

PLAY POOL. IN THE ZONE

**SYSTEMS, STRATEGIES, IDEAS, AND METHODS FOR HOW TO
CONTROL THE CUE BALL, POCKET BALLS WITH ACCURACY,
RUN MORE RACKS, AND WIN MORE TOURNAMENTS, FOR
AMATEURS AND ASPIRING PROFESSIONAL POOL PLAYERS**

MAX EBERLE

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PLAY POOL IN THE ZONE

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Dedicated to You,

**The pool player striving to excel at this
fascinating game, a relentless test of physical
accuracy and mental toughness.**

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PLAY POOL IN THE ZONE

In my experience as a young man, playing pool in the zone was a state so powerful to my brain that I've spent an entire lifetime trying to get back into that realm of being as often as possible, much like an addict must keep returning to their drug of choice at the expense of all the other aspects of their life.

Thus, I must issue a warning about playing pool in the zone, it is known to be highly addictive, so enter into this endeavor at your own risk. Remember to balance your life with other things that make you happy. That being said, get ready to have a lot more fun on the table because playing pool at a high level is enjoyable indeed.

When you put in the practice and dedication with your game, where the hours, days, months, and years blend together as one solid blur of playing serious pool, you learn things about how to play, and you will develop abilities that at times give you a superhuman feeling that you can do anything you want with the cue ball and make any shot that presents itself or that you can imagine.

This feeling is what I want to help you achieve with the passages of this book. Let my experience and years that I put into working to perfect my own game give you a head start, or extra push towards finding your own perfection on the table.

I dare not use the word shortcut because ultimately you will have to practice hard and often to become the best you can be, even with the nuggets of wisdom that I'm giving you here. Yet if you apply most of this stuff, it will be a shortcut to better play for you.

See if what I say and recommend makes sense to you and if it actually works for you on the table. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

It may not be possible to control exactly when you'll be in the ultimate zone of omnipotence on the pool table, yet as you work on these skills and perfect them, your average game will start to look better than what you might consider your best day now, and your high points and zone days will become better and better.

When you do have those great sessions of firing on all cylinders, and feel that you might be ready to give ole Mosconi a run for his money if he were still alive, you'll know why I've spent a lifetime playing pool across the world looking for that next fix of playing pool in the zone.

You too will find yourself in the middle of a perfect run, pocketing ball after ball, landing that cue ball just where you want, time and time again, until late at night, satisfied with your play that day, you'll take a tired yet satisfied trip to bed where you'll dream about pool, knowing that you'll wake up the next day with the thought and desire to once again play pool in the zone.

WIN MORE GAMES WITH THESE FIVE SIMPLE WORDS

Getting into the details of what you need to fix in your game can be quite labor intensive. In my one-on-one personal lessons, I'll always find several things for my student to stop doing and give ideas on how they could do what they do better.

It often takes a lot of wording and rewording until we find a way to make an idea really click. The five words phrase I have for you can get rid of a plethora of bad habits and it replaces them with a simple yet effective remedy.

These are three of the biggest faults, or bad habits, that almost every single one of my new students have with their game:

1. *Moving their body*
2. *Moving their bridge hand*
3. *Not delivering a good stroke*

So what are the five words that can magically help you stop doing these three no-no's of playing pool?

"Stay Down And Follow Through"

Make this your mantra in your next practice session or match and see how it magically puts you in stroke and turns you into the well-polished and refined player you might see on TV winning a major title.

"Stay down and follow through" means to keep your head and body still and your bridge hand tight and motionless as you follow through the cue ball, with a perfectly executed stroke that goes until its natural completion.

Stay down and follow through... Do it, breathe it, live it. Run more racks, win more games. Welcome to wonderland.

THE FOUR D'S OF POOL EXCELLENCE

Today I'm giving you an easy way to remind yourself how to be the best possible pool player that you can be.

These are the four D's of sports achievement as outlined by Sports Psychologist and author Gary Mack, in his great book Mind Gym.

Actually, I had read an interview with Earl Strickland years ago where he promoted three of these same D's of excellence. Earl called them the three D's of pool; Dedication, Determination, and Desire. These are what you've got to have to be a great pool player, and I've always remembered that.

The fourth "D" as offered by Gary Mack is Discipline.

So, the four D's of Pool Excellence in no particular order are:

- *Dedication*
- *Determination*
- *Desire*
- *Discipline*

Dedication:

To become truly great at anything you have to be dedicated. The chances of you only playing only a few days a week and seeing a drastic improvement in your pool game are slim to none. You've got to play and practice to improve your game every single day.

If you've reached a level that you are happy with, you may not have to put in as much time to maintain your game, but in order to reach that level, you've got to be dedicated with great regularity.

Determination:

Don't let anyone or anything get in the way of what you want to accomplish on the pool table. Be determined to make a shot, learn a skill, win a match, win an event, and all of the above. Do it within the context of sportsmanship though.

One does not need to become a distracting "shark" to win, and in fact, this makes one kind of a loser even if they do end up winning. Be determined to win and have class while you do what you do.

Desire:

You won't go get it if you don't want it, and it's the amount of desire you have for it that will fuel your dedication, determination, and Discipline. Use that desire to fuel your pursuit of excellence. However, do not have so much desire that it distracts from implementing your skills.

Channel all that desire into concentration and let the game that you've worked so hard to build flow out of you in your performances.

Discipline:

No one can make you keep your body still. Stick to your game plan, keep your rhythm, play the correct shots, or do any of these things for you that require discipline. You have got to see the value in having discipline and have the maturity to implement this into your game on a daily basis, shot in and shot out.

THE AIMING CODE IS CRACKED AGAIN

Aiming always seems to be a hot topic these days. One reason I teach 15 aiming systems in Pro Pool Academy is that I know there is simply not one "system" that resonates or is easy for every one of my students to grasp or find useful on the table where it counts.

One thing I do repeat often is the importance of "getting down on the line" as you take your stance. In other words, stare intently at the object ball as you drop down into your form.

This one thing alone will instantly double the skill of millions of players if they were to just give it a try. It almost does not matter which system you are using, they all basically depend on you looking at the object ball on the way down into your stance.

After that, it almost does not matter at all what you do, take 10 practice strokes, just one practice stroke, or even close your eyes. If you came down on the stroking line accurately, there's a real good chance you'll make the shot, provided you stay down and follow through of course.

I've explained this many times and in many different ways over the years. Remember, your aiming system is important yet not necessarily as important as how well you apply it.

If you can keep your eyes glued onto the object ball as you get down on the shot, all the way until your bridge hand is secure on the table and your head is locked into place, your aiming technique will be highly effective.

MAKE THE LONG SHOTS: FAULTS AND FIXES

Lately, many people have been asking me for help on their long shots. I've been told by players that no matter how much they practice; they still only make 20-25% of their long shots. Well, it's true, everyone has ended a good run because of missing a long shot.

And it's the guys who can make those balls consistently that instill a little fear in most of their opponents. Let's face it, that's one thing that separates the top players from all the rest. The retention of accuracy regardless of distance.

In fact, there are millions of pool players who avoid long shots by only playing on a small table where there really are no long shots. But here I'm going to assume you want to attack the long shot head-on, and not avoid them by only playing on tiny tables.

What happens on long shots is that minute errors in your fundamentals, aim, or delivery are amplified and therefore the cue ball does not arrive at the object ball in the correct place.

BIG FAULT #1: Jumping up during the last stroke.

BIG FIX #1: Tell yourself to stay 100% still and do it! This is easier said than done, and disciplined work on this is only performed by the few, who end up winning most of the matches out there. Be one of the winning few who keep their body still.

BIG FAULT #2: Not carefully setting up your stance or descending into the shot on the correct line.

BIG FIX #2: Get on the stroking line FIRST then set up your feet and descend carefully with your eyes on the OBJECT BALL all the way down till your hand is on the table.

BIG FAULT #3: Wobbly, flimsy bridge hand.

BIG FIX #3: Make your bridge stronger and tighter and keep it solid throughout the stroke and follow through.

BIG FAULT #4: Thinking negatively or thinking about how long or tough the shot is right before you shoot the ball.

BIG FIX #4: Give yourself a fighting chance, tell yourself how easy the shot is and that you are going to make this shot. Or tell yourself that even though it's a tough shot, you're going to make it and give it a good stroke.

MAKE USE OF THE POOL TABLE DRIVING RANGE

I've heard it countless times from people when I tell them that I play pool, "I can make angled shots but I'm helpless on straight in shots." If you are familiar with my other instructional materials, you know how much importance to your pool game I place on taking the time to work on your straight in shot.

As with most things, if you just work on it a little bit, you will improve your pool game. Work on it a lot and you have the makings of a champion.

And the great thing about this discipline is that it helps all aspects of your pocket billiards game, all the way down to extremely thin cut shots, which seem to have no relation to the straight in shot.

While you work on your straight shot at all different distances, focus on following through with your cue staying perfectly on the line between the center of the cue ball and the center of the object ball. Keep your head down so you can actually see if your stroke stayed on that line or not.

If you miss the shot, notice which side of the pocket the ball went to so you can make an adjustment in your aim on the next shot.

Carefully check to see if you are indeed cueing the cue ball in the center, as it is easy for your eyes to trick you, and you may actually be hitting to the left or right...this causes deflection and then a miss.

Also try hard to get the center of your cue on the stroking line, having someone with a keen eye watch you do this is invaluable to your progress.

This is like hitting golf balls on the driving range. What great golfer does not make use of a driving range or does not work on their ability to hit the golf ball straight? Like a golfer, you have to hit buckets and buckets of balls to reap the benefits.

If you are not willing to work on your game, you cannot reach your full potential as a player, but since you are reading this, I know that is not the case. I know you will do what it takes to succeed.

As you do this pool drill, you will find that the more consistent your foot positioning and body positioning is, the better your setup into the straight shot will be. Everything you do will get better.

I dare you to do this for 10-30 minutes a day for a year and just see how much your pool game improves.

PHILOSOPHY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FUNDAMENTALS

One of the things I'm most known for in teaching pool is fundamentals. I've been blessed to receive many compliments from many top players and world champions on my own technique and I'm thankful to have helped players from dozens of countries improve their physical approach to the game and make them better players. This pleases me as I've put in a ton work on my form and in teaching it to others.

However, I want to discuss something even more important that will ultimately control how good of a player you become, and that is your philosophy. The first component of your philosophy is your intent on how good you decide that you will become. Not want or hope but decide that you WILL become that good.

You've got to draw a line in the sand and declare to yourself where all this work on your game must and will ultimately take you, and then you must constantly remind yourself of this target until it becomes your underlying thought and belief in yourself and where you are headed as a player.

To decide means to "cut off from all other possibilities."

Being crystal clear on your target skill level will animate your thoughts and actions way beyond being a normal ball banger in the pool hall who just wants to get away from his problems or in a somewhat wishy-washy way wants to get better, someday, and hopes to one day be "good enough to compete against so and so..."

Figure out exactly how good you want to be first, how far you are going to take this. And then trust you'll find the way and resources to help you get there.

Another component of your philosophy is your plan, you need to decide now how to arrive at where you one day want to be. Even though you might not know exactly how you will get there, what I mean is, do you plan on being dedicated to the cause and work on it in small increments every day, knowing and believing that it's the small increments compiled over time that will get you there.

