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

In a recent online video ([NV J.125](#)), I demonstrated several issues with current pool league rules. The biggest problem is: Every league has a different set of rules. Wouldn't it be nice if everybody would just use the same “official rules of pool,” as published by the World Pool-Billiard Association (WPA)? The [rules resource page](#) at billiards.colostate.edu has links to the official WPA rules and the rule sets for popular league systems. The page also lists the important differences among league rules. In the video, and in this article, I discuss some of the rule differences and recommend a few changes.

45° Rule

First, let's cover the “rule” that bugs me the most ... the VNEA frozen cue ball (CB) “push shot” rule. Under VNEA rules, you are required to hit the CB at an angle (to the side or vertically) of at least 45°; otherwise, the shot is considered a “push shot” foul. In **Image 1**, the CB is frozen to the 11 and I plan to pocket the 13 in the corner. This shot is a foul under VNEA rules unless the cue is elevated 45° or more. Under the WPA “official rules of pool,” you are allowed to hit into a frozen CB since it does not involve a double hit or a push. The shot might feel different, but it is definitely not a push shot. The VNEA should get rid of this seemingly arbitrary rule. It makes no sense, it serves no useful purpose, and it has many problems.



Image 1 Frozen CB shot

First, the shot is legal under the “official rules of pool,” and we should stick to the official rules whenever possible. As the super-slow-motion clips in my video clearly show, the shot is not a double hit or a push, so it should not be defined as a push shot. Elevating at 45° does not change the action of the shot at all. As I

demonstrate in the video, the action and outcome of the shot is no different whether the cue is level or elevated at 45°. Why should a level-cue shot be a foul and an elevated-cue shot be legal if the action and outcome of both shots is identical?!

The action of the shot is also no different for various horizontal angles. The CB heads forward of the tangent line at angles much smaller than 45°. And the CB still heads forward of the tangent line at angles much larger than 45°. The action of the shot is certainly no different for an angle a little less than 45° as compared to an angle a little more than 45°. So why should one of these shots be a foul and the other not? The choice of 45° for the angle is totally arbitrary.

Also, if elevating the cue instead of angling it horizontally, 45° is a much bigger angle than most players and refs think, and most people are not at 45° when they think they are. In **Image 2**, look how high the cue needs to be elevated to make sure the angle is more than 45°. This is much higher than most players and refs think is required to satisfy the VNEA 45° rule. And what if the player changes the angle of the cue during the stroke? If the cue was at 45° before the stroke, but the angle of the cue is less than 45° when the tip hit the CB, is that a foul? Many people drop their elbow and change the angle of the cue during an elevated-cue stroke, so this is a concern.

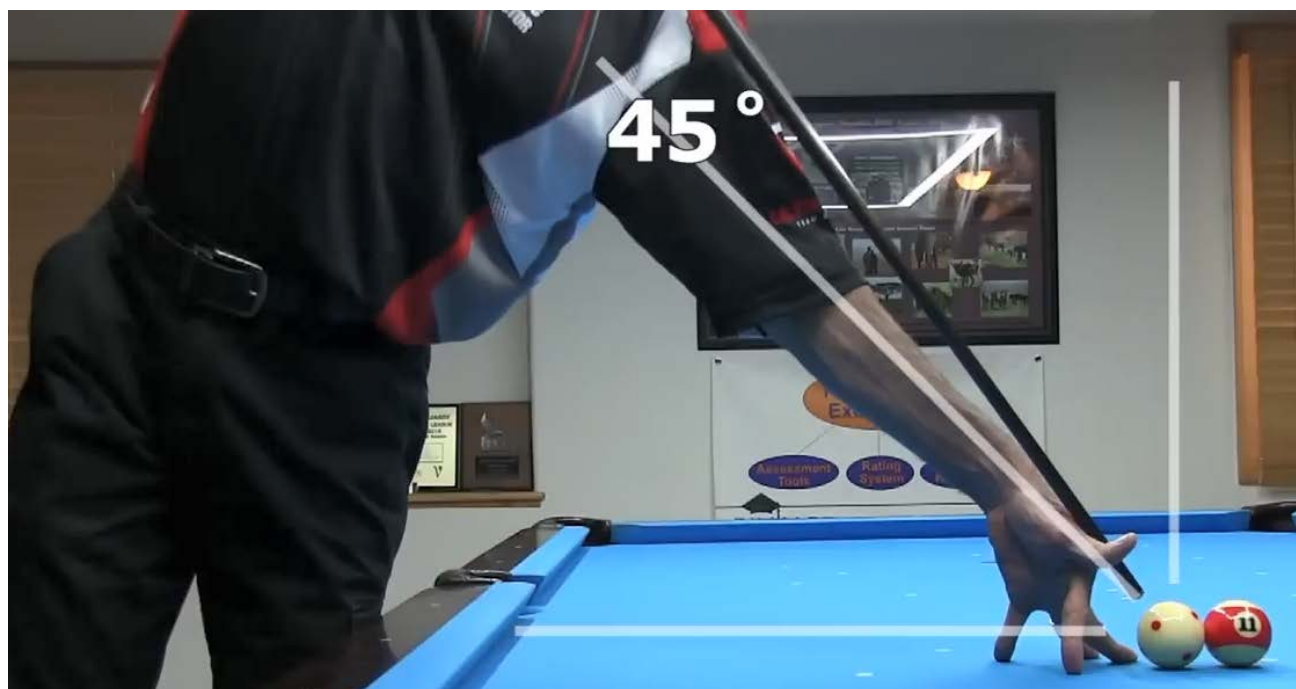


Image 2 Cue elevation above 45°

Again, VNEA, please get rid of this apparently arbitrary and problematic “rule.” There will be far fewer misunderstandings and disagreements, and nothing will need to be judged if we instead follow the “official rules of pool” and allow a hit into a frozen CB since it is not a double hit or push shot.

