

# CUTTING CLASS

Here's a look at two similar shots up against the rail.



**JUST BEFORE** this year's U.S. Open, I put on an instructional clinic at Obelisk Billiard Club in Newport News, Va. The manager, Greg Ferguson, is a fellow Kentuckian. His wife, Shawn, started us all out with a great breakfast that day.

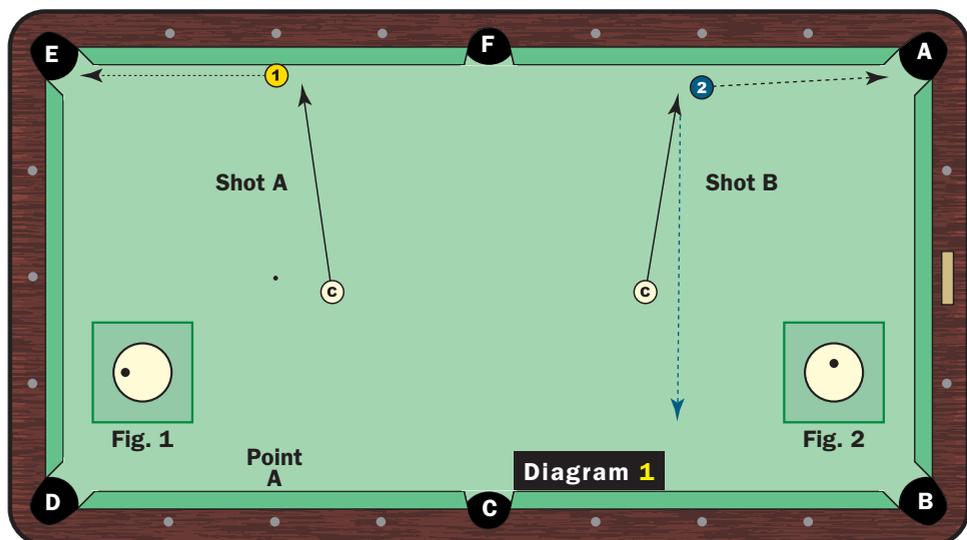
During the clinic, one of the players asked a question about frozen balls. He ended up asking several questions, but the first one was about Shot A in **Diagram 1**. You can see that the 1 ball is frozen to the rail, and the cue ball is out in the middle of the table. He wanted to know the best method of making the 1 ball in pocket E. Because the angle on this shot is pretty thin, using a lot of left English (about maximum left English, in fact) helps to pocket the 1 ball. (See Figure 1.) This is because you get a little larger margin for error with maximum left English. Even if you hit the rail slightly before the 1 ball, the left English will spin the cue ball toward the 1 ball. A lot of players try to hit the 1 ball and the rail at the same time. As discussed in an earlier column, you can also make this shot by contacting the 1 ball slightly first. The reason for contacting the object ball first was to change the path of the cue ball, so it would go three or four rails for position. But loading the cue ball with a lot of English and aiming for a split hit or contacting the rail slightly first makes pocketing the 1 ball easier. If you contact the rail first or get a split hit, the cue ball will come across table toward point A in Diagram 1.

It will take you a few shots to get the feel for where to aim with a lot of left English, but after just three or four tries you should start to see the aiming line toward the 1 ball. With more practice, you will start to develop some confidence. Also, it should be noted that while you are practicing this shot, trying to contact the 1 ball first doesn't

help at all. This way of seeing the shot will only lead to hitting too much of the 1 and consistently missing the shot.

Next, look at the 2 ball in Diagram 1. This shot is exactly like the previous example, only the 2 is about an inch off the rail. One of the players asked me if it is best to try to pocket the 2 ball just like the 1 ball. Well, first of all, to pocket the 2 ball, you no longer

have the option of contacting the cue ball — plus the topspin helps cut the 2 ball. True English tends to drive the ball into the side rail or contact the cue ball too fully. But by contacting the cue ball as shown in Figure 2, you should be able to send the cue ball across table on a line connecting the middle diamonds of the two side rails (the blue arrow). So you are still in good shape if the 2 ball is the winning ball or if speed is all you need to



ger have the option of contacting the rail first or the rail and ball at the same time. The 2 ball is slightly off the rail, so you must contact the 2 ball first to pocket it into pocket A. You still have a little margin for error on this shot, depending on how hard you shoot and how big the pocket is.

During the article I have used the words “slight” and “slightly” a lot. This shows how exact you have to be to pocket these shots on a consistent basis. Figure 2 shows the contact point on the cue ball to use when pocketing the 2 ball. You should also try and keep your cue as close to level as possible on this shot. Because you are contacting the cue ball on the vertical axis and above center, you don't want to allow for any curve or deflection on

worry about for position on your next shot. The same goes for the 1-ball shot on the other end.

Obviously, in some cases, position could override your decision on the cue ball's contact points in both of these two cases. And in some situations, you may have to change to bank the ball cross-corner in each case to get position on your next shot. Another option you should consider would be to play safe. But both of these choices are possible subject ideas for another month.

For this month, I hope this helps you develop the ability to pocket both of these shots more consistently. See you in the winner's circle.

[Ed. note: Congratulations to Mr. Varner on being selected captain of Team USA in this month's Mosconi Cup.]