You don't have to make some crazy improvement overnight or in just a few days, take the slow and steady route of consistent work on your game over days, months and years.

Yes, fundamentals are an aspect of your improvement, yet it's the philosophy of incremental changes and course corrections over time that will turn you into the beast on the table you know that you can and will become. When you are focused on improving in small ways, your leaps in skill may actually show up as big jumps in skill level that magically appear one day.

Most likely it was the daily small things you did that created that "quantum" leap. Ultimately, it will be your philosophy of having an intention and of slow and steady improvement that will push you through the multiple sound barriers or slumps that allow you the success you desire.

Be the guy who creeps up and passes everyone around you and runs racks like its nothing, like you were born to do it. Slow and steady wins the race.

TECHNIQUE IN PLAYING POOL IS MEANINGLESS WITHOUT INTENTION

With all the techniques out there for aiming and playing, systems devised, packaged, and sold to pool-playing lovers like yourself, what really is the most important factor that will get you playing like a champ? And, what is it to play like a champion? Is winning enough or is mastering the game the real goal?

I'll start out by proposing that mastering the game is the goal and that winning is a byproduct of mastery. Jack Nicholas told Tiger Woods at the start of his career that excellence is the lodestar and winning will come as a byproduct.

Do the pool balls know or care what kind of spin you put on it, or punish you because you did not comply with someone's theory on how the game "should" be played? Not really, but they will behave as a consequence of what you think and do and how you put them into motion.

With a lot of practice, you'll find that you can master the game as long as you are within certain parameters of accuracy and at least get the cue ball where YOU wanted it to go, and the ball in the pocket you intended.

What matters most is how much intention you infuse into your playing, be it practice or competitive. If you know me by now, there are themes I always come back to and so it should be no surprise what I'm about to say... by starting to incorporate the choosing of an exact spot for your cue ball to land on EVERY shot you take, you will

become MUCH better than previously possible, AND do it in a much shorter time frame.

This kind of discipline in picking the spot for the cue ball will become more valuable to your game than any SYSTEM ever will. And I'm one who promotes systems. It is the system however that is the servant of intention and therefore not the master of your results.

On the pool table, your plans and desires (with the help of your increased skills learned from the results in which there were clear intentions) will be the driving force behind the success of the systems you incorporate.

If the system you use does not get you closer to gaining mastery of the cue ball, it's either time to give the system less credit or start adding the component of getting your cue ball where you want, over and over again. Why, because you want mastery.

And if you are indeed trying to win, that's what it will take to beat the players who can (or who are at least very close) to playing perfect pool. Time to bear down and make things happen properly on the table. And of course, within that, learn how to relax and do it with style.

ADAPT: THE ONLY OPTION

Now I know why, while growing up, I never heard a Filipino pool player complain about poor pool table conditions, it's because the "billiard" table conditions in the Philippines can be so difficult that even bad conditions on a pool table in the States are usually like a well-manicured PGA Tour golf course in comparison to the normal conditions over there in your average billiard hut.

There are a few pool halls with acceptable conditions actually such as Star Billiards, One Side, and Puyat Lanes Billiards all in greater Manila. Yet there are tables across the country that are only covered by a roof, with daily serious pool playing by the locals, that present a challenging playing surface, to say the least.

I experienced this most recently on a trip to play in Manny Pacquiao's Pacman Cup in General Santos at the southern end of the Philippines. It was my first time traveling there in the summertime hot, wet, and muggy season, and wow how extreme the conditions were at that time.

Not only were the tables playing tougher than in Fall, Winter, and Spring... The humidity was making my hands and even my face sweat while I was busy trying to adjust to the different tables.

The best conditions in Gensan were in the tournament arena at the Pacman Stadium and even better in the air-conditioned SM Mall. All the other tables away from those venues were in half inside/outside pool halls and were directly affected by the humidity and pollution in the air from nearby trikes and jeepneys, two of the local modes of transport.

Suffice it to say, this was a crash course in adjusting to extreme conditions, and yet at the same time, it was a lot of fun.

Of course, there is the talcum powder. Most players in the Philippines use it and even dump a big pile of it on the side rail near one of the side pockets for easy access. I asked my partner in the Pacman doubles event what to do if the pile of powder is in the way of your shot, and he told me to “just swipe the pile over to the side.” This sounded comical to me, but ok, it made sense.

I learned to take obstacles like a low hanging wooden beam over the breaking end of the table in stride and just duck out of the way when I was walking near it. Of course, I learned this the hard way after hitting my head a few times.

In my first-round match in the singles event, I played one of the best matches of my life in terms of running out and cue ball control. This was after a morning three-hour practice session on that local table. The conditions on the tournament table were so good in comparison to that table that everything just seemed easy in my match.

When I returned home from the Philippines my skill level felt to have jumped up several notches as a result of all the serious play against great players known and unknown, on equipment both good and extremely rough and super challenging.

Embrace the “tough” conditions you may find on tables here in the states and elsewhere and remember that it is probably not that tough in reality when compared to what exists in the Philippines where serious players must learn to adapt to unusual conditions.

I recommend seeking out a bad table once in a while to hone your ability to adapt to poor conditions. It’s easy to get accustomed to perfect conditions here in the states and fall into a lull of thinking all

pool tables will be so easy. Keep your senses on alert and your game will improve.

It's a good idea to keep a bridge hand glove and a hand towel in your case for those times when conditions get hot and muggy.

HIT YOUR SWEET SPOT ON EVERY SHOT

Without hitting the sweet spot properly, doing a couple other very important things won't really be so helpful.

The first important thing is to control your body into a shooting mechanism that you can position into a chosen line of aim. This is getting into alignment and making sure your form is a properly working pool-shooting machine.

The other important thing is to have rhythm and then deliver a smooth confident stroke while keeping a solid bridge and staying down in your stance.

The SWEET SPOT connects these two important components of your game.

So, what is the sweet spot?

It's that moment when you just arrive and settle into your stance with your eyes on the object ball and see that you are indeed on your line.

It's right at this moment that you'll know that you're in the proper position to make the ball... or not.

The better and more often you hit this sweet spot of perfect aim and alignment, the smoother and more confident your strokes will be because you just know you will make the ball.

It's all about hitting this sweet spot. Once you do, you can even get ridiculous with the shots you attempt in practice and can literally do

magical things with the cue ball while knowing in advance that the shot is going in.

I've written and made videos about this in various ways, especially talking about positioning your body. This is all of that, condensed into one magic moment, or sweet spot.

Try finding and hitting this spot today in practice or in an event. See how wonderfully it connects your form with your shot and how easy the game becomes.

MAKE MORE SHOTS WITH A CLEAR AND POSITIVE THOUGHT

While playing pool, there is an importance to not thinking any negative thoughts right before or during a shot that you want to make. All pool players have experienced missing right after thinking that they would miss. This "negative" thought could have crept in before they got down to shoot, or in the instant before they pulled the trigger.

As an exercise for your next time at the table, in practice or even in competition, and especially on longer "tougher" shots, I want you to tell yourself "this ball is going in" at different times before your delivery stroke. You can even keep it going like a meditation mantra and don't stop until the ball actually does go into the pocket.

Saying the entire phrase "this ball is going in" or "this shot is going in" could even be too long and distracting to say in your mind as you are about to shoot, so for that time right before and during your last stroke, you can just say the word "in" for simplicity.

This exercise can be used in a few different ways,

1. *To replace actual negative thoughts or doubts that you may have noticed before some shots with a positive replacement.*
2. *To calm general anxiety that could cause you to move during your delivery stroke.*
3. *To proactively prevent negative thoughts or anxiety from appearing at all.*

You can invent your own positive phrases as well that work better for you or customize them to specific shots or situations. It could be “I’m making this cut shot” or “I’m winning this match.”

You may find yourself pleasantly surprised when your body obeys your mind when it comes to these positive thoughts. The mind gives the body its instructions on how to behave so take the controls and steer it into winning actions.

NEVER GIVE UP

One of the themes that will always come up if you are a pool champion or working to become one, is to never give up. Lately this “there is always a chance to win” attitude has won me 3 matches because I did indeed have to come back.

Looking back on my career up until now, it has won me hundreds if not thousands of matches.

Now, of course, you will not always have great opportunities to make a comeback, yet when you have the right attitude, you will be able to come back many times to win when the opportunities show up.

And somehow when your opponent feels that you're fighting hard, you'll get more of those opportunities because of the pressure you put on them.

There is nothing worse than giving up in a pool match. Don't be that player. It's better to just quit competing at pool altogether than to be that player who makes it a habit of giving up when the score is not in your favor.

Nick Varner once told me about coming from behind “I never usually looked at the score until it was hill-hill anyway.” So, man-up, stay tough and be mentally strong. Fight, fight, and keep fighting until the last ball drops, and you'll find that often it's you who shot it down.

A match is a real pool war and you're a soldier on the table. Be the champion that you can be. Champions never give up.

THE WINNING MINDSET IN MATCH PLAY

There are only two ways to think about the one percent of pool players who have become run-out players and tournament champions.

One way is to think that their position is unjust, that what they have is simply a result of randomness, luck, or they were simply blessed with innate talent beyond most peoples' reach and just the right circumstances to make them as good as they are and able to win as much as they do.

This type of thinking basically guarantees that you will not have to worry about becoming a great player.

The other way to think about it is: If one person can do it, then there's no reason that I can't do it too. If he can do it, then that is proof that others can, so therefore I can too. So now I will get busy figuring out how and start doing it now, today.

You will either see great players and their abilities, talents, and wins as proof that you can't... or proof you can. Having the winning mindset for playing pool is an utmost important thing.

Both in the match you have now, and in your hope and prospect for long term success and future improvement to become the pool player and person you want to become.

You can create and change your mindset through the power of your own imagination and thinking, and through the power of association (exercised by reading this and the players you choose to listen to,

learn from and hang out with), and through the power of implementation of the skills you learn.

Shut your mind out to negative comments thrown out at you by weak thinkers or sleazy pool sharks trying to throw you off your game.

Hold on to the positive champion comments, thoughts, compliments.

Hold highest in your mind the vision of yourself being a champion and possessing the skill, ability, and heart to be a champion... on and off the pool table.

THE TRUTH

I had a nickname for the ten-foot Hermelin pool table at Best Billiards in Las Vegas... “The Truth.”

Once you started playing on this pool table, you’d find out pretty quick the truth about how accurate, or inaccurate, you really were.

“The Truth” was a great gift to my game and I considered myself lucky to have access to that table each and every day. It was one of the only ten-foot pool tables in Nevada.

If you ever get a chance to play on a ten-foot pool table, seize it. It will force you to become more accurate, to become more fundamentally sound, to think about your position play harder so the table does not force a difficult stretch, to play smarter, tighter position so you are not always shooting a super long shot.

Even if you are a die-hard bar box pool table player, putting in some time on this table will make you even more of a monster on that bar box. In fact, after playing on a ten-foot pool table for a while, the nine-foot table will seem like a bar box.

Pool players grab your pool cue and find yourself a ten-foot pool table to test your skills and improve upon them with. You have no option but to improve by doing this.

