

# A Beginner's Guide to 8 BALL POOL

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# 8 BALL POOL

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## Chapter 1: Equipment

8 Ball Pool is the most popular existing pool game. Although it's played by millions of people all around the globe, it's very challenging for anyone to become even remotely good at this game. That's why we made this guide to help you learn and improve your skills. Here you'll find literally everything you need to transform yourself from a complete beginner to a player capable of going even against the top professionals out there. The text is presented to you along with many pictures and examples to improve your understanding of the subject. If you follow this guide consistently and practice accordingly, your success is guaranteed. However, before we start dealing with the game itself, you need to acquire certain knowledge about game equipment first. Depending on where you're going to play (professional club, bar etc.), the quality of equipment you're going to encounter varies significantly. Therefore, all parts of the equipment are divided into *essential* (the items you simply can't play the game without) and *optional* (equipment which improves the quality of the game, but its absence won't affect the match significantly).

### I. Essential:

#### 1. Table



Obviously, you can't play pool without a *table*. Pool tables come in many shapes and forms; however, they all share a similar layout: *surface*, six *holes*, four *borders*, *ball container* and *ball exit hole*. Most of them have a separated exit hole for white ball (*white exit hole*) and a *coin entry* (especially in bars). Table layout in details is presented in the following chapter.

#### 2. Sticks

Pool *sticks* are your main tools in this game. They're used to perform any sort of shot at the white ball. A typical stick is divided into three parts: *tip* (used to hit the white ball), *body* (from the tip to the center of mass) and *handle* (from the center of mass to the end of the stick). There are

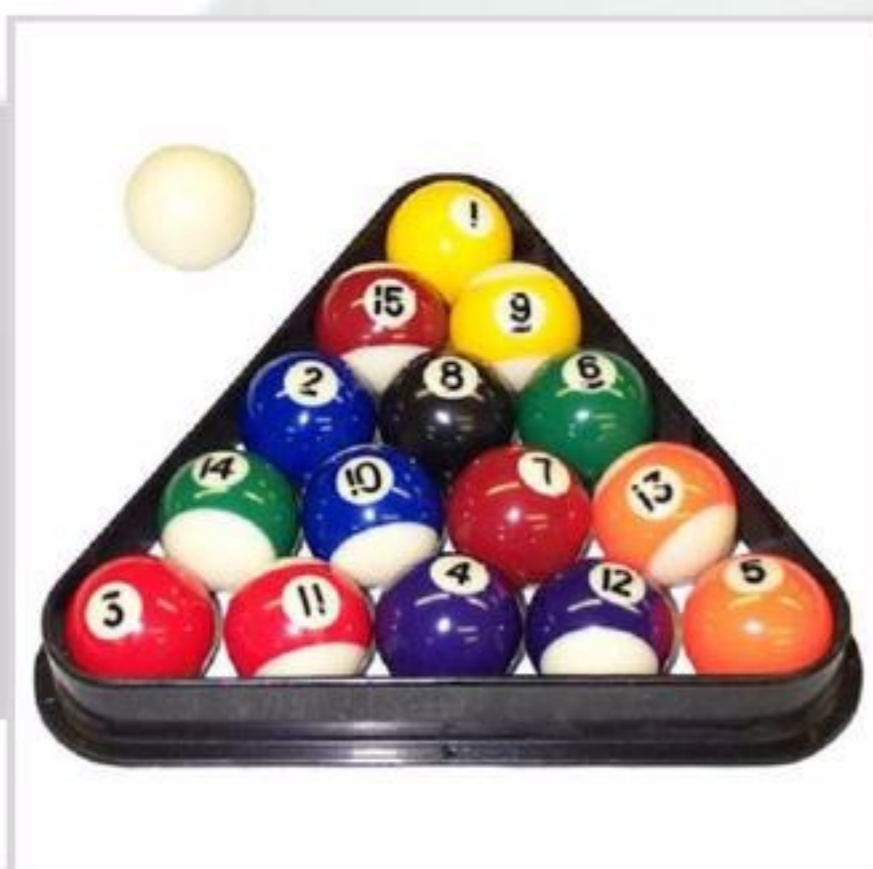


countless types of sticks, which vary in length, mass, shape and texture (wooden, metal, plastic...). Depending on their design, their characteristics differ considerably, which presents a huge impact on the game itself. The moves a player with a short metal stick can perform in a certain situation are entirely different than those of a player with a long, light wooden stick. The most important part of the stick, however, is its tip, which also comes in several variants. With softer tips white ball is less likely to skid, while a harder tip is more resistant to powerful shots. If it's completely worn out or damaged, a tip can be replaced. We'll talk more about the role of tips later. The crucial thing you need to remember about sticks is that there's no perfect stick. Although the quality of design and the condition of the stick do make a difference, it's up to you to test many models yourself until you find the one that suits you perfectly.



### 3. 16 Balls (with Triangle)

A set of pool balls consists of two *classes* of *colored balls*: 7 solid balls (or *solids* – single colored) and 7 striped balls (or *stripes* – with white “poles”), plus the *black* and the *white* ball. Both classes of colored balls consist of the following colors: red, blue, green, yellow, orange, brown (dark red) and violet. The numbers are used as secondary identification, but they're not particularly significant. Saying, for example, *yellow stripe* is more common and practical than saying *nine*. You should keep in mind that, while all the other balls are completely identical, the white is a bit larger, heavier and has a rougher surface. They come together with a *triangle*, which is used to position the balls at the start of the match. The picture below shows a correctly set up triangle, but we'll discuss the rules of ball positioning later on.





#### 4. Chalk

After each shot is made, the tip of the stick tends to wear out as time passes. The *chalk* is used for rubbing the tip in circular motion. In that way you keep it in good shape, which allows you to perform your shots well during the entire match. Despite the fact it's recommended to rub the tip after every shot, you should at least do it after more powerful shots, when giving spin/swerve to your balls, or especially after a failed shot, as those moves damage the surface of the tip the most.



#### II. Optional:

##### 1. Stick Attachments

When you find yourself in a place where you can't make a good shot due to a great distance from the white ball or some obstacle like another ball in front of the white, *stick attachments* come around as useful tools. You simply have to place them on the tip of another stick and lay them on the table surface. They have many "*branches*" intended for use in different challenging situations, making them a good all-round part of equipment. Probably the most widely used and popular type of attachment is presented on the left picture. Sometimes you can find "*auxiliary sticks*" which have an attachment permanently connected to the stick itself and are not meant to be used for shooting. Proper use of these attachments will be explained more in detail in the following chapters.





## 2. Stick cases, cleaning and maintenance equipment

There's not much to say about these items. They're mostly used by professional players for keeping their personal sticks in good condition and you won't find them in common locations with pool tables. It's common to see those players often bringing their own chucks along with them as well to make sure they don't run out of it, which often happens in public places like bars.





