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## Carom Variations

Because a legitimate opportunity for an early win in 9 Ball tends to occur infrequently, we need the necessary knowledge to capitalize and secure the victory when that opportunity does arise. Most beginning players only identify combination shots as a way to pocket the 9 ball early. Soon however, all players learn to recognize carom shots and another whole world of possibility opens up to them. Those who spend the necessary time to learn and practice caroms will convert many chances in situations where the uninitiated player would fall short.

Although carom shots are not difficult to learn, the principles at work set them apart from all other pool shots and demand some special attention to gain comfort when shooting caroms. Also, depending on the setup, carom shots come in different forms, each employing a different approach for success. In the diagram we see three separate opportunities to carom the cue ball off of the solid ball to sink the nearby striped ball waiting in front of the pocket. Each distinct shot calls for its own specific technique to pocket the striped ball.

Shot A is my favorite type of carom and, because of its properties, the one I want to play whenever possible. As beginners in pool, we all identify the primary challenge of pocketing balls and focus our learning on that singular objective. Eventually, after shooting at enough balls, the process enters the non-thinking part of the brain and we begin to feel “hard wired” for pocketing balls. And, because we’re not billiard players, most of us never get that same feeling for carom shots. Shot A allows us to make the carom by shooting the object ball to a target—the very thing we do most naturally. When we add the basic position principle that a sliding cue ball will move on the track that’s 90 degrees to the path of the object ball after contact, we end up with a very reliable method for carom shots. So, for Shot A, lay your cue along the solid line, one-half ball width away from the solid ball, the distance of the cue ball’s center at contact. Then find the line perpendicular to the solid line as shown with the dotted line that goes to the X on the side rail. To make the carom, simply shoot the solid ball at the X, just as you would shoot a ball at a pocket, and stun the cue ball as you do for a stop shot. You can make this type of carom feel the same as a normal pool shot by staying focused on shooting the solid ball to its target and keeping your eyes fixed on the solid ball as it rolls to its target. If the solid ball goes to the X and the cue ball is sliding, the carom has to go.

Next is Shot B, which does not allow for the same technique but employs follow instead. For caroms with follow, begin imagining the line that goes from the center of the solid ball to your intended target, as shown with the dotted line that goes to the stripe. Now, with an above-center hit, aim the center of the cue ball at the spot on the back of the solid ball where the top, dotted line meets it. It may sound strange to aim at a spot you cannot see, but somehow the mind is able to fill in the missing visual information and find that aiming point rather easily. The cue ball will travel along the lower dotted line and, with good follow, proceed forward after contact to pocket the striped ball. Be sure to hit the shot with a level cue and a smooth stroke. Shot B illustrates another feature that

makes caroms appealing to the 9-Ball player. With proper speed the solid ball can wind up in the middle of the bottom short rail for a good safety in case of a miss. A missed combination with this shot however will often leave the 9 ball hanging with the solid ball nearby to give your opponent an easy game winner.

Finally we have Shot C, which employs draw, and may be the most difficult of the three shots. To pocket the striped ball in Shot C you will identify two lines, one that goes through the centers of the cue ball and solid ball, and the other through the centers of the solid ball and striped ball, as shown with the dotted lines. To make the carom, aim at the spot on the solid ball exactly between the two dotted lines and play it with draw. Many players add right-hand english to this shot but that's a mistake. Straight draw works best. Another common error is hitting the shot too hard, which sends the cue ball wide and into the right side rail. You want to hit the shot with just enough speed to make it, so a short, snappy stroke should work most effectively.

Because opportunities to pocket the 9 ball early tend to occur randomly, the player who converts those chances usually emerges on top in an otherwise even match. Here we see a representation of three distinct carom techniques to learn and practice for another element of the edge we seek in competition. And as we improve and move up the competitive ladder, each small measure of advantage that we take for ourselves makes a bigger difference in every match.



