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*Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, technical proofs (TP), and all of my past articles can be accessed and viewed online at [billiards.colostate.edu](http://billiards.colostate.edu). The reference numbers used in the articles help you locate the resources on the website.*

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This is the eighth article in a series dealing with the “[Video Encyclopedia of Eight Ball \(VEEB\)](#),” a five-disc instructional-DVD set I recently created with fellow *Billiards Digest* columnist Bob Jewett. VEEB teaches all of the skills, knowledge and strategy one needs to excel at 8-ball. Topics include offensive and defensive strategy, position play, shot types, safety play, advanced shots, and run-out planning. An outline of the entire VEEB series along with video excerpts from each DVD can be viewed online at: [dr-dave-billiards.com/8-ball](http://dr-dave-billiards.com/8-ball). This month, we look at the most important shot in 8-ball ... the break. If a good player makes a ball, gets a good spread, and has an opening shot after the break, that person is a huge favorite to win the game.

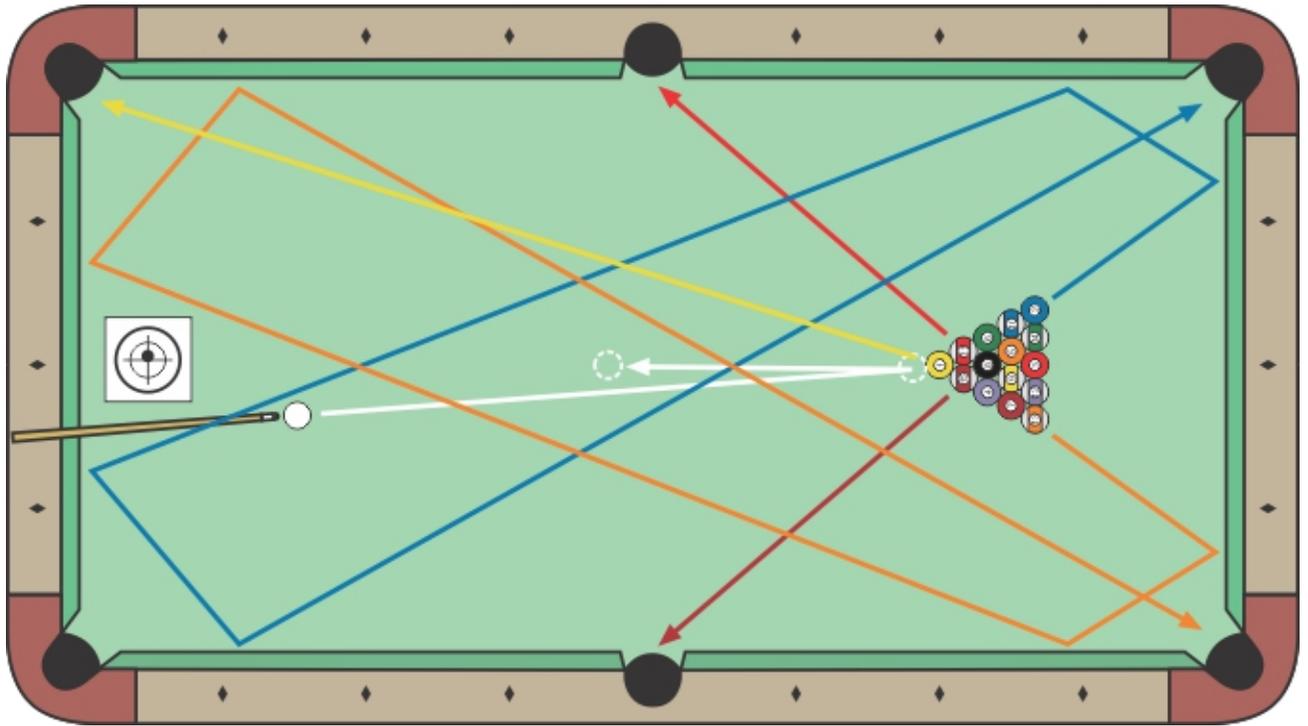
The most important element for getting a good break is making sure the balls are racked properly, with as many of the balls touching each other as possible. If there are gaps between the balls, even a good hit can yield poor results. Remember, always rack carefully and if you are playing under rules where your opponent or a referee racks for you, be sure to check the rack for gaps before breaking. There is nothing wrong with asking for a re-rack if the rack isn't tight.

The next most important thing to remember about the break is to use only as much power as you can control. If you try to hit the break too hard, you won't have accuracy or consistency. It is much better to use a little less power and get an accurate hit. A square hit delivers all of the cue ball (CB) energy to the rack and results in a good spread. Also, the CB won't head toward rails and pockets with a possible risk of scratching, unless it gets bumped by another ball. Your goal should be to try to “squat the rack” near the center of the table to have the most options after the break. To do this with power, the CB must have a touch of topspin. Due to the effective mass of the rack, with a square hit, the CB will bounce back from the rack. If the CB didn't have topspin, it would continue back up table. With a touch of topspin, the bounce-back motion is slowed, allowing the CB to come to rest near the center of the table.