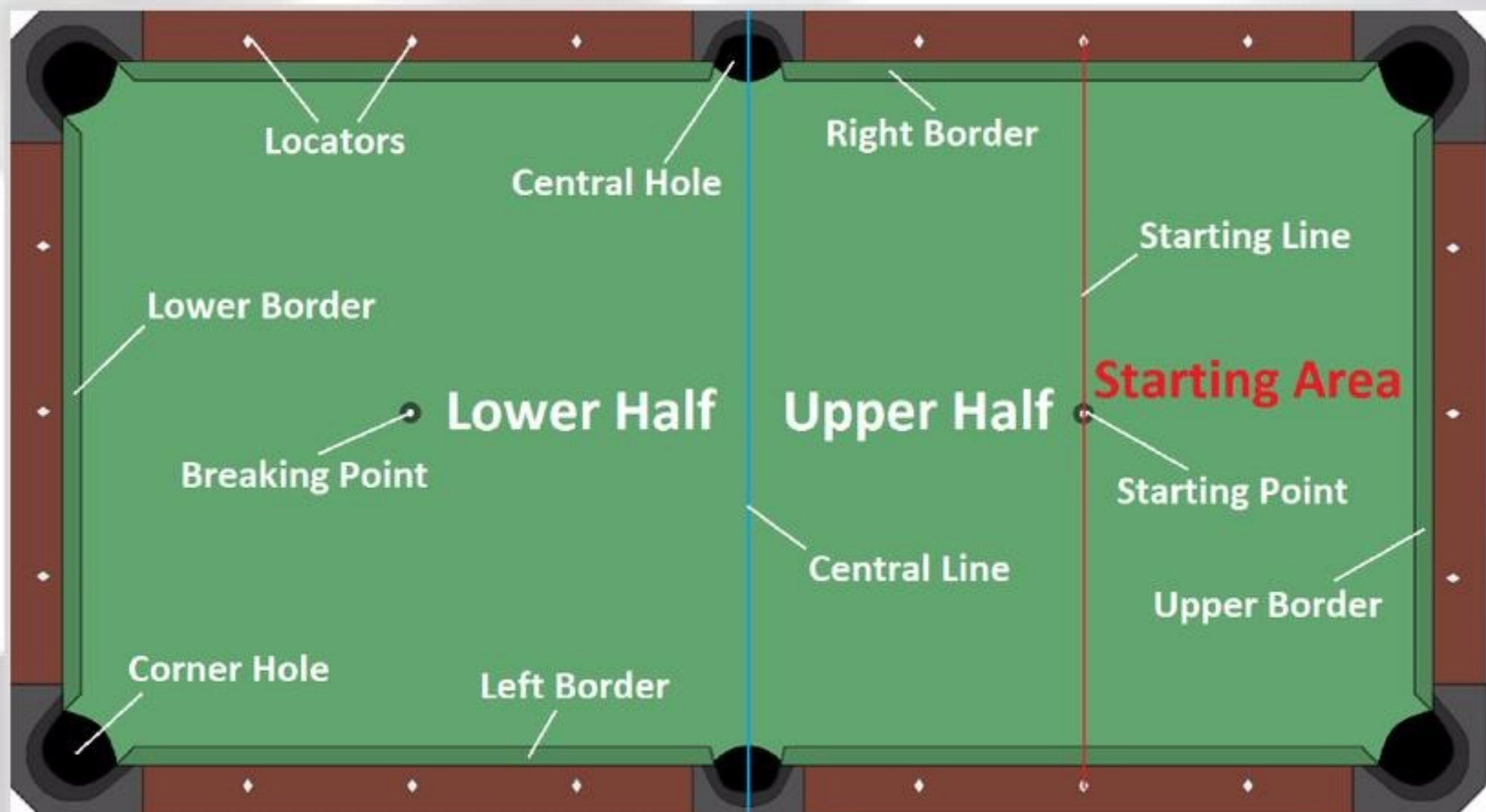
## Chapter 2: Rules

Now when you have a general idea of the pool equipment, it's time for us to start dealing with the *rules* of the game. There are two types of rules: *public* and *official*. Official rules are only used by professionals and you won't find almost anybody using them outside the professional leagues and tournaments. Public rules, on the other hand, are used by all those millions of players around the world. There are countless variants of public rules, but the rules listed in this guide are the most balanced, *standardized version*. To get a full understanding of these rules, you need to learn the table layout, which is presented on the picture below. We should also clarify two terms which you can't follow the text without.

**Turn** – In pool a turn is considered to be the period during which one player gets to play the match in continuation. During *his/her turn*, the player can make as many *moves* as possible before he/she *loses the turn* and an opposing player gets the next turn.

**Move** – A move is a period of time which takes for a player whose turn it is to think, make a decision and shoot. There's no move limit per turn. In other words, during one turn, a player can make shots as long as he doesn't lose the turn. The rules about getting the next move and losing your turn are listed in this chapter.

Now, we're going to explain the game in steps.



**NOTE:** *Starting area is a part of the upper half.*

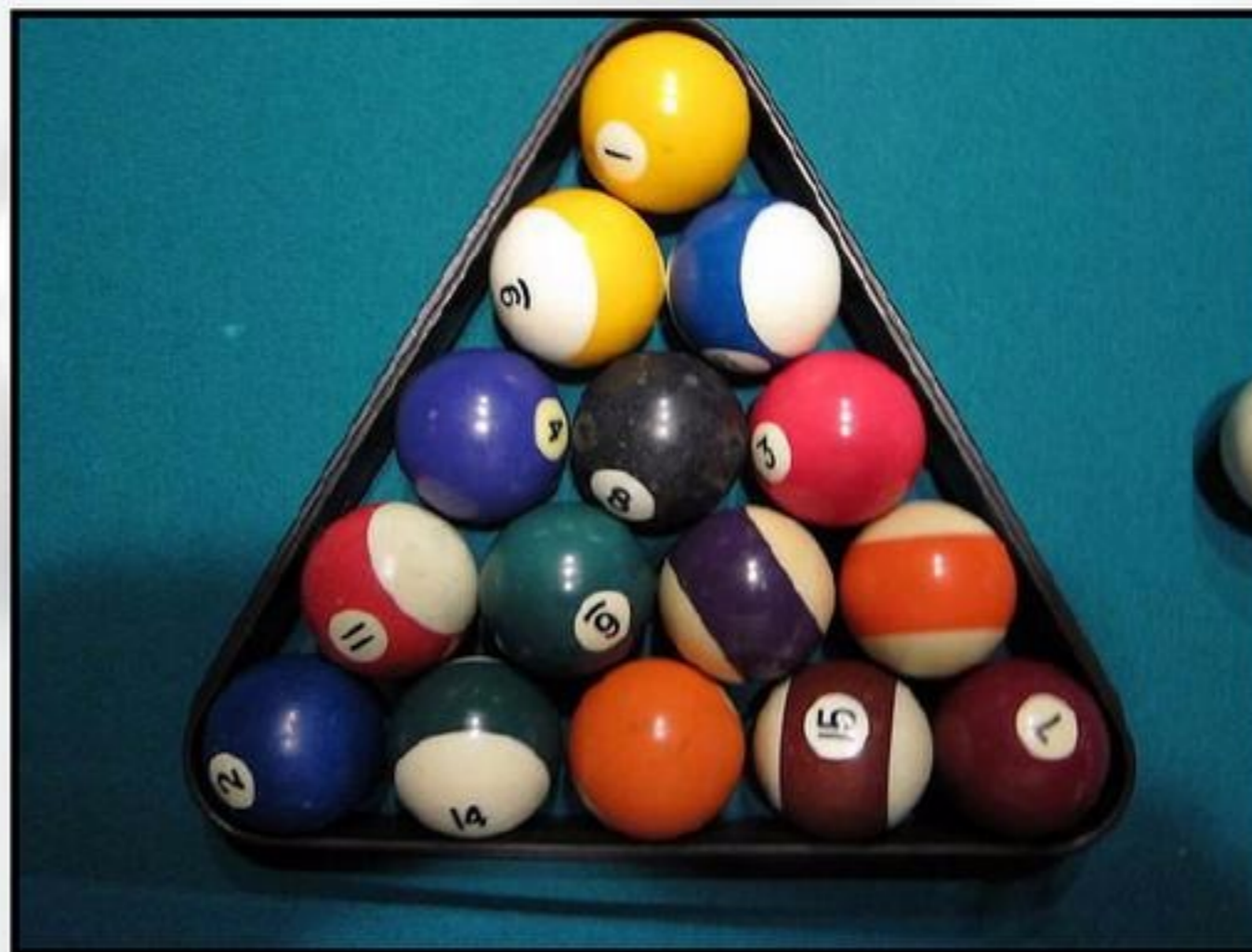
**1. Before the match** - The match can either be played *one on one* or in *teams*. If that's the case, there's no player limit per team. Members of each team have to decide in which order they're going to play. Opposing sides then take turns (the duration of a turn is described below). Each turn is played by the next player in the row. After the last player ended his/her move, the same order repeats until the match ends. Before the start, players should choose their sticks and make sure the



tip is in good condition. Otherwise, rub it with the chalk. One stick can be used by several players. Next, the players need to arrange which side has the *first turn*. If you're going to play more than one match in the same team composition, then in the following matches each side takes the first turn subsequently.

**2. Ball positioning** - Now, it's time to start the match. Insert a coin in the coin entry. The player who has the first turn takes a stick and stands behind the starting area and prepares for the *breaking shot* (or *break*), while a member of the opposing team places the triangle on the table surface and takes the balls out of the exit hole. He then passes the white ball to the opposing player about to break and positions all the other balls inside the triangle in a specific order shown on the picture below.

*NOTE: The positions of striped and solid balls can be switched (a striped one is placed on top instead of the solid yellow; the others follow in the row striped-solid-striped...), including the two balls in the center of the triangle just below the black, but the position of the black itself **HAS TO REMAIN** the same. When positioning the balls, keep in mind that only the class of balls matters, while their color is irrelevant.*



**3. Breaking move** - After the balls have been correctly positioned in the triangle, you need to move the triangle so that the black ball is positioned directly on the *breaking point*, while the lower side of the triangle (the one opposite of the black) has to be parallel with the lower border. When you're done, raise the triangle carefully so the balls remain in place and put it where you found it. Now it's up to the opposing player who has the first turn to make the break. He/she may place the white ball anywhere he/she likes inside the *starting area*. The ball must not cross the *starting line*. To make a successful break, the player needs to shoot at the triangular formation of the other balls in order to *pot* at least one of them. A ball is considered to be *potted* only when it enters one of the holes without returning to the table surface (e.g. jumping back out). After it rolls into the ball container, everyone should see it through the glass. Always keep an eye on the potted balls as in many situations you can easily fail to see if one of the balls entered a hole (especially when it comes to high-speed shots).

Depending on the class of the ball which the player potted, this class became *his/her class* or the class of his team (in team play). We'll explain what that means in the next step. If more than one



balls dropped in the holes, then the class of the ball which entered the ball container first is the player's class. Anyway, the player who managed to pot at least one colored ball without potting the black or white gets the next move (described in the fourth step).

*NOTE: Always choose your class according to the ball which rolled into the container before the others, even if it didn't enter the hole first.*

If you potted the white together with one or more colored balls, you choose your class in the same way, but you have to place the white ball carefully on the *starting point* and the opponent gets the turn. *NOTE: This is the standard procedure every time the white drops during the entire game. If you pot only the black ball, you instantaneously win the game!* If the black is potted along with the white or any other ball, it's placed in front of the *central locator* (the white spot in the center) on the *upper border* (it needs to be touching the border) and the opponent gets the turn. If the space is occupied by another ball, place the black as close as possible to the central locator but keep in mind it has to be touching the upper border. Just like with the white, potting the black during the break doesn't affect the class choice (if other colored balls were potted).

*NOTE: Sometimes you won't be able to re-obtain the black once it's potted, particularly in some bars and clubs. In that case, you can either nullify the game, call it a draw, or choose one of the colored balls to act as the black. If there's an odd number of colored balls, then you should choose a ball belonging to the class with more balls on the table.*

If none of the colored balls were potted during the break, then the opponent gets the turn (regardless of whether the black or white were potted or not) and the match continues according to the rules described in the next step. The rules of the breaking move don't apply anymore. The first player who manages to pot a colored ball acquires the class of the potted ball.