YOUR REWARD IS ON THE WAY

Sometimes I wonder how amateur players feel about working on their fundamentals. Do they enjoy working on them, or is it labor that is just too time-consuming and too hard to see the results? Then I realize that how on earth can they enjoy working on fundamentals when good information is so hard to find in the first place...

But for now, let's say an aspiring player has good information in their hands about fundamentals, or a good teacher to work with. Will they have the sticking ability and focus to continually mold themselves until everything starts to click? To quote the great boxing trainer Freddie Roach, "It ain't easy!"

Even for a guy like me who is living in large part is based on performance on the table, it is no piece of cake to master the basics. Even with a lot of time devoted to mastery of the craft, it's a lot of work to get it right.

And sometimes the results come slowly... or there seems to be a backward slide that could last hours, days, weeks or more. Or sometimes there are the occasional strings of great shots only followed by a miss that was off by a diamond or two.

I can say this; you've got to love the process. You've got to also feel it is coming to you, the mastery of the game. You can't listen to the negative words of negative people. You have to think like a champion, train like a champion, and expect to accomplish your goals the way a champion would. In essence, you have got to become a champion.

Lately, I've been making some slight changes in my alignment and stroke, plus increasing my control and feel in my grip... this has not been easy or fast, and in a sense, it's a leap of faith because I have to trust my learning, my instincts, and my ability to analyze other great players to find useful nuggets that could add to my ability.

I've been experiencing some marvelous shot making moments... in between some awful misses, and then back to some nice moments, all the while continually guiding myself into what I am trying to accomplish... which is basically committing to and mastering a new movement.

Last night I revisited the thrill of the harvest. There really were no bad shots. It all came together in a way that not only worked but transcended the sum of the parts that went into making an effective pool shooting machine. It would be easy to call this zone experience accidental, but that would be too easy. It was no accident. I did the work. I stuck to it. I expected success.

And there is the lesson. Work your ass off to perfect a technique with unwavering persistence, and you will be rewarded. Even in the face of sending balls FedEx into the rails...persist. Demand of yourself that you get it, and that you get it right.

When you miss a shot badly and someone laughs or scoffs at the pool hall, crack a smile from the side of your mouth and wink at them and say to them in your mind "Go ahead jerky, keep laughing, you've got a high-speed train on the table coming your way." And then breathe and get back to work on your game.

The reward is making everything you look at and walking the cue ball around the table like it is a perfectly trained prize show dog, loyal to its master.

THE SENTENCE THAT CHANGED MY FRIEND

Recently my friend from San Diego was in Vegas for the CSI tournaments at the Rio. He was there to play with his league team and was looking for help with his game.

He told me the backswing was not so important as long as your stroke forward was pure. I told him that the backswing is very important because if you pull back on the line, it's much easier to come through on a straight line.

He liked that.

Then he asked me what the pros are doing right, and I said: "**Henry, the pros do a number of things right, and they practice it.**"

The next day, he called me to thank me for what I said. He told me his game had transformed and he was playing like the beast he once was years ago when he was playing more pool.

You see, you can do it too. Learn how to do all the little yet important things well, and then keep doing them every time you play. Master the things that make you solid, and it all adds up to a solid game.

Just this multi-skill awareness will help you. Focus on the process for success, each and every shot, so that the good results will follow.

Eventually, it becomes second nature. Go through all your skills and make sure you are doing the little things like staying down, keeping a solid bridge, finding your stroking line before you get into your stance, etc, etc...

CROSSING THE RIVER

Sometimes I have to be a little blunt. I want my students to have real results and have real improvement, so it's time for a little tough love.

It seems like everybody these days wants to be a wizard on the pool table right away. They want to pull off crazy shots, learn advanced strategy, kicking, cool bank shots, etc.

And then when I watch them play a little, they can't even hold the cue properly, they are jumping up on their shots, they are hitting their body with their cue on their stroke, or to avoid this they are crookedly steering their cue and delivering an ugly stroke.

Yet they want advanced strategy, and they can't even pull off a friggin stop shot when they need it, or draw the cue ball six feet for shape on the 9-Ball.

When I have a new student, I know what their problems are before I even see them hit a ball. This might sound arrogant but it's not. It's just reality. I've been teaching for 20 years and I know what people are doing wrong.

It's almost always something from that previous paragraph, and usually combined with several other things like not aiming while standing, not knowing where the stroking line is, having no idea what they want to do with the cue ball until they are down (or changing their mind), changing the aiming line (stroking line) while down on the shot. The list goes on and on.

It seems like everyone wants to do insane Corey Deuel shots before they can just consistently make easy looking run outs... Man oh, man.

Let me tell you. You've got to crawl before you can walk, walk before you can run, and run before you can fly. Now I want you to be able to fly, just please do me a favor... take the time to go through the proper process of improvement so that you can one day fly.

Ok, now when I say crossing the river I'm talking about the land of riches and super skill and strategy on the other side of the river from where you are standing. It's a wide and deep river filled with hungry piranhas and crocodiles, undertows and giant man-eating catfish. If you try to swim across this river without first mastering the basics...surely you will be eaten alive.

There does exist however one sturdy and safe way to cross this perilous river. If you take this bridge what awaits you on the other side is resort style living with all the amenities and possibilities your heart desires. You can run out in whatever way you choose, just because you feel like it.

You can make long shots, short shots, bank shots, kick shots into the pocket, make the cue ball land on a dime at will, and win events on a regular basis. Sound good?

Well, that bridge is the fundamentals. Be different than the slew of amateurs out there who just wing it, play kind of decent, and then when they get to the river bank, simply stare at the other side dreaming and wishing they could cross to the land of bounty yet don't have the bridge to get there so they just stay on this side or jump in only to get eaten by a great white shark, or worse yet eaten by a big carp.

Don't let that be you. Find the bridge and walk across surely and safely to the other side to run-out land.

Ok now go make that bridge more solid, straighten out that stroke, stay down and follow through on your shots, and mark up another bead on your side of the scoreboard. Go master your fundamentals and start kicking some tail!

A DRILL FROM "COWBOY" JIMMY MOORE

Watching YouTube, you may have seen "Cowboy" Jimmy Moore in a classic television match beating his opponents on the pool table. He is a legend and Hall of Famer, a straight pool master, and known by his peers who included Willie Mosconi, to be a master of the cue ball.

The Cowboy's son Jimmy Jr., who I've become good friends with here in Las Vegas, is a really cool guy and an excellent pool player in his own right. Jimmy Jr. has been telling all kinds of great stories about his dad, and this drill is one of them.

Basically, you line up all fifteen balls in order from the bottom of the foot rail in a straight line out past the spot. I've found that after the eighth ball or so, you'll need some space between the balls so you can still hit the contact point.

In this drill, you must shoot the balls in order, into opposite corner pockets every shot. There really is no rule that you must go two rails with the cue ball, or only one rail with the cue ball every time.

You can even bank a ball if you get out of line or draw the cue ball 3 rails to get back into shape if need be. But you **MUST** shoot them in order, and into opposite bottom corner pockets every shot.

Then, when you make the 15-Ball, you place the balls back up and work **DOWN** the line, and back up five to get to thirty-five.

Jimmy Jr. said The Cowboy used to bet even on the money that he could run thirty-five balls, or "35 no count." Jimmy Jr. said he usually won this bet. Just incredible, and he liked doing it on a 10-foot table the most.

I've done the one pocket one-rail-drill many times, yet this adds a whole new level of difficulty.

I can vouch that it does indeed help your cue ball control. Just two nights ago I ran 168 balls and it had been several months since I broke 100. The "Cowboy" used to run 100 or more every single day, and even guarantee that he would run 100 within two hours... or not get paid for his pool hall exhibitions!

A SLIGHT TWIST ON AN OLD FAITHFUL DRILL

The chapter "Make Use of the Pool Table Driving Range" discusses utilizing the long, straight in shot. Practicing it every day for a while will help so many different aspects of your game from aim to body alignment and more.



Diagram 1: Long straight in shot

So, the slight twist on old faithful is to set the shot up just slightly off of straight in and get used to the little adjustment in aim that it requires to make the shot. Doing this will also teach you how to make the straight in shot by default. Once you can cut slightly to the right and to the left, you'll know that in between these, is the straight-in aiming line.



Diagram 2: Long almost straight in shot, a slight cut to the right



Diagram 3: Long almost straight in shot, a slight cut to the left

Practicing this variation will give you a slight edge in your game. A slight edge is still an edge, and it's the accumulation of countless slight edges that will keep your game on the rise constantly.

Remember CANI ...Constant And Never-ending Improvement.

BE THE CAPTAIN

When you are at the pool table it is *yours*. **You** make the decisions. *You* decide which balls to make and in what order. And *you* decide where *you* want to land or try to land the cue ball on every shot.

You have the choice to run a tight ship or a sloppy one. And you can navigate with accuracy using all the instruments available to you or you can drift about with the wind and just wonder where the seas will take you next.

Learn to make concise decisions with where you want to go so that your ship can efficiently get you there. The more decisive you are in where you go with the cue ball, the tighter your ship, and your course can be. So stay on your toes as you walk around the table and be confident in your decisions.

The actual execution of your shots is the sailing part. You will want to develop the skills to get the job done and arrive at your port of choice with a nice shot on the game-winning ball, time and time again.

As you walk around the pool table running the balls, keep the control of the cue ball on the front of your mind. Send it cleanly to the contact point on the object ball and have it take your desired path to the landing port you have clearly chosen.

Remember, you are the captain of the pool table, the object balls, and the cue ball. Take charge and sail to clear destinations. Play with command.

PRE-SHOT ROUTINE: THE BEGINNING OF CONSISTENCY

The pre-shot routine is a much talked and written about phenomenon in the game of golf, and as important as it is in golf, it is also as important in playing pool.

An effective pre-shot routine leads to consistency in your game and successful results over and over again. There are plenty of items on your physical checklist to take care of in a short amount of time.

You'll also need a solid mental pre-shot routine to keep you focused on the task at hand which is getting both the object ball and cue ball to go and land where you want.

Clear thinking presides over all of it. Know with clarity what you are working to accomplish on every shot. That being said, build clear thinking into your routine. This could be classified as a (pre)-pre-shot routine.

Thinking over your strategy, even if it's just a visual glance of the table to see the pattern so that you know with confidence what your first shot will be, is critical to winning pool matches consistently against tough opponents. To keep them in the chair, get clear on your game strategy.

Once you've decided on a shot, now get clear on that shot. You'll never be a great position player if you don't pick out where exactly you want the cue ball to land. You'll also have a slower time adjusting to table conditions if your targets are generalities at best.

Now that you know what you are planning to do with clarity, it's time to get set up. This is the beginning of the real pre-shot routine, and it begins with your feet. In particular your back foot. You've got to be aware of your back foot and its position in relation to your shot. This helps set up your stance for the entire shot.

Both feet are really involved so let's call this your footwork. Good footwork is essential in playing top level pool. Most people do this on autopilot and it works for them. Even pros do it on autopilot.

The difference is that a top pro has put thought and time into making their footwork as good as possible so that their automatic mode happens to be awesome by design and conducive to playing consistent run out pool.

The best footwork out there can only be guided by the best planning or visualization for the shot. Keep that in mind. What you want to do is set up your feet at the proper distance from the cue ball on every shot, so that the rest of your pre-shot routine can flow in proper sequence and order.

