

There are only five possible types of snooker shots and the method of determining which of the five to use in any situation depends on the lie of the table and the tally of risk versus reward for the circumstance. The mental process by which the player decides which type of shot to play in any particular circumstance is actually much simpler than most players realize. Much too often, players spend an inordinate amount of time analyzing numerous possible shots and their numerous possible outcomes when in fact the vast majority of potential shot choices can be immediately eliminated as being inappropriate for the situation at hand. Oftentimes, the proper shot to select for a given situation may well fall into more than one of the defined categories. There is certainly no inconsistency or contradiction to view such a shot as belonging in more than one category. The five possible types of shots:

1) Scoring - A scoring shot of course means that the approach to the shot has absolutely every intention of potting the intended ball. While probably a sizable majority of professional shot choices fall into the "scoring" category, it is a mistake for average amateurs to approach more than perhaps 25 percent of shots strictly as a "scoring" shot. A strict definition of a "scoring" shot means that there is no regard for the resulting lay of the table for the opponent in the event that the pot is missed. Remember that when watching professional game play, the "potting percentage" of a professional will often be above 90 percent. Through tireless, continuous practice, a professional can approach this type of shot with near certainty of the intended outcome (potting the ball and continuing the break). A very good amateur, on the other hand, will have a potting percentage of 60 to 75 percent. Though few will actually admit to it, a more typical amateur, with little time or desire for intense practice, will have a potting percentage of just 30 to 50 percent for shots in the short to medium-long range.

To be very specific, a "scoring" shot means an approach to the shot without regard to consequence in the event of a missed pot. Given the potting percentages stated above, it is foolhardy for an average amateur to play a strictly "scoring" shot more often than about 20 to 25 percent of the time and these will usually be when playing a particular color to either leave position on a particular next red or leave position in a particular area for a choice of reds. In other words, whenever an amateur is playing at red, the shot should be approached positively with every expectation of potting (and of course leaving position on the next intended ball), but the player must also be aware of the probable lay of the table for the opponent in the event that the pot is missed (remember, typical amateurs will only have an average potting percentage of 30 to 50 percent so that, even with the best intentions and the most positive attitude, a missed pot is still very likely). The best approach to such a shot is to

be quite certain that, in the event of a missed pot of that red, the table will not present an easy starting red for the incoming striker ("shot to little", next bullet point). On the other hand, when playing at color, the player must decide absolutely, "I will pot this ball and I will leave a simple shot on the next red" or "I may or may not pot this ball so I will purposely leave a red available, but not a simple shot (just in case I miss this color)."

This mental approach to minimizing the number of "scoring" type shots as a percentage of overall shot choices is not at all intended to be a "negative" outlook on your overall game. On the contrary, the player should only play a strictly "scoring" shot when absolutely comfortable and feeling 100 percent certain that the pot will be made. This will usually be when left perfectly to pot a color and position for the next red. Then, after the pot is in fact made, this only reinforces a positive mindset to one's overall game. If a questionable shot is approached as "scoring" shot, then the pot is missed, and say the opponent is let in for 8 or 16 or 20 points or more, this will have a severe negative impact on the first player's mindset. That initial shot should not have been approached as a "scoring" shot in the first place--the seemingly "positive" attitude that the player was certain that he would make the pot has turned into a big "negative" because the result gave so many points away.

2) Shot to nothing (shot to little) - "Shot to nothing/Shot to little" will be treated equivalently in this section, the only real difference being that "shot to nothing" generally has low expectation of a pot with high expectation of a safe leave. Often, this means playing a long red to a black corner and bringing white all the way back to baulk for safety. "Shot to little" is in effect the opposite in that a pot is often expected, but in case it goes awry, then at least a simple, straightaway pot for the opponent is avoided. A typical example occurs frequently around black spot. A medium easy red may be played to leave on black (expected to pot but possibly not), but the striker should always be aware to NOT leave an easy starter red for the opponent by interpreting the probable outcome in case of a missed pot. In this section, only the phrase "shot to nothing" will be used in additional descriptions while both types of situation should be kept in mind.

The "shot to nothing" should by far be the most sought after shot choice in the amateur player's arsenal. Fully 60 to 70 percent of shots played should fall into the "shot to nothing" category. (Many of these will also fall into other categories as well. For example, playing a red full on to leave on a color will certainly be intended as a "scoring" shot, but the "shot to nothing" aspect of the shot should also be appreciated. For the "shot to nothing" to be effective, a thorough and solid understanding of the cue ball path after contact is an absolute necessity. Too often, amateurs rely on "luck of the roll" after cue ball contacts

object ball to hopefully get some sort of position on the next ball on. **THIS IS WITHOUT A DOUBT THE AREA OF AN AMATEUR'S GAME THAT IS MOST IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT!** Most amateurs believe that their biggest problem is that they miss too many pots. In fact, most amateurs' biggest problem is that, since they don't understand the path of the cue ball well enough, they tend to leave quite difficult following pots for themselves after potting great starter shots. These poor positions then lead to missed pots, making the amateur believe that he misses too many pots. The big difference here is that, if an amateur could better learn the path of the cue ball, he can leave himself with much simpler pots to play at, then of course, scoring (and potting percentage) will naturally rise.

