

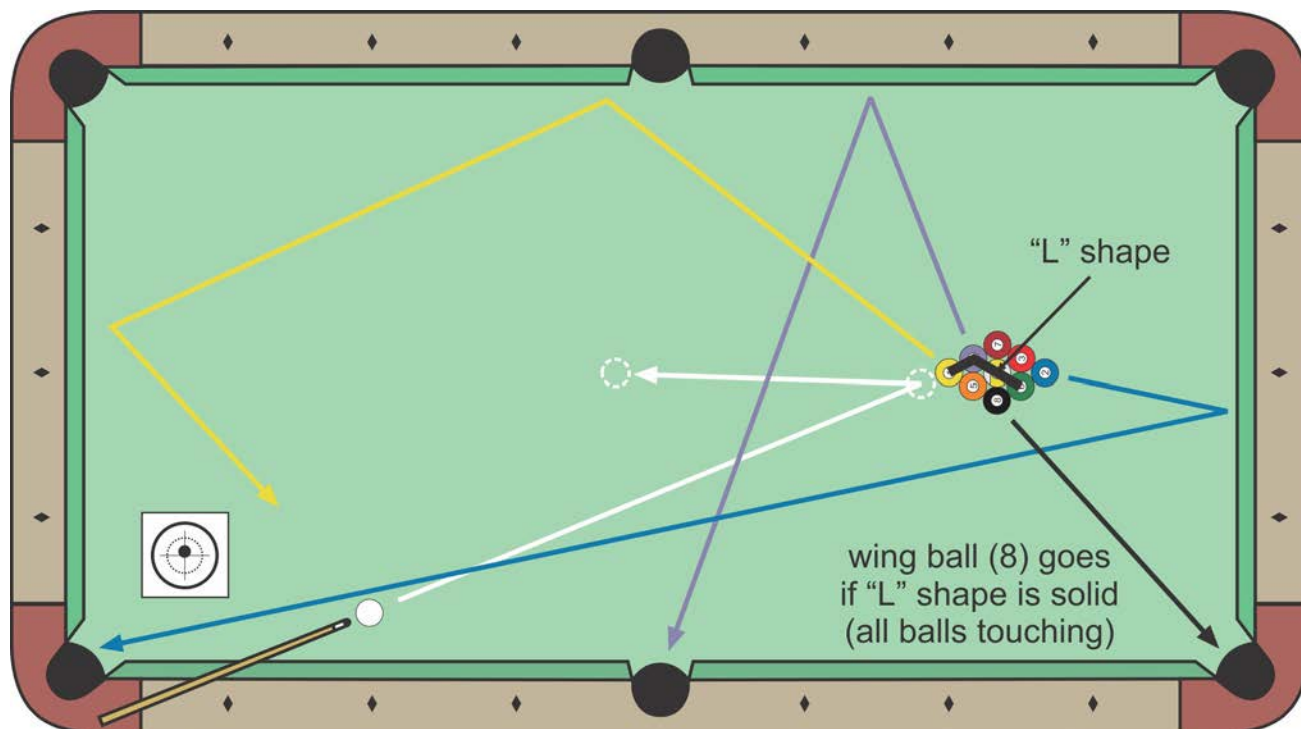
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Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, technical proofs (TP), and all past articles are available online at [billiards.colostate.edu](http://billiards.colostate.edu). Reference numbers used in the articles help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

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Do you know how to pocket the wing ball with a 9-ball side? Do you know what to do if you are required to break from the “box?” Do you know what to do when the 9 is racked on the spot? And do you know how to satisfy the 3-point break rule? I recently posted an online video ([NV J.60](#)) that answers these and related questions, and here I summarize useful information from the video.

As shown in **Diagram 1**, the standard 9-ball break (with no special rules in effect) is a **side break**, where the cue ball (CB) is placed close to the side rail. With a good rack and a square hit, you will pocket the near wing ball (the 8 in Diagram 1). If you instead broke from the center and hit the 1 squarely, the wing balls would both go above the corner pockets. With the right speed, it is easy to get a look at the 1 in the upper-left corner after a side break. If the **3-point rule** is in effect, where you need to have at least 3 balls be pocketed or be driven above the headstring (into the “kitchen”), you will need to use faster speed, in which case it is good to play for the 1 in the bottom-left corner (as shown in Diagram 1).