So, start to think about the spacing between your feet and the cue ball, and focus on setting that up properly before each shot. You'll see how that awareness helps your consistency in playing pool.

PRE-SHOT ROUTINE: CHALKING UP

Chalking your cue not only has an important physical function to playing the game, it serves as an important element in your pre-shot routine that contributes to your consistency as a player.

Chalking is a ritual that helps with your success on the table. It has a place in the sequence in the way you get into your stance/shots and therefore deserves your attention.

For starters, begin to pay attention to how and when you chalk the cue. Notice if your chalking frequency and technique changes depending on what is happening on the table or in a match. See if you can notice a rhythm about the way you chalk when you are playing well and try to duplicate it or recreate it all the time.

Also, if you don't have personal chalk, how neat are you with the chalk on the table? Do you lay it down upside down allowing everything around you to get filthy? Players who are really sloppy with the chalk might also have a sloppy game. If you want to be a champion, have a clean chalk game.

Look at how snooker pros all carry their own chalk and chalking is a part of their pre-shot routine. The table stays clean and the game moves faster. Plus, you don't have to go hunting for chalk and constantly moving it out of the way of your next shot.

Instead of making chalking just something that must be done, incorporate it into your shot routine so that it contributes to your

success. Keep it neat and clean just like your cue ball control ought to be if you want to win.

GET TO THE STROKING LINE

So far, we've covered setting up your feet and chalking the cue as part of your pre-shot routine. So now let's back up a little bit.

Before you can position your feet or your back foot onto the stroking line, you must find and get your eyes squarely "ON" the stroking line. That step needs to become the foundation of all your shots and all elements of your pre-shot routine, at least once you get into the setup phase.

The step of getting the eyes on the stroking line first (before getting down into the stance) sounds so obvious, yet too often I see players NOT finding the line first, and so their entire shot making process begins with little hope of success. Luck and propensity to compensate become their crutch or best hope.

You need to organize every stance, set up for every shot, **around the distinct visual confirmation of the stroking line**. Let me repeat, you need to organize every single shot/stance set up, around the distinct visual confirmation of the stroking line. What does that really mean? It means don't get down to shoot a shot until you stand on and see the line you want to shoot down.

So, the key element of your pre-shot routine is to find and look down the stroking line. If you can add this to your game, almost any sequence of events after that will produce a much greater measure of CONSISTENT success for you on the pool table, for years to come.



Fig. 1: This is (the yellow line) standing ON and looking down the stroking line (the line you will hit the cue ball down)



Fig. 2: The green grassy line here is the stroking line. This is NOT standing on or looking down the line.



Fig. 3: You are the airplane that lands on the stroking line.



Fig. 4: *Not a good-looking landing! Don't start landing until you are lined up with the runway. So simple yet so powerful. Organize your stance around this line as you stay focused on it.*

Even try to prove me wrong by NOT getting on the stroking line before you get down into your stance, and report back to me how that turned out for you.

Basically, get behind the cue ball facing in the direction you want to shoot, and then refine the accuracy of that so that you can get down and make a shot successfully. As you descend into your stance, keep your eyes focused on the object ball and be sure to maintain being centered on the stroking line.

PRE-SHOT ROUTINE: WARMUP STROKE PATTERN

A big part of putting yourself into a trance of consistency is your stroking pattern during your warmup strokes. An entire book, *Pleasures of Small Motions* by Bob Fancher Ph.D. was written with this aspect of your game as being THE most important part of a performance on the pool table. There is merit to this.

If you take a look at Efren Reyes at various stages throughout his long career and pay attention to his pre-shot stroking pattern, you'll notice how little variation there is in what he does as the years go by.

Every top player develops their way of taking warmup strokes and that becomes very helpful or necessary in creating rhythm inside of their game.

The coordination of your eyes to the movement of your cue is very important and you ought to put some effort into finding a way of doing it that works for you. Once a player "gets in stroke" that also means that their arm and grip are warmed up, along with their eye movement sequence, as it relates to the warm-up strokes and final delivery of the cue.

If you do all of the previous components of your pre-shot routine, get your bridge set firmly, and then get into your stroking/eye movement pattern, your likelihood of success on any given shot will increase tenfold.

There is no magical one correct way of organizing your practice strokes or some magical number of practice strokes for you to take, yet when you find one that does work for you, that becomes your magical result producing sequence. You might be in “dead punch” and only take one or two practice strokes every shot.

This is possible with superior attention to detail in your shot setup process. Three, four, five, or six warmup strokes may be your magic number, or even fifteen. Somewhere in the single digits should get the job done though, and it can vary a bit on shorter shots compared to longer shots.

One general guideline is to look at the cue ball as your cue tip is going into the cue ball and look back at the object ball as you pull away from the cue ball. Then before your last backswing, lock your eyes up at the object ball and then start your last backswing and then deliver your actual stroke.

There can be so much variation that I give this as a guideline, yet work on it, look at your favorite pros and come to settle on something that works the best for you.

My grandfather Pop always marveled at local players who “sawed too much wood,” meaning they just stayed down taking practice strokes forever before each shot. As you improve, your pattern should become more refined without the need to stay down forever on a shot.

With the disciplined adherence to all the components of pre-shot routine, finding a good pace for yourself will develop.

PRE SHOT ROUTINE: SECURE YOUR BRIDGE

If the pre-shot routine is a sequence of events that you can repeat in order to generate consistency in your game, then securing your bridge is probably the most important event out of that sequence.

As many professional players as there are, there are that many styles of play. Yet one thing that is not optional is having a well secured bridge hand onto the table. Watch closely how well a pro secures their bridge and you'll notice how good they are at this.

The moment that the bridge hand becomes secure is the moment you know a shot will soon be fired off. When you start to address the shots and table well with the bridge hand, your quality of shot results will surely take a quantum leap as well.

A pool player will only be as good as their bridge will allow them to become. This makes this step in the sequence of prime importance.

A good analogy would be to that of a rock climber. Imagine you are 1,000 feet off the ground on the vertical face of a granite cliff and your only way out is up. You reach upwards feeling around for a suitable handhold on which to grab so you can pull yourself up and free your other hand to look for a new hand hold and continue the process.

Knowing that your life depends on each handhold, you will definitely make sure that you have a great grip each time you decide on a hand hold. Grip first, then continue.

The same is true in pool, most players just do not know this. First, secure your bridge in place, and then begin your practice strokes and

finally, deliver the cue (while holding the bridge). Holding on to a cliff is not so easily forgotten when your life is on the line, but what about on the pool table.

Yep, that's right... most players are letting go too soon, the equivalent of dropping off the rock face without a parachute.

The payment for such bridge hand infractions is not nearly as costly as dropping off a cliff... but missing a lot may as well be dropping off a cliff if you are hoping to improve and maintain a high level of skill on the pool table.

Add this most important aspect of your pre-shot routine into your game and trust me... you will begin to dominate your current pool world, even if it is just you and the table. You'll be beating the table more often than not. And if you do compete, winning will become a routine matter of fact in your daily reality.

Deny yourself this step in the sequence, and you may find yourself being the shark chum of solid players for a long time yet to come. The choice is yours.

Be the comfortable shark that swims around and eats what it wants. Secure your bridge hand by a matter of routine, and keep it secure as you follow through.

PRE-SHOT ROUTINE: STEP AND DESCEND INTO YOUR STANCE

A little bit back ago I talked about the importance of footwork in your pre-shot routine in playing pool. I mentioned that you can get your back foot positioned (on the stroking line and the correct distance from the cue ball) so that you can then get into your stance. We also talked about the importance of clear thinking on what you want before getting into your stance.

Before moving forward, I want to suggest that you have a few options when it comes to your stance setup footwork. Many people when asked, don't even know what they do with their feet to set up, they just do it naturally.

This can be good, especially if they've practiced hard to make shots, and now this unconscious footwork works for them as an automatic success system. However, putting more effort and attention to this can help greatly improve consistency in shot making and cue ball control.

Here are five major options of footwork you can choose:

- 1. Position your back foot on the stroking line in the location where it will be during your stance, so that you can simply step forward with your front foot and in the same motion your body and bridge hand continue, and your stance is formed.*
- 2. Position your back foot, then step forward with your front foot and get both feet set, pause, then descend onto the table with your bridge hand.*

3. *Stand a little closer to the shot with your front foot in place and then step backward, putting your rear foot into place last as you descend into your stance.*
4. *Stand in the middle of where your feet will be, step your front foot forward into place, and then step back with your back foot and drop down into your stance.*
5. *Some type of variation of these four styles.*

There is no single “right,” or only way to do this, there are many wrong ways, however. What is true is that what you choose does need to work for you and become automatic in a way that serves your game successfully.

Pay attention to your stance setting up footwork and start to purposefully set up your feet in a way that improves your consistency. After a while, things which seem hard to you now will become quite easy when you map out a success sequence in your pre-shot routine, and learn how to plug it into your shots over and over again.

THE FASTEST WAY TO GREATLY IMPROVE YOUR 9-BALL AND 10-BALL GAMES

Once while staying on Boracay Island in the Philippines for a few weeks after a tournament, I managed to actually stay in stroke by playing Eight-Ball, and one of my favorite games which is wildly popular throughout the Philippines called Sixty-One against the local hot shots.

If you ever visit this paradise island, the place to play is a bar called 2-Kings. They have just one table, but it's by far the best one in town and a fun place at that.

"Sixty-One" is a form of 15-Ball Rotation (my favorite game) and **has all kinds of interesting rules such as:**

- *To make a good hit you can hit the rail and then the proper object ball without having to hit a rail afterward.*
- *If your opponent makes a bad shot, you can play the shot from the current position or spot the ball and take a spot shot from the kitchen.*
- *The player to get 61 points first wins the game. Each ball is worth the number value of that ball. If you snooker yourself, you can give your opponent a spot shot (the next object ball spots and your opponent has ball-in-hand behind the head string).*
- *If your opponent snookers you, you can make him shoot a spot shot.*
- *Slop counts (but you could play where it does not). Any ball pocketed on a bad hit gets spotted.*

- *To make a good hit you may hit the lowest ball first and then a rail or rail first and then the lowest ball with no need to hit a rail after.*

Sixty-One really is a fun way to play Rotation. Playing 15-Ball is one of the best and fastest ways for you to improve all around as a player. The position skills are more demanding than in 9-Ball or 10-Ball and you'll have to get good at combos, caroms, kicks and creative position plays. Plus, you'll have to become good at the spot shot.

I've loved playing 15-Ball Rotation since I was a kid and credit it with having a big part in making me into the player I am today.

Even though you probably will not find many 15-Ball games around the world, just practicing it will help you get much better in a shorter period of time than not playing it. Now there's a nice secret if I've ever heard one.

I remember reading a quote from Earl Strickland on his secret to becoming a better 9-Ball player and his answer was "Rotation, rotation, rotation" Have fun and improve your skill by playing 15-Ball Rotation in any of its various forms.

THE SECRET FIRST RAIL FOR BRILLIANT CUE BALL CONTROL

I've said it before, that if you have been playing pool for any length of time, you know that one idea can make a big difference in your game.

