
Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, technical proofs (TP), and all of my past articles are available online at billiards.colostate.edu. Reference numbers used in the articles help you locate the resources on the website.

This is the third article in a series dealing with a “Top 10” video series I recently posted on YouTube. The clips can be accessed via online videos [NV J.10](#), [NV J.13](#), [NV J.14](#) and [NV J.15](#). This month, I will cover the shots and principles from the third video: “**Pool Shots Amateurs Play Wrong ... and How to Play Them Right.**” The video covers the categories of shot and technique elements below with which many amateurs have trouble. Any player wishing to improve and excel must have solid understanding and abilities in these areas.

1.) Don't Scratch

Careless amateurs scratch often. If you know basic cue ball (CB) control principles, you should never scratch, or even doubt if a scratch is possible or not. The natural angle for rolling-CB shots, as predicted by the 30° rule peace sign, the tangent line for stun shots, as predicted by the 90° rule, and the 3-times-the-angle direction for good-action draw shots are very easy to visualize and there is no excuse for not knowing exactly where the CB will head on a shot. For more information about these systems, see the links in the YouTube video description. Online video [NV J.14](#) also contains numerous examples of how all of these principles are applied.

Pocket hangers also cause problems for some amateurs. Sometimes they aim straight and try to slow roll it, with the CB following the object ball (OB) into pocket. Sometimes they try to hit a stop or draw shot with the same bad result. Sometimes a good play is to just cheat the pocket to either side, possibly going rail first. Stop and draw shots are also options. Again, [NV J.14](#) shows a range of good game-situation examples.

2.) Make Pockets Play Bigger

Have you ever seen amateurs rattle a ball in a pocket because they used more speed than they needed for the shot? As demonstrated in [NV J.14](#), the effective size of a pocket, especially a corner pocket, is much larger at slower speed. Your stroke is also usually more accurate at slower speed. If you need to use fast speed into a corner pocket, aim as carefully as you can into the heart of the pocket and don't risk hitting the near point, which can easily cause the ball to rattle. Instead, aim closer to the opposite facing to give yourself a better chance to pocket the ball. The same advice applies to side pocket shots also. It is best to target the far wall of the pocket with slow speed.

3.) Use the Rails as Brakes

Have you ever seen amateurs come up short or go long when trying to finesse shape to get a look at the next shot like the 8 ball in **Diagram 1**? Here, a much better play is to come off the rail. The cushion kills the CB speed some and gives you a much larger margin for error with speed. Using the cushions as brakes like this is a powerful technique, and is a better option than trying to finesse the shot.

