



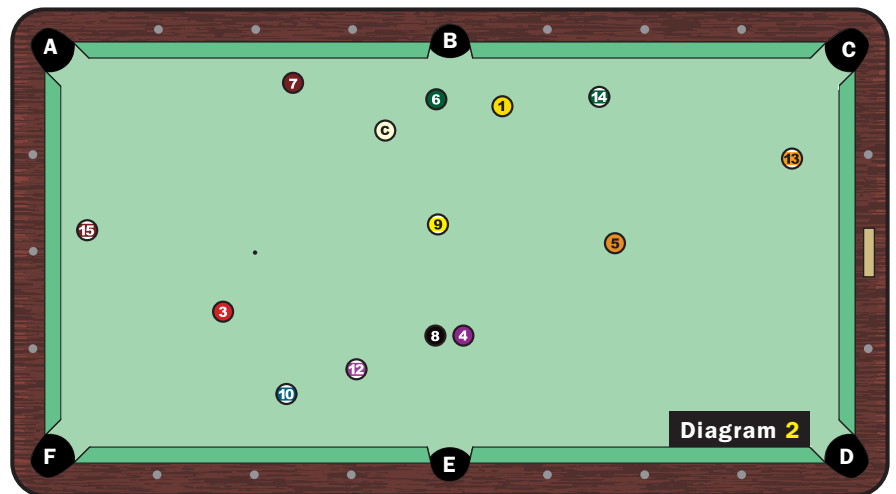
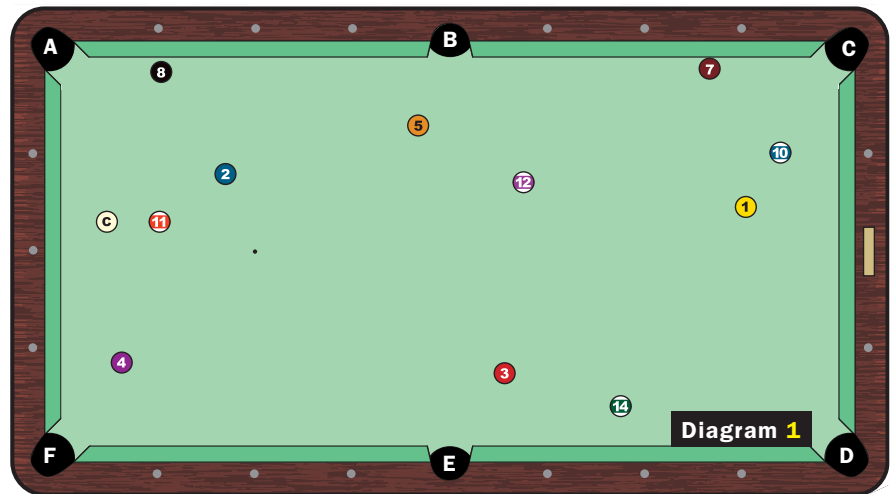
LAST-POCKET THINKING

This twist on 8-ball can help you prepare for the game-winner.

THERE ARE many different variations on how you play the game of 8-ball. There is “Straight-In 8-Ball,” the most common type. There is also “Bank-The-8,” which is not quite as popular, and therefore played less frequently. There is even a game of 8-ball in which the player shooting solids must pocket the 1 ball in a designated side pocket, and his opponent must pocket the 15 ball in the opposite side pocket. This last variation, sometimes called “Alabama 8-ball,” is also quite uncommon, so you will not see it played very often.

The particular game of 8-ball I would like to discuss in this column is “Last-Pocket 8-Ball.” This is a form of 8-ball where each player must pocket the 8 ball in the same pocket in which he pocketed his final object ball. Last-Pocket 8-Ball is a great variation on the game, and it requires a lot of extra skill and strategic thinking. It encompasses all aspects of pool, including banks, speed control, concentration and strategy, to name a few. This game also forces you to think ahead to the 8 ball at all times (a habit that can actually be critical in straight-in 8-ball too). If you don’t, you may end up being stuck with an extremely difficult shot on the 8 ball, and that can mean the difference between winning and losing the game. Therefore, you won’t want to take even your first shot without a solid plan of how you are going to run the balls, including declaring a last pocket and shooting the 8.

