

READY, SET, MASSÉ!

Power and elevation are two factors in curving your cue ball.

BACK IN the late '80s, my friend Jim and I used to spend our college evenings playing pool. It was there that he taught me how to massé. We started with a simple shot as seen in **Diagram 1**. This shot requires you to elevate your cue stick about 75-80 degrees and aim along the red line. Pretend the face of the cue ball is a clock and hit it at 4:30 p.m. — though when we did this at Carnegie Mellon University, it was actually 4:30 a.m. The cue ball should travel just past the 1 ball before the spin kicks in.

For shots like this, the most common problem is miscuing, and it usually boils down to the same issue: not hitting the cue ball where you are aiming. Massé shots are tough because you are not used to shooting with such an elevated cue. When executing a shot like this, concentrate on the spot where you are hitting the cue ball. Take about 50 percent of the power out and just concentrate on hitting that spot. After awhile, you will get the feel for this contact point and can slowly add power.

If you are getting the cue ball to curve, but are not making the 8 ball, you can adjust the elevation of your cue and/or the power of your stroke. The key is knowing what each adjustment does. Take a look at **Diagram 2**. Diagram 2a shows what can happen when you adjust the power, with the red line showing more power and the blue line showing less (assuming all other variables remain consistent). Diagram 2b indicates the elevation adjustment, with the red line showing more elevation and the blue line showing less elevation. Notice that more power causes the cue ball to travel farther before curving, but you

get more curve. Less power does the opposite. Similarly, the more elevation you use, the less distance the cue ball travels before curving and you get more curve. Less elevation does the opposite.

In today's trick shot competitions, there are many variations of that massé shot. The Rainbow Massé is one example, which I've shown in **Diagram 3**. The cue ball is near the corner pocket and the blocker balls are curved as shown. This shot uses slightly less

elevation of my cue, causing more spin and less distance for the cue ball. If I curve into the "rainbow" of balls, I elevate less, causing less spin and more distance for the cue ball.

I have to thank my friend Jim for teaching me that shot because in the early '90s, I did an AT&T commercial where the grand finale was the shot in Diagram 1.

Of course there were a few minor differences. First, the entire rail was taken off the table so the camera could get a worm's-eye view of the shot. Normally, I would sit on the rail and brace my bridge hand on my leg, but I had to shoot free-handed here. Second, I was surrounded by black screens and lights, and I had to wear a long-sleeved black shirt so as not to influence the reflections and shadows. (It had to be over 100 degrees in there!) Lastly, the pool table light was very low and was the entire size of the table, leaving me no room to elevate my cue. The director wouldn't budge on the placement of the light, so we had to think fast. We found some metal pipes and used duct tape to secure it to one of my shafts.

The pipes were about 18 inches long, but we attached them sideways so they wouldn't add any height to my new cue. The problem was that the pipes were sticking out in all directions and something minor — like my head — was in the way. After about 50 takes, dropping 10 pounds, and gaining plenty of bruises, the sound of "That's a wrap!" was music to my ears.

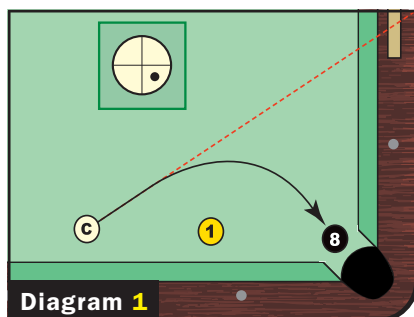


Diagram 1

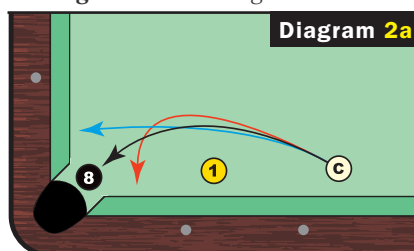


Diagram 2a

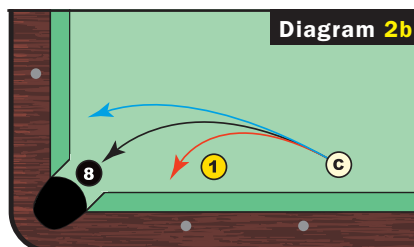


Diagram 2b

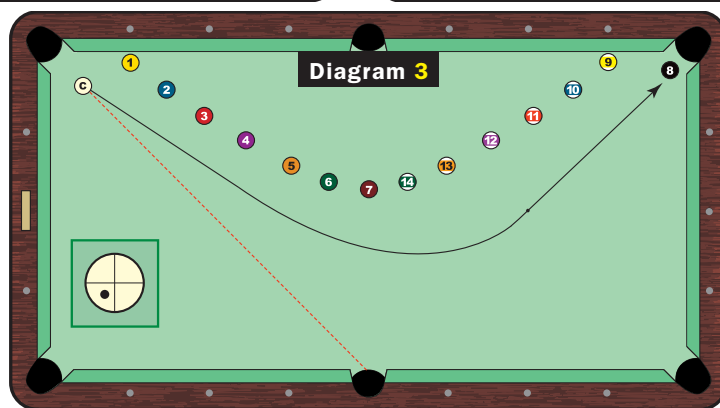


Diagram 3

elevation than the one in Diagram 1, because the cue ball must travel farther before curving. Hit the cue ball at about 7:30, aiming toward the opposite side pocket (shown by the red line). If I miss this shot, my adjustments are limited to the elevation. I keep the power and aim point the same. If I don't curve enough and hit the foot cushion, I increase the

elevation of my cue, causing more spin and less distance for the cue ball. If I curve into the "rainbow" of balls, I elevate less, causing less spin and more distance for the cue ball.