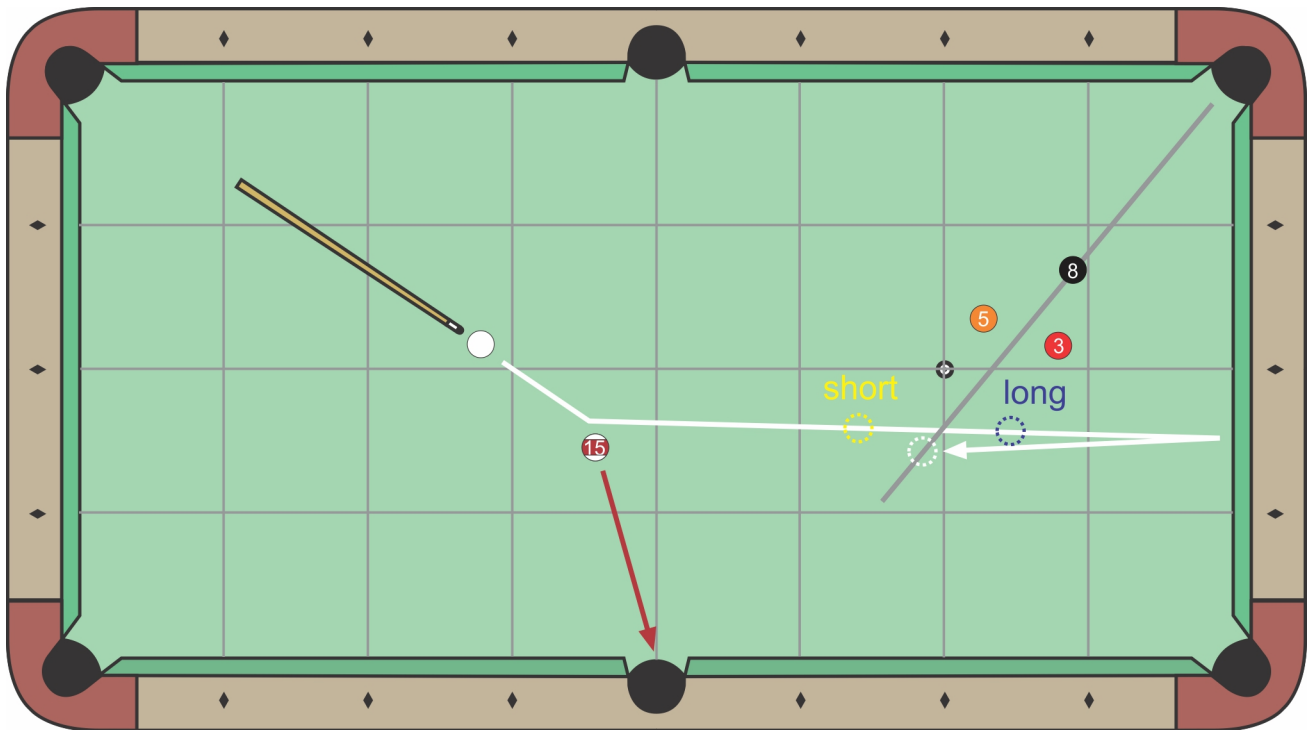


Diagram 1 Using the rail as a brake

4.) Master the Table Center

One thing amateurs often underappreciate is the power of controlling the CB to go to and through the center of the table. It is good to practice this skill and it helps to know the 45° rule illustrated in **Diagram 2**. The rule states that if the CB heads into the end rail at 45°, it will head toward the center of the table. If the CB comes into the end rail at a more-shallow angle, it comes up short of the center. And if the CB comes into the end rail at a steeper angle, it goes long of the center. Again, [NV J.14](#) shows a range of good game-situation examples where sending the CB to or through the table center is the right play and where the 45° rule is used to plan the shot.