Some ideas may work for you more than others. That's one reason why you want to constantly be on the lookout and search for the golden nuggets... here is one such nugget. See how it works for you.

The back story includes my grandfather Pop's philosophy that the cue ball is the only ball on the table... the only ball that matters. He would tell me that anyone can make a shot, but it's the player who can control the cue ball who controls the game.

And I'll add that shot making should become a given because you must pocket the object ball consistently.

Now, when I was training with the late, great Jason Bowie in the Washington, DC area in the late 1990s, one of our lessons was that the object ball was simply the "first rail" that the cue ball had to contact on route to its destination.

I loved this concept. It puts all the emphasis on the cue ball into your stroke and helps you mentally "assume" that you are making the object ball.

Of course, the cue ball will react differently off of an object ball but the idea is interesting and potentially very helpful. Just go test and see how it changes or helps your game, and if your cue ball control becomes better. Remember what Pop told me... "The cue ball is the only ball on the table."

Thanks, Jason for that tip. You are greatly missed, yet your memory and legacy live on.

WINNING UGLY IN POOL

Many times, if you missed the end of a pool match but saw the players walking away, you can tell who won or lost from their body language alone. Not all the time, but many times. What this shows is that winning is important for most players.

Now if you are a pool purist, playing great pool in a match but still losing should give you at least a little satisfaction of a game well played. But still, in competition, it is the WIN that we want as our result.

Even Ugly Betty was kind of pretty.

Because of the innate desire for the competitor to win, I suggest that you fight like a pit bull in every match. We all know that playing pool comes with no guarantee that you will play your best or even your average game every time.

This means that we cannot avoid experiencing lapses in good play from time to time, and this will inevitably occur on occasion when it hurts the most; in a tournament or in a private match for monetary stakes.

The trick is to keep fighting like a champion boxer. I don't care if you are getting hit with a barrage of punches and tripping all over yourself. You don't give up. You keep bearing down.

Even if your runouts are just plain uglier than normal and you are too tight and choppy feeling... make it work the best you can. This is called winning ugly.

There is a great book called *Winning Ugly* by Brad Gilbert and Steve Jamison. I recommend it highly. They are tennis players, yet their principles apply beautifully to the game of pool. If you aren't "dabbing-em" too well, who cares. Your main goal at the moment is to win.

You don't want to be the guy with the losing body language after the match. Somehow winning ugly has the magic effect of making you walk out of the arena with your head held high, and who knows... you just might find yourself winning pretty in your next match.

Come on, just get it done. If it's looking ugly, who cares. It's still winning. Win ugly if that's what it's going to take.

THE TWO BEER POOL CHAMPION

I must have been told this over a thousand times by occasional pool players... “I suck at pool, but after I’ve had a couple of drinks, I play really good!” This is funny.

I call it the two-beer threshold... their performance improves up to having two alcoholic drinks; anymore and they pass the tipping point where their game then starts to decline.

For those of you who may drink on occasion, have you ever noticed how beer affects your pool game? What I always say when people tell me this is “yeah that’s because you are more relaxed and not worried about the outcome so much.” Even the occasional pool player can feel pressure to perform when they play.

They are surrounded by friends with everyone eyeballing what they are doing and of course, they don’t want to look bad, so they get tense. They try too hard to control what they are doing.

But then all of a sudden after two beers, they could care less what their friends think, they act and stroke with more confidence, and all of a sudden start potting balls from everywhere.

Now, as a pool player, I’m not recommending that you go out and drink a couple of beers every time you play. What I am recommending is that you make a decision not to care what other people think, relax, and to play with confidence. Add a little beer to your stroke without drinking any beer.

One way to do this is practice playing some speed pool by yourself. This will force you to act on instinct and trust your gut feelings, then

once you slow down, you will have that knowledge of yourself playing well in a faster more relaxed manner.

Another thing you can do is play while imagining your whole body has turned into a wet noodle. Really, just relax every muscle in your body and in turn. your stroke should become slippery smooth and relaxed with a very long and straight follow through.

Then, this will carry over into your more “focused and controlled” game and stroke. Loosen up, you can be a two-beer champion... without the beer!

TALK TO THE CUE BALL VERY SPECIFICALLY, WHILE YOU PLAY

If you analyze everything that goes into clearing the pool table in a beautiful way, the list of everything you have to do correctly is rather lengthy. At some point, when you can keep all of those things humming along nicely below the surface, you will be able to focus on making decisions and then committing to those decisions over and over again.

A singular focus in the game of pool will enable you to ride the wave of your technique as the surfer who makes the decisions on how and where on the wave to ride. Without mastery of how you do what you do, the wave will come crashing down and wipe you out.

However, once you have all your ducks in a row, fundamentals, aiming, pre-shot routine, stroke, positive focus, a cocoon of concentration... you can now exert a powerful singular focus upon what you do, such as “where exactly do I want the cue ball to land and how hard must I hit it to get there?”

So playing the game of pool is similar to driving a car which is made of thousands of pieces all working together in unison, and all you have to do is “Keep your eyes on the road and your hands upon the wheel,” as Jim Morrison of The Doors sang in Roadhouse Blues.

Most people seem to think that they're a great driver. Yet as a passenger I've sometimes been compelled to wake the driver up or altogether ask to please let me out of the car so I can walk. It's amazing how many people just don't pay attention and weave all over the place, all the while thinking their driving is the best.

Even though the car is doing the work for you and you might be in automatic driver mode, just how accurate is your driving really? One of my pool coaches had me drive perfectly as an exercise, and I can tell you, many drivers out there scare the bejeezus out me and quite frankly I prefer driving myself or flying with well-paid professional airline pilots.

When you possess a well-oiled and tuned up pool machine, by all means, try to make your pool shooting a work of art. Without the intention to play pool perfectly, it will never happen.

Just the act of trying will get you closer to making beautiful works of art on the table. After all, it's not only whether you run out or not, it's HOW you run out that can make the game so irresistible!

Make your runouts the stuff of legends my friend.

And by all means, drive perfectly between the lines or at least in the part of the lane of your choosing. And keep your eyes on the road when you change the radio station too, so we can all get safely to the next big pool tournament.

Since you've brought me on as one of your pool coaches, you'll just have to live with my back seat driving here. Seriously, see how perfectly you can drive, and by the time you arrive at the table, you just might find yourself in the zone already.

HIT THE CUE BALL LOW AND WHERE YOU WANT

ONE OF THE BIGGEST problems new students of the game have in being able to draw the cue ball back is that they are simply not hitting the cue ball low enough to generate the backspin required for the cue ball to change direction and come back from the object ball.

Hitting the cue ball low enough requires very accurate tip placement onto the cue ball during the final stroke. Getting to this accurate position requires a good solid bridge hand that holds the cue at a good level and a cue that is angled nicely down into the bottom of the ball.

Having a level stroke is not what you want on a draw shot. Of course, you don't want to shoot downward at too much of an angle, as that will limit follow through and forward cue power, but you DO want to shoot down into and through the bottom of the ball.

So many of my students drop their grip hand too far before their cue tip strike the cue ball. This causes the tip to raise and not hit low enough. This is difficult to see oneself doing. Even many instructors may miss this when watching a student.

I've trained myself to watch closely what a player is doing and catch what is going wrong. If this is your problem, I suggest you think of the draw as more like stabbing the cue into the table than as a normal stroke.

Even though I teach to drop the elbow on the stroke, this does NOT mean to drop the hand very much at all... the grip hand will swing down and when the cue is coming in at the ideal angle into the bottom of the cue ball, the stroke then goes forward like an ice pick

going straight down into some ice, in this case, the cue will be heading down into the table.

Make sure to keep your elbow high enough to angle the cue down in the first phase of the draw stroke.

One thing you can do to help remedy not hitting the cue ball low enough is to look at the cue ball when you hit the ball, so now your main target is the bottom of the ball and you just try to stroke the cue through what you are looking at... imagine a hole that was drilled out of the ball through the bottom and your cue is going through that hole, which you will be looking at.

Also, it is good to let the cue scrape the table right after it hits the bottom of the ball, scrape the table for four to seven inches or so beyond the original starting point of the cue ball.

The draw stroke is pretty complicated while you are figuring it out. The work you put into it is very much worth it for your game.

ONE SHOT OPENS MANY DOORS

Ultimately a pool player needs to have an accurate perception of pool shots at all the different angles. So, it kind of makes sense that you should run through all the angles in a practice session so that you can start to “see” all of them. Well, yes and no.

Yes, because of course, this will help you as it will be great to become familiar with all the angles. The more time you put into that the better.

And no, because just moving through the angles relatively quickly can cause you to gloss over the depth and quality of a practice session that could have been devoted to only one angle, one shot. Or one angle and many “shots” that result in cue ball position off of that one angle.

To say it simply, practicing one shot till the cows come home, sprinkling in different cue ball destinations, will actually increase your perception and ability to make balls on all of the other angles. You’ve got to trust me on this one and try it out for yourself. See the diagram below that’s in my book *Zen Pool*, this is from the chapter Cue Ball Compass.

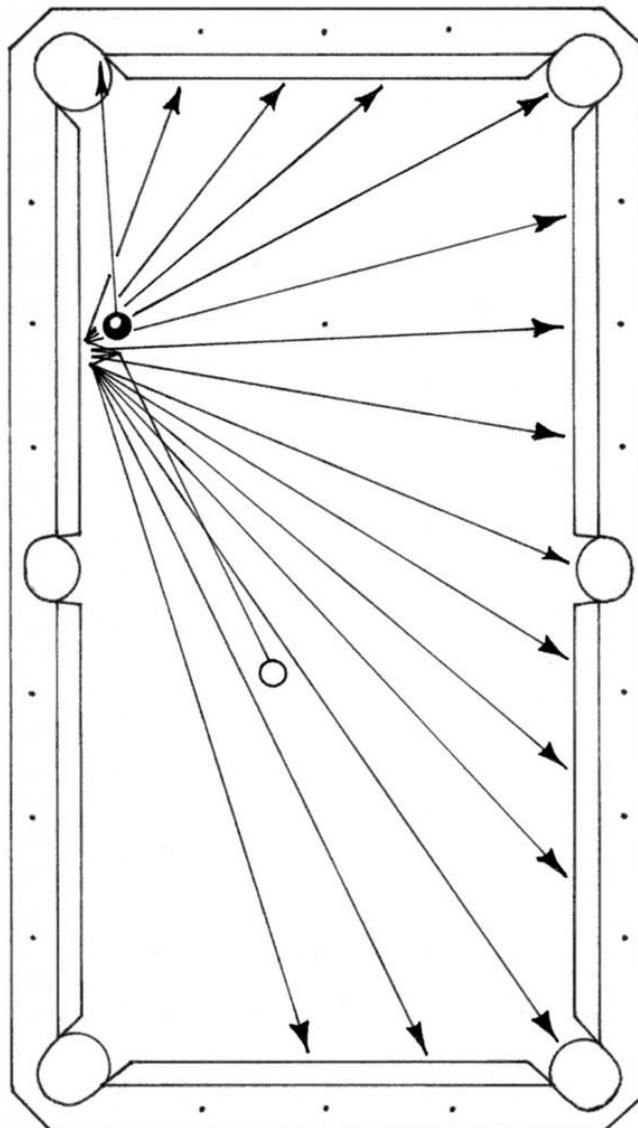
Take a shot like the one below and work on it for an hour. Do it so much that you forget how many sets of 15 balls you shot. I call this “hitting buckets of balls” type of practice.