This also applies if the breaking shot missed the other balls completely. If a player hit the left or right border on the upper half of the table (before the central line), the break counts but the opponent gets the next turn. Only if the white didn't cross the central line, the opposing player next in line takes the ball and gets a new break instead.

**4. The match** – In the previous step we explained the principles of ball class choice. Now we're going to say how exactly it affects the match. Let's say you potted a solid ball. That means your balls are solids. Now, your objective is to pot all remaining solid balls (in any holes you choose). The hole where you potted your last solid is your *finishing hole (FH)*. To win the game, you have to pot the black ball in the finishing hole. If the black is potted in any other hole, you lose the match. Sounds simple? If it were, we wouldn't write this guide in the first place.

To pot *any* ball, you have to *make a shot*. As we said before, you can only shoot with the white ball, and you do that by hitting it with the tip of your stick. It's forbidden to touch the white with any other part of the stick. You also cannot touch any other ball except the white with any part of the stick. In a regular match, in both cases the player (and his team) is punished according to the rules (listed below). Same rules apply if a ball was touched by any object except the stick or a part of the player's body.

*NOTE: In a friendly match, accidents like this normally happen due to shooting mistakes, so a punishment isn't really necessary. Instead, return the white and any other balls to their previous*



positions as accurately as you can. Otherwise, simply ignore what happened, but in that case the opponent gets the turn.

Now let's list all the remaining rules:

- Even the slightest *touch* of the white with the tip of the stick without changing the ball's position is considered a legal shot. The white doesn't have to move *at all*. *NOTE: In a friendly match, if a player accidentally touches the white while preparing for a shot, you're allowed to return the ball (and any other balls the white possibly hit) to their previous positions and let him/her redo the shot.*
- During one shot, you can only touch the white with the tip of your stick *once*. If you (intentionally or not) hit the ball two or more times, you lose the turn. The same applies if you push the white instead of hitting it.
- If you make a shot while one or more balls on the table are still moving in any way (including spinning in place), your opponent gets the shot.
- The hole where you pot your last remaining ball becomes your finishing hole. If the opponent pots his last ball into your FH, then his FH becomes the hole *opposite* to yours (e.g. if your hole is upper-left, his is lower-right).
- A *direct shot* is a type of shot where the white hits another ball without touching any border first. If the ball classes haven't been chosen by the players yet, you can hit directly any colored ball. However, once the class choice has been made, you can only directly shoot your class of balls. By hitting your opponent's balls in that way you lose your turn and the opponent can choose if he either wants to pot the ball you hit or leave it where it is (depending on his/her *strategic situation*).
- If you shoot the black ball directly any time during the match, **you instantaneously lose the game**. This also includes directly hitting the black with a *jump shot* (described later) during the break. *NOTE: Jump shot always counts as a direct shot unless it touches a border. Only after the last of your balls dropped and you just have the black left to be potted in the finishing hole, you get to touch it directly.*
- You can hit both the black and your opponent's balls without consequences by using *indirect shot*. The white either has to hit at least one border or one of your balls first and then an opponent's ball or the black. But beware: if the opponent only has the black ball left, then by hitting it with the white after it touched just the borders **will still result in a loss**. You can touch the black after the white hit at least one of your balls, though.
- If you pot the last of your opponent's balls, they can *choose* their finishing hole. However, if you already have a FH, the opponent isn't allowed to choose the same hole. *NOTE: This also applies when you hit the opponent's last ball directly, but only if he/she decides to pot it.*
- You can always use your own or the opponent's balls to hit any other ball legally (including the black). These are called *chain shots*. You perform them by shooting the chosen ball with the white first (if it's an opponent's ball, hit it indirectly), which will launch it at the targeted ball. You can use multiple reflections (between any type of balls) to ultimately hit the targeted ball. Remember there's no punishment if you use another ball to hit the black even when it's the only ball left to your



opponent. However, in case you pot the black using a chain shot, but you hit an opponent's ball directly in order to perform the shot, you lose the game.

*NOTE: You're completely allowed to use the black for chain shots, but make sure you hit it indirectly or according to special rules when it's your opponent's last ball.*

- To get the next move, you need to pot at least one of your balls during your current move. It doesn't matter if you potted one or more of your opponent's balls as long as your ball dropped. If you fail to pot any of your balls, you lose the turn. If you pot the white, it needs to be placed on the starting point and your opponent gets the turn, even if you managed to pot one of your balls. If you pot the black while you still have your balls left on the table, or you shoot it in the wrong hole, you lose the match. If you pot the black in the finishing hole but one or more of your opponent's balls also drops, you still win. However, if the white enters a hole along with the black, it counts as a loss.

- When you shoot from the starting point (after the white was potted), you're only allowed to shoot balls on the *lower half* of the table directly (*check the table layout*). You also can't hit any border on the *upper half* before the white touches a border or your balls beneath the central line. If you make a direct shot at any ball on the upper half, or directly touch a border before the central line, your opponent gets the turn (if you hit the black you lose). Also, if the white doesn't cross the central line after the shot, you lose your turn. *NOTE: If the black is positioned before the central line and you potted all of your balls, then hitting it directly counts as hitting any other of your balls. However, if you pot it, even in the right hole, you lose the match.*

- If there's a ball on the starting point or just below it which *blocks your path* to the lower half, you're allowed to move the white closer to the central locator on the upper border until you have a clear angle of the first five centimeters of either the left or the right border just below the central holes. Just make sure the white keeps the same distance both from the left and right border while you move it. You're also allowed to make a jump shot across the obstacle if you choose so, and you can move the white in the same way if the obstacle is placed directly on the starting point or too close to the white for the shot to be possible. But if you accidentally hit the obstacle, it counts as a direct shot.

- If the white ball is *knocked off the table*, the procedure is the same as if it was potted. If you shoot the black off the table, you lose the match. Any other ball which permanently leaves the table surface is returned as close as possible to the central locator on the upper half and it needs to be in contact with the border. The player who knocked off one or more colored balls loses the turn.

*NOTE: A ball is not considered to be knocked off if it jumps off the table surface, but then falls back on the table. However, if it touched anything except the *table itself* while it was flying (e.g. a player, the ceiling etc.), the procedure is the same as if it was knocked off. If that's the case, you have to wait until all balls completely stop moving before you return the "knocked off" ball to the central locator.*

- Stick attachments can be used in any situation, but if the attachment itself touches any ball on the table, the procedure is the same as when a ball is touched by any part of the stick. Shots made using the attachments count as any other shots. *NOTE: In regular matches shooting using a stick with an attachment counts as touching the white with any part of the stick except the tip, and is therefore punished in the same way.*



- A player is allowed to *lean* on the table, even with both legs off the floor, but if he/she touches any ball with a part of their bodies, it counts as if they accidentally touched the balls with any part of their sticks. Shots made while the players lean on the table are considered normal shots. Also, any type of climbing or standing on the table on your feet or knees is illegal, and results in the opponent getting the turn.

- If one player/team pots the white more than three times in a row without touching any other ball, it results in an instantaneous defeat. Failing to hit any ball, as long as the white remains on the table, can be repeated indefinitely. This rule applies only if the white is potted over three times subsequently: if you, for example, pot the white two times in a row but it remains on the table after your third shot, the counting will start over the next time the white is potted while failing to touch other balls. *NOTE: This rule also applies if the white is knocked off the table over three times in a row without hitting any balls first.*

- If the black ball moves to a position five centimeters or less to a *neutral hole* (non-finishing hole for both sides), then, if all players agree, it can be moved next to the central locator on the upper border (it has to be in contact with the border). However, if either left or right upper hole are finishing holes for one side, then the black has to be moved to the central locator on the lower border instead. There's also a scenario where one of the upper holes is the finishing hole for one player, while one of the lower holes is the finishing hole for the other. The black is then placed next to the central locator of the border opposite to the side of the table where the player whose turn is coming has his finishing hole (as a protection from an easy pot).

- The following actions, in addition to their standard punishment, also result in a defeat of the side which repeats them over three times during a match:

1. Hitting any colored ball on the upper half of the table directly while shooting from the starting point (after the white has been potted).
2. Failing to cross the central line with the white when shooting from the starting point.
3. Pushing the white or touching it with the tip of the stick more than once during one shot.
4. Touching any ball with the stick, any other object or any part of the player's body (hitting the white with the tip is obviously allowed). *NOTE: This rule can be ignored in friendly matches if such actions weren't intentional.*

- The last rule refers to *multiple matches* and *tournaments*. We already explained that the opposing sides need to make an agreement on which side has the breaking move in the first match. If that's not possible, make a decision with a *coin toss*. In the following matches the opposing sides take the first turn subsequently. In team play, all members of a team need to have an opportunity for a breaking shot before the order repeats. Before playing multiple matches in the identical team composition, make an arrangement on the number of matches a side has to win to achieve the final victory. You can also decide on the number of games instead of the number of victories, which leaves the possibility of a draw if the number is even. A standard tournament should have at least *four participants*. It's advisable to have an even number of players participating a tournament. If there's an odd number of participants, though, then it's up to the organizers to decide on the tournament structure. A victory is achieved by the player who wins two matches against an opponent. The winners go to second round. The player who wins the finals wins the tournament. Losers of the semi-



finals have to play for the third place. Only in the finals and in the third place play-off the participants have to win a total of three matches. Tournaments can also be played in teams, but in that case all teams need to have the same number of players.