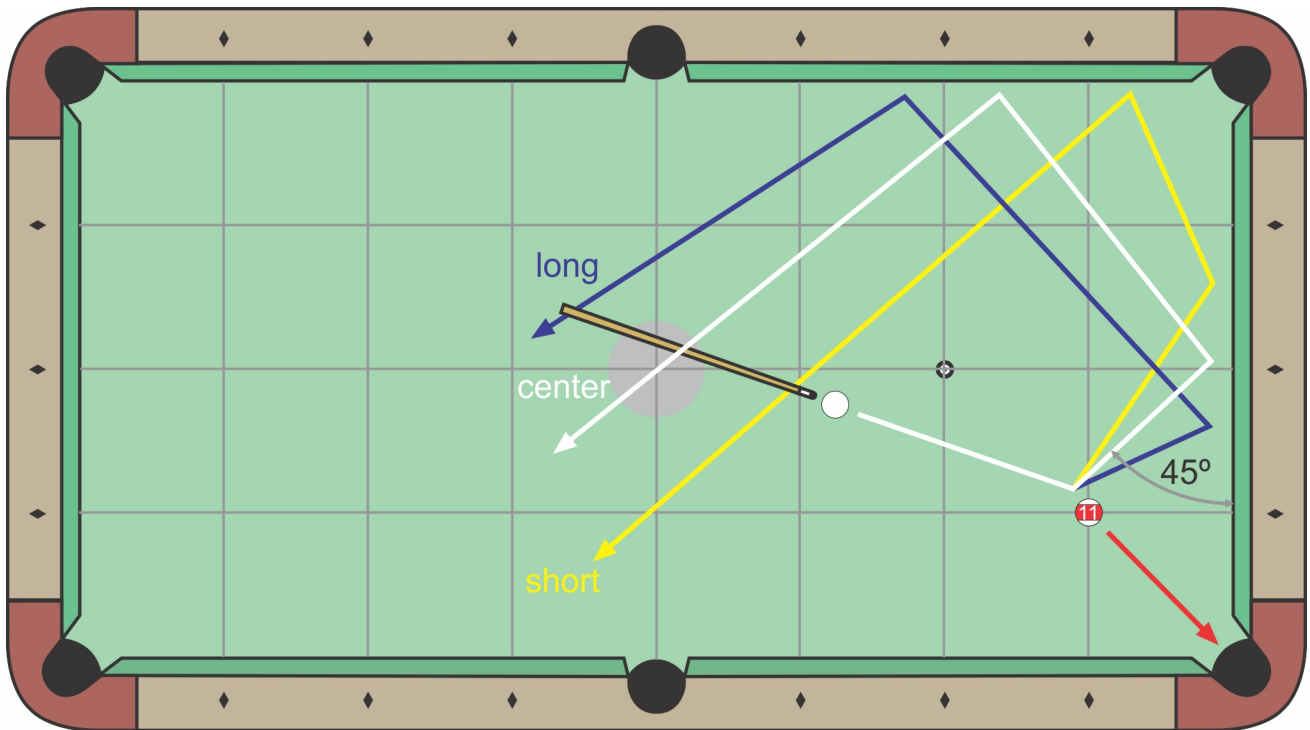


Diagram 2 45° rule

5.) Control Rail Cut Shots

Have you ever seen amateurs play poor shape when cutting a ball close to a rail? An important principle for shots like this is that with the right amount of draw and outside spin, you should be able to bring the CB back along the line of the shot from any angle. Other options are to hit a stun shot for reliable tangent-line motion, or to use close to maximum draw and rely on the 3-times-the-angle system, which means the CB will come off the rail at twice the incoming angle. It is also sometimes important to be able to use inside follow to go forward and use spin-intensifying drag. For more information on all of these approaches, see the examples in the video and the links in the YouTube video description.

6.) Avoid Banks Unless Very Easy

Have you ever seen amateurs attempt a bank shot where a thin cut is an option? A thin cut is almost always more reliable than a bank. You can hit it a little full or thin and still pocket the ball. Now, where the cut is almost impossible but a cross-side or cross-corner bank is fairly straight, the bank can be the right play.

7.) Elevate Smartly

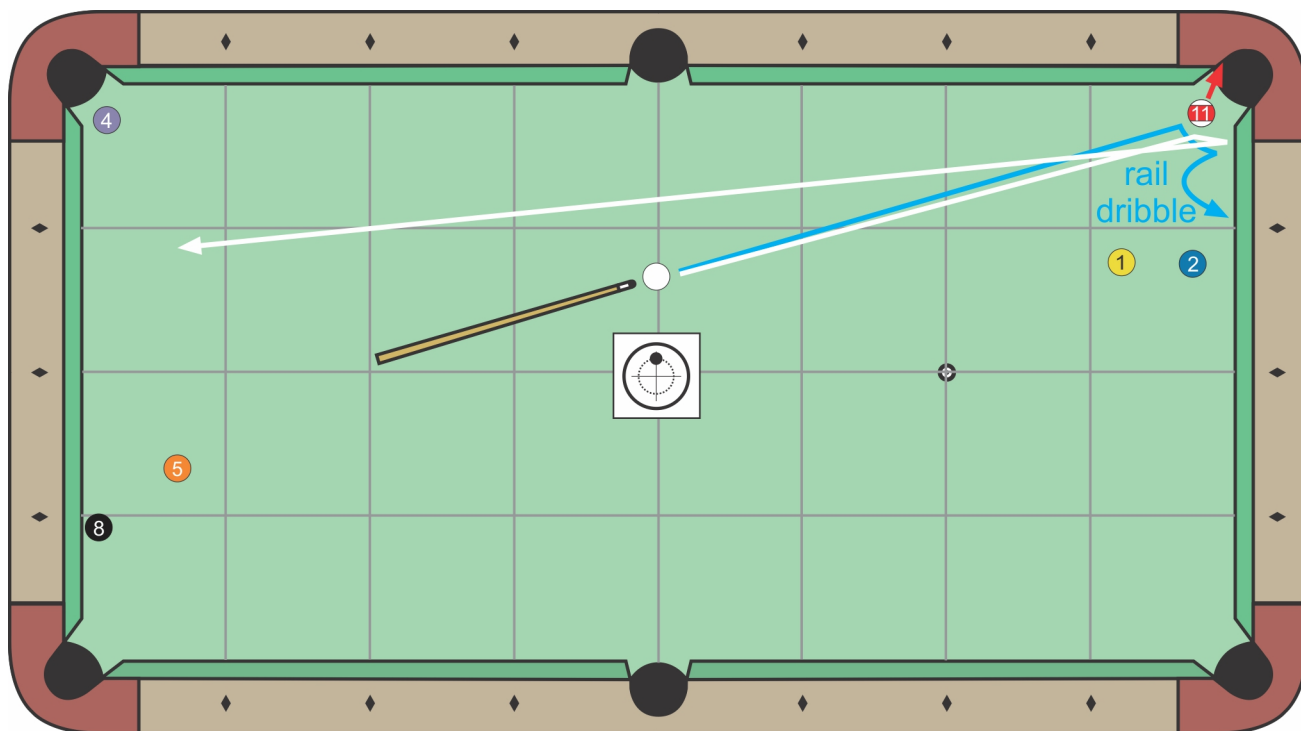
Have you ever seen amateurs elevate the butt of the cue way more than they need to? The problem with this is if you do not hit the CB exactly on the vertical centerline, the CB will curve slightly causing you to miss. You should always have the cue as level as possible to minimize possible swerve effects. Now, sometimes you need to elevate the cue to clear over an obstacle ball. For shots like these, it is good practice to verify your aim in the level position, keep your "vision center" over the cue as you elevate, and elevate only as much as you need to clear the obstacle ball. Also, as always, keep your head, body, and elbow as still as possible during the shot. The same technique should be used for jump shots, which also require an elevated cue.

