

## Precise Draw

When we first begin playing pool, most of us apply all of our focus to the overwhelming concern of pocketing balls. Before long, the necessary hand-eye coordination takes hold and we gain proficiency with shot making. We learn to determine precisely where to hit each object ball in order to sink it as we become “wired” for hitting the spot on an object ball to make almost every shot we attempt, including some wildly difficult ones with considerable distance to the pocket.

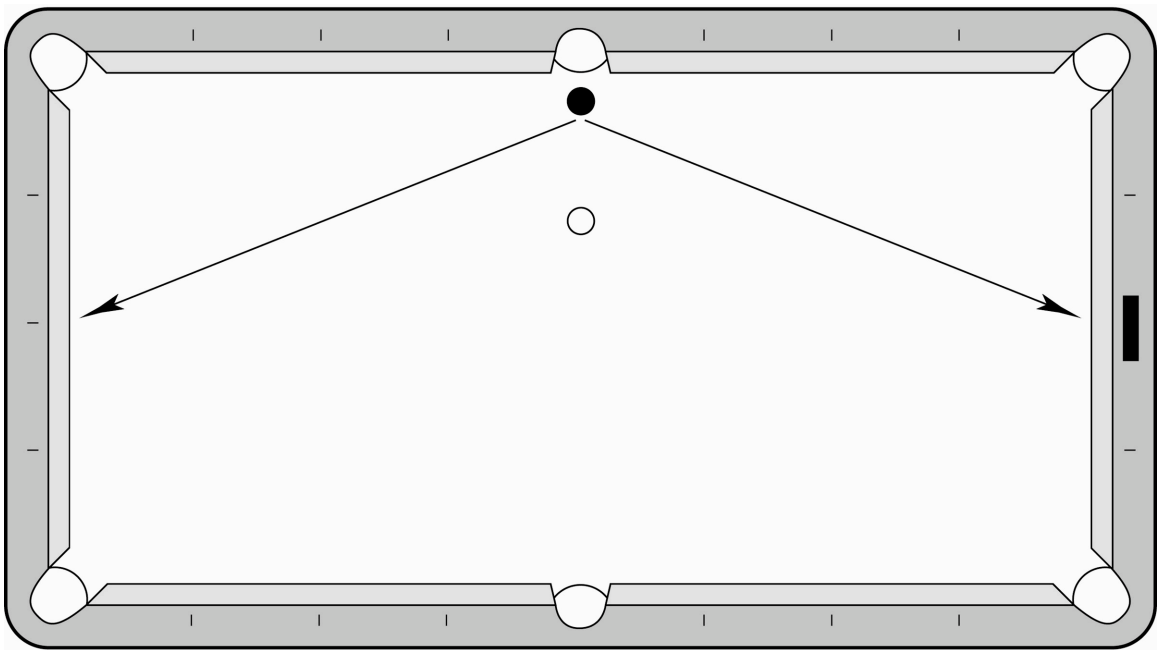
As the distance an object ball must cover to reach the pocket increases, the margin for error around the exact spot to hit on that ball reduces sharply. And so it follows logically that as the distance between the object ball and the pocket decreases, the margin for error becomes larger. Even on a tight table, an object ball that’s very close to the pocket offers such a wide range of places to hit and still make the shot that some players find it difficult to choose the best spot on that ball to hit. Because, as beginners, we become accustomed to hitting a precise spot that a shot far from the pocket demands, we tend not to pay much attention to the easy, close in, shots. Somewhere in our education we must revisit with those shots to teach ourselves how to choose the best spot to hit on an object ball when we have options.

In the diagram we see a simple, yet powerful exercise that works to refine our draw and our ability to choose an exact spot to hit on an object ball when a range contact points will pocket the ball. Set up the shot as shown, with the object ball about four inches from the lip of the side pocket and centered between the pocket’s points. Place the cue ball about 12 inches back and mark the positions of both balls. Begin the exercise by exploring the pocket with no regard for the cue ball. Shoot some shots into the center of the pocket, the extreme edges and as many points as you can visualize inside of it. Before each shot, choose an exact dot in the pocket for the object ball to hit and then shoot it there. Most pool shots offer some wiggle room and the best players like to shoot for a dot in the pocket instead of aiming at a big, black hole in the rail. You will see that, for this close-in shot, the pocket offers a wide target for the object ball, and you can use this exercise to develop a habit of making exact choices for aiming.

After investigating the size of the pocket you can add cue-ball control to the exercise. Because we applied so much focus to pocketing more difficult shots as beginners, we are accustomed to identifying one spot to hit on an object ball and then accepting the range of position tracks that one spot offers. Here we have a shot where we can pocket the ball and literally cover the whole table with the cue ball. It’s possible to make the shot and hit every diamond on the table with the cue ball. However, at this stage, we’re going to confine the exercise to draw and all the targets between the two arrowheads.

Begin with a straight-on hit to pocket the object ball and draw the cue ball back into the lower side pocket. Play that a few times to sharpen your aim and warm up your draw stroke. After you're drawing the cue ball straight back proficiently, you can move through a variety of position targets. Cut the object ball slightly left to draw the cue ball back one diamond to the right of the lower side pocket. Then, by choosing the precise spot on the object ball and hitting every shot with the same smooth draw stroke, you can cut the ball increasingly left with each shot, just enough to move the cue ball one diamond segment farther right around the table until you are hitting the right arrowhead. Count the pockets as diamonds too so, before turning the lower-right corner, draw the cue ball into that pocket for an elegant scratch. When you reach the right-hand arrowhead, repeat the exercise on the left side of the table. There's a rule of thumb that applies to this shot for choosing the correct point on the object ball. Make a line that goes through the centers of the cue ball and object ball—the straight-in line—and note the point on the object ball for that line. Then, make a line from your target diamond to the object ball and note where that line touches the object ball. To draw the cue ball to the target you aim at the point on the object ball exactly between the two points determined above.

Some of the best exercises are the simplest and this one is the best I've found for refining draw and learning precise aim together. Spend a little time with this exercise to give your aiming professional precision while you discover an amazing new skill for drawing into position, break outs and the occasional carom on the 9 ball for the game winner.



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