**ABC’s**

Here’s an exercise I call “the ABC’s”. This is a great drill to do with someone that you are trying to teach or learn from. Throw out 3 object balls out on the table, and mark them with hole reinforce stickers so you can accurately set up the same thing and practice repeatedly. Shoot them in rotation as in the game of 9-ball, and start with the cue ball from 3 different starting positions: A, B and C. Mark A, B and C with stickers also.

Cue ball position A should be where you would put the cue ball if you had ball-in-hand - your ideal angle and distance from the ball. B and C should be challenging but not unreasonable. They should be set up as longer distance, tougher shots. Discuss this with a more advanced player so you can learn their thought process and type of stroke required.

This exercise makes you appreciate having the correct angle on your present shot because it affects the difficulty and ability of pocketing the rest of the balls. It also forces you to practice less than ideal angles so you are better prepared for where your opponent left you or you accidentally left yourself. Notice what your averages are in running them out each time from each of the 3 cue ball starting positions. This also helps you see where your weaknesses are. Next time you see one of these shots in a game and know you are not comfortable with it, you might decide to play safe instead. Or, you might pocket the shot in front of you and set yourself up to play safe for the next shot.

Here’s an example. Position A (diagram 1) is the ideal place you would put the cue ball if you had ball in hand. It’s close to the object ball and placed on the left side of the object ball’s line to the pocket. You basically have position the entire time the cue ball is moving towards the next shot, so it is high percentage. Speed control and a little low English are all you need. Tip: you want the cue ball to hit the rail – imagine you are hitting it with just enough speed to hit the rail. The rail will absorb some energy giving you an even higher chance of getting the shape you want. The key to having a high average run out here is not getting too big of an angle on the 8-ball to avoid being snookered behind the 9-ball. Getting straighter on the 8 also helps you more easily draw back for a straight shot on the 9-ball.

Position B (diagram 3) requires high inside (right) English. Again, your goal is to run into the rail to get as straight as possible on the 8-ball. Practice allowing for deflection here and hitting the ball with a smooth follow through. Feel the shot.

For cue ball position C (diagram 3), it is reasonably easy to pocket the 7-ball, but getting position on the 8-ball is a lot more challenging. Shoot with high and a little inside English and go 3 to 4 rails. The key to this shot is making the cue ball hit the proper spot on the 2nd rail and shooting it hard enough to get to your target zone on the 8-ball. If you find that you are not comfortable with this shot, you may want to consider just playing safe now, or simply pocket the 7-ball with a natural rolling cue ball and play position to play safe on the 8-ball.