This is the kind of practice that improves your game for life. It also helps you get out of a slump. It increases your accuracy and your body awareness. It improves your grip, bridge, stance, setup, focus, shot-making, and cue ball control.

When you practice one shot in this way, you simply start to see all the shots and all the angles with more accuracy.

It does not have to be the shot below. Create your own shot to practice. Do a few, or do one new shot every day. This will make you so good it's insane...if you are dedicated to actually doing it with full concentration.

Don't talk to people who would distract you. Brush them off or ignore them. Seriously. Get to work. And then buy them a beer when you knock them out of the next tournament.



KEEP A LIFE RAFT TO SAVE YOU FROM A FUNK

When competing in a pool match, a “FUNK” or “COMA” is when you just can’t seem to do anything right. Maybe you run several balls, but rack after rack keep messing up somehow. Either you get out of line or you miss a shot you normally make.

And this “funk” seems to go on game after game after game. It feels downright awful, and maybe you find yourself experiencing this often in competition.

In practice, you play great and then in the tournament, the pressure seems to get to you just enough to where you don’t perform on the pool table like you know you can, and as you feel that you should.

What I suggest is that you have a way, or ways, to get out of such a funk. An emergency game plan so to speak, for playing run out pool in the face of just playing not run out pool.

Let’s just say that what you are doing at the moment is not working. Sure, if you keep at it, you’ll probably snap out of your funk pretty soon and start running out. But in a pool match, let me tell you, you really don’t have time for that and cannot afford to keep handing games over to your opponent.

The secret I’ll give you today is to resort to a backup aiming system. This will refocus your mind and clear the doubt that occupies it at the moment. Doubt is a cancer that can creep in and prevent you from playing your game, so having faith is of prime importance.

You need “antioxidants” of the brain to start your winning process. Keep in mind that I have used this successfully in countless matches

where I was just not performing well, I turned around my play, started running out, and often won the match that I had buried myself in.

Too often I'll see a player with the body language of resignation to their "fate," of once again playing bad and dogging it. This is awful body language. Never let yourself give in to accepting a piss poor performance and projecting that into your near future.

What you need is confidence and to play well from here on out. So, if you are using for example, the ghost ball aiming system, but it just is not working, what you do is switch to "find the contact point and hit the contact point," and now you will start to consistently make balls, get a rack under your belt, and start creating some momentum in your match.

Or maybe even if you are just practicing but having a bad day, change something up and find what does work RIGHT NOW, instead of repeating what isn't working. Generate accuracy in the now, create confidence, control the rock. I know this can work for you.

HOW GOOD AT POOL HAVE YOU DECIDED TO BECOME?

When snooker is on display at the World Snooker Championships at “The Crucible” in Sheffield, England, the world gets treated to an awesome display of skill by the world’s top snooker players.

It's hard not to be a fan of the entertaining Ronnie O’Sullivan, who again won the title... back to back and for the fifth time overall now. He has a special combination of talent, confidence, and experience that enable him to prevail against the world’s best players.

As a pool player, don’t overlook his snooker technique whatever you do, as snooker is a prime example of many of the things I teach about fundamentals. There really is no room for being sloppy with your body control in that game.

American pool players have been lulled into a false sense of ability by the manufacturers of bar boxes and the widespread existence of bucket sized pockets on eight and nine-foot tables in pool halls all across the country.

It's ok to play on bar boxes and bucket pockets once in a while but playing only on those tables will do you little good for preparing you for playing on tight regulation sized equipment under pressure.

So often I hear local amateurs say, “I don’t want to play on that table, it's way too tight!” Well if you are here reading this it must be because of a desire to improve your game.

And so I challenge and invite you to step up your level of commitment to excelling in the act of making shots and controlling the cue ball on a pool table, or any type of billiard table be it 3-cushion, pool,

snooker, Russian Pyramids etc... by seeking out and playing on tougher equipment than what you are accustomed to.

The laser-like focus and dedication required to play on tougher equipment will have the effect of transforming you into a more skilled and accurate cueist.

All the players in pro snooker have body control skills that far exceed most pool players. Have a very close look at how these guys set up, deliver the cue while keeping their body still, and then get up to the next shot.

Here are a few important things you can do to up your game like the pro snooker players.

- *Decide what to do*
- *Get on the stroking line*
- *Get down into your stance*
- *Move your stroking arm and strike through the cue ball*
- *Keep your body still while stroking and till the end of the stroke*
- *Stand up and go do it again on the next shot*

When you put these steps into your pool game, you'll be well on your way to be the best in your league and possibly better than most "A" level pool players around the world...and perhaps even one day win a major pro title.

If you are reading till this point, I know you want to get better. And I know I've just given you one of the keys to the kingdom. Now working hard to own this and make it work for you... is up to you.

You can't be too obsessed with perfecting the basics, for it does take a lot of work. Get your heart and mind set on mastering your form so you can master the table.

THE PRESIDENTS HAND

Having touch in the sport of pool & billiards is so important. To get the cue ball to land where you want, not only do you have to judge the speed in your mind, you must transmit that decision into the cue stick through your arm, hand, and into the shot.

Your grip hand is the contact point between your brain and the shot, so you better have a deft touch inside of your grip hand. Your paws (hands) have to be somewhat 'soft' to get the job done.

My best friend growing up had a chance to meet a former US President and shake his hand. He said his hand was unbelievably soft. Makes sense since his whole life has been that of a politician.

When playing pool, you need the grip hand of a president. Even if your hand is rough, you have to have a 'soft' hand in delivering the cue. Cradle the cue, don't grip it too tight or too soft. Allow the perfect speed of the shot to transmit through your hand and into the cue, without interference.

FOUR THINGS POOL CHAMPIONS CONSISTENTLY DO FOR SUCCESS

If you are reading this, you want to be a better pool player. Either you are already a champion and just want to win even more, or you know that you have what it takes to make it happen, and you just need to keep getting those little edges to advance your game.

That's why I've made this checklist for you today to help you make sure you are moving forward.

Here are four things that champions consistently do that allow them to keep winning, or at least win as much as possible...and that help them to keep improving.

Number 1: Champions have clear intentions of their outcome. They know where they want to make the ball, where they want the cue ball to land, and how they plan to get it there. Champion pool players live in a universe of specificity when it comes to what they are doing on the table. The more specific they are, the higher their success will tend to be.

Also, they know what they want to accomplish in an event... instead of saying "Oh I want to do pretty good," they will say something like "How big is my first-place check going to be?" Instead of saying "I want the cue ball to be somewhere over there," they say, "I want the cue ball to land right there."

Number 2: Champions stay focused on what they want. Instead of allowing their mind to wander into the bad things that could happen,

they become good at deciding and then staying focused on their desired outcome.

Number 3: Champions continually put in the work to develop or maintain the skills necessary to tackle all situations. If there is something they don't know, they are eager to learn a new technique or shot.

Number 4: If something goes wrong, champions don't dwell on it, instead they get focused back into their goals and into a positive solution to fix the situation from that moment. So if they miss a shot, they might get mad, but they know they better be ready soon to respond with the good stuff in their next opportunity.

Think and act like a champion and guess what... you will become one.

FOUR ELEMENTS TO PLAY STEADY AS A SKYSCRAPER

When builders set about building a skyscraper what do they start with, the front door? The radio tower? Of course not, they start with building a strong and deep foundation, otherwise, the building would fall down, and that would be bad.

The same goes for a pool player. To become the best player possible, a player must create a solid foundation of basics or fundamentals, and then they can start adding layers of complexity and ability on top of their accurate and repeatable shot making system.

The fundamentals of a pool player are not as static as the foundation for a skyscraper, but the principle is the same. A pool player must either radically overhaul their fundamentals or simply hone them once they are solid. In a sense, it is a constant process of making sure they are good.

Once the fundamentals are solid, it is a constant process to implement them shot after shot, game after game, match after match.

Here are four actions for you to incorporate into your pool game in this new year of playing more solid:

- 1. Find the stroking line before you get into your stance.*
- 2. Keep your body and head still during your stroke (stay down and follow through).*
- 3. Keep a solid bridge on the table all the way through your stroke.*
- 4. Keep the pressure in your grip hand light, even during your stroke.*

Without even changing your alignment, doing these things will help you play very solid pool immediately.

DON'T LET YOUR BALLOON EXPLODE

I am often asked “How do I prevent myself from choking on shots in a match” or “How do I obtain a decrease of anxiety when confronting a crucial shot?” So, this question of how to perform under pressure is a great one.

First of all, each player does not experience the same situation with the exact same feeling of pressure, so a lot of it has to do with the “pressure” that you give to the situation or shot.

How do you see yourself? What is your reality? These are important answers to know, and more importantly to create anew if your current self-image of “reality” is not working for you.

Become the champion in your mind that you want to be first so that it's easier to deliver winning shots when you need them to produce the win you want. This speaks to the daily way you speak to yourself and what you visualize yourself accomplishing.

Without having the wins already to remember and give you confidence, you've got to believe they will come and even imagine that it has already happened.

Still, regardless of your self-image, all pool players feel pressure. If you expect it not to be there and then it shows up, it will be much harder to deal with compared to if you actually expect it and are prepared to handle it.

Nick Varner told me something like this... that he was waiting for the day when the pressure of pro matches would disappear, but that day

never came, and he realized he would just have to deal with the pressure and play through it.

In this video, former NBA coach Pat Riley blew up a balloon in front of his players to illustrate increasing pressure... "When the balloon began to expand, just like in a game when the pressure began to expand, you could never let the pressure explode, you had to deal with the pressure. As the pressure began to expand or build, you could never begin to lose what it was you had to keep from a sanity standpoint, to make sure you can win that game."

So, the idea is to expect the pressure to increase and expand and therefore deal with it. Don't become a balloon that explodes all over the pool table.

Increase your focus. Increase your intensity. Breathe from your belly, at least while you are in your chair. When you practice, imagine you are in a high-pressure situation and play as if the pressure situation is real.

As you 'win' practice games with this imaginary pressure, your confidence in real pressure games will be better, and you will be more likely to successfully deliver your stroke the way that you do so confidently in practice. Be the champion you are capable of being.

DO YOU HAVE AN AIMING OBSESSION?

Aiming in pool has long been a hot topic, and it seems so now more than ever. Your aim is important, yet stance, bridge, and stroke must come first. As an instructor who has personally worked with thousands of players, I can say for sure that aim is not the big deal that it is made out to be when compared to other urgencies in your game.

In fact, before I even see a student even hit a ball, most of the time I know what we will be working on right away, and it's not aiming systems.

Once a player is enlightened to all the flaws in their fundamentals and how to fix them, there is a lot of work and time that must then be invested in creating one's self into a new pool shooting machine.

Once this machine starts to take tangible and reliable shape, several "aiming systems" will now work. The magic bullet is not in the aiming system, but in the body coordination that goes into delivering the cue stick through the cue ball.

