

SUBTLE SAFETIES

Fight your urge to go for it when you can play defensively.



A LOT of players don't like to play safe. Maybe it's human nature, but most people prefer to go for the shot, no matter how difficult it may be. However, never underestimate the value of a good safety. In **Diagram 1**, you are stripes in a game of 8-ball, and you're out of position on the 10 ball. But all that's left on the table are the 10, 8 and the cue ball. What should you do?

You could try to bank the 10 into side pocket C. The cue ball would come around three rails for position on the 8 ball. So position is easy, but making the 10 ball is pretty tough. For one, you have to cut the bank a lot — and the more you have to cut banks, the easier they are to miss. Also, if you miss the 10 ball, your opponent will have an easy shot on the 8 ball to win the game.

Another option that may be a lot better is to play safe on the 10 ball. By shooting softly into the 10, it will come off the rail a couple of inches. The cue ball will die close to the rail (see Fig. 1). Also, the cue ball and 10 ball will be so close that a jump shot wouldn't be a possibility. On this safety, speed and the hit on the 10 are critical. If not, you could end up leaving your opponent straight-in on the 8 ball.

It is such a simple safety but very effective. Against the vast majority of opponents, it'll get you back to the table for another chance to win.

The first time or two you try this safety, you may not execute it perfectly and you may leave your opponent a shot. But with a little prac-

tice, you probably will say, "Wow, what a simple and easy safety!" You need to work on this safety so you'll have the nerve and confidence to play it the next time it comes up in a game.

Now let's examine **Diagram 2**. Notice the situation is the same, except you are on the 8 ball and the positions of the 8 and 10 have been reversed. Again, your chances of winning probably increase with this simple safety. It is easy to overlook this safety or to be afraid to play it because you are afraid the cue ball or object ball will get away from you and leave your opponent straight-in on his object ball.

But what if the position of the 10 ball were slightly different? At 10-2, the 10

ball is now in the middle of the head rail. On this safety, most players will have a tendency to relax a bit. The reason is obvious: If you fail to hook your opponent, he still has a whole lot tougher shot than when it was in front of pocket B (10-1 in Diagram 2). It's amazing how removing the threat of leaving your opponent a good shot to win versus a really hard shot to win eases the pressure on executing the safety.

The defensive shots in the diagrams are tough because they are delicate. You could foul by hitting the safety too easily and failing to get the 8 ball to the rail. The opposite result would be to overshoot and let the 10 ball get out of the way, leaving your opponent a shot on his

ball. Once you learn to practice this safety, you will gain the confidence to use it in a game. You want to be sure and have your opponent kick off the lower short rail (between pockets D and E). Don't let him kick between pockets C and B if you can prevent it.

Over the years on tour, a lot of players had to learn to win. Often, one of the things that was the hardest to learn was when to play safe. Being able to pocket any shot, the top players always wanted to test their shot-making abilities. They hated to play safe. But when learning to play safe, they started to end up in the winner's circle. Remember, "Never underestimate the value of a good safety."

