



# BACK TO SCHOOL

To ace any 8-ball test, get your mind in the right place.

**F**OR THIS month's column, I would like to discuss where and what your thoughts should be when you are in a game of 8-ball. As an introduction to this topic, I'd like to talk briefly about my experience teaching at Northwestern University for six weeks early this year. First of all, the class was fun and the students (two of which are shown in the photo) were outstanding. Even though it was a class for beginners, I wanted to cover a vast variety of topics including the thinking involved in 8-ball.

We started with fundamentals and then plugged through a variety of types of shots — caroms, kisses, combinations, rail-first, banks, etc. We finished with more advanced topics, such as English, strategy and even jumping over balls. I was totally amazed at how quickly the students were able to pick up some of the advanced topics. For example, after only one short lesson, all of the students were able to jump over a half of an object ball, with no jump stick involved. I also tried to include teaching the students one or two trick shots every class. I know from my own experiences with pool that amazing friends and family with different trick shots is really a lot of fun. Of course, the point I would like to make of all of this is that the subjects we covered were tempered with the topic of where the player's mind is at when using all of the things s/he learned in practice, i.e. while in the course of an actual game.

Aside from visualization, the most important thing you must focus on is what you want to accomplish during your frame or inning at the table. The most important thing to remember at all times is that your opponent can-

not win the game from his chair. (Of course, the one possible exception is if you scratch on the 8 ball and lose the game yourself.) In other words, when it is your turn, you are in complete control. The key to becoming a great player and thinker of the game is a simple fact: In your mind, you must have a complete plan — including knowing exactly what you are trying to accomplish when you're at the table.

The first rule in making your plan is that you cannot allow your opponent to step up to the table under favorable conditions. If you do let him back up, it should be only to face a nightmare on the table. The second rule is to take



**Coach Larry: Keep a positive mind-set when you're handling a cue.**

your time once you're standing up, thinking out all of the details in your plan and allowing a few seconds for visualization. Most of the time, pool is not like basketball or football — there is no shot clock or penalty for delay of game. One big error I often see is made by those who are intimidated. Players rush their shots and make mistakes as a result. At the same time, you don't want to take an inordinate amount of time, consequently destroying your rhythm at the table.

Now, what are you thinking when you are standing, getting ready to shoot? You should first analyze the entire table, looking for a way to run out and making the decision as to whether you are even going to pocket a ball. Once you have chosen your shot, even if it is a safety shot, your next point of focus should be on the most difficult aspect of that shot — it may be in controlling the cue ball, it may be in pocketing the object ball, or it may be in moving an object ball in the case of a safety. Once you have made this determination, that aspect of the shot should be your main focus. Finally, before you get down on a shot, you should have already shot

it — and made it — in your mind's eye. After you've selected to approach a particular shot, let yourself see the successful completion of all the tasks involved in that shot, whether it be pocketing a ball and getting position for your next shot or moving certain balls to play safe. This means keeping your thoughts positive while visualizing your shot. Any negative thought that enters your mind will take over and ultimately lead to failure.

In addition, if you happen to fail to accomplish what you set out to do on a shot,

don't let that negative experience affect what you do next. Just make a mental note for your next practice session, dust yourself off and step back up to the table with a positive outlook.

There is a particular sensation that happens when everything comes together on a shot or a series of shots. When your mind and body work together in tandem, pool is like poetry in motion, and it gives you a wonderful sense of accomplishment. I like to call this "the winning feeling." Good luck.