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Combos With English

Throughout our work with english over the past six months it seems that every step forward comes with a set of warnings to manage the various difficulties that english brings to a pool shot with such variables as deflection, curve and throw. Last month we took a refreshing detour with a difficult rail shot that becomes rather easy with a technique that employs inside english. With that in mind let's examine another common yet challenging shot that becomes much easier with english.

It seems that the more we learn the more we shy away from combination shots. In fact, one can make a reliable assessment of a player's experience based on the types of combination shots that person will attempt. Like bank shots, experience teaches us the difficulties associated with combinations. Watch some of the shots a beginner will try after learning that pocketing the 9 ball on a combo wins the game. Better players usually shy away from all but the easiest short cuts, usually opting instead to run out an open rack. Occasionally however, the combination we face is the best choice and so we need the necessary tools to convert the opportunity.

In the diagram we see a combination shot that's aimed close to but not at the corner pocket. Since the line of centers, as shown with the dotted line, meets the rail within a few inches of the corner pocket this shot represents a good opportunity to keep shooting and a legitimate shot at a game winner if we're playing 9 ball. Even though we only need to move that stripe over a few inches to the pocket, the shot may be a bit more challenging than it looks. As my father made sure to tell me many times, "No matter how easy they look, combinations are always tough."

Through the years I've found that to be true and have learned to approach all combinations with caution and care. And while we may not be able to call this particular shot easy, there is a technique to make it considerably easier than it would be if we followed the popular approach to off-angle combinations. The conventional method for moving that stripe to the left and into the pocket would call for cutting the solid exactly enough to the right to cut the stripe to the left and into the pocket. We commonly see players getting down and pretending to shoot the stripe as if the solid were the cue ball to give them a contact point on the solid. That technique can work but is saddled with complexity and difficulty. Because of friction we must make sure to cut the solid a little thinner than we think necessary and, also because of friction, the solid, in turn, must cut the stripe a little thinner than the conventional approach dictates. Also, because of the short distance between the two balls, the solid will slide into the stripe and therefore impart more friction than it would if it were rolling, another complexity to factor into the calculation. For a thorough discussion of that phenomenon, you can read the results of Dr. Dave Alciatore's scientific analysis of friction and throw at:

http://www.engr.colostate.edu/~dga/pool/bd_articles/index.html

Throw - Part III: follow and draw effects" (October, 2006)

Although we can't skirt the rules of physics we can apply a different technique that helps insulate the shot from problems with friction. Instead of trying to determine exactly how much to cut the solid ball we're going to introduce english to the shot to gain a feel for "gearing" that striped ball to the pocket. First a quick review. Left-hand english always transfers some right-hand english to an object ball while also throwing that ball a little to the right. If there's a third ball, like the stripe in our picture, any right-hand english on the second (solid) ball will transfer some left english and left throw to that stripe. So, on a regular pool shot, left throws the object ball to the right. For a two-ball combination, like the one we have here, left throws the target ball, the stripe in our case, to the left, which happens to be the direction in which we want to move it. The right-hand english on the solid ball also helps to offset the effects of friction in the same way that outside english works with standard cut shots

Set up the shot as shown with the solid and stripe about four inches apart and the line of centers going to the rail a few inches from the pocket. Place the cue ball on the line of centers and get ready to shoot. Instead of trying to cut the solid dramatically enough to your right to cut the stripe into the pocket, prepare to cut the solid very slightly to your right. Cutting the solid to the right is not necessary to pocket the stripe, but we must make certain that we don't inadvertently cut it to the left, which, because of deflection, is a possibility here. Then, with a soft, smooth stroke, apply left-hand english to the cue ball and observe what happens. With a slight cut on the solid ball and a soft, smooth stroke, you can vary the distance you move the striped ball by adjusting only the amount of english you use. After a few trials you should be pocketing the striped ball consistently and attaining a good feel for the relationship between the amount of english used and the distance the striped ball moves toward the pocket.

After you are pocketing the shot in the diagram consistently you can experiment with different setups, keeping a couple of points in mind. This technique only works effectively for shots of this type. If the balls are farther apart than eight inches the shot will become too sensitive to english to work predictably. Likewise, when the object balls are too close, within an inch say, the english can help move the target ball but will not exert as pronounced and controllable an effect as it does with the shot in the diagram.

I've shared this technique with dozens of players, including a couple professionals, and every person who's learned it prefers it to the conventional method for its ease and predictability. After you gain a feel for moving the target ball with english, set up a few combinations within this framework and try both methods. I'm betting that you experience far greater success using english to control the shot.



