

TWO BIRDS, ONE SHOT

A combo is one way to eliminate multiple problems at once.



RECENTLY played in the IPT Pro-Am Tournament just outside Chicago at Palace Billiards. The layout in **Diagram 1** came up after a player scratched in one of the games I was watching. Naturally, the first decision facing the incoming player is which group to take. Looking at the stripes, there are some problems that we can easily identify. The 11 ball and 12 ball are blocked from both pockets A and B. Also, the 9 ball can't get past the 8, so pocket A is not an option. On the other end of the table, the 15 ball is blocked from pocket E by the 7. Just taking this quick glance at the stripes, we can see four problems.

Now let's look to see if there are any difficulties with the solids. First, the 2 and 6 balls are on the same rail. Also, the 3 ball only goes into pocket D, so getting position on this ball looks to be the biggest challenge of this rack. In the diagram, you can see the blue-shaded box near the long rail. This is the best position area for the 3 ball. You need to fall almost straight-in on the 3 ball — too much angle can be very dangerous.

After looking at both groups of balls, I prefer the solids. The stripes carry four difficult positions plays (the 9, 11, 12 and 15 balls), while the solids only have three issues (the 2, 3 and 6 balls). Also, the problems with the stripes are harder to solve than with the 2 and 6.

Often, pattern play in 8-ball begins with looking at the 8. In this example, the 8 ball is in a good position, sitting right by pocket A. Regardless of which ball is last, getting on the 8 should not

be much of an issue. With this particular layout, almost any of the seven solids could serve as the key ball. The 4 ball or 5 ball might be the toughest, but even these two balls could lead to good position on the 8.

Now where do we start? In this layout your first choice could vary. There is definitely more than one pattern which could lead to a game winner. A lot of players would start with the 3 ball — this is not a bad choice. However, I like

Also, be aware that the 6 ball could follow the 7 ball into pocket E, which is what actually happened when I watched the player run out the solids. If you elect to play the combination and fall close to straight-in on the 3, you have solved most of the major problems of the rack. After pocketing the 3 ball, you can play the 2 ball into pocket A. Then just bounce off the rail for position on the 4 ball for side pocket C. You just need a slight angle on the 4

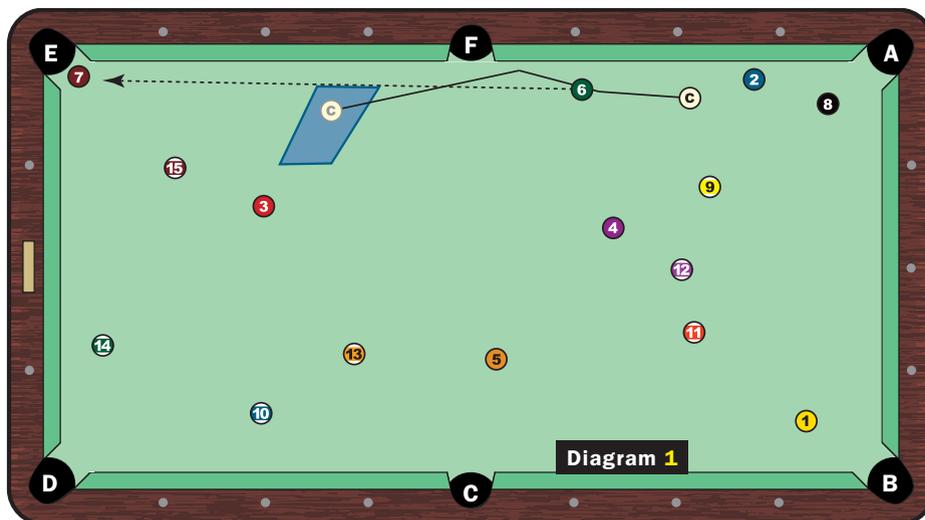
ball so you can end up close to straight-in on the 5 ball for the same pocket. From the position of the 5 ball, you have great position for the 1 into pocket B. From there, you can play the 8 ball into pocket A.

Another pattern to clear this table would be to start with the 3 ball into pocket D, then

play the 2 ball into the corner, and then the 4 ball into pocket C. Then, instead of going for the 5 like last time, go down table for the 7 ball and come up for the 6 ball. Next play the 5 ball in the side and finish up the same as the other plan.

In either case, the 4 ball is not a problem, because you take it out after the 2 ball. But if you pocket the 2 ball without going to the 4, you could get in big trouble.

The player I was watching ran out using the 6-7 combo as the opener, but you can have a little fun studying this layout. Make a choice which route you want to take, and then completely focus on execution. I'll see you in the winner's circle.



to start with a combination on the 7 ball. The cue ball will follow forward, hit the long rail on the short of side pocket F and go forward into the blue zone, which is right where you want to be. Remember to fall as close to straight-in on the 3 ball as possible.

Another word of caution is to concentrate on hitting the 7 ball as full as possible with the 6. Otherwise, the 6 ball could end up getting away from pocket E and could make it harder if not impossible to run out. You would like for the 6 ball to end up close to pocket E, and you don't want to run the risk of it getting tangled up with another ball. I like this choice, because it could eliminate all your problems in one shot.