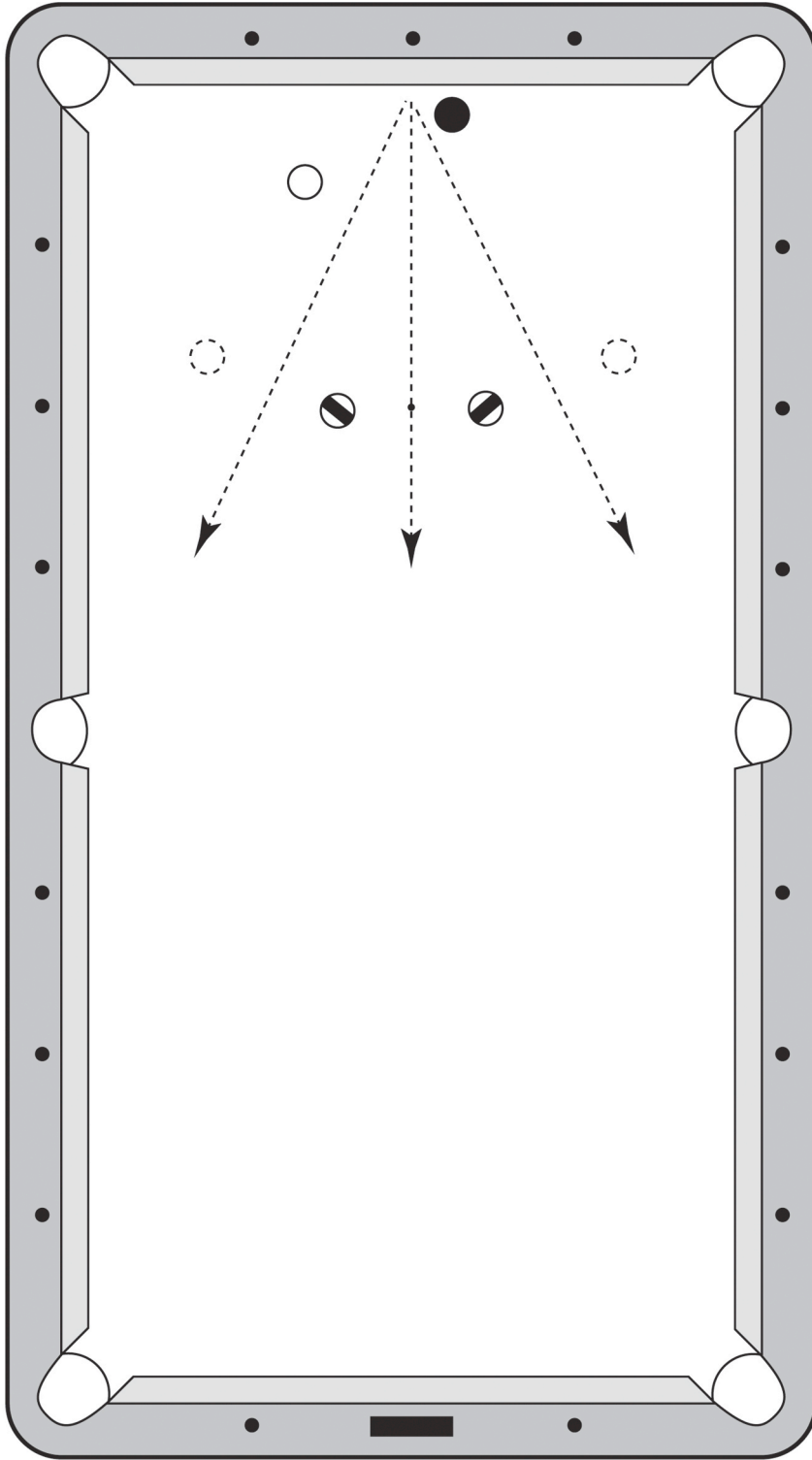
After you’re comfortable with pocketing the ball it’s time to add precise position to the shot. Set two stripes on the table as shown, straddling the foot spot and the line that goes through the table’s center. The balls shown in the diagram are about 2 1/2 ball widths apart and that’s probably a good starting point. If the shot seems too easy, move the balls closer together until it’s challenging enough. If you’re running into one of the stripes on most shots, make the space a little wider to enjoy more positive results and greater success.

A cue ball that tracks perpendicular is an essential reference, and so we must seek consistent precision on this first position shot. Like a cue ball that rolls over the table’s center spot, a cue ball that tracks perpendicular to a rail cannot scratch, regardless of how fast it’s rolling. Play the shot with center ball and adjust your stroke until you find the perpendicular track. Adding punch will move the cue ball backwards toward the left side rail in the diagram. A stroke that comes through the cue ball more slowly will move it

forward toward the right side rail in the diagram. Practice the shot until you can measure the acceleration precisely enough to track the cue ball between the two stripes consistently. Then, experiment with speed to see what's required to hit the same track at different speeds. You should find that the slower shots require a little more punch while more speed will require that you take some of the snap out of your stroke to come through the cue ball a little lazier albeit faster.

After you feel comfortable with the perpendicular track you can move the stripes to make different target tracks. For the one where the cue ball rebounds from the rail backwards you will need to lower your tip or add punch to the stroke. Before changing where your tip meets the cue ball, try controlling the cue ball's track by changing only how the acceleration meets the cue ball. A snappier punch stroke with the same center-ball hit can easily move the cue ball backwards enough to go through the space indicated by the stripe and dotted-line ball on the left side of the diagram. Set up the balls with the space that we see on the right side of the diagram and practice moving the cue ball forward with a center-ball hit and a lazier stroke. After getting in touch enough with your stroke to hit various target tracks, you can move your tip around to match up a spot on the cue ball with precise degrees of acceleration to hit various target tracks. And finally, you should practice hitting the different tracks at different speeds.

Here is a deceptively simple looking shot. I'm not certain why it seems tougher than it looks except that, in my experience, shots that require hitting the cue ball at or close to the center are very sensitive to the slightest changes in both stroke and tip placement, especially when the cue ball and object ball are close together, as we see them here. Set up this shot and practice hitting the indicated tracks with all of the changes and adjustments discussed. Consistent success with this shot will never bring you a standing ovation. It will only move you one more significant step toward greatness.



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