Even when the path of the cue ball is fully predictable and acts as intended, there is still always an uncertainty as to the resulting position of the object ball that was intended to pot. Often, (assuming that the pot was **REASONABLY** close,) even the path of this missed object ball is somewhat predictable. In most cases, before attempting the pot, the striker may very well make a simple assessment such as, "too thick is better than too thin". As an example, if a medium red from near the blue is being attempted in a black pocket with leave on black on spot, the thought may be "too thick is better....." the idea being that too thick will tend to rebound off the black cushion back toward baulk, while too thin would tend to rattle the jaws and red will stay somewhere at the top of the table to leave itself pottable for the opponent. This type of prediction can only become accurate with experience so that closely observing one's missed pots is actually much more important than admiring one's successful pots so that one's predictive abilities can be gleaned. Again, it may seem negative to have as a mindset "too thick is better...." or the like, but realistically, since the pot is far from 100 percent certain, it will actually have a net positive effect if the pot is missed, but both the cue ball and the object ball act as expected. Despite missing the pot, the opponent still has no clear shot (the "shot to nothing/shot to little" was successful). Realistically, no one will ever be close to 100 percent potting efficiency so that to play the game with that seemingly positive expectation will only ultimately lead to a negative outlook as you become more aware of how many pots you will actually miss that you thought you would make. On the contrary, if you make a full prediction about the outcome of the shot even if you miss the pot and your other shot result predictions come to pass (such as thinking to yourself, "I will pot red to leave on black, but be careful not to leave on the other red that is near black spot, and if I miss the pot, that red will rebound all the way to mid-table"), you can look at the situation with a positive outlook. And of course, if the pot is good, that will also lead to a positive outlook. The more you see that the balls act as you expect them to (even when you miss pots), the greater your confidence in your abilities which

is of course the key to sustained improvement.

3) Straight safety - As the name implies, this shot is approached with absolutely no intention of potting a ball. In the amateur game, this shot is used far too frequently, perhaps as often as 30 to 40 percent of shots when the usage level should be closer to 10 or 20 percent. Many shots that are played as straight safety should in fact be approached as a shot to nothing instead. With creative thinking, there is very often a possible pot on, while at the same time running the white ball to some safe area. Oftentimes by amateurs, the baulk area is thought to be the only safe area to run to when white near the black cushion, or in amongst or behind the pack of reds will be perfectly safe. Often safety play of the white at the top of the table may even cut off the opponent's safety play to the baulk area. Unfortunately, many amateur players look at a safety shot as a method of scoring points, anticipating that their opponent will commit a penalty simply because they were snookered, even in a mild sense. This of course is untrue; most snookers do not result in penalty points being awarded. Instead, strict safety play should be viewed not as an opportunity to gain points with a snooker, but as a way to gain the advantage, gain the upper hand. By severely limiting your opponent's choice of shots, he may well be forced to play so as only to be able to hit the ball on but with little or no control of the result. So laying a snooker should not be expected to gain points directly (through penalty points), but rather indirectly (opponent contacts the ball on but leaves you an in to score a sizeable break). If you lay a good snooker then smugly think to yourself, "There is no way that he will get out of this one!", you are just setting yourself up for disappointment when in fact he escapes the snooker. Instead, it is much better to think, "He has limited options. There is a good chance that I will be on that red in the corner, then I am in for 16 or 24." Always approach the straight safety with low expectations (all that is required is that you don't leave a simple starter for your opponent). If you do even better than that and wind up laying a good snooker, your outlook will be all the more positive. If you approach the shot thinking, "I am going to bury him behind the yellow!", you will be disappointed with yourself when the white is alongside the yellow and your opponent has a long, thin, difficult red to cut in. On the other hand, when you think, "Deep in baulk is good, and maybe behind yellow could be even better," then the long, thin, difficult cut is a positive outcome and the snooker is an added bonus if it happens.

A variation of safety play which may often be overlooked is called a "containing safety". This would be a case in which it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to leave a long safety or a possible snooker, often because reds may be scattered over every sector of the table. This can be referred to as "nowhere to hide". The containing safety is played knowing that the ball on (usually red) will be very

easily struck by the opponent, but there will definitely be no balls left in a pottable position so the incoming striker will have the same dilemma of "nowhere to hide". The most obvious example of this is when rolling the white directly among the pack of reds (this could be called "hiding in plain sight") but there are innumerable examples of containing safety play. Containing safety play will often go "tit for tat" between the players until one of them makes a mistake and accidentally leaves a pot available to begin a break.