That being the case, once a player has a SUPER CONSISTENT approach and delivery of their cue, aiming once again becomes important. Just as aim to a sharpshooter is important... yet even the sharpshooter must know how to not get in his own way by timing the shot with his breath, not moving his body at all, etc. etc...

It is alluring to seek the magic "AIMING" bullet that will make you a champion overnight... however, don't be so hypnotized by the aiming siren that you forget to handle the real business of mastering your

fundamentals of stance, bridge, stroke, and keeping your body (and head) still during your shot execution.

DO THIS, BE MORE CONSISTENT

Even though all great players have their own style, there's one thing they all do extremely well in order to keep making the balls disappear. If you can do this one thing extremely well also, you'll have a good chance of becoming great yourself.

There are a lot of components that go into making this one thing happen and I've covered them extensively in Zen Pool, Powerful Pool, and Pro Pool Academy.

If you focus on this one thing happening, and with extreme accuracy, then all the rest of the essentials will find a way of magically showing up in your process out of pure necessity.

How can I best describe this one thing, let me try...

Get your stance, cue, and bridge hand setup into perfect alignment into your intended shot, where they all come together perfectly in one glorious moment... before doing any practice strokes.

So, if you're going to do a bunch of practice strokes, you had better make sure your stance/aim was assumed accurately first.

If you only do tiny practice "waggles" like some professionals, even those come after the initial hyper-accurate stance/aim glorious moment setup.

The age-old drill I've promoted so often is to get set up into the shot with the tip about an inch from the cue ball at the precise moment that you complete your stance, and then from that static position after a few seconds, you pull your backswing and then deliver your actual stroke through the cue ball, with zero steering allowed of your cue.

This drill puts the premium on stance/aim setup and mastering the glorious moment of the formation of your stance/aim in the first second of its creation.

Once you start pocketing balls with this drill, you then begin to add your practice strokes or waggles AFTER that same perfect static setup of your stance/aim shooting machine.

Any kind of style that comes before or after this glorious moment is up to you. I'm here to make sure you do what you need to in order to play great pool. The style you add to this is up to you.

FUTURE CASTING YOUR RESULTS FOR SUCCESS

Once in an email, I suggested telling yourself the word "in" or other positive phrases before you shoot or even during the stroke. One subscriber of mine replied and said it's better to have a quiet mind during the shot.

I actually agree with this and wanted to clarify that the positive phrases I suggested are best used as a means to get you going mentally in a positive direction when things are not going so well.

I found that I can say a phrase during the stroke, and it helped me out of a mini-rut that was lasting a few minutes, but eventually, I went back to saying nothing in my mind once I got my confidence back. The more tricks you have to regain your confidence on short notice, the better.

Here's a technique that I invented for myself to put my mind in a winning mindset before a match or event: **'Future Casting' by making past tense statements.**

Ok, so what is future casting? Basically, it's creating the future by talking about what you want to have happen in the future as if it has already happened in the past.

So for example if you are about to play a match against a player who you have never beat before, or about to play in the finals, go find a quiet space like your car where you can be all alone, and once you are in your quiet spot, start saying out loud what you just did from the third person perspective.

So, if your name is Bob, "Bob just beat so and so, or Bob just won the tournament." Be as specific as you can be with exactly how you want it to happen, and then speak about it as if it did already happen.

I've used this method several times with great results. It helps your mind accept the fact that you will do great and have actually already done great. You may even picture some of this as you are saying it.

Focus on the words and believe them without a doubt, just as you might be hearing a factual report on TV about a football game that just finished. This helps you focus on what you want to have happened, which is the essence of confidence.

ADJUSTING YOUR CUE BALL CONTROL FOR ALL SPEEDS OF CLOTH

Playing on the different speed of cloth tables, often in the same tournament, in back to back matches, is something you need to be ready for if you're a competitive pool player or even if you just like to perform at a high level all of the time.

This ability will directly affect your winning percentage. So, let me give you a few recommendations for adjusting to different cloth speeds...

1. **Pick smaller position areas** or spots as your cue ball landing goal. *I like an area about the size of a quarter as my cue ball target. What this does is gives you accurate feedback on your results based on the force you used, so that your next cue ball speed control attempt can be delivered with more accuracy, and probably more accurate than your opponent who is most certainly picking bigger zones. It's amazing how fast you can "get the feel for the speed of a table" when you do this.*
2. **Put your emphasis on cue ball control.** *Sounds basic and it is. The winning strategy is usually simple. Your shot making process should basically stay the same anyway so turn up the volume on your awareness of how hard you need to hit each shot. This will directly affect your speed of stroke.*
3. **Learn from your results.** *Pay close attention to just how long or short your cue ball is going when you miss position.*
4. **As always, stay down during your stroke.** *Stay down and follow through... This solves countless problems and helps you focus on cue ball speed control.*

5. **Do some drills that you are good at on an unfamiliar table.** *This will help you calibrate to the new cloth faster. I love the one rail lineup drill where I line up 9 balls in a straight line from the center diamond on the foot rail up to the foot spot where you rack the balls, you must run all the balls in order and must hit one (and only one rail) only on every shot (not as easy as it sounds). Any precise speed control draw drills you can invent are great. Also, hit a few lags up and down the table and try freezing the cue ball on the rail like in the pre-match lag.*
6. **Watch other players play on a table before you play on it and even ask them about how fast the table is playing.** *This could give you some valuable info so you can adjust faster than your opponent.*

Add a few of these to your game and I guarantee you'll play better and win more matches.

A SNEAKY TRICK TO IMPROVE YOUR POOL GAME

Today I have a real gem for your pool game. Just by doing this you will automatically improve your game in a couple of ways. So here it is, play or practice some pool with your opposite hand. In my case, since I am a right-handed shooter, my opposite hand is my left hand. And if you are a left-handed shooter, opposite-handed would be with your right hand.

The first good reason to practice your opposite handed game is that you will not need to use the mechanical bridge as often. You'll be able to simply reach the shot and play it well with your other hand.

Most players will feel completely lost when trying out their opposite hand. I was not much different, but I got into it simply because I like a challenge and I wanted to know what it felt like when I taught a new student the fundamentals... it must feel clunky like I felt with my opposite hand.

The trick is to try it a little bit every day and don't give up. You'll have to work on your bridge, alignment, stance, and stroke. It is also weird turning your neck in the opposite direction.

When you understand how to get behind the cue ball and line it up to the object ball with your normal hand, you can use this as your constant and bring it over to your opposite handed game. Just try it, it's a lot of fun, and it will make using the clunky bridge less important (although you should practice that too).

The second reason for practicing the opposite handed is that according to research, it improves your normal handed ability

automatically. So, without an ounce of practice, this is a sneaky trick to improve your normal handed game! Don't be lazy!

Just put a little time in on the pool table with your opposite hand. Learn how to play pool all over again and allow yourself to be humbled while looking like a neophyte if that's what it takes.

By using your other hand, the other side of your brain is activated, and you now activate Whole Brain Power.

I can tell you this from my own experience, from putting in the practice left handed I have won many games and matches because I can execute accurate shots with cue ball control that I just can't do yet with a bridge... and I did notice an improvement in my right handed game. Everything just seemed to get even easier, which my friend, is a good thing.

A LESSON IN CONFIDENCE AND DELIVERY FROM A WORLD SNOOKER CHAMPION

Once you have created and mastered your fundamentals, the ability to hook them up with confidence into every shot can make you a champion.

Many pool players have so much movement in their stance during delivery of the cue that it is laughable when compared to snooker players.

Why make it so hard on yourself to be great? Why not just realize that you have got to stay still, and start staying still when you stroke your shot?

Go to YouTube and Watch seven times World Snooker Champion Stephen Hendry play some snooker.

Notice how once he decides what to do, he just gets down into his stance perfectly and is ready to make the shot and move on to the next one. Also, when he shoots, he does not jump up, he stays down long after the cue ball has contacted the object ball as if to exaggerate good form.

Whatever your fundamentals are, it is important to master them and position yourself into the shot with accuracy and confidence.

Do this and you will become better in an hour for the rest of your life. You will beat players you only dreamed of beating before. You will transform yourself into a champion.

BREAKING UP CLUSTERS AND MOVING BALLS IN 14.1 STRAIGHT POOL

While this concept will apply to just about every game on a pool table, it's so important in 14.1 Straight Pool that you could say 14.1 Straight Pool really is all about how well you break up clusters and manage the cue ball after it contacts the cluster, to ensure that you still have a ball to shoot at.

It's really easy to fall into the trap of being happy with just hitting the cue ball into a cluster and then taking what you are left with and assuming it will be good because you thought your job was to just break up the cluster, and not consider how they break up and what you'll be left with afterward.

When any major 14.1 Straight Pool tournament approaches, this topic is at the top of my mind in the weeks preceding the event and the more I play 14.1 Straight Pool through the years, the more I see the importance of this part of the game.

A cluster could contain anywhere from 2 to 14 balls (as in the break shot), and if you want to get really technical, just bumping a solo ball into a new position as in creating a break-ball could be considered a cluster as this is the type of accuracy or planning that I'm going to be addressing in this article.

When should you break up a cluster?

First off, consider whether a "cluster" needs to be broken up in the first place. Often there are one or more loose balls next to a cluster

that could be picked off first but because of their position, they appear to be part of the cluster.

Many times, you can pick a few of these off first or use one of them as a mid-rack break shot to get into the cluster in mind with the cue ball. You'll want to consider the timing and angle of approach that you attack a cluster from. Breaking a cluster too early may just create more problems by driving balls out of the cluster and getting tied up with other loose balls nearby, thus defeating your effort.

So, you may want to pick off nearby balls first that are just hanging around near the rails or waiting to be tied up with other balls.

Or if breaking a cluster looks good but there is no insurance ball handy, you may want to wait for a shot or two and approach the cluster from an angle where there is an insurance ball nearby just waiting to bail you out of trouble just in case the cue ball does get stuck in the pack.

Where to attack the cluster...

The trick here is to get specific with exactly which ball you plan to hit first with the cue ball, which side of the ball, and even how thick you plan to hit the ball on the chosen side.

The first consideration is getting the cue ball into the clear after you hit the ball. You can choose to play position on a specific ball outside of the cluster or try and predict where a ball from the cluster will land and play position on that ball.

Having an "insurance ball" handy is really nice because you will not be forced to make the cue ball escape completely because that insurance ball will bail you out by being your next shot.

The real fine part of the game after controlling the cue ball is controlling the way the balls spread during these cluster breakouts and it all begins with being able to hit a specific part of a specific ball.

While you may not always be perfect here, I promise you that just by planning and trying to predict where you hit a specific ball, you'll find yourself running more balls where before your run would have ended in absence of this detailed planning.

How hard to hit the cluster?

OK so now that you are going for and sometimes hitting your specific ball and getting your cue ball loose for another shot by design, now you can start choosing the speed with which to hit that ball based on a few things such as:

- *How many balls are in the cluster? (more balls usually means a harder hit is required, think break shot)*
- *How full will you hit the ball?*
- *What is the specific configuration of all the balls in the cluster?*
- *And do you want them to travel very far, or just separate enough to be open and makeable, and not create new clusters with nearby balls?*

Just study the cluster for a bit, look at the combos and caroms and make predictions based on what you think will happen if you hit the first ball here with this speed...and so on. This is the fun puzzle part of the game, and 14.1 Straight Pool presents opportunities for this like no other game does.

