



UNDER PRESSURE?

View a challenging situation as an opportunity to prove yourself.

TRAVELING AROUND the country promoting my cues, teaching and giving demonstrations, I'm often approached by players wondering how to play better under pressure. Many players complain they leave their best games on the practice table — something I understand. When I first starting to compete in tournaments, I was really uncomfortable. My first thought was that I need to play a lot of tournaments to get over this feeling of discomfort. Usually, I started to feel ill at ease when I would get over the shot, so the natural inclination was to shoot as quickly as possible. Then I could get back up, and I didn't feel nervous anymore. Playing in a lot of tournaments helped, but I still would get nervous. And trying to shoot quickly was a poor solution. Rushing the shot was not an effective solution.

After playing in more tournaments, I started to try and figure out why it was so uncomfortable leaning over and aiming. Most of the problem was caused by the degree of difficulty of the shot. For instance, take a look at **Diagram 1**, with one 9 ball and eight possible cue-ball positions C-1 through C-8, trying to pocket the 9 ball into pocket A, I usually felt no pressure on an easy shot like this. However, almost any of the other cue-ball positions created an uncomfortable feeling for me. Naturally, from these positions, the uncertainty about making the shot caused my discomfort. I was aware that missing the shot was a possibility. This awareness created thoughts of fear and doubt, which led to feeling uncomfortable over the shot. I was focused and concentrating all right, but not on the most important things.

The most important factors on pocketing the 9 ball in Diagram 1 from positions C-1 thru C-7 is to align and aim properly, both to pocket the 9 ball and keep the cue ball on the table. These days, I approach tough shots 180 degrees from fear and doubt. I look at tough shots as a challenge and fun. It is going to be a great op-

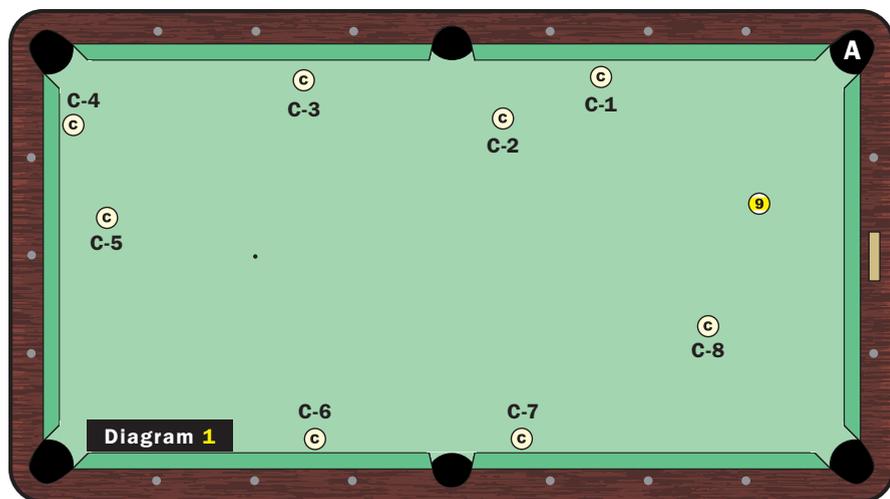
portunity to see if I can execute the shot. You need to replace fear and doubt with feelings of enjoyment and confidence.

Fear and doubt lead to missed shots and losing; fun and confidence lead to winning. Personally, I prefer making the shot and winning. I don't mean to lead you to think you are going to make every hard shot, but I want you to look at every shot as a chance to see if you can focus and concentrate on the most critical factors of aiming, aligning the shot and accurately contacting the cue ball.

One final thought on pocketing any

And I'll say it again, if you do miss, don't be too upset and beat yourself up. Instead, try to figure out why you missed the shot. Did you hit the object ball on the thin side or thick side? Was the contact point on the cue ball was off? Learn to analyze your shots and use this feedback to improve your performance.

Some games and matches are won or lost by making or missing a tough shot. But a far larger majority are won or lost by taking advantage of opportunities — and your opponent's missed opportunities. For example, let's say you lose a



shot — hard or easy — is to always see the collision of the cue ball and object ball. Don't move your head too soon. As I mentioned earlier, it is easy to want to rush a shot when you're uneasy, so you can escape the discomfort when you pull the trigger. Resist this by always seeing the collision. Another crucial factor is not too grip too tightly. Sometimes on a hard shot, it's easy to strangle the cue. Make a point to lighten your grip under pressure.

In summary, you must focus on a few things under pressure in order to perform better. I love the challenge of trying to pocket these shots. It's great to have the opportunity to pocket a difficult shot like from position C-5 or C-6.

match, 11-8, but you gave up three games to your opponent that you should have won. If you had won these games instead of losing, you would have won the match 11-8. That is a substantial reversal, resulting from just three mistakes. Players and fans tend to remember the last game only. Usually you win matches and tournaments by taking advantage of your opportunities and not giving away games.

The one thing that makes this game a lot easier is confidence. For me, this always came from practice. If I am uncomfortable with a shot or shots during one of my matches, the secret for me is to practice these shots until I feel like they are easy. Keep practicing, and I'll see you in the winner's circle.