*NOTE: This is the basic structure of a standard tournament. The organizers of a tournament are allowed to **change any structural aspect** they decide. For example, in the semi-finals the participants can pass into the finals by winning five matches instead of two.*

## **Chapter 3: Technique and Tactics**

Congratulations! You've just learned the rules of 8 Ball Pool. Now it's time to start dealing with the game itself. Knowing the rules won't help you much if you don't know how to play the game. First off, you need to acquire the knowledge of pool *technique* and *tactics* in order to develop *strategies* and establish your own *play style*. In this text we're going to explain the first two, while strategies and play styles are the main topic of the following chapter.

The term *technique* is considered as *the way you make your shots*. It includes the way of holding the stick properly, shooting in order to perform various types of shots and positioning the balls according to your plans.

All types of shots, each with a different purpose according to the situation on the table, are referred to as *tactics*. Every tactic is more or less demanding in terms of technique. Therefore, the number of tactics a certain player can use depends on his/her *level of technique*.

### **Technique**

Each shot you make requires a certain amount of technical skills. Beginners usually have very low technical capabilities, which limit them to a narrow choice of tactics. On the other hand, experienced players have a broad range of tactics at their disposal, which gives them the upper hand in a match. However, being technically superior won't bring you victory alone, but we'll cover that in the next chapter.

To perform a shot, you need to know how to hold the stick properly. First step is to locate its *center of mass*. To do that, place the stick on the open palm of your hand and move it back and forth until it remains there without falling. When you're done, grab the stick by the handle (anywhere from the center of mass to the end) with your right hand if you're right-handed or left if you're left-handed. That hand is called your *shooting hand*. There's no "best part" to hold the stick by. You'll simply have to try shooting while holding it by different parts of the handle and decide which position works best for you. Just make sure you don't grab the body of the stick (below the center of



mass) as you'll have a counterweight, making your shots difficult and greatly increasing the chances of committing a mistake.

Before shooting, place your other hand (your *aiming hand*) 10 – 30 centimeters away from the white in a *shooting mode*. Shooting modes are various “shapes” of your hand which allow the stick to smoothly slide in the direction of the white. Most common shooting modes are shown on the pictures below. Try them all out and choose the one you find the most effective. Don't worry if you fail nearly all of your shots in the beginning. It's completely normal for any beginner. Remember that your efficiency will increase by practice. Just don't switch too often between shooting modes after you find the one which suits you best, because your aiming skills will increase only if you keep practicing with the same shooting mode.

*NOTE: These are not the only existing shooting modes. Use your imagination and try different hand positions yourself in order to create your personal shooting mode if you find it necessary. A little advice: the shooting mode presented on the central right picture (with a lot of red balls) is maybe the easiest to learn and use, and also a very effective one. It will probably take time for your hand to get used to that position, but once you've practiced enough, it will make your aiming much easier.*





The distance between your aiming hand and the white should be somewhere between 10 and 30 centimeters because it's almost impossible to aim and shoot effectively at a shorter distance, while aiming from a longer distance will increase the *stick oscillations*, raising the chances of making a shooting mistake.

It's time to discuss *shooting stances*. A shooting stance is the correct position of a player's body when he/she is making a shot. Place the leg opposite to your shooting hand in front of your other leg. The distance between your legs should be roughly the same as the distance between your shoulders. Rotate your feet 45 degrees in the direction of your stick. Now, your whole body should be rotated to the side of your shooting hand (look at the picture of the woman making the shot above the text for further clarification). There are two types of shooting stances, each intended for a different kind of shots:

**1. Aiming Down the Sight (ADS)** – This shooting stance is used for precision strikes, when accuracy is more important than power. It obviously implies the usage of *aiming*. To aim, a player has to lean forward until his/her eyes are positioned right above the stick. This way they can see exactly where the white is directed, and are also able to see the exact spot on the targeted ball they need to hit in order to send it in the desired direction, just like aiming with a rifle. To shoot, simply stretch your shooting hand forward after you carefully aimed at your target. When using ADS, remember to shoot at *optimal power*. That's the power of a shot which gives you the best chances to pot a targeted ball. Hitting it either at higher or lower power will increase the probability of missing your shot. There's no "universal" optimal power of a shot because each shot has *its own optimal power*, according to the distance between balls, the angle of shooting, possible obstacles near the ball trajectories etc. You'll learn to assess the optimal power of any shot with time and practice. *NOTE: The woman of the picture above is using a typical ADS.*

**2. Shooting From the Hip (SFH)** – This is the shooting stance used for shots which require less accuracy and more strategic positioning of the balls. The player should remain standing vertically or only partially lean forward when performing shots. This gives you an excellent view of the entire table surface, allowing you to assess the goal and possible consequences of your strike. Instead of aiming, you'll need to use *anticipation*. As you can see the direction of your stick from above, you can *anticipate* the trajectory of the white and the one of the targeted ball. This stance is great when it comes to calculating the angles at long-ranges shots, placing the white on a good defensive position, performing powerful shots which don't really rely on accuracy etc. It's also the preferred stance for making the breaking shot, which is usually more successful when it's high-powered. *NOTE: There are many advanced techniques which increase the efficiency of the break, but they're too complex to be covered in this guide for beginners and regular players. We'll stop at saying that power generally increases efficiency.* A player using SFH is shown on the picture below.





*Stick characteristics* and the *type of the tip* also have a significant role when shooting. Lighter sticks are better for very accurate, low-powered shots, but when performing powerful shots, there's a greater chance for the white to skid, which causes a failed shot. On the contrary, must heavier sticks don't lack any precision, but are also more stable when shooting at full power. So, as long as you don't have the technical skills to perform ultra-accurate shots, we recommend you to stay away from light sticks and choose the heavier instead. However, some players simply prefer lighter sticks and generally play better using them, so we won't discourage anyone from choosing them from the beginning. In addition, we need to emphasize the importance of stick length. Longer sticks mostly have better balance and are easier to aim and shoot with, so we'd recommend you to choose the shorter ones only in some bars and clubs when there's not enough room around the table. But again, certain players do better with shorter sticks so try them both out and make a decision yourself. This applies in particular to shorter and physically smaller people who find shorter sticks less challenging to balance with.

When it comes to the tip of the stick, you can find sticks with softer tips ("sticky", more "rubber-like") and with harder ones. The only real advantage of harder tips is their durability, as softer ones tend to damage and wear out with time, especially after failed or powerful shots. In our opinion, softer tips are more useful all-round, as they significantly reduce the chances of the white to skid, especially when shooting at high power, adding spin to the white or performing different kinds of challenging shots. Furthermore, stick oscillations while aiming cause missed and failed shots a lot more when using harder tips. We advise you to stick to the softer tips, but you should try out both and decide for yourself.

Mastering the usage of the *locators*, although it isn't necessary, can make your life easier during a match. Locators are special spots on the borders placed in regular intervals. All you need to know is that when you shoot at a border under a specific angle, each locator leads the white to another one. To learn in which way the locators are interconnected and how to take advantage of it during a match, you will need to practice. A lot.

Adaptation to *table flaws*, *low-quality equipment in bad condition*, and usually, the *lack of certain parts of equipment*, is the key in winning a game. If the table is "leaning" at one side, or the surface is a little uneven, it causes *table deviation*. It means that in certain parts of the table surface, or on the entire table, the balls will deviate from their expected trajectories (usually in a specific direction). This especially applies to low-speed balls, which will deviate more the slower they move. Learning in which parts of the table the deviation is present, predicting it and possibly taking advantage of it in some situations will make an unpleasant surprise for any opponent, but what's the most important, it will prevent you from continually making mistakes and missing your shots. In addition, remember that dirt on the table also causes unpredictable deviations, so make sure you clean the table as much as possible before the game.

Reflecting balls using the borders while making your shots is crucial for any player. But it may prove difficult if damaged or low-quality borders result in unpredictable ball reflections, rendering their usage practically useless in almost any situation. It's a well-known fact that when you shoot at a border at full power under most angles, the white will almost always reflect closer to the center of the table comparing to the expected trajectory. Things are similar when dealing with unpredictable borders. The more powerful your shots are, the less predictable the angles of reflection will be. To



avoid unnecessary mistakes, limit yourself to minimal border usage. In case you still need to use border reflection, use low-powered shots, as short-ranged as possible. Don't add spin to your shots if possible as the white often won't react the way you planned.

There are no pool players who haven't found themselves in a situation when the chalk is missing, or the tip is damaged. As you'll find out, even the slightest oscillation, particularly when using more powerful shots, will result in the white *skidding* and you failing to perform the desired shot. Be careful as shooting at high speeds with a damaged or worn out tip may send the white flying off the table. To reduce the number of missed shots to a minimum, you should take a breath and aim slowly and carefully before each shot. Don't exaggerate in power. Also, avoid adding spin as it won't be successful. *NOTE: Softer tips are easier to play with when damaged due to their "rubber-like" core, which will still "stick" to the white to some point, reducing the chances of skidding. Nevertheless, be extremely careful when performing the shots.*

Although it happens rarely, sometimes you'll encounter *oversized triangles*, which make starting ball set-up quite challenging, unless you know how to counter it. Once you positioned the balls, push them with your thumbs in order to squeeze them together, and keep holding them in that position as you slide the triangle until the black is positioned directly above the breaking point. Then release the balls, push the triangle a little forward before you raise it and the balls should remain in formation.

