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## One-Rail Kicks

Many otherwise talented players do not possess kicking skills beyond rudimentary, one-rail shots that they typically approach with little more than a “feel” for hitting the object ball. After learning the systems for accurate two and three-rail kicks, most skilled players prefer to use two or more rails because, believe it or not, going more than one rail with the cue ball is usually the more predictable approach. But often we are forced to kick at a ball one rail, and so we need a reliable way to calculate the shots.

The biggest challenge with all one-rail systems is that they’re based on hitting the cue ball perfectly flat, that is center ball without even a trace of english. Hitting a cue ball dead center can be difficult, especially under pressure, but it’s a skill that must be mastered. The best exercise for finding the cue ball’s center is the old standard where we practice hitting the cue ball straight through the center of the table. Place the cue ball about eight inches behind the foot spot and shoot it to the center diamond on the far short rail. Hit the cue ball with a half tip of high to ensure that it rolls rather than slides after hitting it. With a smooth stroke and medium speed, shoot the cue ball to the center diamond on the far rail and leave your tip in place after the follow through. When you have mastered the center-ball hit, the cue ball will rebound from the far rail, straight through the center of the table to come back and hit your tip squarely. It’s an old, simple exercise but one with great value and a good one to spend ten minutes with periodically.

With the center-ball hit under control you’re ready to try some one-rail kicks. Shot A in the diagram is a simple one to figure since the cue ball and object ball are equidistant from the rail. To hit the solid ball off of one rail we simply find the midpoint between the cue ball and the object ball, extend a straight line from it to point X, and hit that point with a naturally rolling cue ball and medium speed. Any extra speed will cause the cue ball to rebound at a tighter angle than its approach to the rail and therefore requires an adjustment. To hit the solid ball with more speed, you must hit a spot on the rail that’s closer to the corner pocket. Hitting the cue ball below center has the same effect as extra speed and also requires that you hit a spot on the rail closer to the corner pocket. Spend some time to practice hitting the object ball with medium speed and natural roll from the reference midpoint. Then you can experiment with various speeds and various levels of draw to find the new spots on the rail for hitting the solid ball.

Finding the midpoint on the rail is a simple matter with a shot like the first one but how do we handle a shot like B, where the cue ball and object ball are not equidistant from the rail? There are two approaches that accomplish the task easily and effectively. One method allows us to “move” the object ball, and with the other, we imagine the cue ball in a different place to begin the process of finding our target as if the two balls were equidistant. Both methods yield the same result and various situations make it easier to choose one over the other.

To “move” the solid object ball, imagine a straight line from that ball to the cushion that ends at O. Now, find the midpoint between the object ball and the cue ball,

M in the diagram. Lay your cue on the line from M to O and hold it there for a moment. Then move your stick over the cue ball on a line that's parallel to the M-O line. The spot where that parallel line meets the cushion is where you need to shoot to hit the object ball.

To “move” the cue ball we imagine it in the place on the table that would be equidistant with the object ball, spot C in the diagram. Find the midpoint between C and the object ball, MC, and make a straight line to the cushion from that midpoint, Y in the diagram. Lay your cue over the line from C to Y and hold it there for a moment. Now, as in the first method, move your stick on a line parallel to C-Y over the cue ball. Did you get the same spot on the cushion to hit? Both methods serve the same purpose for accurately finding the exact spot on a cushion to hit for a one-rail kick. Sometimes it's easier to “move” the object ball and sometimes it's easier to “move” the cue ball. Remember though that the spot you find will work with a cue ball rolling at medium speed. If you want to hit the shot with more speed, with draw, or both, you must adjust for the tighter rebound angle that those changes will cause.

As we move up through the ranks to compete against better opponents we can expect tougher safeties from them. At the professional level, where any player with an open shot is almost a guarantee to run out, matches turn on brutal safeties and the ability to answer them with accurate kicking. Nowadays, a player who lacks the knowledge and skill to perform one, two and three-rail kick shots consistently will hand the cue ball over to his opponent too often and cannot expect to win many matches outside of his own basement.