Straight pool requires more urgency than one pocket, as cannot easily hide your opponent and feel safe, you actually have to keep running, stay in the clear, don't miss etc. That's what makes running

balls in 14.1 so great... you simply can't hide. You are forced to stay on top of things to continue a run.

Hitting a single ball into position...

Once in a while there will not be a good break shot after a nice opening break or mid rack break out. This means you'll have to manufacture a break-ball by pocketing a ball and pushing another ball into a good position to become a good break-ball.

For this, you'll have to get creative and most importantly exercise great direction and speed control to hit the ball where you want with the proper speed... Just attempting to do this will make you better at it, and you'll start to see all kinds of possibilities.

The break shot...

Before each break of a new fourteen ball rack or frame, walk over and take a look at the tangent line from the break-ball and see where the cue ball would strike if it goes 90 degrees into the stack. Will it be hitting the top or bottom of a ball in the rack?

Use this info to base how hard and what spin you will put on the cue ball, or simply observe what happens to the cue ball after it caroms off of the break-ball and rack.

The better you get at predicting and controlling what happens to the cue ball on the break shot, the longer your average runs will become.

Start to play actual shots from start to finish and through observation of what happens, gain valuable wisdom to increase your stock as a 14.1 player and artist of the green felt.

EIGHT POWERFUL TIPS TO HELP YOU STAY STILL

Every pool player does it at least once in a while... jumps up during their stroke, and the degree to which they can control themselves by not jumping up during their final stroke may very well determine the potential they have to improve beyond their current level of skill.

This one fix (staying down instead of jumping up) is so powerful that it alone will wipe out scores of other problems that jumping up caused, thus you may literally increase one to ten or more skill levels in a few days' time... for life. As long as you can maintain the powerful habit of staying down on your shots.

Eight Tips for Helping You Stay Still on Your Shots:

- 1. Practice shooting with your eyes closed: Go ahead and line up into your shot, take your practice strokes, and then just before your last backswing, close your eyes and shoot the shot. Do this for a few racks and get the feeling for how you automatically stay down when your eyes are closed and then just carry that over to your open eye pool game.*
- 2. Stay down until the object ball drops: Keep your body completely still (except your stroking arm) until the ball falls in the pocket.*
- 3. Stay down until the cue ball stops moving COMPLETELY. This is an advanced extension of number 2, and much more powerful. Do not allow your body or head to jump up even a millimeter until the cue ball comes to a complete rest, usually well after you have made the object ball. This one is tough at first, and if you are like 95% of my students, you will most likely fail until you have someone there to inform you that you did*

indeed move before the cue ball stopped. Since I'm not there to watch you... be DISCIPLINED! Be in the 5%. This will make you much more powerful as a pool player... if that's OK with you.

- 4. Become a statue: Pretend that once you are in your stance, you have transformed into a bronze statue... and are unable to move (except your stroking arm). Now, once you have stroked the shot, you are a statue with a follow through and you simply stay there for a while (as decoration in the room). How good are you at becoming a statue?*
- 5. Be prepared by lining up well: By getting down in the proper place to make the shot, there will be no reason for you to move, jump up, add body English or any of that chronic missing nonsense. Lining up into your pool shot is an art and a science. I've got lots of free and paid materials to help you out in this area. Anyway, commit to the shot with precision and you will be better able to stay still.*
- 6. Relax during your stroke: Keep your body relaxed and still and deliver your stroke with the smoothness and accuracy it deserves.*
- 7. Have confidence and faith: You've got to stroke the shot like you know it is going in the pocket, period.*
- 8. Take your time, make each shot a work of art: Even if you insist on playing fast, when it comes time to stroke the shot, keep your body still and stay down as you stroke the cue with a complete and beautiful stroke... and THEN you can resume to running over to the next shot. Or keep a nice medium pace and be deliberate as you keep your body still.*

Ok, those are eight powerful tips to help you stay still and keep your body down during the shot. Practice these and I guarantee you that

your game will improve at a record pace. Enjoy your next playing session and remember... **play pool in the zone.**

KEEP CLIMBING UP AND INTO THE ZONE

My grandfather once told me that improving at pool is like climbing a ladder that is easy to climb at first because the rungs are very close to each other. As your game improves with time however, the rungs of the ladder get further apart and it becomes more difficult, or takes more time to climb up to that next level of skill.

This means you'll have to continue working hard to keep improving. It is a common occurrence for players to stop trying hard to improve because they feel stuck at the level they've achieved thus far.

Realize that as you become proficient, each rung or level on your path to improvement will become harder to reach. Put in a concerted effort to work out the details of your game that will make climbing and improvement possible.

This is where a private coaching session with me or a qualified coach can be so valuable, because we will notice fundamental mistakes a player is making, and give them the tools to climb up to the next rung of skill on the pool table. Without a keen watchful eye, a player may get stuck at a skill level for life or for much longer than without the coach to guide them.

When I was fifteen, my uncle Dave kept pointing out that I was hunching on my shots. This meant that I was moving my head and body up as I shot. His constant feedback helped me focus on keeping my body and head still, and because of this I was able to improve much faster than I already was without his watchful help. For this I'll always be grateful.

When you have flashes of brilliance and play "above your head," know that this performance level is within your capability. Push yourself to keep training hard to make this zone you've achieved become your regular game. When you do this, you may be pleasantly surprised to find your peak playing experiences improving with each passing month and year.

Part of playing pool in the zone is to allow yourself to perform and trust in your own abilities. Focusing on the process for success you've developed will help you get the results you want. As you gain confidence with each shot, you'll be able to go through your steps in a more automatic way and start to focus more on your decisions and strategy, knowing that you can execute whatever you decide.

Play smart and smooth, and believe in yourself. You can play pool in the zone and achieve incredible things on the table. You can play pool in the zone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Max Eberle is a Dover, Ohio USA born professional pool player and artist. He is one of the world's most demanded private instructors and film & television performer/consultants. Max's clients include major movie studios, brands, celebrities, and pool enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels on multiple continents.

Max has played and won professional matches on ESPN, and has been featured in The LA Times, The Washington Post and Billiards Digest. Since 2006 his instructional products continue to help players across the world drastically improve their pool game.

Max Eberle is the current World 10-Foot Table 14.1 Straight Pool Champion at the Derby City Classic, multiple times West Coast and East Coast 9-Ball Champion, twice top five ranked in the USA Mosconi Cup points race, former back-to-back ACU-I National Collegiate Champion, and former BCA Junior National Champion.

Max has a high run of 237 balls in 14.1 Straight Pool with a 127-and-out in World Tournament match play, 10 racks of 9-Ball and countless racks of 8-Ball. [Link to Max's complete pool player profile](#)

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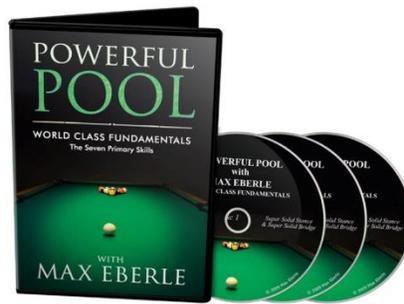
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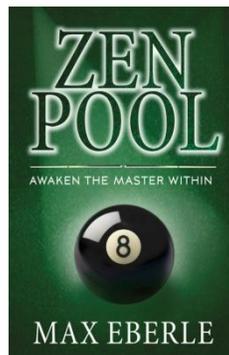
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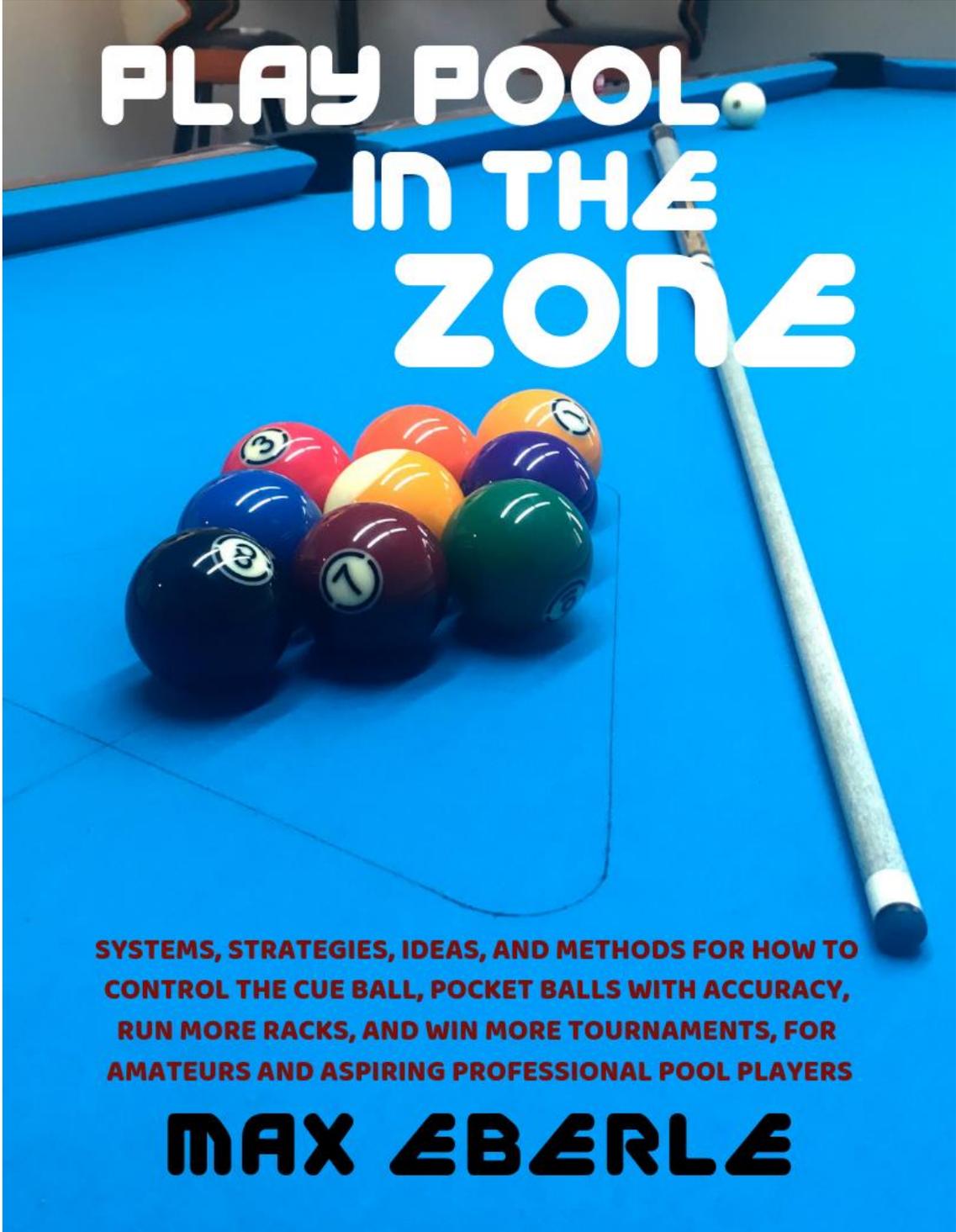
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