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Steve Davis Snooker


Steve Davis

Tuesday, March 09, 2010

Get a grip

*Hi Steve thanks for helping everyone with your snooker, I wanted to know how come when I pull my cue back I can see the cue twisting slightly I think it is the last 3 fingers doing this could you help me out please.
Thanks for your Time.
Anthony Walker.*

*My query is with the grip , can you best describe this,
I have read through many examples, also seen videos on youtube,
can you tell me if when you grip the cue should the forefinger and thumb be locked throughout the back swing and the feathering?
I struggle with this part of the game, which in turn when i am playing sometimes i tend to concentrate more on how i am gripping the cue instead of the actual pot.
Also how tight or loose should the grip be ? thanks. Han 147*

Hi All

I've always looked at my own technique as a "work in progress". Agreed, it's a fine dividing line between "change for changes sake" and "change for ... the sake of change" :). Oh and also changing things when you are struggling with your game and something works in practice, you tell yourself that this change is of real benefit and is now a better technique than the previous one and then when you get in a competitive match it all falls to pieces and you feelcrapanddesolateandyouarebackatsquareonehavingwastedhoursonend practicingadjustingthelittlefingerofyourbridgehandhalfamillimetertothelleft whichfeltveryuncomfortablebutyouperseveredwithitandwererackingthemintothethebackofthepocketand "oh Bollocks to it!" Just thought you might like an insight into my career! Does it ring any bells with you?
There are so many things to do with "technique" and the pursuit of "good technique" that can be of distraction. Pursuing a good technique can be likened to traveling down a long winding path with loads of alleyways leading off it. The winding path is your "form" and the alleyways lead to the possibility of either a better path, or a total dead end. My job and yours is to walk down that path and highlight which alleyways should have "no entry signs" posted by them.

I'm trying to make this blog as helpful as possible although I am aware that at any given moment in going along my own path, I might be smitten by something enough to give it blog space when perhaps a month later I wouldn't give it table time!

So with that in mind, on to the GRIP!

Before we go any further, consider these players and their "Grips". Dave Harold, Ken Doherty, Joe Swail, Peter Ebdon, Stephen Hendry, John Parrott, Alex Higgins.

What they all have in common is that despite having unique "grips" they are all brilliant exponents of the game of Snooker. Actually my list of players could have contained every Professional snooker player who has ever held a cue! So, when giving advice about the grip, and I'm talking about solid, unequivocal, carved in stone advice, Where do I start? Is there one grip that could be better than another. Would Dave Harold be better off with a stronger grip or John Parrott with a looser one? Who knows!?

One thing is for certain, any grip that interferes with the intended path of the cue is a bad one!

A grip where the fingers are taken off and then put back on, can possibly interfere with this path. A grip that induces a twisting of the cue (visible to a player by the twisting grain) can possibly interfere with this path and a grip where there is a "squeezing", using the back fingers as the Cue Ball is hit can also interfere with this path.

Of course, it is possible to have any of the above grip actions and still deliver the cue in a straight line.

Here is an interesting invention <http://www.gravitycue.com>. check out the 360 purecue action trainer video. I'm not endorsing this, but it may have merit. I'd like to see some of the current top players using it before I made up my mind on it's usefulness.

Here are some thoughts on a Snooker coaches view of the grip.

The generally accepted method of gripping the cue is to use the front fingers in conjunction with the thumb to actually hold the cue and then have the cue resting on the other fingers. I know I'm being vague here but bear with me. The pressure used to actually hold the cue varies from one player to the next. Advice is usually given, not to grip the cue too tightly as this will inhibit the "hit" and that because there is a certain amount of "squeezing of the grip on the delivery / hit, then gripping too tightly leaves you "nowhere to go" in the squeeze department!

Loose is considered good as it keeps tension out of the forearm and it is accepted that in order to play forcing strokes, the back fingers must release from the cue (in order to keep it on a parallel path) and that the reintroduction of the fingers may help with the "timing of the hit"

Too loose is considered a no-no and too tight is considered possibly worse and can result in the cue being lifted from the bridge on the follow through.

Are we in agreement that this is a fair assessment of the theory of the grip? Without looking back into my own 1980's "how to play" book I would think that I probably said something roughly in line with that myself.

Some of the players in my earlier mini list break these rules! Should you be happy with your game and accuracy then I wouldn't bother changing a thing! But, if you are hitting across the line of the shot and can't work out why then take a little time out to try a little experiment.

Here is another way of looking at the grip.

What muscles do you use to actually instigate hitting, and then hit the Cue ball with? Ok, I can't be bothered to go online and look them up! But one thing is for sure, they are in your arm and not in your hand.

Would it be fair to then assume that the accuracy (and perhaps power) of a shot comes from these muscles and not from anything your grip might add to the equation?

Let's take "power" out of the equation and just consider "accuracy". Perhaps a good grip should be a "carrier" for the cue and be as inert a force as possible in the whole process of delivering the cue.

Let's cut to the chase

Alex Higgins had such a grip. Instead of using the thumb and first finger Alex gripped the cue with the back fingers. His index finger was pointing to the floor and his thumb was not wrapped around the cue and was of no influence in the shot. This achieved a number of possibly beneficial things. Firstly his back fingers never left the cue and therefore were not needed to be reunited with the cue in such a way that could interfere with the direction of the intended hit, especially in moments of tension. Secondly, any "squeezing" of the grip would seem to be eliminated. Or certainly not a "squeezing" that would add an "x factor" into the equation. The hit is produced solely by the arm muscles, as the grip is isolated and certainly is being utilized more as an inert carrier of the cue. And thirdly, and very importantly, the grip is far more likely to stay "inline" with the cue throughout the hit. the back knuckles of the grip will find it very difficult to "twist" away from the cue. Something that could encourage the forearm bone to alter its line during striking. Hopefully you can picture this? Apologies for not English good :)

If you are having problems with imparting unintended side spin on plain ball shots, and can't seem to work out what is happening, then perhaps it is time to look at your grip. Can it be that the fingers are the enemy?

For a while back in the 1980's I utilized this Alex Higgins grip to good effect. For some reason (unknown to only my subconscious mind) I tried it again recently. The results were instantaneous! I immediately became more accurate. I used this grip in my World Championship qualifying match recently and it felt so much better on so many different types of shots, ranging from power shots to pressure situations. I'm pretty convinced that it is of great benefit to me to continue to utilize it.

Try this for the week. Grip the cue using the back three fingers (it can be fairly firm) and hold your chalk between your

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thumb and index finger to isolate them from the equation. Let me know if you see any changes in your potting preferences or any changes to imparting unwanted side spin. How does this affect your power shots? Do you feel that you are potting with more authority? If so, then perhaps you too can utilize the Alex Higgins grip!!

Cheers!
Steve

4:52 PM **7 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

Thursday, February 25, 2010

Improve your snooker with fouls strokes??

Hi Steve

first of all its great that you are devoting time to help others with snooker technique, some very good ideas there. What i would like to comment on and hopefully get your opinion on is, do you think billiards can help the snooker player, i love billiards and it was always played when i was a kid in the local miners institute, although all the young lads wanted to play snooker, billiards was still played by the older miners, and me and a friend still play it now, but i dont know anyone else who plays it, so we just play a short game before playing snooker.

I know it will help with getting to know the angles but what concerns me is you do not have to be as accurate to get the scoring shot (although i do realise to keep a break going you have to keep it accurate) so it could lead to sloppy play Also do you have an opinion on the old timers ability, against the modern day players, i know you used to play, was it the English under 19 you won? and do you ever play now?

Thanks if you have the time to answer
Frank

Hi Frank

I think that you have answered your own question!

I'm not being filppant here but playing Snooker helps your Snooker and playing Billiards helps your Billiards!

I would say that the only thing that playing Billiards could possibly help you be aware of is in recognising the path that the cue ball takes after contact with the Object Ball.

Considering that none of the top Snooker players (including me) play Billiards these days, and considering that the standard of snooker is better than it's ever been then I suppose this in itself answers your question

Cheers!
Steve

7:16 PM **0 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

Thursday, February 25, 2010

A little advice on a sense of potting perspective

Hi Steve

i hoped you could give me some advice on sighting the shot when down with the chin on the cue , what is actually going on in your mind ,you talked about ball coverage , is this what your trying to work out when sighting the shot , sorry to be a pain but really struggle these days to pot consistent cheers paul

Hi Paul

The process for judging the pot starts when you are standing in an upright position behind the ball. This is why it is important to stand behind the shot instead of just walking around the table and "dropping" into position. Preferably you should stand with your eyes directly on the line of the shot, rather than your feet in the position they will eventually take up. If you do the latter then it is difficult to get your head/eyes on the exact line unless you bend to the right (assuming that you are right-handed).

The more you stand behind the shot and try and visualise the part of the ball you need to cover up then the more you will start to recognise these reoccurring situations around the table.

It is difficult to do this once you are down in position as your perspective become different.

So, use the upright position to judge the "angle" or "part of the ball to cover" and then use the chin on cue position to judge that you are aiming where you intend to send the cue ball

Cheers!
Steve

6:32 PM **0 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

Short of practice ideas? Short of answers!

Hi Steve,

I have played at a very high level as an amateur and now I'm in my early 40's feel quite bored of the usual line-ups, straight pots, colours off spots etc.

My question to you is twofold aswell: What do you practice nowadays in order to keep your interest and maintain your standard (if you feel you can share this in a public forum)? What would you advise me to include in a practice regime in order to continue to improve, or given my age, at least not go backwards? Thanks from myself and every snooker player for your willingness to put yourself through all these questions!

From Paul

Hi Paul

I'm not really sure. And that is being totally honest!

The moment you start to become bored by your practice routines is certainly the time to change them. But to what?

I personally can't practice more than half an hour on my own without becoming bored so I don't do it!

Perhaps this is the time in your snooker to just play competitive practice? Play a friend or even enemy with something at stake. Loser washes the other one's car outside the snooker club. Best of 51 played over 5 sessions?

Whatever turns you on. It doesn't have to be money

Practice technique for far shorter amounts of time and then forget it when you are playing in competitive practice.

Cheers!
Steve

7:10 PM **2 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

Saturday, February 06, 2010

Blind Pocket Blindness

HI STEVE!!

MY NAME IS HUGO AND I LIVE IN TORONTO, CANADA. I HAVE 2 QUESTIONS FOR YOU.

1. I HAVE A 10'X5' SNOOKER TABLE AT HOME WHERE I PRACTICE ALMOST EVERY DAY. I'VE BEEN PRACTICING FOR A YEAR. HOW RELIABLE IS TO PRACTICE IN THAT SIZE TABLE, COMPARING WITH A 12X6 PROFESSIONAL SNOOKER TABLE?

DO YOU THINK I CAN BENEFIT IN PRACTICING IN A TABLE THAT SIZE?

2. LATELY I WAS` PRACTICING POTTING THE BLACK FROM ITS SPOT FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES. THE PROBLEM IS WHEN

THE CUE BALL IS CLOSE TO THE TOP RAIL, LEVING A "BLIND POCKET" POT TO THE BLACK. I TRIED TO VISUALIZE A GHOST BALL IN LINE WITH THE BLACK, FINDING THE SPOT ON THE BLACK WHERE TO HIT IT WITH THE CUE BALL BUT ALL UNSUCCESSFULLY. FINALLY I TRIED JUST "GUESSING" THE POTTING ANGLE AND WAS MORE SUCCESSFUL IN THAT WAY. ALSO LESS CONCERNED WITH THE POTTING. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO PLAY THOSE SHOTS WHERE YOU PLAY THE POT TO A BLIND POCKET?
I APPRIATE YOUR INPUT ON THOSE TWO QUESTIONS AND I AM VERY GLAD YOU CAN GIVE A HAND TO THOSE SNOOKER FANS THAT WANT TO IMPROVE THEIR GAMES.
KEEP YOUR GOOD WORK!!!
HUGO

Hi Hugo

Many Thanks! It seems that you have got some chalk dust in your Caps lock?!

OK A 10 x 5 table is a lot better than a 0 x 0 table!

I'd still want to have some regular practice on a full size table and use the 10 x 5 to work on technique more. Then when you go to the Snooker club forget about technique and just play the game and think about positional play.

Concerning potting a ball into a "blind pocket" I think a lot of people have this trouble but actually it shouldn't make any difference whatsoever!

When you hit the cue ball you should have your eyes fixed firmly on the part of the ball that you intend to "cover up" with the cue ball. And indeed a more theoretically correct method would be to have your eyes fixed on that "imaginary" ball that you mentioned.

With this in mind, then it should make no difference where the pocket is! Cover it up with a dust sheet! Unscrew it and put it on a chair!

However, if you are choosing the wrong part of the ball to cover in the first place then perhaps you should go back to the basic Half Ball pot as a method of recognising pots around the whole table and also very importantly the black off its spot.

Put the black on its spot and put a ball "your imaginary one" in line and touching the black so that they are lined up as a plant into the corner pocket (favouring the side cushion jaw).

Now place your cue ball on the table where you think it will be a half ball pot on the black so that the cue ball will then hit the top cushion after potting the black.

To check you have done this very accurately, lay a pencil on the top cushion and line it up with the cue ball and the "imaginary ball" on. Now take away the "imaginary Ball" and check that when you aim the cue ball at the pencil point it is also perfectly in line with the edge of the Black ball. If not adjust the Cue Ball position and then repeat the whole process again.

Then mark the table with a small cross w(where your cue ball is) and repeat the whole process for the "Blind Pocket" style cut back but this time place the Imaginary Ball so that it favours the near cushion jaw. (why? see addendum at the bottom)

You will now have two marks on the table that are Perfect half ball pots on the black.

The "Half Ball pot" is the only shot that you can ever play where you can actually aim at something with your Cue! Every other shot you are trying to imagine something :)

Practice this shot from both positions and both sides of the table. It will teach you a lot about your cue action. Set other positions up around the table.

Blue off the spot and cue ball very near the Brown spot is great practice.

When you strike the Cue ball make sure that your eyes are fixed on the edge (Half way down the ball!!) of the object ball. This shot, more than any other will train your eyes to "forget" the pocket.

OK so you ask "that's great for "half ball pots" but I'm talking about thinner pots than that!"

Well, go away and practice the half ball pot and then after a while when you are playing in normal play you will start to recognise these half ball pots everywhere on the table.

You will also start to recognise pots that are thinner or thicker than Half Ball. You will start to use the Half Ball as a reference point. As a potting aid!

Before each shot talk to yourself and say "That's a half ball pot" or That's thinner than Half ball by a fraction perhaps even only a "Quarter Ball" !!!!! :) Perhaps the Thick pots are very thick perhaps even a 3/4 ball !!!! OK nothing to aim at with your cue but trust me this will take the whole "WORRY of the pocket out of the equation.

Remember The Half Ball Pot is your best friend in the whole wide world!!

Cheers!

Steve

Addendum: When playing any cut shot there will be a certain amount of "friction" between the two balls. For the split second that they are in contact the cue ball (that has a directional force on a completely different line to the intended potting line) will effectively be trying to "grab" the object ball and take it with him!. Depending upon the thickness of the Cloth and the cleanliness of the Balls, this can create a marginally "thicker contact effect" or in extreme cases a fairly obvious one

3:18 PM 1 Comments (Add Comment) | 0 Kudos Translate

Thursday, February 04, 2010

Expanded Chest Problems

So, Something I forgot to add :)

Assuming you have read "Chest Problems" and have decided that you are interested in perhaps a better (or should that be "different") way of approaching the shot, then here is my suggested method of incorporating a more "face on" cue action.

The normal way of approaching the shot from an original upright position is from the left. IE. Right foot on the line of the shot and (unless you are going to lean over to the right) body and head also to the left. It will only be when you are down over the shot that you will hope to be on the line of the shot with your eyes.

Should you lean your torso over to the right whilst in this standing position then yes you can keep your eyes on the line of the shot the whole time until you are down over the cue.

You can also stand behind the shot with your belly button and of course head directly on the line of the shot (ala Michael Judge) and as you get into position your feet will travel to the left slightly in order to make way for your right arm to get on the line.

However this is not how I think Mark Williams achieves his position over the ball.

Try this.

Get down to the shot by letting your head and eyes to guide you rather than your feet or Right arm or cue.

It's a subtle but important change of emphasis that of course should guarantee that when you are in the "down" position then you are guaranteed that your eyes are directly in line with the shot.

So, stand upright behind the shot with your eyes totally on the line of the shot. Stoop down a bit if it helps to focus your mind on getting your head exactly on the line.

Then from the moment you start to bend "forwards" (not across) to get down to the shot, look at nothing else other than the part of the object ball that you are intending to cover with the cue ball. Do not think about what your feet are doing and do not try and line the shot up using your cue or right fist.

Then as you are moving lower, bring the cue under your body and plonk it on your chin directly under your eyes.
 Then you can look at the Cue Ball :)
 OK this should guarantee that you are much more "face on" to the shot and you will have the feeling that your cue is "under" your body much more, and certainly running along your chest.
 You should have guaranteed that your head and eyes are in line with the shot and that your cue is also in line.
 Are you still standing on the ground? Hopefully yes! So don't worry about the position of your feet and how they look compared to the theory books.
 You will still stand in an orthodox way (albeit perhaps more over to the right) and as you become more familiar with this method of approaching the shot, you will subconsciously find stable and comfortable new positions for your feet.
 The theorists will be able to shoot holes in the above method, but all I would say is, give it a try.
 Even my Father (a staunch advocate of the cue and right arm being in line) has agreed that he seems "lined" up better.
 For me, my cue now runs up the "inside" of my right arm should you be looking at me face on.
 For you., well you may feel like you are mimicking Mark Williams or perhaps Jamie Cope. They may never win "the rolls royce cue action award" but boy can they both pot!
 Let me know how you get on!
 Cheers!
 Steve

7:38 PM 1 Comments (Add Comment) | 0 Kudos Translate

Thursday, February 04, 2010

Chest problems

Hi Steve!

Many thanks for the informative articles on here! I've been looking for really in-depth articles about snooker technique for a while now and came across this myspace. The suggestion of slowing down your backswing has especially really helped! Has taught me that the power of a shot comes from the length of the backswing, not from differing cue acceleration (why has no coach ever just said that to me?), making me play much smoother.
 I have a couple of questions if you're happy to answer them. First of all I've read somewhere (Ronnie's autobiography?) that when younger you were changing your technique all the time. What eventually caused you to settle down your technique? I've had serious problems spending years constantly editing and adjusting my technique, unable to move on to more advanced areas of the game as a result of the inconsistency. Whenever a technique seems to work, something subconsciously will change, and the whole adjusting and changing cycle starts again. I work hard at really trying to acquire as much information as possible about technique, but the levels of understanding around seem to be extremely limited. Everyone else seems to just play and ignore technique.
 As a more specific question, what are your thoughts on where the cue should run across the chest? I constantly seem to switch this point, and noone (including coaches) will give me an answer about the effects of having the cue more under the body, as opposed to right out to the side to the point where the cue is almost in the armpit. The latter seems to result in a more upright head and a more sturdy, straight back technique (Stephen Hendry?) whereas the former seems to get the cue more centrally between the eyes (thus why Hendry holds the cue fractionally to the right of his chin? Compensating for the cue coming more from the side?). That's about all I have picked up though, any thoughts from yourself would be appreciated!

Jack Morgan

Hi Jack

A WORD OF WARNING concerning the slow final back swing (pull back)
 make sure that as a result of slowing down your final back swing that you don't LENGTHEN it on every shot. This would not be a good outcome.
 Another point : The power of the shot comes from how much "force" you apply. The more acceleration the cue has the harder you will hit the ball, assuming that you are delivering it accurately of course.
 So, yes if you have a longer final back swing (pull back) then you can probably build up more cue speed. The problem though is that the longer that back swing is then the more difficult it is (especially when attempting a forceful shot) to deliver that cue tip back to the intended point of contact.
 A shorter back swing can sometimes produce better results in this department and also improve a players potting accuracy in general play.
 A shorter bridge can also improve a players ability to return the cue to the intended line of aim and at the same time naturally induce a player to limit his back swing, which will all improve accuracy.

In order to play a forceful shot with a shorter back swing the player will need to "feel" more explosive in his final delivery and of course this can lead a player to either rush the shot (by not finishing off the back swing properly) or create too much body and head movement and thus destroy accuracy. It's not for everyone one but worth experimenting with to find your own limits.

In essence, the shorter your final back swing can be whilst still being able to generate the force required for the shot (with accuracy!) the better

A great example of a player with a very short back swing is Mark Allen. He is not lacking on power shots and is a very accurate potter. He is probably very consistent on a daily basis due to this short back swing.

OK NOT EVERYONE CAN PLAY WITH A SHORT BACK SWING

In the same way that some boxers are harder punchers than others (and with a shorter pull back!) then some snooker players will be harder hitters of the cue ball. It's effectively how hard you can "punch" that cue through.

However what we are also looking for in snooker is "control", so a balance has to be found with a cue action that gets the ball in the pocket! Take a look at the action developed to Break off at Nine Ball pool as an example. This is an extreme hit! designed to be as hard as possible. Accuracy is somewhat sacrificed as the player is effectively "on the edge" and yes, a very long pull back is incorporated.

In normal play on a pool table, a player's "cue acceleration" WOULD differ from the Break off shot, and WOULD also differ from shot to shot.

OK, on to your Questions:

Firstly I'm not sure that I was changing my technique all the time. At least I don't think I was! What I think I was doing (and still am!) was trying to keep a load of plates spinning.

There are so many individual pieces to your technique that you can choose to focus on. The problem of course is that at any one time (during practice and especially Competition) you can probably only cope with concentrating on a maximum of two "plates", and usually only one. That's when the smashing starts!

So the art of a good technique is to try to instill good habits that your body won't forget.

Unfortunately, over time, you will forget even good habits. Or rather you may start to "relax" those habits until the time when it is pointed out to you by an observer that you are no longer doing "this or that".

However, over my career, I have always been searching for better technique so I was changing technique when I felt it was worth the effort. Most importantly, I wasn't changing for changes sake.

I think we all play at our best when we are playing "naturally". So this next statement is very important. DON'T always be practicing technique. Otherwise you will forget to play the game itself.

Perhaps the way to do this is THINK technique in SOLO practice, Think POSITIONAL PLAY in NORMAL practice. You can then adjust the mix of Solo/normal.

I will still consider a change in my technique should I feel that it is warranted and coincidentally this brings me on to your specific question of "where the cue should run on your chest" as it is something that I have recently changed in my own technique.

OK, well the first thing to discuss is whether the cue should actually be touching the chest or should run clear of it?

For the vast majority of my pro career I played with the cue "away" from my chest. So the only two points of contact with

my body were my hands. Obviously this wasn't a handicap, or at least I didn't think so at the time, as I won a few club tournaments along the way! I was able to withstand the pressure situations very well and delivered the cue on a straighter line than my opponents. As I've grown older I've found that harder to do and I think that I can keep the cue on a straight line better, if it is touching and running on my chest. This gives me added stability and has seen (in practice) my potting accuracy increase noticeably. I did play like this once before (when I beat John Higgins in the Welsh Open one year) but I don't remember why I started doing it or why I stopped now as it was too long ago! I think it was the result of trying to line my head up better and not really about my cue running on my chest

Are there any draw backs? None that I can't determine so far. The theorist could argue that this can limit the follow through and when the fist hits the chest it will naturally try and go around the chest and thus take the cue offline. Well, as long as you have given yourself enough room to hit the ball first, before you hand hits your chest then the ball is already on its merry way up the table!!

Ok, the question is "what are my thoughts on WHERE the cue should run across the chest?"
(Assume that you are right handed)

A Nigel Bond, Jamie Cope, Mark Williams style will result in the cue running over your right nipple and a Stephen Hendry, John Higgins, Rory Mcleod style will result in the cue running more on the pectoral muscle to the right of your nipple. Hopefully I'm correct about this as I haven't checked to see!
Obviously there are a number of factors that determine where this cue runs. Physique and stance spring to mind, but I think the main factor will be in how you actually APPROACH the shot

Put the Blue on the Blue Spot and the white a foot behind it lined up for the middle pocket. Now stand (same distance as you would normally be away from the ball) SQUARE ON (with your belly button on the line of the shot and your hips facing forward) Keep hold of you cue, but not "gripped" ready to play (hold it with your right hand behind your back!). Now slowly bend from the hip to line up your head behind the shot until you are satisfied that you are totally in line with the shot. When you are then make a bridge and without moving try to get your cue on to it and line up the shot with you cue. Obviously your chest will be in the way, but now ask yourself a question. think of a picture of a player. Mark Williams? Jamie Cope? Nigel Bond?

OK go back to the "normal way" of playing.

Put the Blue on the Blue spot and the White on the brown spot (ready to hit the blue to the black spot)

Stand up STRAIGHT in your normal position.

Do you have your right foot on the line of the shot?

Yes?

Do you have your left foot somewhere out to the left of the line of the shot?

Yes? (I bloody hope so!!)

Is the left foot closer to the table than the right?

Yes? OK you are one of the vast majority of decent snooker players. Perhaps a majority of 100%

OK remain standing up STRAIGHT in this position.

This is your starting position for lining up the shot. Yes?

If it is (and the theory books tell us this is correct) then some questions:

What direction are your hips pointing in?

Draw a line from your nose, through the cue ball. Where does the line aim?

How do you judge those pots?????????

that was Some food for thought :-)

OK, so from this upright "normal position we now bend our hips, which sends our torso over to the right, and we find our position over the ball, with our left arm stretched out (straight or bent regardless) and our head slightly twisted to the left to get "square (ish) with the shot.

Now I think that the vast majority of players using this method of "Approach" will now probably have their cue running somewhere along their chest to the right of their nipple and on their pectoral muscle (I hope this is true no regardless of physique!)

Another thing that can determine where a player runs his cue on his chest can be how "High" he stands. A player like John Higgins who gets his torso very low to the table will "have" to have his cue more under his armpit. Whereas a player like Mark Williams who stands "over" the shot. will be able to get his cue more under his body and therefore run the cue across his nipple.

Whilst all of my career I have tried to get my cue running straight up my right arm (when you look at me play a straight pot from behind the pocket) I have the worrying feeling that this was all just a waste of time, and in many ways can cause more problems than it cures.

In contorting your body (Rory Mcleod, Stephen Hendry) to get your right shoulder (and possibly arm) in line with the shot, You are possibly sacrificing good alignment when over the ball. Obviously natural talent will always win the day, but why make the game difficult?!

While the jury is unanimous (the rocket) on who is the most naturally gifted player of the modern game (and probably all time!) there is one player who plays snooker the most natural way, and that is Mark Williams. In a nutshell he is more "face on" in his approach to the shot and his alignment is great because of it! No wonder they call him the best single ball potter in the game.

To answer your question on a basic level. It is probably best to have the cue running on your chest and it probably doesn't matter where it runs. Probably :)

As usual, even if your technique is not correct. You're natural ability will go a long way to coping.

so remember:

DON'T always be practicing technique. Otherwise you will forget to play the game itself.

THINK technique in SOLO practice but Think Positional play in NORMAL practice.

Everything else is just theory!

Cheers!

Steve

9:00 AM 0 Comments (Add Comment) | 1 Kudos Translate

Tuesday, September 01, 2009

To Feather or not to Feather? That is

Chris asks

"When I started to learn the game I was taught for every shot to have 3 'feathers'. So I would address the cue-ball, feather 1...2...3 (three cue actions), then pause at the back and deliver, for each shot.

My question is, should we do that and have that strict rule of 3 cueing actions on each shot or is it perfectly correct to have slightly varying numbers of cueing actions now that I have got a lot more advanced as a snooker player? I notice that very few, if any, professionals have a consistent number of 'feathers' when playing.

Also, have you used a Talisman Soft Pro snooker tip and if so what do you think?"

Dear Chris

It is obvious from watching a cross section of the top professionals, that in order to achieve a top class standard, having any one particular formula for a cue action is not necessary. When it comes to the "feathers" or backwards and forwards movements of the cue in preparation for hitting the Cue-Ball we see a whole spectrum of methods employed by the Pros. They range from a set number of methodical lengthy movements (ala Anthony Hamilton) to a more "darts like approach", ie. short "setting up" movements before the final backswing/pull back, akin to how someone would attempt to throw a scrunched up piece of paper into a wastepaper basket. The former is somewhat contrived while the latter is a far more natural technique. However what we need to find out is if there are any benefits in one style over the other. In reality, much technical theory is passed down the snooker generations as "the gospel" because a top champion either played with that particular style, or wrote a book advocating a certain technique as "best", regardless of their own playing style, in a don't do as I do, do as I say approach. This intimated that if you had talent, then you could "get away with it", but "seeing as you don't have talent, then ... take this advice!" Perhaps this is true, but this approach, by inference, means that one method is seen as more "stable" than another.

So, to "feather" or not to "feather"? And if we are to "feather" then how many times, how far back do we pull the cue and at what speed do we make them?

What do these "feathers" achieve? Well perhaps it is first important to establish what they don't achieve.

1. They are not "practicing the shot"

A golfer practises the shot. He takes a whole practice swing, including the follow through. No snooker player actually practices the "hit" in their preparatory movements.

2. They are not practicing the "weight of delivery of the shot". If this was the case we would see the top golfers "feathering" when putting, regardless of whether they had previously practiced the "hit/follow through" or not. In order to practice the weight of delivery of the snooker shot we would need to practice the "hit" as well as the "pull back". Furthermore, possibly the most "feel" intensive sport, Darts, should be considered. If practicing the "weight of delivery" of the throw by lengthy preparatory backwards and forwards movements was all important, then all the top darts players would be doing it! None of them do.

So perhaps the "lengthy feathers" are to replicate and "practice" the final pull back?

Possibly, but these "lengthy feathers" never incorporate a "pause". Also a player's last "pull back" is usually longer and more deliberate, so the final "pull back" is never truly practiced.

Perhaps the "lengthy feathers" can be used to check if a player is pulling the cue back on a straight line and delivering it back at the point of intended contact on the ball?

This seems a reasonable idea. However, while you are making these lengthier style movements you will not only be looking at the Cue-Ball, You will be turning your attention to the Object-Ball, so then to some extent the most important reason for these movements would be somewhat wasted.

There may be some truth in the above theories and explanations mentioned above but in essence they are leading me to what I consider to be the only possible reason for having a SET amount of "feathers"

3 was the number mentioned, but as long as we are not talking 33 then the number of "feathers" is irrelevant. The "feathers" are part of a player's preparation, physically and mentally. Each player will have incorporated different lengths of "feathers" and a different amount. Some players will make these "feathers" slow and deliberate and other will be fast and furious. The most important thing is that when it comes to playing a shot in a tense situation, that a player has a method that repeats itself. A player that "cues up"/"feathers" differently for different shots, runs the risk of not being in control of their cue when he or she most needs to be.

The act of having a set number of feathers can act as a mental trigger. The body will subconsciously know when it is time to make the final pull back and then make this important movement "unforced" and as "natural" as possible.

The only problem with this theory is that it is fine for short distance shots but when you observe the top professionals who actually have this methodical style of "feathering", when it comes to long distance shots or pressure situations, you will find that they have more "feathers"!!

So, this can only lead to one conclusion.

The most important reason for preparatory "feathers" is to give yourself the time to settle, and mentally confirm that you are "lined up" on the intended shot. Some shots require more time! Making these "feathers" smooth and deliberate can aid in keeping the final "pull back" and "delivery" controlled, but even this will be down to the individual. Making the "feathers" lengthier may assist in checking to see if the cue is being kept on line, but it is the "hit" through the ball that most needs to be on line. This extension "through the Cue-Ball" is never practiced by "feathering".

Even the most "gifted" player needs some time when "down on the shot" before the final "pull back" and "delivery". 3 or 4 "feathers" seems reasonable for most normal shots but then 3 quick short ones will be far shorter than 4 slow long ones! A player that takes too long on the shot is as bad as one that take too little. If you find that you sense you are missing shots through being careless, then by all means increase the amount of "feathers" and make them feel more deliberate. Should a friend observe that you look too methodical on the shot and take ages to hit the ball, then perhaps you could investigate less, and possibly shorter "feathers". You are trying to achieve a cue action that has "method" but doesn't disrupt the body's natural abilities.

Concerning cue tips I will post something on this soon but suffice to say that I played in last season's World Championship with a medium Talisman. this tip was fantastic in the build up. Far better than any Blue Diamond or Elk I have ever used. However tow days after the World's finished played an exhibition and the laminates seperated and the top two sheared off! Until they get the glue right they must be considered unreliable. MARK Williams had the same problem but this actually happend in his Match against Stephen Hendry. John Higgins however uses the Hard Buffalo (black) ones and thinks they are great.

I am currently exploring the Japanese laminated tips and may have discovered a good make. I'll post soon.

Cheers!
Steve

2:12 PM **0 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

Tuesday, July 21, 2009

The Rear Pause .. or lack of it!

Hello Steve.

I have another question...I have been playing top amateur snooker for around 20 years, including the UK in the late 80's when you were the MAN! I have never had a discernible rear pause although I do have a slow backswing and I know the cue has to stop, but my rear pause can be measured in microseconds. Even with the slow backswing I can still detect some body movement due to the quick change in direction of the cue.

Even as a certified Master Coach I have been unable to find a method where I can naturally integrate a rear pause of maybe 1-1.5sec into my backswing - delivery. I've tried counting, slowing the backswing even further, deliberately pausing for 5 seconds and mentally pausing for 1-1.5secs, but it seems to detract from my control of the shot positionally. I've been working on this for well over a year now and still haven't been able to get it to feel right.

Terry Davidson

Hi Terry

The "rear pause" is obviously not necessary in playing top class snooker (Peter Ebdon and Mark Allen spring to mind) and in trying to achieve one a player may do more harm to his game than good, especially if he or she has been playing a long time without one.

However should a player want to experiment in ingraining a pause into the cue action then it really will have to be a case of mind over matter.

The eyes are the secret to the pause. If, on your final backswing, you follow the tip of the cue with your eyes until the cue has stopped, and then (and only then) move your eyes to the object ball, and then (and only when your eyes are fully fixed on the object ball) do you start to move the cue forward you cannot fail to achieve a "rear pause".

As you suggest in your question ("I have been unable to find a method where I can naturally integrate a rear pause") the problem is one of familiarity. This method will be, and seem, "unnatural". It will only become "Natural" after extensive methodical ingraining over many months of practice. Whether it is worth the effort is of course the \$64k question. Possibly not, but I can only say from my own experiences that when I have a full pause I seem to have all the time in the world in which to play my shot. Without one I feel rushed and out of control. Especially in pressure situations.

Steve

5:29 PM **0 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

Friday, June 26, 2009

The Stance ... Overrated? It's not your feet that hit the ball!

Hi Steve

Just joined myspace after seeing an interview with you posted on youtube. I searched for your myspace on google and found it.

I have grown up with a snooker table & playing for over 40years. It is only recently that I have changed my stance. I have been working on it since I started playing.

In attempt to improve my game I joined a snooker forum (<http://thesnookergym.com/forums>) Nic Barrow. When trying to explain my technique one of the online coaches Terry Davidson (Canada) described my technique as "the soft shoe shuffle" So yesterday I posted 2 videos on youtube to try and explain my technique better. It would be great if you could look at it and tell me if I am on the right track. Here is a link "<http://www.youtube.com/user/NEWTIP>" My E-mail hello_graeme@optusnet.com.au

Thanks for everything you have done for snooker.

Best Regards

Graeme Smith (Sydney Australia.)

Hi Graeme

Many thanks for contacting me! My first online question!!

OK, Firstly I don't really worry too much about a player's stance. When you look around at all the top snooker players, they all have their own way of standing, which is probably the result of a mixture of physique and habit. Obviously if you were showing a pupil the theoretically best way to stand, you wouldn't pick a "Mark King" or "Peter Ebdon" but obviously this can't be too much of a hinderance! In general the Snooker player stands with a more "Square on" stance to players of other "table ball sports". I.e. their hips are closer to facing the line of the shot than the "side on stance of, say, many pool players. Apart from subsequent generations of players copying their heroes, I'm not entirely sure why this square on approach has caught on. When I first started showing signs of being decent (19ish perhaps) I was much more 45 degrees (not just with my feet but also my hip line) to the line of the shot. I was advised by a decent amateur/coach at the time (Mick Binfield if I recall) to stand much "squarer to the shot". I have no way of knowing what I would have achieved had I continued on my own course, but it could well be argued that it was good advice! After turning Pro and having success, many other snooker players copied this squarer stance. Perhaps the reason why lies in Snooker's need for great accuracy over distance. Not such a prerequisite is needed in other games. Touch and feel come much more into the equation in something like 3 cushion billiards for instance. Perhaps Squarer hips and squarer feet mean more resistance to sideways movement of the body? Or perhaps it's rubbish!?

So as far as you own stance is concerned. I wouldn't worry about it too much. As long as you are comfortable and at the same time feel stable enough on the shot then .. JOB DONE!

However (after watching your video) what is of more concern and something that all players could benefit from doing is to drastically (and it WILL feel drastic as well!) slow down your final backswing (or a more accurate term "final pull back"). The final pull back should be a deliberately controlled movement. It will be used to watch the cue come back on the line of the intended strike on the Cue Ball. It will be much easier to have a proper pause if your pull back is slow and controlled, and when you do have complete control of your final pull back and pause only then will be in control of your eyes. You will find that you will be able to move your eyes (in plenty of time) from the Cue Ball, FULLY onto the Object ball (not some random area in no man's land!). Only when your eyes are fixed onto the object ball should you be starting to deliver the cue forward. Whilst many great players have used other methods, I remain convinced that this eye method improves a player in many areas of the game more than any other technical advice. Having a fast pull back effectively undermines the control needed to play snooker.

How to achieve this?

You will need a friend to watch you play on a regular basis but the feeling you should be looking for is for your final pull back to feel at "Half Speed". It will feel so strange and unnatural to start with. You will start to revert to your old habits very quickly which is where a friend will be a great help. ON difficult or power shots you will tend to want to speed up the final pull back. Resist this if you can!! If you are looking for a top player to copy then video footage of Mark Selby would be perfect. Video yourself and run the two together to see the difference! You'll be astonished :-)

Happy Potting

Steve

2:35 PM **1 Comments** ([Add Comment](#)) | **0 Kudos** [Translate](#)

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