

Rail Shots Part 4—English

Several months ago we began working with a common yet critical pool shot as an introduction to establishing complete control over it. That discussion evolved into a series of exercises which we shall complete this month. Back in June we started off playing the shot in the diagram to establish your feel for the perpendicular cue-ball track. From there we proceeded to move off of the perpendicular track by varying the hit on the cue ball and then, last month, adding changes in stroke. This month we shall add english to the mix to provide you with a complete set of tools for controlling the cue ball with this shot and others.

Any introduction to english merits a long discussion to describe all of the effects that its use might have on a particular shot. Although we do not want to downplay the importance of a complete understanding of those effects, space limitations force us to proceed here a bit more recklessly after defining a couple of terms. When shooting with english you have two basic options, left or right. Because those are relative terms, we like to refer to english as “inside” or “outside” when describing a shot. Whenever you are cutting a ball to the left, inside english is left and outside english is right; the terms are switched of course for a cut shot to the right.

Throughout this series we have begun the exercise by pocketing the object ball and moving the cue ball straight across the table on the perpendicular track. This month we are going to begin with a shot that moves the cue ball as far as possible from the perpendicular track. With the balls positioned as shown in the diagram, pocket the object ball a few times with a high center hit on the cue ball and a medium-soft follow stroke. If you are executing your smooth follow stroke, the cue ball should be landing somewhere near the opposite corner pocket. If you wanted to play position for a ball at point X you would need to add some inside english, left in this case, to move the cue ball up to the foot rail instead of across the table.

Play the follow shot a few times now adding a half tip of inside english and noting the results. Most misses with inside english are over cuts because of deflection or squirt. When you use left-hand english your tip deflects the cue ball or pushes it off of the line of aim to the right. Every pool cue deflects the cue ball uniquely making it critical that you always play with the same cue to develop consistency with english. Play the shot until you are moving the cue ball to the foot rail repeatedly for a shot on the ball at point X. You can now begin adding speed to move the cue on a three-rail track to the center of the table and beyond. As you add speed you will encounter more deflection and must compensate for it by aiming to cut the object ball less. With additional speed be certain to maintain a smooth follow stroke. If the cue ball is beginning to move across the table instead of up toward the foot rail you are punching the ball. The key to success here is the follow stroke, which takes much of the deflection out of the shot.

Let's try the shot now with outside english. Just as we used inside english with the first shot to make the cue ball follow straighter, we shall use outside english to augment our draw by spinning the cue ball back off of the first rail. Play the shot a few times with medium speed and a low center hit to draw the cue ball back. To draw the cue ball back to the head rail, add a half tip of outside or right-hand english and try the shot. Play the shot until you are moving the cue ball all the way back to the head rail without hitting the shot hard. Remember that good draw is not the result of hitting the cue ball hard but comes from an easy yet accelerating stroke. You can execute two distinct draw shots with the same low right hit on the cue ball by adjusting your stroke. To play for a ball at point Y use a normal bridge and follow through to make the cue ball hit the first rail and move across the table as it comes back. To play for a ball at point Z, use a longer, slower follow through to spin cue ball back off the side rail, and remain close to it on its trip back to the head rail.

To conclude the exercise, move the cue ball to point B and try to hit the perpendicular track with english. Add a little punch for inside english and use a follow stroke for outside english. Although we have only covered several shots, you now have a good feel for the principles of shooting the rail shot with english, a powerful tool for controlling the cue ball despite the added complexity. Because there is no way to quantify the adjustments you will make for deflection, curve and throw, remember to experience the changes you make with speed, stroke and amount of spin used in your practice shots as you learn to play with english in the realm of feel.