**Diagram 1** 9-ball side break

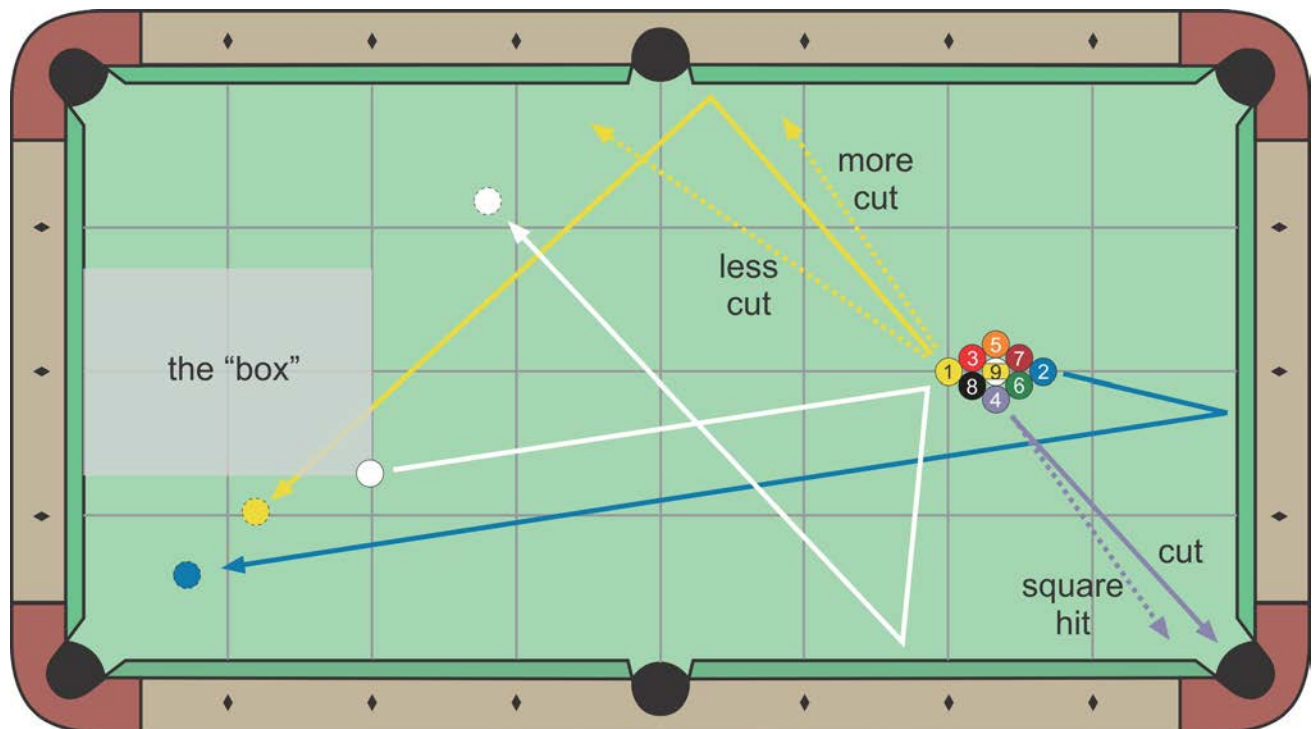
A square hit allows you to easily control the CB, ideally leaving it close to the center of the table, where you have the best chance for a shot after the break. When the CB hits the large effective mass of the rack, it naturally bounces back, even with no bottom spin. To squat the CB near the center of the table, you need slight topspin on the CB when it hits the 1.