8.) Break Out Smartly

Have you ever seen amateurs break out clusters with too much speed? When breaking out clusters, you should use as little speed as possible to get a predictable, controlled and desirable outcome. You want to know where the CB and OBs will end up, and you want them to be situated so you can complete the runout.

9.) Don't Dribble the Rail

Have you ever seen an amateur attempt to use topspin with an OB close to a rail as shown in Diagram 3, where the goal is to follow off the end rail to go up table for the 8? With a full hit, and when the OB is this close to the rail, the topspin does not have enough distance to accelerate the CB, and the topspin remaining on the CB after rebound makes it follow back to the rail (see the blue CB path). I call this "rail dribble." If the OB were farther away from the cushion, the shot would work fine, as demonstrated in [NV J.14](#). A better option in a situation like this is to just thin the ball, as shown with the white CB path. However, depending on the size of the pocket and how deep the ball is in the pocket, the pocket point might be problematic.



[Diagram 3](#) Rail dribble

10.) Detect and Avoid Double Hits

Have you ever seen amateurs be clueless about knowing whether a close-range straight shot is a double-hit foul or not? With a single hit, the CB will stop with a stop shot, delay slightly before going forward with a follow shot, and not go forward at all with a draw shot. When the CB is frozen to the OB, you are allowed to hit into the CB since it involves no push or double hit, even though it might feel otherwise. All of these shot types are demonstrated in [NV J.14](#).

I hope you are enjoying my “Top 10” video and article series. As always, the video description in YouTube contains links to resource pages that provide additional information and demonstrations related to every topic in the video. Be sure to watch the video and check out the resources. Better yet, after watching, try everything out at the table to diagnose your weaknesses and improve your skills.

Good luck with your game,
Dr. Dave



[NV J.10](#) – Top 10 Pool Shots Every Player Must Know!!!

[NV J.13](#) – Top 10 Things Pool Players Do Wrong ... and How to Fix Them

[NV J.14](#) – Top 10 Pool Shots Amateurs Play Wrong ... and How to Play Them Right

[NV J.15](#) – Top 10 Pool Strategy Errors Amateurs Make ... and How to Prevent Them

PS:

- I know other authors and I tend to use lots of terminology, and I know not all readers are totally familiar with these terms. If you ever come across a word or phrase you do not fully understand, please refer to the [online glossary](#) at billiards.colostate.edu.

Dr. Dave is a PBIA Advanced Instructor, Dean of the Billiard University, and author of the book: [The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards](#) and numerous instructional DVD series, all available at: DrDaveBilliards.com.