Another technique of great importance is adding *spin*. It changes the trajectory of the white after first impact with a border or another ball in the direction of the added spin. Bear in mind that the spin works much better after the white hits a border than after a collision with another ball. You normally hit the white in the *center* while shooting. If you try hitting it a little left of the center (but don't change the direction of the stick) while shooting directly at the opposite border, the ball should move *left* instead of straight towards you after impact. The farther to the left you hit it, the deviation is greater comparing to the straight trajectory. You add the *right spin* the same way. If you hit the white above the center, you add *forward (top) spin*, which makes the white retain its speed. It will take longer for the ball to stop moving than it would after a normal shot. When the white collides with another ball directly, it will keep following the ball it just hit, which can be very useful (e.g. when performing chain shots). Hitting the white below the center adds *back (bottom) spin*. At lower speeds, it will make the white stop moving earlier. After it hits another ball, it will follow it minimally or stop the moment after impact. However, a powerful back spin, especially when combined with high-speed shots, will make the white come back towards you after hitting the first obstacle. Spins can also be *combined* (e.g. top-left, bottom-right). You'll have to learn to estimate the power of the spin you need for a certain shot, but that will come with practice. Just don't exaggerate with the power of the spin, as hitting the white too far away from the center results in skidding and failing the shot. Be particularly careful as skidding while trying to add back spin may cause the ball to jump. Harder, worn out or damaged tip and high-powered shots increase the tendency of skidding. None the less, spin combined with a softer tip and very powerful shots, if done correctly (without skidding), can cause extraordinary deviations, probably the most powerful a non-professional player can perform.

If the white is located on a difficult position for you to make an effective shot, you should use stick attachments if there are any. Decide which "branch" of the attachment suits you best in the



corresponding situation. Make sure you don't touch any other ball while positioning the attachment. Aim carefully and try not to shoot with too much force as using an attachment can be challenging even at low speeds, for beginners in particular. If no attachments are present, you'll have to lean your body above the table in order to shoot. Try to improvise with aiming, as you'll probably have to find a different solution for each "tricky" position of the white. Sometimes a good solution is to sit or lean on the table and shoot with the stick behind your back. You'll probably face major oscillations of the stick while attempting to aim, so take your time, shoot very carefully and again, don't exaggerate in power.

Speaking of power, we need to mention *power levels* (or *PLs*). There's a total of seven PLs all shots are divided into, depending on how much power you put in them. Each type of shot has its optimal power level, but we'll talk about that a little later. At this moment, we're going to list all seven PLs along with their basic description, starting with *power level 0 (PLO)*.

PL0	You simply touch the white without moving it at all. Used for some defensive tactics.
PL1	Minimal movement of the white, as it doesn't even reach the border. If it collides with another ball, the targeted ball barely moves.
PL2	Low-powered shot used for hitting the target accurately, without much disturbance of other balls. The white continues to move after the impact, but at low speed, excellent for positioning for the next shot.
PL3	Medium power. The white has enough speed to make at least one circle around the table, but it's still fairly easy to control the shot. Useful when shooting at greater distances.
PL4	A powerful shot. The white moves around at high speeds after the first collision, which increases the chances of the ball hitting something you planned to remain in place.
PL5	A very powerful shot. You have almost no control over it, as it will most likely cause chaos around the table. However, there are countless situations where chaotic movement of balls benefits you more than the opponent.
PL6	Maximum power. These shots should be avoided due to great risk. Besides the fact you have no control over it at all, even the slightest mistake will most likely send the white flying. Using it at close range will make the white and possibly other balls jump in unexpected directions. Stay away from this power level until you acquire some experience. Even then, use it only in the breaking move and when you're absolutely sure the immense power will be absorbed by borders and other balls without unwilling consequences.

Now it's time to talk about the *types of shots*:

- 1. Contact shot (CS)** – Simply touch the white ball without moving it. Be careful not to push it. This is the only PLO shot and it comes in handy in defensive situations.
- 2. Direct shot (DS)** – Place the stick in the direction of a targeted ball and carefully aim for the hole where you want to pot it. Once you're ready, shoot by simply moving the stick forward, while keeping the rest of your body motionless. This shot tolerates all PLs from 1 to 6, depending on the situation. *NOTE: DS is also used for breaking, but in that case the PL must not be below 3, while 4 and above are recommended.*
- 3. Indirect shot (IDS)** – This shot is used when you want to reflect the white off a border in the direction of the target. Before you shoot, take your time to calculate the correct angle. PLs: 2-5.



Avoid PL6 as the ball can jump off the table. *NOTE: Be aware that angle of reflection changes with power.*

**4. Chain shot (CHS)** – The purpose of the chain shot is to shoot at one ball and use it to hit the chosen target. Useful when one ball is positioned behind the other. There are countless ways this shot can be used. There is no limit on the number of balls which can “participate” in a chain. Nevertheless, be aware that, by using multiple ball reflections, you reduce your chances of accurately hitting the targeted ball. PLs: 2-5 (but don’t put too much power unless necessary). Remember you can also use your opponent’s balls and the black in a CHS, but you have to follow the rules when hitting them.

**5. Jump shot (JS)** – This technique is used to shoot over obstacles blocking the path to your target. To perform it, hit the very bottom of the white right below the center while holding your stick under an angle of roughly 15-20 degrees. Use PL3 to PL4 as too much power will throw the white off the table, but hitting the ball too lightly will cause it to skid instead of jump. You’ll need to practice a lot until you become accurate with this shot, but once you master it, you’ll have a formidable weapon in your arsenal to counter your opponent’s defenses.

**6. Spear shot (SS)** – A helpful technique when there’s a wall next to the table preventing you from positioning your stick normally while aiming and shooting or when there’s a ball right behind the white, not allowing you to hit the “center” of the ball. To perform a spear shot, position the stick at least 45 degrees off the table surface and aim at the white roughly around the area which you would hit in order to give it a powerful top spin, while keeping your aiming hand in air. If possible, try touching the surface at least with two or three fingers, which will increase the stability to some point. Anyway, you’ll be dealing with a rather unstable shot, causing significant oscillations while aiming. Aim slowly and carefully and wait for a good position of your stick before you make the shot. Your efficiency will increase as time passes. Use PLs from 1 to 4 or 5. *NOTE: Maybe you’ll find it easier to grab and hold the handle of the stick as you’d hold a throwing spear. It’s particularly useful at larger angles. Furthermore, if you make a mistake while applying a lot of power to this shot, you can cause an unintentional swerve.*

**7. Swerve** – Not much to say about this shot. It’s a very advanced technique which makes the white *go around* an obstacle and hit the target. It’s performed similarly to spear shot, as you need to hit the areas of the ball which would normally give it left, right or center top spin while holding the stick almost vertically and using PLs from 3 to 5. Swerve is performed mostly by professionals, and it’s too complicated to be covered in this guide in more details. Try experimenting with it yourself if you have the desire to learn.

**8. Pulse shot (PS)** – A technique useful for breaking or performing other powerful shots. SFH is the preferred shooting stance for this shot. Aim and make a sudden, powerful “stab” using your stick, pulling it back the moment after it hit the white. The ball absorbs a “pulse” which sends it forward at high speeds, while mostly preserving the accuracy. Your shots will probably get PL4 to 5. Be careful if dealing with a harder or damaged tip.

**9. Swing shot (SWS)** – A devastating technique used for breaks and most powerful shots. Similar to PS, but instead of the sudden stab, you first need to pull your stick back, and then strike forward, using your body weight, rotating your hips at the same time. There’s a greater chance of making a mistake while shooting, especially if using a bad tip, but if performed correctly, you’ll almost certainly



get PL5 to 6. It's also less accurate than PS, and tends to knock the white off the table as well, so think twice before using it.

**10. Ram shot (RS)** – The most powerful type of shot. Stand about a meter away from the table but position the tip of the stick next to the white, just like you're performing a direct shot. Then leap forward, run two short steps or slide towards the table, making the shot while your body is still moving. In other words, you'll use your whole accelerated body mass to make the shot. It will give unthinkable power to the white, but the chances of performing this technique without missing or sending the white off the table surface, unless you're an experienced player, are rather low. Even if you manage to do the shot properly, the white can still be knocked off the table, possibly along with several other balls. Using this technique anywhere outside the breaking move is extremely risky and definitely not recommended. NOTE: When leaping forward, try to keep your stick in place and move only your body, as if you accidentally move or swing the stick while jumping/running/sliding, there's no way your shot can be successful.

To improve your technical skills, you can either practice in an *active* or *passive* manner. The first refers to continually practicing specific types of shots before or after the game itself. However, you'll need full access to the table and the balls all the time to keep potting them without paying after every few shots. Bars are not an excellent place for active practice. Visit a pool club instead and take your time to get good at shots you consider useful in your arsenal. Passive practice, on the other hand, is about gradually improving your technique as you play the game. It may be slower comparing to the active variant, but you'll be practicing more than one type of shot at the time. Moreover, you're going to acquire valuable playing experience and learn how to incorporate every shot in your strategies and play style more efficiently than practicing each technique separately. It's also worth mentioning that it doesn't require any type of clubs, unlike the active variant.

## Tactics

Understanding the technique itself isn't much of a use without the knowledge of tactics. Keep in mind that technique is only a tool, while tactics are the real weapons you need to defeat an opponent. Therefore, tactics are divided into three groups: *offensive*, *defensive* and *special*.