With a side break, the back ball (the 2 in Diagram 1) also has a chance to go in the bottom-left corner, and the far 2<sup>nd</sup>-row ball (the 4 in Diagram 1) has a chance to bank cross-side. With a cut break, where you hit the 1 less full, aiming more to the right, you can pocket the 1 in the side, but it can be difficult to guarantee a shot on the 2 after the break.

If you are not playing under the 3-point rule, you can use a **soft break** and still pocket the wing ball. The advantage of a soft break is that it is easy to control the CB and get a look at the 1 in the upper-left corner, the side, or in the upper-right corner. If soft breaking and pattern racking are allowed, 9-ball is boring. If you rack the 2 next to the 9-ball (where the 5 is in Diagram 1), you can easily leave an easy combo for the win after making the 1. And even if another ball is next to the 9, an easy early win is still possible. These “cheats” are demonstrated in [NV J.60](#). Thanks to Corey Deuel, who pioneered some of these creative strategies, we have rules to prevent such trickery. With the 3-point rule in force, a soft break obviously does not get the job done.

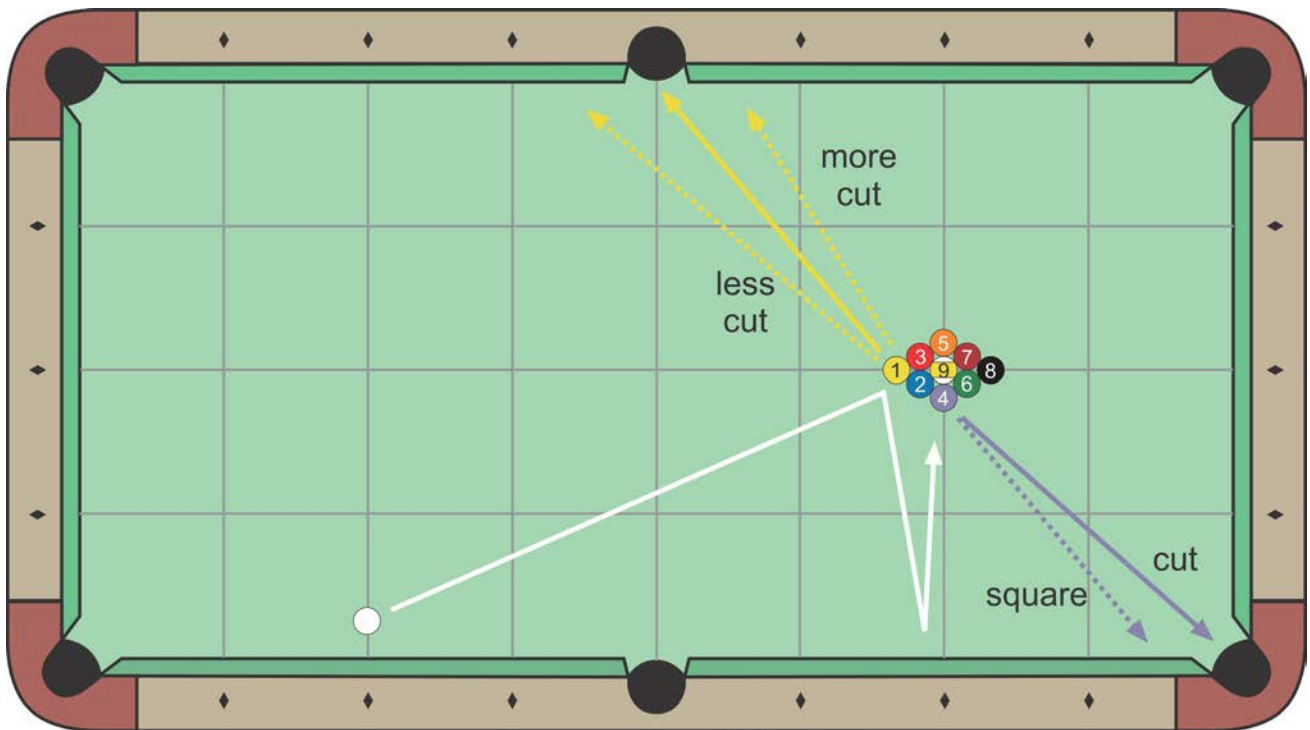
To pocket the wing ball successfully and consistency, it is important that there are no gaps in the “L” shape through the 1-4-9-6 “L” shaped ball path in **Diagram 1**. If there are any gaps in this path, the 6 will not get out of the way fast enough for the 8 to go forward to the corner. In [NV J.60](#), I artificially create gaps in different parts of the “L” path to show how the wing ball does not go. I also demonstrate that it goes easily if there are no gaps.