I will outline some of the subtleties of this particular form of 8-ball, as well as some strategies and techniques which can help you improve your game of Last Pocket. First, note that there is one catch to the designation of the players’ last pockets. Both players cannot have the same last pocket. In the event that both players do pocket their final balls in the same last pocket, the player who declared the pocket first will get to assign the other player’s “last pocket.” In general, he must assign a corner pocket.



Side pockets are not allowed unless it is agreed upon before starting.

At the same time, you can play for a side pocket and shoot your last object ball in it, declaring that pocket. However, if you decide to choose a side pocket, it’s still essential that you are able to get good position on the 8 ball from your last ball. If you don’t, and you miss the 8 ball, you are at a great disadvantage having a side pocket if your opponent has a corner pocket.

In **Diagram 1**, I have shown an interesting layout for a player who is shooting solids. If this were not a game of Last

Pocket, you would have several practical options for running your balls and pocketing the 8 ball. However, because you have to have the 8 follow your last solid, you have to change your approach when planning your strategy. Now, you have to figure out how to put your last ball in the same corner in which you will pocket the 8. Take a couple of minutes before reading further and try to figure out for yourself how to run this table.

Now here is the best approach for this rack: First, shoot the 4 ball in the corner, following to the rail and coming out for a shot on the 5 ball in the side pocket.

Next, take the 5 in side pocket B and roll up for the 7 in the corner. Be careful not to get too close to the rail because that will leave you too straight on the 7 ball. You want to leave yourself an angle on this shot, so you can go off the long rail and leave yourself an easy straight-in shot on the 1 ball in corner pocket D. When shooting the 1, you want to stop the cue ball at impact to give yourself an easy shot on the 3 ball in the side pocket. Then, shoot the 3 and roll forward a little for a good angle on the 2 ball in corner pocket A near the 8 ball. Pocket the 2 and take the easy shot on the 8 ball in the same corner for the win.

The key to successfully running this rack is leaving the 2 ball for the last ball before the 8. In addition, you should notice the importance of how little movement there was on the cue ball after each shot. This minimizes the chance you can get into trouble.

In **Diagram 2**, I have shown another Last Pocket situation which again requires you to map out the whole table before you begin shooting. Once again,

try to figure out the correct strategy for solids before you read on.

In this situation, you have a rare instances where you will designate a side pocket as your last pocket. If you think through this layout carefully, you will notice that this is a very simple runout. You should first shoot the 7 in corner

the cue ball back, so that you are left with a straight-in shot on the 8 into the same side pocket.

Notice how both layouts require maximum cue-ball control and minimal cue-ball movement. This lessens the chances of erring in speed control and increases your probability of success in

BOTH LAYOUTS REQUIRE MAXIMUM CUE-BALL CONTROL AND MINIMAL MOVEMENT. THIS LESSENS THE CHANCES OF ERROR.

pocket A, coming off of the rail for position on the 3 ball in the opposite corner. When shooting the 3, stop for position on the 6 ball in side pocket B. Stop the cue ball on the 6, giving yourself a shot on the 5 ball in the corner pocket. After pocketing the 5 in the corner, stop yet again for a shot on the 1 ball in side pocket B. For this shot, you can now stop the cue ball to give yourself a perfect angle for a shot on the 4 ball. Draw

completing your plan. For this reason, I recommend practicing and perfecting your stop shot from all distances.

Furthermore, I cannot stress enough the importance of planning the whole rack, all of the way to the 8 ball. Not thinking this far ahead was the most common mistake I saw recently among the men and women at the 2010 BCAPL National 8-Ball Championships in Las Vegas. Good luck.

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