Where you decide to break from is a personal choice, but there are several obvious options. As a general rule, always break from the head string so the CB is as close as possible to the rack. The most standard position to break from is slightly off center, as shown in Diagram 1. With a square hit, the front ball generally heads up table, sometimes toward the corner pocket. As also shown in Diagram 1, the 2nd-row balls usually head toward the side pockets. One reason to position the CB slightly off center is to create slightly different angles to the side pockets giving the best chance for at least one of the 2nd-row balls to go. Also, the corner balls tend to go four rails around the table toward the corner pockets. With a good rack and a good hit, if nothing else gets in the way, these balls have a chance to go.

Sometimes, depending on conditions, how the racked balls are sitting, and how a table is playing, you might get better results in one CB position vs. another, so it is good to try out different spots and angles. Sometimes just moving to the other side of the table can make a difference.

Sometimes, even with a really good hit, you won't make a ball on the break. Unfortunately, the worst possible outcome of an 8-ball break is to spread the balls and leave the CB in the center with a wide open table for your opponent with no problems to solve. Luckily this will happen to your opponent at times also. The randomness of the break is one of the things that makes 8-ball so interesting.



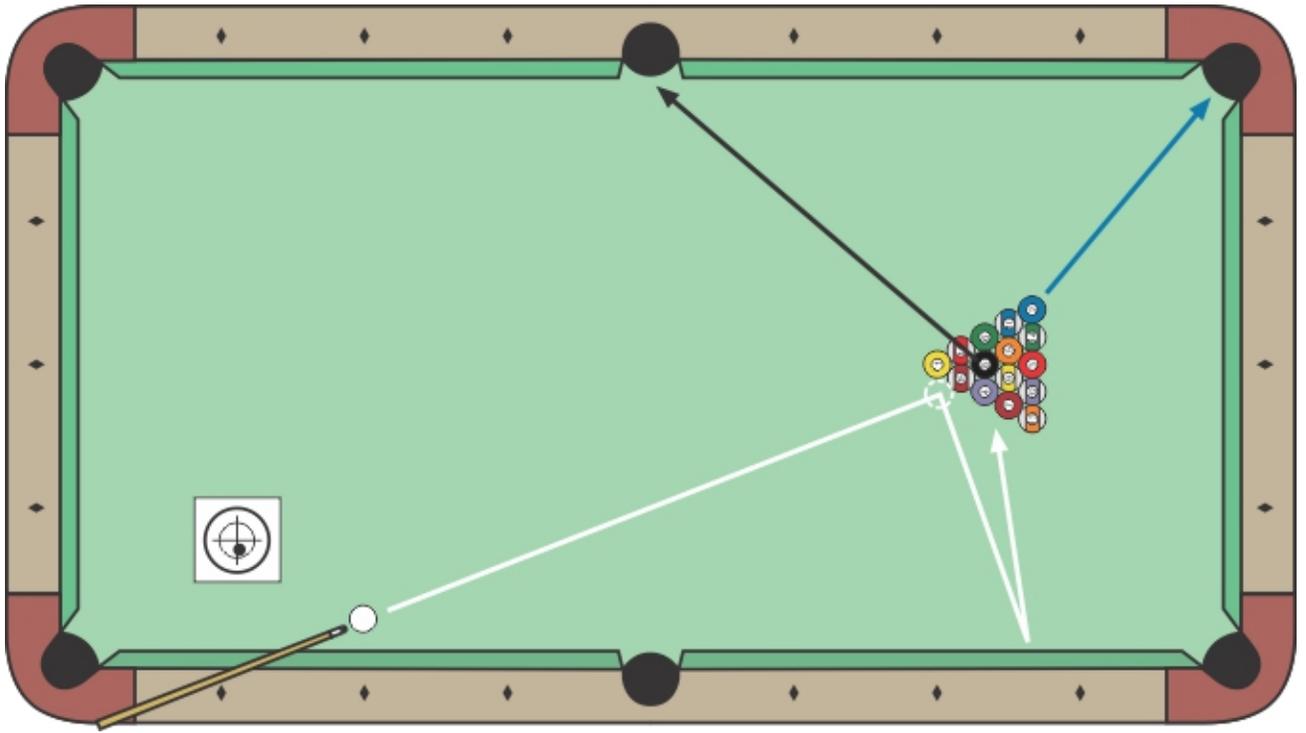
**Diagram 1 1<sup>st</sup>-ball break**

As shown in Diagram 2, another common break shot is where you break from the side rail and target the ball in the 2nd row instead of the front ball. If you hit the ball as squarely as possible, the balls usually spread well. Also, the 8-ball will generally move out of the rack area. If playing under rules where pocketing the 8 on the break counts as a win (e.g., in the APA league system), the 2nd-ball break is a good option since the 8-ball motion gives you the best chance to pocket the 8 on the break. Even though the odds are low to pocket the 8, the game-victory payoff justifies the approach. The 8-ball will generally move toward the opposite side pocket, but motion in other directions is also common, depending on exactly how the racked balls are sitting.