Because it is so easy to pocket the wing ball and control the CB and 1 with a side break, some tournaments require you to **break from the “box”** as shown in **Diagram 2**. The “box” is usually 18” wide. With a square hit from this smaller angle, the wing ball heads above the corner. You can still pocket the wing ball, but you need to use a “cut break,” where you hit the 1 at a slight angle. The ideal aim is the same ghost-ball position used with the side break. It is more difficult to satisfy the 3-point rule when using a cut break, so you obviously need to use enough speed. It can also be more difficult to control the CB with a cut break; but with the right speed, you can usually leave the 1 close to the bottom-left corner for a shot after the break. You can also pocket the 1 in the bottom-left corner (with enough speed) or in the side (with the right amount of cut) and try to get a look at the 2 in the bottom-left corner (as shown in Diagram 2). Again, all these things and more are demonstrated in [NV J.60](#).



**Diagram 2** Breaking from the “box”

Because it is so easy to make the wing ball with a side break and with a cut break from the box, another rule becoming more and more common requires the 9 to be racked on the foot spot, as shown in **Diagram 3**. Obviously, because the rack is shifted up table, with a square hit the wing ball goes way above the corner. With enough cut, you can send the wing ball toward the pocket, but other balls tend to get in the way with the **9 on the spot**. The best strategy with the 9 on the spot is to pocket the 1 in the side. With a cut break over a fairly wide range of angles, the 1 goes.



**Diagram 3 9-ball on the spot**

The most difficult of the break rule variations is **breaking from the box with the 9 on the spot**. Again, with a cut break, you can send the wing ball low enough, but other balls often get in the way. Although, as with the side break, you can make the 1 in the side fairly reliably with enough cut, but it is even more difficult to satisfy the 3-point rule. One downside of using too much cut is the CB usually flies across the bottom of the table where it can interfere too much with moving balls and can also scratch.

One strategy with the 9-on-the-spot, breaking-from-the-box, is to use enough cut to pocket the 1 while also using bottom-right spin to send the CB across the table into the 9. With a good rack, the 9 shouldn't move much or at all on the break; and by hitting it with the CB, you get a chance to pocket the 9 in the upper side or upper-right corner for a “**golden break.**” If you want to see examples of pros pocketing the 9 on the break during tournament matches, check out the video on the [9-ball break resource page](#) in the FAQ section at [billiards.colostate.edu](#). It takes skill to hit the 9 consistently, but it is luck if you can pocket the 9 for the win. Although, the more consistent and accurate you are with hitting the 9, the more often you will get “lucky.” Regardless, it is very difficult to make the 9, it can be difficult to guarantee a shot after the break, and sometimes you will not satisfy the 3-point rule. That is why the 9-on-the-spot, breaking-from-the-box rules are such a challenge. The best strategy for most people is probably to go for the 1 and not focus on the 9 too much, especially if the 3-point rule is in effect. You will not get a chance at a “golden break” early win, but you will not break dry or scratch as often.

I hope you enjoy the video and gain a better understanding of 9-ball break strategy and how to adjust based on ball reactions. For much more information about the 9-ball break, see Vol. I of the [Video Encyclopedia of Nine-ball and Ten-ball \(VENT\)](#). VENT-I covers all 9-ball racking and breaking strategy, effects, and techniques in great detail. This comprehensive resource is strongly recommended. Good luck with your game from Dr. Dave.



**[NV J.60](#)** – 9-BALL BREAK STRATEGY, Under All Rules

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](http://billiards.colostate.edu).

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