*Offensive* tactics all share a similar objective: potting your balls or placing them on better positions for your team and yourself to pot them at first following opportunity. It's virtually impossible to win the game without having an offensive component in your play style. However, you won't be the only one playing offensively in a match. Your opponents will attempt to pot their own balls with just as much persistence. That's where *defensive* tactics come in handy. Their goal is to block, stop or obstruct your opponents' play in any way in order to prevent them from achieving their plans and gaining the upper hand. *Special* tactics don't belong to any of these groups, as they can be used in both offensive and defensive ways, but only in certain opportunities.

All three groups of tactics vary significantly in terms of *technical requirements*. In other words, some are fairly easy to perform, even to beginners, while others are challenging even for the best players out there. We'll extend our knowledge of offensive and defensive further in the next chapter,



when we'll talk about strategies and play styles. Now we need to explain the other two terms: *planning* and *probability*.

Planning, as its name says, implies making a plan in advance and calculating all the consequences before making a shot. For example, you spot one of your balls is in a good position to be potted into a central hole, but you also don't want to change the place of your other ball near your target. Instead, you want the white to stop right behind it so you could easily pot it into a lower hole. That would be the ideal outcome. You should know, though, that things don't always go according to plan. You can either miss the target, or shoot too strongly and make the white collide with the ball predicted to remain in place. If the first part works out well, you can also call your shot partially successful. Remember that the more complex your plans are, the less likely they're going to work out the way you wanted. *NOTE: For a shot to be called planned, it needs to have an expected outcome (e.g. potting the targeted ball into a specific hole). It doesn't matter if it doesn't work out because you missed, it's important you knew exactly what you planned to happen.*

The outcome of a shot based on probability, on the contrary, is based more on coincidence planning ahead. Performing a planned move requires as much control over your shot as possible, while making a typical *probability shot* implies very little control over any ball. These shots are usually much more risky to perform but they can really pay off in situations which surpass your technical capabilities. They can make a difference between victory and defeat when playing against a more experienced, technically and strategically superior opponent. Usually they need little technical skill to perform, but more of a good eye to spot situations where they can prove useful, and also a certain amount of courage. These shots mostly rely on less aiming and high power, as in most cases they're shot from SFH stance. But be very careful: before making probability shots make sure the black and most of your opponent's balls aren't positioned too close to any holes. Potting opponent's balls is often inevitable (but it's rarely a deciding factor in a match unless it's his/her last ball), but sending the black into a wrong hole needs to be prevented at all costs. If the black is dangerously close to a hole, don't make probability shots or, if it's unavoidable, do it with extreme caution. Speaking of black, we have to state the obvious: try not to use probability shots when you're attempting to pot the black in your FH, as the chances for the ball to hit the right hole are next to non-existing. Even if you miraculously manage to pot it, there's always the risk for the white to be reflected into a hole as well. *NOTE: As every probability shot is mostly out of control, there's always a small chance for the black to be potted, regardless of how safe its position seems. Sometimes you simply have to accept the risk in order to win.*

Just a few more words about amplifying the probability. If shot without thinking, the probability shots will often cause more damage to you than to your opponent. Before you make the shot, try to estimate the following factors:

- how to increase the number of your balls hit by the strike
- under which angle the targeted ball will gain as much power as possible
- how to avoid making the targeted ball start spinning in place or fly off the table
- under which angle (roughly) one or more of the targeted balls have better chances of being potted
- how to avoid hitting the black
- how to (roughly) avoid potting the opponent's balls



Taking all these things into account when attempting a probability shot is called *amplifying the probability*. With experience and practice you're going to learn how to correctly assess the chances of a successful outcome and perform the best strike to amplify the probability as much as possible. Although their importance in the game is beyond question, never forget the probability shots will always be risky and unpredictable, no matter how skilled or experienced you become.

To get a better understanding of utilization of probability shots, we'll use the example already mentioned in the paragraph about planning. Let's say you want to pot that ball in the right central hole, but you need to shoot under a difficult angle, while there's an opponent's ball next to your path that even the slightest oscillation will make you hit it directly. Moreover, your aim isn't particularly good that day. So, before making *any* shot in *any* match, you have to estimate the probability of a positive outcome based on the situation on the table, your level of technique, your eventual tendency to make certain kinds of mistakes, the condition of equipment you use and your personal psychophysical condition in that moment. In this particular occasion, you estimate that, even if you apply optimal power and completely forget about positioning the white for the next strike, your chances of potting the target are below 15%. Furthermore, if you miss, the white will remain in a perfect position for your opponent to pot at least three of his balls in a row. However, you notice there's a cluster of your balls just between the targeted ball and the left lower hole. If you send that ball in the direction of the cluster at high power, there are great chances it's going to hit two or maybe three of your balls. Even better, one of your balls just in front of the right upper hole only needs to be touched to drop. Your assessment is that the probability of at least one of your balls being potted is above 40%. The black is somewhere near the center of the table so there's no immediate danger for that ball entering any hole. In addition, the white is likely to reflect after impact with the targeted ball and hit an opponent's ball a little below, moving it away from the right lower hole. Taking everything into account, you come to a conclusion that making that probability shot is a much better idea than attempting to pot the target into the right central hole. Of course you can end up potting one of your opponent's balls. You can even send the black into a hole and lose the match, despite low chances. Or maybe you can pot three or four of your own balls in a single move, block your opponent and get a clear shot at your remaining balls, with other players staring in amazement. That's the deadly beauty of probability shots.

*NOTE: Planned shots, especially when misfired, can also have an unexpected yet beneficial outcome for a player (e.g. if you intended to pot one of your balls into a central hole, but your shot missed, the targeted ball can reflect from the border and enter a lower hole). But remember these are not probability shots. Effects of a probability shots cannot ever be truly predicted or expected in any way by the performer. As long as you had a precisely planned outcome in your mind, any other consequences of your shot (favorable or not) are a result of pure coincidence.*

It's time to learn *basic tactics*. As we already indicated, we separated them into three functional groups: offensive, defensive and special.

### 1. Offensive tactics:

**Regular pot (RP)** – The most common of offensive tactics, the RP is simply about sending a targeted ball into a hole of your choice. This can be done through direct shot, indirect shot or chain shot. It's



the best idea to choose the easiest hole and shoot at optimal speed, without giving much thought to where exactly the white will end up, what it's going to hit after the reflection, or where the targeted ball will go if you miss. However, if it's obvious the white could endanger the black or even launch it into a hole, definitely find a different solution. Also, in cases where you could unintentionally pot the white or an opponent's ball, or shatter any formation of balls on the table you'd like to remain in place, readjust your aim and power, unless you're willing to make a sacrifice for successfully potting your target.

**Position pot (PP)** – Unlike the regular pot, PP focuses on the trajectory of the white and its final destination after the strike has been made. In other words, by using PP, you want to pot the target, but your primary objective is to settle the white on the exact position where you want it for your next move. This tactic is technically much more demanding, as you need to precisely estimate the direction and power of your shot in order to make the white stop at the chosen location. The control over the shot is far more important comparing to RP, so don't exaggerate in terms of power unless you have no other options. It often requires the usage of borders, spins and reflections from other balls to perform PP correctly. Before attempting this shot, decide on your priorities: are you ready to risk the pot to effectively place the white on a certain area of the table, or do you want to hit the target at cost of less accurate white positioning? When missing your shot could bring you to the verge of defeat, we advise you to choose the latter, or maybe even go with RP, and then think about the next move afterwards. An example of a simple PP is adjusting the power so the white stops after colliding with the target. But this is a very complex tactic, as shots of this kind can sometimes be endlessly complicated. We advise you to stick to RP and eventually the simplest of PPs until you develop your technique, as even many experienced players find these shots extremely difficult.

**Reflection pot (REP)** – This special kind of shot is used when you don't have a straight path between your target and the chosen hole. Instead, you decide to use any other ball nearby as a "launching platform" to redirect the trajectory of the target in direction of the hole. Those balls are called *reflection balls*. Remember to aim carefully and assess the power necessary for your target to reflect correctly because the tiniest mistake can make you completely miss your shot. It takes a lot of practice to perform these shots well on a regular basis, so try not to rely on them too much while you're still a beginner. Always try to anticipate where the reflection balls will end up after your shots to reduce chances of strategic mistakes. And don't forget to be very, very cautious when picking your reflection ball. The black and the opponent's last ball are both a highly risky option as any type of accident can result in either of them being potted. Your balls are much better suited for this role, but other opponent's balls can be a good choice as well. Just make sure the relocation of the reflection ball doesn't do any damage to your strategy (in both offensive and defensive terms).

**Multiple pot (MP)** – A tactic useful in opportunities where you can pot more than one of your balls in one shot. A player needs to set the direction of the white so after the impact with the first target its reflection trajectory leads to another targeted ball to pot it as well. There are numerous methods to accomplish this. It can be done through a chain shot, when two or more balls are positioned in a row near a hole. Giving top spin to the white without using too much power will cause the ball to follow the targets and push them all into the hole. Another way is to shoot at one target but have the white reflect in the direction of another. In most cases, you'll simply have to improvise according to the situation. Be careful with this tactic as by missing your initial targeted ball the white most likely won't hit the following targets either.



