



CLUSTER BUSTERS

Stay in control when you're breaking balls out of trouble.

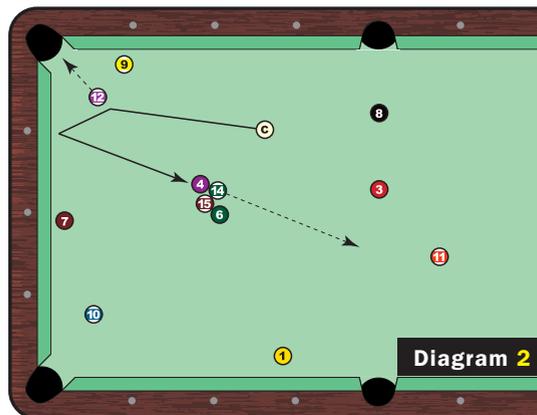
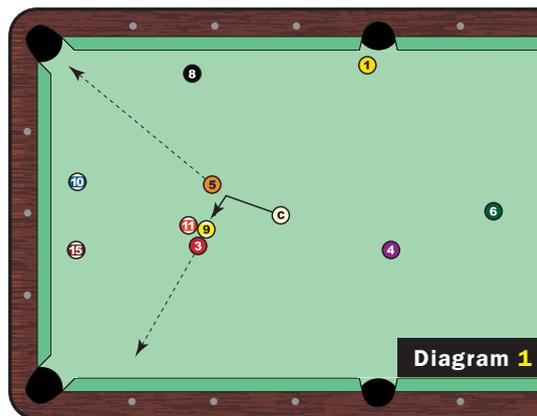
A DREADED table scenario lays ahead. It is one we have all seen far too many times. The balls are spread all over the table, and you would have an easy runoff if not for one pesky problem: one or more of your balls is trapped in a cluster. Arrgh! It's the only roadblock along your path to running out all your balls and the 8.

While not life-threatening, clusters can be victory-threatening. However, with the correct know-how, clusters can be conquered. Before you attack a cluster, you need a plan that meets three requirements. First, you must have a break ball that allows you to break open the cluster. Secondly, you must know approximately where the balls in the cluster will be after you break it open. And finally, you need an insurance ball that will guarantee you have a next shot.

Allow me to elaborate on each of these aspects. The break ball is a ball that can be pocketed in such a way that, upon hitting it, the cue ball is sent along a path that ends at the cluster. The second requirement of knowing where the balls in the cluster will go depends on knowing where you will make the cue ball hit the cluster. You must choose a way of breaking open the cluster that will put your involved balls in pocketable positions. Last but not least, the insurance ball must be a ball that is positioned so that it will be an easy subsequent shot from where the cue ball winds up after hitting the cluster.

The first cluster I am going to illustrate is a three-ball cluster that involves only one of your object balls. In **Diagram 1**, you have solids, and every ball is open except for your 3, which is stuck behind two stripes. Even a glance at the layout elicits the decision to use the 5 ball as the break ball by shooting it in the corner and having the cue ball come off of it in a direct path to the cluster. Before you

attempt the shot, however, study the table carefully to ensure that you meet the other two needs of the shot. You don't want to break into the cluster and get the three ball tied up in another sticky situation immediately after. On impact, the 3 ball is going to take the indicated path. The speed you use to hit the 5 ball will determine where the 3 ball will stop. There is no guesswork here; you



control your own destiny. If you hit this too hard, the 3 ball has a good chance of getting tied up behind the balls on the short rail. Lastly, you have to examine the table to make sure that there is an insurance ball. In this case, the 1 ball makes a good insurance ball, because it is near enough to the side pocket that it almost guarantees a shot after the 5.

In **Diagram 2**, I've shown a situation that is a little more complex. Here, the

balls did not break open very well, and you have a larger cluster to work with. While on the surface this table layout looks more difficult, you want to approach it no differently than you approached the example in **Diagram 1**. First, pick out what ball you can pocket that would send the cue ball back into the cluster after contact. In this situation, you have stripes and you can shoot the 12 ball now, sending the cue ball right into the cluster. You have two good insurance balls: the 9 and the 10 balls. Both are in spots to guarantee you another shot after you break open the cluster. You must always remember to study the cluster and try to determine where the balls in the group will go after you break into them. In this case, you will have to use your imagination a little. You are only breaking open four balls, so you don't have to hit this shot exceptionally hard.

As with anything on a pool table, you want to remain in complete control. When studying a cluster, try to figure out where your opponent's balls are going too. You don't want them to tie up the 8 ball or one of your other balls. In the situation in **Diagram 2**, it looks like the 14 ball is going up table, and the 15 ball is not going to move much. Your opponent's balls shouldn't move too much, so you shouldn't tie anything else up.

Every cluster is somewhat different, so you must study them very carefully. I recommend playing and learning straight pool, a game that makes you consistently deal with clusters. Straight pool can help you determine the right speed to use to break open clusters, so you can still control the roll of the cue ball and the targeted balls after impact. You always want to put yourself in a position for a shot on the insurance ball, so that all your efforts don't fall by the wayside. Good luck.