

# THE TEST OF TIME

Fight the effects of aging by drilling shot-making and strategy.



**UNLIKE A** lot of other sports, pool is played by many players well into their 70s, 80s and even 90s — basically as long as they can hold a pool cue. Because of this fact, players can develop handicaps to the game. Eyesight is not such a problem these days, with all the corrective surgery available to people. Players, however, still develop back and neck problems that interfere with their game, and arthritis can become a major factor too. But the two aspects of your game that you can count on maintaining, as long as you keep your wits about you, are your knowledge of the different games and your ability to strategize. The stronger the thinker you are, the longer your game will stand the test of time.

But you'll need to be proactive about maintaining your game. Even though pool is not necessarily a strenuous physical sport, you still need to stay in shape. A good stretching routine or yoga can actually be a big help in the long run. I even recommend light cardio exercise to keep in top condition for pool. In addition, a rigorous practice routine is a must to keep your shooting level at its highest. All of these are especially important when you are preparing for a tournament that involves long hours of play.

When it comes to shot-making ability, every individual player has strengths and weaknesses. It is important that you are honest with yourself about your specific weaknesses, so that you can tailor your practice sessions accordingly. One of my favorite practice drills, which addresses shooting straight-in shots, involves setting 15 balls across the table as I've shown in **Diagram 1**. I like to start by placing the cue ball two diamonds away from the 1 ball and in line with the

corner pocket. Shoot that first ball into the corner pocket A, stopping the cue ball at impact. Next, take ball in hand and set it up the same way for the second shot (and each subsequent shot after that). After the first seven or eight balls, start lining up the remaining shots to go into corner pocket B.

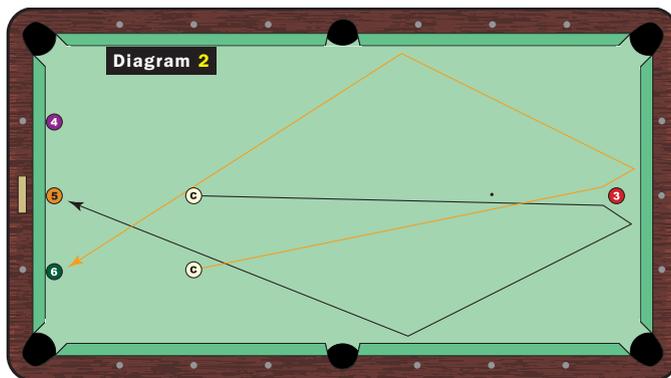
I like this drill a lot because it's a good way to gauge how I am shooting. Based

trated in **Diagram 2**, addresses cue-ball control. As you can see, I have set the 3 ball just a few inches off the middle of the short rail. To begin, I have set the cue ball on the middle of the headstring. The object of the drill is to strike the 3 ball thinly on either side and bring the cue ball back to the opposite short rail, so that it hits the 5 ball. The intended path of the cue ball for a right-side hit on the 3 ball is shown in black in **Diagram 2**. Next, you want to hit the 3 ball so the cue ball comes back to hit either the 4 ball or the 6 ball, depending on what side of the 3 you're striking. To do this, you need to hit the 3 ball a little more fully.

Start by putting a little follow on the cue ball, making contact at 12 o'clock. From there, you can develop a feel for the amount of speed you want to put on the cue ball. You can add complexity to this drill by moving the cue ball one diamond to the right or left of the center. This will really change up the drill. To demonstrate how, I have shown two different paths you can use for the cue ball to reach the 6 ball from one diamond to the right of the middle of the headstring.

This drill will teach you how to hit an object ball thinly, while still maintaining control of the cue ball. It will also teach you how to get the cue ball to specific areas that you might want to reach to snooker your opponent or leave him with a tough shot.

These two drills address just two of the many shooting skills you will want to work on during your practice sessions. Perfecting drills such as these will definitely help your game, and they'll allow you to continue developing your skills as the years add up. Good luck.



on previous experience, I know I should be able to go all the way across without missing.

For less experienced players, I recommend that they start with the object ball only one diamond away from the object balls. Perfect the exercise at this shorter distance before moving to two diamonds between the cue ball and object ball. Similarly, once you perfect the drill from two diamonds back, it is a good idea to redo the drill from three diamonds away.

The second drill, which I have illus-