



Key Shots to Know

THE HANGER

An object ball hung between the jaws of a corner pocket is commonly known as a "hanger", meaning it is almost impossible to miss. However, the tricky part of shooting a hanger is getting position on the next ball.

Assume your cue ball is about 3/4 of a table length away, across center table. One instinct might be to play it thin with a high follow stroke on the cue ball. The problem is that this could cause either a force follow effect, causing the cue ball to die on the cushion, or the cue ball could hit the point of the cushion and bounce between the jaws (or even scratch).

If you try to force too much of an angle on the hung ball and stroke it hard, you might even cause it to bounce in and out and thus leave your opponent the hanger.

You could always attempt to draw the ball straight back, but if your name isn't Mike Massey, you might not want to attempt it.

Your best bet is to shoot the shot with low running english (english toward the natural side the cue ball will carom after contact with the object ball) and hit the long cushion near the pocket first. Practice it to get the feel of the speed and you will see how easy it is to get the cue ball back out into play.

PRACTICING HANGERS

Those "Hangers," where the object ball hangs at the pocket's edge, look like the easiest shots in the world. However, they are often the trickiest to play position from.

Set up a "Hanger" in the corner pocket and find a way to get your cue ball back near the center of the table. Do it by drawing straight back off the object ball from different distances, and then try to do it by hitting one of the cushions adjacent to the pocket first.

THE STOP SHOT

A Stop Shot is when the cue ball is struck dead center so that it slides toward the object ball rather than roll toward it. The effect is that when the cue ball hits an object ball full, it stops.

When the cue ball and object balls are some considerable distance apart it would take an extremely hard hit to have the cue ball slide the entire distance without any forward roll. Therefore, players have learned to start the long stop shot with a slightly below center hit, as if they were playing a draw shot. The effect here is that the cue ball begins to move forward with back spin, however the friction of the cloth erases that spin and at the critical point of contact with the object ball, the cue ball is actually sliding with no spin (a stop shot).

BEWARE THE PUSH

In the game of 9-Ball, the player at the table immediately after the break is given the option to PUSH. This means that if they do not have a satisfactory shot or are unable to hit

the lowest ball on the table, they may PUSH (meaning shoot the cue ball to another position on the table without incurring a foul). It is then the opponent's option to either shoot the shot from that position or have the PUSHING player shoot again.

Many amateur players accept the shot after the PUSH if they can at least see the object ball, no matter where the other player pushed to. Quite often, this may be the right decision. But don't be trapped by pressuring yourself into taking the shot just because you can see the ball.

The pushing player usually thinks their opponent will take the shot, so they must have something in mind when they execute their push. Take the time to put yourself into their shoes and figure out why they pushed to that particular position.

Now that you have an idea what they were thinking when they pushed out, do whatever feels comfortable. You are in the drivers seat now. Passing or taking the shot is your luxury.

PLAYING NEAR THE RAIL

PLAYER ASKS: "When I am shooting and the cue ball is froze or close to the rail , I mis-cue a lot....can you advise?"

You will not be able to keep your cue as level as you do when the cue ball is away from the rail. Elevate the butt of your cue) just a little so your cue tip points down closer to the center of the cue ball. Chalk up and shoot a bit softer than you normally would so the cue tip won't accidentally slip off the top of the ball.

The reason for the mis-cue is that the area of the cue ball you have to shoot at is much smaller near the top of the ball; when the cue ball is near a rail), by shooting a little more down at the ball, you are ensuring your cuetip will be as close to center of the cue ball as possible.

THE 5 KEYS OF JUMPING

- 1) Elevate the butt of your cue.
- 2) Keep forearm (on grip arm) parallel to the table surface.
- 3) Raise the heel of back foot for more elevation.
- 4) Keep slight bend in bridge arm.
- 5) Strike down on center or above center of cue ball. It's not how hard you hit it but how good your wrist action is.

One of the jump shot pioneers who was jumping balls in the '70s was **Jimmy Spears** who earned the name "**Fly Boy**". But it was probably **Earl Strickland** who introduced the jump to fans nationwide.

JUMPY ADVICE

A jump shot forces the cue ball to jump up and leave the table surface. This is accomplished by elevating your cue and striking a downward blow to the cue ball (hitting above its horizontal axis or equator). Scooping the cue ball up off the surface (by picking it up with a strike below its horizontal axis) is not a legal shot.