If you get a fairly square hit on the 2nd ball and use a bit of draw and/or outside spin, the CB will also tend to bounce back through the rack area. This is a good approach since it can help a sluggish 8-ball move more and help clear any clusters that might remain in the rack area. Another advantage of a 2nd ball break is that if the balls rack and sit well, and if the hit is good, the opposite corner ball has a very good chance to go in the corner pocket.

One disadvantage of going across the table with the CB is that it can tie up with balls that sometimes remain in the rack area. Also, sometimes the CB can carom off a ball while going across the table, which could lead to a scratch. Some people prefer using softer speed and a little more draw and/or outside spin to send the CB toward the center of the table instead where there will usually be less traffic and more options.

Another potential disadvantage of the 2nd-ball break is the likelihood of a scratch if you are not very accurate and consistent with the hit. If you hit the front ball a bit before the 2nd ball, a scratch in the corner is very likely. You can also scratch if you don't hit the 2nd-row ball squarely enough. Scratching on the break, especially if you pocket balls and get a good spread, is a terrible thing. A good player will be very likely to run out with ball in hand after the break, especially if there are no real problems to solve. And even a not-so-good player has a huge edge against a player of similar skill with ball in hand after the break because they get to choose the set of balls that offers the best chance of winning. If you are not accurate enough to consistently hit the 2nd ball squarely and avoid the front ball, you probably shouldn't use the 2nd ball break. Scratching on the break is too big of a penalty to risk.



**Diagram 2 2<sup>nd</sup>-ball break**

Online video [NV G.9](#) demonstrates all of the opportunities and issues described in this article with numerous examples. And if you want more technique and strategy advice dealing with the break, see the [“break” FAQ page](#) at [billiards.colostate.edu](http://billiards.colostate.edu). Also, the VEEB-IV DVD includes many more break examples along with game-situation examples dealing with jump shots, end-game situations, rule calls, and foul detection and avoidance. As always, you should check out the videos and try the shots yourself the next time you’re at a table. Reading is good, and watching is better, but trying is best.

I hope you are enjoying my series of articles dealing with the “Video Encyclopedia of Eight Ball (VEEB).” If you want to view video excerpts from the entire DVD set, check out online videos [NV G.1](#) through [NV G.11](#).

Good luck with your game,  
Dr. Dave



- [NV G.1](#) – Video Encyclopedia of Eight Ball (VEEB) Overview
- [NV G.2](#) – How to Deal With Pocket Blockers in 8-ball, from Disc I of VEEB
- [NV G.3](#) – How to Select Key Balls in 8-ball, from Disc I of VEEB
- [NV G.4](#) – How to Use Cue Ball Drag to Enhance Sidespin in 8-ball, from Disc II of VEEB
- [NV G.5](#) – How to Use Spin-Induced Throw to Hold the Cue Ball in 8-ball, from Disc II of VEEB
- [NV G.6](#) – How to Come Into the Line of Blockers When Playing Safeties, from Disc III of VEEB
- [NV G.7](#) – Various Straight-In Shot Options in 8-ball, from Disc III of VEEB
- [NV G.8](#) – How to Deal with an End-Game Ball Tied Up with the 8-ball, from Disc IV of VEEB
- [NV G.9](#) – 2nd-Ball 8-ball Break, from Disc IV of VEEB
- [NV G.10](#) – Rack 8 Run-Out Example from Disc V of VEEB
- [NV G.11](#) – Rack 9 Run-Out Example from Disc V of VEEB

PS:

- I am happy to announce that my entire collection of instructional DVDs (23 total to date) is now available for streaming via YouTube. For more info, see: [dr-dave-billiards.com/stream.html](http://dr-dave-billiards.com/stream.html).

- 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 don't fully understand, please refer to the [online glossary](#) at [billiards.colostate.edu](http://billiards.colostate.edu).

*Dr. Dave is author of “[The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards](#)” book and DVD, and co-author of the Video Encyclopedias of “[Pool Shots \(VEPS\)](#),” “[Pool Practice \(VEPP\)](#),” and “[Eight Ball \(VEEB\)](#),” and the “[How to Aim Pool Shots \(HAPS\)](#)” and “[Billiard University \(BU\)](#)” instructional DVD series, all available at: [dr-dave-billiards.com](http://dr-dave-billiards.com).*