4) Challenge - The challenge is surely, the "dark horse" of the possible shot selections. Most players probably don't even realize that such a shot exists, or that it has a name. The challenge is very much like a "shot to little" except for the fact that with a challenge, there is a very low expectation or none at all that you will pot the initial red. (To recap, a "shot to little" is a shot in which you expect to make your pot and continue a break, but realize that it is possible that you might miss so that you are simply aware of where the cue ball will end up in regard to the incoming striker's position on the balls in the event that you do miss.) The challenge is the sort of shot where you know that you will be leaving a possible, albeit very difficult, pot on for the incoming striker, especially if in taking it on, he risks leaving an opening shot back to you in case he misses the pot. A good example of this is when there is a red looming back in the baulk area (so baulk is not a safe haven), white is somewhere around blue, there is still a large pack of reds, and there is a lone red behind black tight to the cushion. The red in baulk cannot be struck easily because it is hidden behind a baulk color. To strike the side of the pack and just bring white back near blue is a big risk because a red may leave the pack and hover near a top corner pocket to be potted. The challenge shot is appropriate: a light glance off the edge of the pack and leave white near a top corner pocket. The red on the cushion behind black is readily available (but very difficult) and you are challenging your opponent to try to pot it. If he does try, he will either hit softly to leave on black (meaning it may well rattle and stay in the jaws for you), or he will decide to strike firmly to make sure it bounces away (meaning that he is much less likely to actually pot the ball). If he takes the challenge and actually pots the ball, he is to be congratulated; he is either very talented or very foolish (or possibly both), but no matter, in this case, his risk paid off.

Challenges should not be the shot of choice too frequently, maybe several times during the course of the frame. With every challenge, there is always the distinct possibility that the opponent will succeed in the opening shot and then could go on to score a large break. Challenges are sometimes laid on purpose, but more often, they are accidental--the intended shot being a straight safety that went astray and turned into a challenge instead. For instance, common safety at the beginning of the frame is to glance off the side of the pack and

return the white to baulk, hopefully behind a baulk color. This may go astray in that a red may pop out of the pack and leave itself pottable into one of the top corners. It certainly won't be an easy shot, possibly risky, but your opponent will likely accept the challenge to try to pot that red.

5) Clearance - The last possibility is the clearance shot. As the name implies, this is near the end of the frame when the only real goal is to clear balls off the table to take any scoring possibilities away from your opponent. Clearance shots should be played when you are well ahead in points, so much so that your opponent either already needs snooker penalty points to win or else nearly does. If your opponent already needs snookers, generally play dead weight to leave the ball on very close to the pocket in the event that it doesn't actually drop in. If you don't happen to take that ball off the table, it's fine if your opponent does. After all, the fewer balls there are on the table, the more difficult for him to snooker you. Also, any thin cuts should be avoided as the white ball may cannon off, still travel a long distance then somehow manage to fall into a pocket to give your opponent penalty points. Do not fall into such a trap. The most important thing with clearance shots is to be absolutely certain where the white ball will end up. Secondarily, either pot the ball on at dead weight or else leave it so close in the jaws that your opponent has no choice but to pot it (assuming he needs snookers to win). Tertiary, be aware of any "trouble balls" your opponent has and be sure that you put the white or object balls **NOWHERE NEAR** the trouble ball; force your opponent to do that work. For instance, if you are 25 points up with brown through black remaining and the pink is tight against the black cushion, just play the brown dead weight to a pocket with no regard to leaving on the blue unless you are 100 percent comfortable that you cannot make a mistake. Whatever else, **DO NOT** play in such a way that any ball involved might get anywhere near the pink and knock it out into the open where it will be more useful to your opponent. When your opponent requires snookers, the best place for all the balls to end up after your shot are: a) the ball on very close to a pocket on one end of the table, b) any other remaining balls at the other end of the table but well separated from each other (the closer they are together, the bigger the "wall" they make for your opponent to leave you snookered behind), and c) the white in the middle of the table near the blue spot (ideally so that your opponent must use the rest to take his shot) or, as usual, tight up against a cushion for difficult cueing.

Even though it is the same word, this use of the term "clearance" is **NOT** the same as when a professional runs a century and pots the final black for the "clearance". That of course is playing to the crowd and the shots may get more and more powerful and entertaining after the frame has already been well secured. No, this type of "clearance" shot means playing smart near the end of

the frame, don't make mistakes, just worry about clearing the table one ball at a time to take scoring chances away from your opponent. Do not be confused by this use of an identical word for two entirely different situations.

.....

Men nearly always follow the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation, even though they cannot entirely keep to the tracks of others or emulate the prowess of their models. So a prudent man should always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. If his own prowess fails to compare with theirs, at least it has an air of greatness about it. He should behave like those archers who, if they are skillful, when the target seems too distant, know the capabilities of their bow and aim a good deal higher than their objective, not in order to shoot so high but so that by aiming high they can reach the target.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Italian political philosopher, statesman. The Prince, ch. 6 (1514).

There is an olde adage about watching a great player play, goes something like this: he doesn't play that good, I never seen him take a hard shot.