**Backup pot (BP)** – This tactic is rarely seen in the game but it doesn't mean it's less effective. The idea is to have either the white or the targeted ball reflect into another target in case you miss your initial shot. It serves as your "backup plan" if you fail to pot your primary target due to its challenging position. In order to utilize this tactic, you'll need specific positions of both the targeted ball and your *backup target (BT)*, as it's practically impossible to carry out if the backup target is placed under a difficult angle. Even with a perfectly positioned BT, it's extremely technically demanding both to aim your primary shot well, anticipate your probable mistakes and, in case they occur, calculate the exact angle and power necessary for one of these balls to reflect in the direction of BT and pot it. We encourage you to try it, but don't expect it'll work very often. *NOTE: BP has certain similarities with the Offensive safety shot (OSS), but these tactics have nothing to do with each other. While BP is performed by aiming and planning, and also requires adequate positions between the white, the targeted ball and BT, OSS is based on probability, can be used in virtually any situation and is highly unpredictable.*

**Offensive positioning (OP)** – Unlike previous tactics which all revolved around potting your balls, OP is about placing your balls on good positions for you or your teammates to pot at first available opportunity. This simple, yet effective tactic can be performed in quite a few ways. The most common form is to simply position a targeted ball which you're unable to pot at that very moment near any hole by using an accurate, low-powered shot. Sometimes it's the best choice to place a ball on another part of the table surface and pot it in your next move instead of attempting a difficult shot you'll most likely miss. Although it may seem easy to perform, you'll soon find out this shot requires an excellent sense of power, as in most cases you'll either barely touch the target or send it circling around the table. Once your technical level increases, you'll be able to accurately shoot among a cluster of your balls and place them all next to different holes, or make a shot at a chosen target and pot it, while positioning one or more balls at the same time to pot them next. OP has a great strategic value as it allows you to place multiple balls near a hole and wait for a perfect opportunity to shoot them all in, but after you positioned a ball, don't wait too long to pot it. A smart opponent will always keep an eye on your balls in order to prevent you from easy pots, so you'll never know when some shot could send your carefully placed balls away. Another important way of using OP can make the difference between winning and losing your match. When it becomes clear in which hole your last ball will end up, and your opponent can't do much about it, before you make the pot, you can place the black next to that hole (remember to hit it indirectly). Once you have your FH, you'll be able to finish the match without much trouble. Just be careful not to accidentally pot the black into a wrong hole, and make sure your opponent doesn't send either the black or your last ball away and ruin your plans. *NOTE: This is only recommended if the opponent didn't pot his/her last ball. Shooting at the black using only your balls instead of the white is extremely difficult and risky and therefore we don't suggest it.*

**Offensive backup positioning (OBP)** – It's rarely advisable to perform tricky shots with 5-10% chances of success. However, if you still want to try to pot the ball directly regardless of how challenging your situation is, it would be a good idea to use OBP. This smart tactic implies shooting at a poorly positioned ball with minimal power instead of optimal, so in case you miss (which will probably happen), your target will still remain next to the hole for you to pot it the next time. For example, your chances of making the pot using optimal power are around 15%, which is still very low, and if your shot misses, the target could reflect away to an even more challenging position. By the time you manage to dig it out and send it into a hole, your opponent could be halfway done with



his/her balls. Shooting at minimal power, on the other hand, could drop the probability of a successful pot down to 8-10%, but even if you fail, the target will remain next to the hole, allowing you to pot it in the next turn without too many problems. A much more advanced version of OBP is shooting at the hole but also calculating the angle and power necessary for the target to reflect near another hole (e.g. the opposite hole). This sometimes allows you to use optimal power and OBP at the same time. However, we recommend to beginners to stick with the simpler version until they acquire some experience.

**Offensive safety shot (OSS)** – One of the most important and useful offensive tactics, the OSS has wide range of functions. It's arguably one of the best tactics to use when playing against far superior opponents, but we'll talk about that in the following chapter. Based a lot more on probability than planning, with rather low technical requirements, it's rather easy to perform, but can take years to truly master. The first thing you need in order to utilize this tactic is to be capable of correctly estimating the probability of success of your shots. Next, you should learn to perform PL4 and 5 shots without making many technical mistakes (the type of shot is irrelevant). The most crucial skill you need to acquire, though, is to efficiently amplify the probability of your shots (explained before). Without learning those three aspects, you shouldn't even consider using OSS, as it will bring you defeat much more often than victory. If you've at least partially mastered all of these skills, you're ready to employ this powerful tactic. OSS is recommended when the chances of potting the target using RP are below 30%, although you can freely use it even when the probability of success is as high as 50%. To perform it, hit the target in the direction of a chosen hole, but instead of optimal power, use at least PL4 (PL5 is in most cases even better, PL6 is too dangerous). So, if your chances of potting the ball in the targeted hole were, let's say, 25%, they may drop to 10%. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean your chances of potting *something* in *any* hole have dropped. On the contrary, if you made a good shot, they have greatly increased. When OSS is applied, if the ball missed, it reflects at high speed, and keeps reflecting off borders and other balls until it completely loses power. Moreover, it hits at least one ball, which can then hit another ball and so on, causing total chaos in which at least one of your balls is very likely to be potted. If any of your balls is potted after the initial strike missed, it's called *secondary pot*. Your chances of dropping your balls have increased to at least 70%, but so are the probabilities of black, white and the opponent's balls being potted. Seems too risky and unreliable? Not if you know what you're doing. First things first, before even attempting this shot, check if the black or the opponent's last ball are on a safe position from which it's almost impossible for them to be potted. Don't forget to keep an eye on your opponent's other balls too. Evaluate the chances of any of them being sent into any hole after the shot is made. Remember it's impossible to prevent all of them being potted, so make sure eventual sacrifices won't inflict too much damage to your strategic situation. When you're done, redirect your attention to your own balls. See how many of them are positioned next to a hole and what are the probabilities of at least one of them dropping when OSS is performed. In addition, decide if you're willing to risk any of them being sent away from their nearby holes instead of being potted. Now choose a hole for the targeted ball. Naturally, it should be the one where you have the most chances of potting your target. After all, your primary objective is to drop the target into the hole of your choice, while a secondary pot is more like a backup plan. However, if you estimate your chances of potting the targeted ball into two or more holes are more or less the same, definitely choose the one from which the target, if it misses, will reflect in the direction of as many of your balls as possible in order to increase the chances of a secondary pot. And we're only halfway done. We still have the white to worry about.



Almost every time you apply OSS, the white will reflect at high speed as well, hitting anything in its path. Make sure you estimate its trajectory before you make the shot. It could reflect in the direction of the black, which should be prevented whenever possible. Also be careful in situations where you don't want the white to get potted. Avoid hitting opponent's balls with the white and try to calculate the angles so the white reflects in the direction of your balls instead. Once you get used to taking all these things into account, the OSS will be one of your most powerful and versatile tactics. Its greatest advantage is the fact it can be applied from pretty much any position on the table, regardless of your opponent's defenses. It can ensure you multiple pots in situations where most players couldn't score one hit with a standard RP. In addition, it's worth mentioning that secondary pots will often give you an extra morale boost, while making your opponents angry, nervous, impatient and therefore more likely to make mistakes at the same time. Nevertheless, always bear in mind that OSS is a tactic primarily based on probability, which means it can either score or miss no matter how high or low the chances are. Moreover, even if you take all the safety measures into account, you can still accidentally pot several opponent's balls and, even worse, the black, each time you perform it. Always think twice before applying this tactic.

**Offensive disruption shot (ODS)** – This tactic is very similar to OSS. It requires the exact same skills to perform. The only real difference is that with the OSS you aim your target at a hole but shoot at full power to ensure secondary pots if the initial strike fails. With ODS, on the other hand, you don't even bother aiming and choosing a hole but simply shoot at one or more of your balls, trying to amplify the probability as much as you can using the same methods as with the OSS. The risks when applying this tactic are also identical. ODS is based purely on probability, uses somewhat more powerful shots comparing to OSS, and, most importantly, it can be applied in practically any situation. You don't even need a specific target. It's used whenever you want to make a pot, but you're either completely blocked or your chances of potting anything by planning and precision are next to null. Just make sure you hit a few of your balls as strong as possible, while attempting to reduce the chances of potting opponent's balls and the black. ODS requires a lot of improvisation as every situation is different. However, it never leaves you helpless and allows you to play offensively even when the odds are slim. It's as significant and useful as the OSS, but you have to be just as careful when you decide to employ it. Both OSS and ODS can win you hundreds of matches once you learn to use them right.

## 2. Defensive tactics:

**Turn skipping (TS)** – The simplest and technically easiest defensive tactic to perform, turn skipping can be a pain even to the most advanced players out there. After the opponent finished his turn, observe the situation on the table. Let's say you're highly unlikely to make any useful moves from the position where the white is placed, but that position is just as challenging to your opponent. If you decide to shoot none the less, a failed strike could leave you vulnerable. However, you can outsmart the opposition by simply touching the white using contact shot (PL0). This way you force them to play from that position. If they try anything and miss, which is highly possible, they allow you to make a move from whatever position the white reflects to after their shot. Usually that location will give you a lot more options to play. In some cases the opponent will perform TS as well, or, if they're skilled defenders, block you even further. You can continue playing TS after TS, hoping they'll lose their



patience and make a mistake. If that doesn't work, you can either attack first using an offensive tactic or, if you spot an opportunity, set a trap and pray it works as planned (we'll discuss trapping a little later).