In executing the jump shot, higher elevations of your cue butt cause more jump.

The main thing to remember on these shots is to avoid shooting down through the center mass (through the fastest circumference) of the cue ball. Instead hit downward behind it, pinching the cue ball into the table. This puts backspin (draw) on the cue ball and will help it remain on the table after it bounces back to the surface.

CUT IT!

Many players consider the sharp cut (45 degrees or more) when the object ball is near the rail, to be one of the toughest shots. Some top instructors have estimated that 99% of all these shots that are missed are undercut, with the object ball running into the cushion on its way to the pocket.

To get better at this shot, don't fear overcutting it or "whiffing" it. Don't start by aiming at half or quarter ball and then slowly moving your cue out to cut it more. Start by aiming with the cut that you will need. Practice getting your cue ball way out behind the object ball, and if you miss a few completely, that's okay, because that's how you will learn the feel for the proper cut.

TAKE IT TO THE BANK

When you attempt to bank an object ball but must cut it into the cushion, the fact that the cue ball is cutting it will cause english to be transferred to the object ball.

If you are cutting the object ball to the right toward a cushion, the cue ball is putting left english on it causing it to come off the cushion at a shorter or more closed angle.

To cause the object ball to act in a more natural way when rebounding from the cushion, put outside english on the cue ball. In the above example, we were hitting the object ball on the left side to cut it back to the right. Therefore, outside (left english) on the cue ball will decrease the amount of spin transferred to the object ball.

THREE BALL COMBO WHEN FROZEN

When three object balls are frozen and the last two are lined up directly to the center of a pocket, it is where the third object ball is touching the middle object ball that determines the direction of the first object ball. If the third object ball is touching the middle ball in the frozen combo on the left side, the first ball will be thrown to the right. Of course this would come in handy if the shot were lined up a little to the left of the pocket.

Quite often, in a three ball frozen combo, it is very difficult to contact the second ball (middle ball) dead center with your cue ball to avoid the throw because of the third ball's position. What can be done to minimize or cancel the throw is to strike the shot harder than you normally would. The hard hit tends to minimize or cancel any throw effect, especially over a short distance.

COMBO WITH TWO FROZEN OBJECT BALLS

When two object balls are frozen but they are not quite lined up toward a pocket, say the shot is lined up to the left of the pocket, what should you do? Well, if the combo is not aimed too far to the left of the pocket, and you have at least a foot or two of distance between the balls and the pocket, you can play it. Just hit on the left side of the first object ball and the second object ball will be thrown to the right and fall into the pocket. Of course, if the frozen shot was off line to the right side of the pocket, you would do just the opposite by striking the first object ball on the right to throw the second object ball to the left.

This also tells you that if two object balls are frozen and aimed directly to the center of the pocket, the combo can be missed if you hit the first object ball to the left or right of its vertical center because that second object ball will get thrown to the opposite direction of the hit.

Experiment with different speed hits and with the shot set up different distances from the pocket to discover how much or how little you can throw the second object ball in this frozen combination shot.

FROZEN CUE BALL THROW SHOT

Here's the situation. Your cue ball is frozen to an object ball and the shot is lined up to the left of the pocket. You wish it was aimed just a little more to the right so you could play the ball. Well, you can play it. Just use a soft to medium hit on the left side of the cue ball and the object ball will be thrown to the right and fall into the pocket. Of course, if the frozen shot was off line to the right side of the pocket, you would do just the opposite by striking the cue ball on the right to throw the object ball to the left.

Experiment with different speed hits, with right and left draw, and with the shot set up different distances from the pocket to discover how much or how little you can throw the object ball.

CHEATING THE POCKET

If you've heard the phrase "cheating the pocket" in your local billiard club, and were not familiar with the meaning, here it is:

Cheating the pocket means favoring one side of a pocket or the other to shoot the object ball into, rather than right into the center of the pocket. The advantage that can be had on some shots is that it may provide a better carom angle off the object ball to get the cue ball into easier position for the next shot.

The next time an opponent tells you they are cheating the pocket, don't worry, they aren't doing anything unethical.