CB Fouls Only

For unrefereed matches common in pool leagues, the WPA recommends calling CB Fouls Only. If a player touches or moves an OB by accident and the moved ball doesn't affect the outcome of the shot, the opponent has the option of leaving the moved ball where it ends up or returning it as close as possible to the original position. The VNEA does follow the “official rules of pool” on this one.

Image 3 shows an example where I am pocketing the 11 but touch the 13 with the cue after the hit. Under most rule sets, including the WPA official rules of pool, this would not be a foul when playing under “CB Fouls Only” rules. If I unintentionally move 13 with the cue during the shot, my opponent has the option to

leave the 13 where it ends up or return it to its original position. One problem with this is it can be difficult to know exactly where the ball was originally. My unscrupulous opponent might move it back to “where they thought it was” in a way that makes the next shot very difficult or impossible. But maybe I deserve it since I wasn’t very careful and hit a ball I should not. Regardless, it is what it is.



Image 3 CB Fouls Only example

For jump and massé shots, enforcing CB Fouls Only can be a little tricky. **Image 4** shows a routine jump shot for the win. As demonstrated in the video, the shot is an obvious foul if the CB hits the 11 first instead of the 8. But what if the 11 moved forward accidentally by the shaft after the 11 is cleared by the CB. Again, under WPA “CB Fouls Only” rules, this would not be a foul, and you would win the game. This type of shot can be very difficult to judge, it can cause disagreements and hostility, and it just doesn’t seem right to move the ball you attempting to jump over. The CSI/BCAPL/USAPL league system has made an improvement to their rules to address this issue. If you are trying to jump over or massé around an obstacle ball, that obstacle ball should not move ... period. If it does, the shot is a foul. This makes it a lot easy to see and call a foul, and there is no potential for disagreements or bad feelings. I really like the CSI CB Fouls Only rule modification. Hopefully, the WPA and non-CSI league systems will also pick up on this good idea.



Image 4 Jump shot example

Open Table

Under the official rules of pool, the table is open after the break, meaning you can hit any stripe or solid, but you are not allowed to hit the 8 first. You should not be allowed to hit the game ball first at any time during the game unless you are on the game ball. Most leagues and tournaments follow this rule. However, under VNEA rules, you are allowed to hit the 8 first in a combination shot when the table is open. **Image 5** shows an example post-break layout where the 8-7 combo would be a good starting shot in VNEA. This VNEA-specific rule is a bit ridiculous, and it should be removed. Again, please follow the official rules of pool, like most people do, including all the other league systems.



Image 5 Open table example

Marking the 8

Under the official rules of pool, the 8-ball shot is treated the same as any shot. You don't need to call the pocket if the shot is obvious. In APA and VNEA leagues, you are required to place a marker close to the pocket where you intend to pocket the 8. If the marker were somewhere else on the table, maybe from the previous game, and you forgot to move it to the intended pocket for the 8, you would lose. This is just silly and can only cause hostility and bad feelings. As with any other shot, if the pocket is obvious, no call or marker should be required. Losing a game and maybe a match by not marking a short, straight-in shot on the 8 is a terrible thing. Nobody (except a real jerk) wants to win like this, and this rule can only cause disappointment and bad feelings. Leagues should be fun, not demoralizing. Please get rid of the marking or patching rule and use the official rules of pool.

Wrap Up

League rules should be written like this:

We Follow the WPA Official Rules of Pool

If you must have exceptions, you can list them concisely, but you don't need to re-write all the rules. The WPA rules and regulations are complete and detailed, and they are written by people who know how to write rules, and they are well-tested and used worldwide. Also, any referee could then work in any league or tournament sponsored by any organization without needing to learn specific rule differences. Why can't everybody just use the same "official rules of pool" instead of making up silly stuff? If players want a concise version of the rules to keep in their cue case or to pull up online, short rule summary documents can be found on the [rules resource page](#) at billiards.colostate.edu.

I personally like the changes the CSI/BCAPL/USAPL system has made, and I hope the WPA and all other league systems eventually embrace these improvements. Some of the APA and VNEA "special rules" are just plain ridiculous and should be eliminated. Please try to convince your local league operators to contact the national organizations to get things changed. If enough people request improvements, maybe the organizations will listen.

Good luck with your game,
Dr. Dave



[NV J.125](#) – Please Fix POOL LEAGUE 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.

Dr. Dave is a PBIA Master 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.