**Enclosure** – TS may be useful in certain situations, but in most cases you'll need to rely on a more advanced tactic when attempting to make life difficult for your opponent. This tactic is called enclosure. You perform it by accurately positioning the white on a part of the table from where your opponent's chances of potting anything are rather slim, either because of difficult and tricky *angles of shooting* (the angle between the white, the target and the chosen hole), or because there are obstacles (like your balls, the black etc.) between his/her balls and the white. Positioning the white among a group of your balls makes it practically impossible for your opponent to score a hit. Placing the white on an exact position can be challenging, especially before you learn to precisely measure the power of your shots. Therefore, always choose the simplest and easiest solution as making any mistakes ruins your defense and allows your opponent to do some damage.

**Blocking** – An excellent tactic to prevent the opponent from scoring easy pots. It's particularly popular among defensive players, as its versatility is unlimited. It implies the positioning of any ball except the white (including your opponent's balls, your own and the black) in any way you choose in order to *block* the opponent. To block your opponent means to set an obstacle either on the trajectory between the white and his targeted ball, or on the path between the target and a hole. The ball used as an obstacle is called *blocking ball*. A ball is *partially blocked* in the following cases:

- The opponent can't hit it directly
- There's another ball between the target and the hole, preventing it from being potted
- It can't be hit indirectly from one or more directions

If everything from above is true, then we say the ball is *completely blocked*. The only way to hit a completely blocked ball is by using chain shots or jump shots (if possible). It's quite clear that the probabilities of your opponent actually potting that ball are ridiculously low. When speaking of partially blocked balls, they can still be sent into a hole, as the chances of the opposition successfully potting them depend on how well you managed to block them. *NOTE: Remember that a ball can be considered blocked regardless of a player doing the blocking. In a certain situation, all the balls belonging to one of those three categories mentioned above are partially or completely blocked to a player whose turn it is.* When deciding which ball you want to block, we recommend you choose either the one the opponent will most likely pot next or the one which would cause the most damage to your strategic situation if potted. We don't even need to say you're supposed to block the black any way you can once the opponent has his finishing hole, or even before that, if it becomes obvious where he's going to pot his last ball. To summarize, blocking can be done in literally countless ways, but you need to be careful both with the decision which ball to block and the performance itself. And don't complicate too much as the last thing you need is failed blocking, which leaves you at the mercy of the opposition. *NOTE: Choosing the black (or the opponent's last ball) as your blocking ball can be dangerous. However, if you position the black as the blocking ball, the opponent will have to be three times more cautious not to accidentally pot it.*

**Relocation** – When the opponent has one or more of his balls positioned next to a hole, relocation is the tactic you'll want to consider. It basically consists of hitting the opposition's balls indirectly in



order to *relocate* them, which means to move them away from a hole and prevent the opponent from getting easy pots. It has to be done carefully, though, as hitting the ball with an uncontrollable shot often results in the ball being potted instead of relocated, or positioned directly in front of another hole, rendering your shot useless. Once you practiced enough, you'll be able to relocate multiple balls in one shot. Use the white to relocate a chosen ball whenever possible, as by attempting a relocation using some sort of a chain shot you'll pot the ball or fail the shot in some other way quite a few times. However, if you're forced to relocate the black after your opponent potted all of his/her balls, then the chain shot is the only available solution. When facing such circumstances, always think twice before making the shot as you already know everything which can go wrong when shooting at the black.

**Defensive safety shot (DSS)** – Unlike its offensive variant, DSS isn't based on probability but on accuracy and control of the shot. Employing this tactic means to make a shot in that way that if you miss, either the white reflects to a part of the table from which the opposition is unlikely to pot a thing, the targeted ball stops on the position where it blocks the opponent, or both. As you can see, DSS includes characteristics of both blocking and enclosure, but its primary goal is still to pot the target, while the defensive qualities are secondary. It's highly difficult to perform in terms of technique, but it's also rather challenging simply to make a plan where the white and the target are supposed to reflect if the strike misses. It takes a skilled and experienced player to think of a desired scenario, calculate all the angles and power necessary and make the shot without mistakes. Only the masters of defensive use DSS on a regular basis. For an average player we recommend to apply this tactic when defensive is crucial, and a missed shot could lead to a potential defeat if the opponent gets a clear shot. Otherwise, you can use DSS when making a tricky shot you'll most likely miss and leave yourself vulnerable.

**Defensive disruption shot (DDS)** – A risky tactic which shouldn't be employed too often. It only comes in handy if your opponent has multiple balls near a hole. You need to shoot them indirectly, but at full power, in order to scatter them away and obstruct the opposition in potting them one by one. The positive side of DDS is that it can ruin the opponent's well-planned strategy and relocate even some of his/her balls near other holes. Moreover, sometimes you own balls will get potted after collisions with opponent's balls. But the downside of this tactic is the fact that, just as easily as the balls can end up scattered around the table and potentially blocked, they can be potted by your own shot or re-positioned next to other holes. You can even accidentally pot the black. Relocation is a way more reliable tactic, but the advantage of DDS is that it can usually affect more balls, pot your own balls from time to time, and create a chaos which can sometimes end better for you than for your opponent. Taking all things into account, though, avoid DDS unless you estimate the chances of a bad outcome for you are rather low.

### 3. Special tactics:

**Trapping** – For a wise and cunning player the knowledge of setting *traps* is crucial. Any move you intentionally perform in order to provoke your opponent into making a mistake is called trapping. One popular way to make traps is to predict your opponent's next shot and the trajectory of his target and the white. Take into account the possibility they'll miss, especially if the situation is difficult. Then place your ball (if it's the last of your balls, even better!) or, if possible, the black (do it



*carefully*) near a hole where you suspect one of the balls launched by the opponent may hit. If you get lucky, you'll watch the opponent potting your own ball, and if you used the black for trapping, make him lose the game. The other way for trapping is useful when you and your opponent are constantly blocking one another and you both refuse to start an offensive because one of you failing your shot allows the other to win. Instead of taking a risk and attacking first, outsmart your opponent. Place the white on a position which will encourage the opponent to try their luck and make a shot, but make sure their chances of actually potting the target are still very low. That way they'll almost certainly miss, allowing you a clear shot and maybe even victory. However, if you make a mistake while setting the trap, or sometimes even if you do everything perfectly, the opponent will have a chance of scoring a hit. That's why traps are never 100% safe, but if you do everything right, "accidents" like that will be minimal. In addition, always keep an eye on your opponent's actions. If he tries to set a trap to you, you'll notice it and take necessary precautions.

**Sacrifice** – The act of sacrifice implies directly hitting an opponent's ball in cases like when standard relocation is impossible, or if it's the only way to perform a chain shot crucial to the game etc. That way you lose your turn and the opponent can choose to either pot the ball you hit or leave it there, but if you gain with your shot more than you lose, it's definitely worth it. When it comes to the opponent's last ball, sacrifice is never recommended, unless you really consider it useful in some specific opportunity (we couldn't think of that kind of situation). This tactic also includes hitting either your opponent's balls or yours positioned before the central line when shooting from the starting point. But, if you really decide to commit such an act, don't do that more than once or twice at most because you don't know if you'll repeat the same mistake accidentally and lose the game. And remember that potting the black into the FH in that case counts as a loss.

**Intentional pot (IP)** – Although these situations happen rarely, sometimes it's the best idea to pot an opponent's ball yourself. For example, one of their balls is near a hole and the black is next to it. But they still have one ball left, positioned on the other side of the table. You notice that in the next turn the opposition will pot the other ball first, then move to the first one and have the black placed next to their finishing hole. To prevent that, you can pot the ball near the black before they do. You lose your turn, but force them to find another finishing hole, most likely saving yourself from defeat. This tactic can be used in many ways, but every time you choose to apply it, make sure it's worth it.

**White pot (WP)** – Keep an eye on the entire situation on the table at all times. You'll often notice opportunities to intentionally pot the white and force the opponent to play from the starting point when they have no useful options to play from that position. Remember that potting it three times in a row without touching any other balls results in a defeat. If possible, make it reflect into a hole after collision with another ball. The ideal time to employ this tactic is when the opponent has all of his balls on the upper half of the table, leaving them no options but to shoot them indirectly, greatly increasing their chances of missing. It will save you in countless occasions when the opponent has just the black left. It's also a good idea to use WP when there's an obstacle right in front of the starting point, rendering the opposition's shot practically useless. This tactic will annoy almost every player. Just watch out for the best moment to use it.

That would be all the tactics you need to know for now. To finish this chapter, we're going to divide the players according to their technical and tactical capabilities into several levels, which will



prove useful in the following chapter. We're going to compare their general abilities and knowledge, the power levels, techniques and tactics they're able to perform without failing every time.

Level 1 (Lvl1)	<p>These are complete beginners, the players who grabbed a stick for the first time. They still don't know how to hold the stick properly, often miss even the easiest shots, and are unable to break efficiently. They need to be taught by experienced players or pool literature (like this guide).</p> <p>Power levels: 0, 1, 2 Techniques: CS, DS Tactics: RP, OP, TS</p>
Level 2 (Lvl2)	<p>Level 2 players have acquired some basic skills and knowledge, and can therefore play on their own. They still make a great deal of mistakes, but they hold the stick more or less properly and are capable of making simple and easy shots with a certain level of accuracy, as well as performing a breaking shot. Although they still mostly lose against more advanced players, with a right strategy, they can sometimes surprise even the best ones out there.</p> <p>New power levels: 3, 4 (but with many failed shots) New techniques: DS (breaking variant), IDS, CHS New tactics: Enclosure (only simple), Relocation, Blocking (simple), DDS, Sacrifice, IP, WP, OP, OBP, OSS, ODS</p>
Level 3 (Lvl3)	<p>Players of this level have begun discovering more advanced forms of play. When having a good day, they can be quite challenging to defeat. