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Two Tough Shots with Inside

In our previous two discussions we examined shots that are made much more easily after adding english and practicing the necessary technique a little. This month we have two shots with english that are not very easy but must be present in every player's repertoire.

In the diagram we see the cue ball and striped ball set up for two separate shots into the top corners. Set the balls as shown and mark their positions so you will set them the same way for every attempt. When Tim Miller, aka The Monk, teaches these shots, he calls them the deadly pair. Though it's doubtful that they're responsible for any fatalities, they are not to be regarded lightly.

Each shot requires cutting the striped ball into one of top corners and moving the cue ball around the table along the paths shown with the solid and dotted lines. So when we cut that ball into pocket X, the cue ball will follow the path of the dotted line. The shot to pocket Y sends Whitey around along the solid line to find the bottom rail on the left side of the table. Both shots demand inside english to move the cue ball as indicated. So, the shot to X will be played with left-hand english while the shot to Y requires right.

Regardless of the type of cue used, deflection always plays a big role with these two shots and, if they're new to you, you can expect to miss a few at the start. Since left-hand english pushes the cue ball out to the right and right-hand english pushes it left, misses caused by deflection lead to over cutting the striped ball, sometimes drastically. The only way to overcome that problem is to experiment with the aiming points on the striped ball until you are making the shots consistently into both pockets. Depending on your cue you may have to compensate by as much as half a ball width.

Many players tend to shoot these shots much too hard at first, a mistake that compounds their difficulty. When I practice these shots I focus on hitting them with the smoothest possible stroke and allowing the english to move the cue ball around the table without excessive speed. There are a few things to keep in mind as you perfect your technique with these shots. The more english you use, in other words the farther your tip moves away from the cue ball's center, the more easily you will move the cue ball around the table. Because the shot demands english and even a small amount introduces the complexity that english always brings, I choose to use maximum english, a choice that allows me to play the shot a lot more softly and still get the cue ball around the table. I maintain that the extra control I gain from a softer hit is a good tradeoff for the small bit of extra difficulty that using more english can add to the shot. It's also critical to use a smooth, lazy follow stroke for these shots. The smooth stroke deflects the cue ball less than a punch stroke and imparts better spin to the cue ball. A punch stroke does not spin the cue ball as well and demands more force since it always diminishes the cue ball's speed.

Your main concern is pocketing the ball consistently into both corners with a healthy dose of inside english on every shot. If you're making the shots but the cue ball isn't moving on paths like the ones in the picture, you will have to investigate to determine why. Are you using enough english? Is your stroke long, smooth and level? If all the necessary elements are present but the cue ball is not returning as shown in the diagram, try moving the balls a little to see if that helps give you the desired outcome. It's possible to scratch in either of the lower corners, and if that happens, there's no need to let that discourage you. Changing the setup slightly can eliminate that problem. These shots arise in all pool games and must not frighten us when they do. Practice them until they feel easy and comfortable. It won't take long before you're handling the deadly pair with deadly confidence.



