

## The Reference Continued

A major breakthrough in a pool education occurs when the perceptive player realizes that many seemingly advanced techniques require nothing more than minor adjustment to well-known basics. That's when the student begins to understand that the game does not demand a thorough mastery of every possibility, but that we can build much of the required learning on top of a smaller set of benchmarks or references. And, after those references are mastered, one may begin to fine tune a complete and powerful game. The main focus at that point is determining what goes into assembling such an important set of tools.

The first and most essential of the reference shots is the stop shot and, after several months of work, we can now complete our discussion of its value. In the diagram we see a very simple shot on the solid ball into the side pocket. Begin with the cue ball on the X and some stop shots. Play them at various speeds with dead, perfect stops as your goal. In practice we must work to eliminate the smallest amounts of front, back, left or right cue-ball movement from the stop shot.

From there move the cue ball over to the Y to play more stop shots at various speeds. For now, do not place the striped balls on the table. A perfect stop shot will move the cue ball reliably along the dotted line whenever the solid ball hits the side pocket dead center. That dotted line, of course, lies perpendicular to the line that the solid ball takes to the pocket, and hitting it exactly calls for precision with both aim and stroke.

Now move the cue ball back to the X for some stun follow and stun draw shots as we learned to play them last month, our first lesson in moving the cue ball with the stop shot as a reference. First, you will move the cue ball a few inches forward with stun follow. Align your tip with the spot on the cue ball that will produce a stop shot with a medium-firm speed, then raise it slightly, perhaps an eighth of an inch. Stroke the shot with a decisive punch stroke and practice until you are sliding the cue ball forward between two and four inches. Practice stun draw by beginning the same way and lowering your tip slightly until the cue ball is sliding back several inches for every shot.

Now move the cue ball back to the Y for one more warm-up shot before we reach our objective for this month. Place the two outside striped balls on the table and shoot some stop shots along the dotted line between them. Instead of giving the obstacles any attention make sure to focus on the stop shot with confident knowledge that it will move the cue ball along the path between them.

When you feel comfortable going through the large gap between the two outside stripes, move the cue ball to the Y again and place the third striped ball on the dotted line. Look at the setup and visualize the cue ball tracking between the center stripe and the top one with stun follow, again focusing on the track itself instead of the obstacles that surround it. It's important to recognize the desired track as a stun follow, which we now know is nothing more than an upward adjustment on the cue ball to a stop shot. For the shot that tracks between the center stripe and the lower one we must see it as a stun draw with a downward adjustment on the cue ball.

Many shots offer a number of possible cue-ball tracks that's too vast for any player to learn in one lifetime. Regarding each individual path as something to learn separately can cause a crippling fear if we should encounter a shot that demands a precise cue-ball track that we have not mastered. So, we master a benchmark track, the stop-shot in this case, and shoot confidently when we can identify a shot as one that calls for nothing more than an adjustment to a trusted reference.

