

November 2008

## Jump or Kick

Old guys like me can remember when 14.1, aka straight pool, was the dominant tournament game. Then, all of a sudden, toward the end of the 70's we experienced a rapid transition to 9 ball and quickly had to learn some new skills to keep up with the fast-paced game. Because 9 ball forces the player to hit one ball and rewards a good safety with cue ball in hand, the competitive player must be able to answer a safety effectively. When one-foul 9 ball first emerged, any kind of snooker could effectively disable a good player. That is no more. Whatever one thinks about the talent of current stars compared to heroes from the past, the best players nowadays perform two shots, the kick and the jump, with more deadly precision than was even imagined only twenty years ago.

In a situation with no clear shot at the object ball you have two basic options, a kick shot or a jump shot. If you want to play competitive 9 ball and you do not feel comfortable with these shots decide now that you will learn and practice them. Although every player possesses some rudimentary skill for sending the cue ball rail first to hit an object ball, we all have room for improvement with kick shots. If you cannot execute a jump shot chances are you know someone who can and should ask that person to show you how it is done. Instead of trying to impart the basics of executing kicks and jumps here I want to explore the simple question of when to choose which shot.

Before we begin let me make a recommendation. If you play competitively and do not own a jump cue, consider buying one. If you are resistant for the reason that they are not allowed on some pro tours, leave your jump cue in its case during your professional matches. Major league baseball does not allow aluminum bats but that does not prevent their use in any baseball league where they are allowed. Recently in a small tournament match against a perennial star of the pro tour, I was feeling pretty good about the fact that I hooked him on a two ball. I then watched as he took out his jump cue, easily fired the ball in and ran out the rack. The jump cue makes jump shots easy and is a tool available to help everyone win more games.

The diagram illustrates two situations with no clear shot at the solid object ball. In shot A I prefer the jump shot for the following reasons. First, the object ball is out toward the middle of the table where it is more difficult to hit rail first. Second, with the obstruction removed, the shot is straight in. A great feature of the jump shot is that the cue ball's movement is up and down instead of side to side and so the cue ball goes where you aim it. Another feature of a straight-in jump shot is that the full hit on the object ball will absorb most of the cue ball's energy to stop it from bouncing off of the table. Making a jump shot here and pocketing that ball is not easy but easier than pocketing the ball with a kick shot. That brings us to the most important factor to consider in the choice between a jump and kick shot. Where do the balls end up if I do not pocket the object ball? In shot A any possible kick at the object is more likely than not to leave both balls at the same end of the table and a shot for your opponent.

Shot B is an entirely different situation. Even the most dedicated and talented jumper should elect to kick here. Two factors to rule out the jump shot are that the obstruction is closer to the object ball than it is to the cue ball and that the shot is a cut shot near a rail making it nearly impossible to pocket the ball and keep a bouncing cue ball on the table. Here, the correct choice is the kick shot for several reasons. First, the object ball is close to a rail making it very easy to hit. And this shot offers two effective options. If you hit this ball one rail first, the solid-line path, and catch it right you can bank it off the side rail toward center of the bottom rail while leaving the cue ball behind the stripe ball. The same thing can be accomplished kicking the object ball two rails first, the dashed-line path. That choice sends the object ball directly toward the center of the bottom rail and also can leave the cue ball behind the stripe ball. I would choose the second option and play for the two-rail kick with some right-hand english. If I miss hit the shot and catch

the object ball too thin I still send it to the other end of the table while the cue ball goes straight across the table and rebounds off the left side rail with right-hand english toward the top rail.

There's no question that 9 ball has changed pool and, over the past few years, has changed dramatically itself. When you watch professionals, who rarely fail to run out from an open shot, you will see that the game now usually turns on playing safety and responding to safety. As you become more comfortable with your ability to hit a jump shot and execute a kick shot with a plan for its outcome you will experience a leap in improvement and begin approaching a hook situation with confidence.

