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Kicking Safe

People often ask me what makes pool so great and, because there are so many aspects to our game, my answer usually depends on the most recent piece of artistry that I've witnessed. Most often however I point either to the game's complexity, which I always insist exceeds that of all other games, or the element that is completely absent from other leisure sports such as golf or bowling, namely safety. Because almost everyone begins playing pool simply shooting at balls with no regard for the opponent, that day when a player learns to control the opponent with safety probably marks the biggest and most powerful single step to the next level that one makes in a pool education.

On Disc III of the *Video Encyclopedia of Pool Shots* Dr. Dave and I present a thorough discussion of strategies for running out and winning along with a series of specialty offensive shots and a complete discussion of safeties and replies to safeties. In the diagram we see two of my favorite safeties from the series that can apply in all pool games even though we see them here as 9-Ball examples. Both employ a technique that we need when we cannot shoot directly at an object ball near a rail, a technique I call the short kick.

In shot A you have the 8 ball and 9 ball left on the table with no good shot on the 8. One option is to play the 8 ball into the corner rail first but, with this setup, not the smart choice for two reasons. One, rail-first shots can be difficult and if you missed the 8 and left it hanging in the corner, it's a sure sell out. Two, after coming off of the rail and hitting the 8 the cue ball is rolling away from the 9 and, even with a soft hit, could easily land too far down table to leave a good shot on the 9. Trying to hit the shot with enough speed to send the cue ball down table and bring it back up for the 9 is difficult and far too unpredictable for the winning player. Option two is a safety that, with a little practice, is simple to execute consistently and yields a very effective result.

To play the safety you will go rail first at the 8 with a below-center hit to stop the cue ball and send the 8 along the dotted line to land near the spot marked X. The first great thing about this shot is that you will hit it the same way you would to play a stop shot if you were shooting directly at the 8 ball. There is no need to learn anything new, only to apply what you already know to a new situation, going rail first for a full hit on the 8 with stop. The one tricky aspect of this shot is that when the cue ball is hit below center with draw or stop it rebounds more sharply from the rail. Thus you will need to aim at the rail slightly closer to the 8 ball than you may guess initially. Practice the shot at first without the obstructing ball to clear the distraction and to learn its pure elements. Experiment with your hit on the cue ball and the speed to move the 8 ball where you want it. Then, replace the obstruction and execute the safety.

Shot B is somewhat more advanced but illustrates the possibilities available on the shot we are playing. In this setup a stop shot would leave the cue ball in front of the 9

and therefore give up a shot on the 8. So now we must progress a step further to go rail first with draw to hit the 8 and move the cue ball back behind the 9 along the solid line in the diagram, essentially the same as shot A but with draw. Begin practicing again without the obstruction to learn the technique more quickly. First, take lower hit on the cue ball, go rail first for a full hit on the 8 and play the shot until the cue ball is drawing back a diamond segment or so near the rail. Continue shooting now with attention to speed making sure to leave the 8 ball up table. Again, when you have a feel for the elements of the shot, replace the obstruction and execute the safety. Shot B is a little trickier than the first shot with the extra element of control required but simple enough to lie within reach of any player who can draw the cue ball a foot. It certainly is a pretty shot, sure to strike fear into an opponent and raise an applause from a savvy audience.

Often in pool you will encounter new shots that do not require new knowledge or skill but merely a different perspective. The stop and draw shots that we are working with this month are the same ones that you know already except that you will go rail first with them. As a side note, I'm not embarrassed to say that relatively few shots in my personal library of pool knowledge are ones that I discovered alone. Most are shots I learned from other players, teachers, books and videos. Shot B, while I'm sure is not my invention, is one of my own discoveries and it came out for me a few years ago as a mistake when I was fooling around with an attempt at something else. So here is the "mistake" that I wish I had made a few years sooner and one that I now share with everyone.

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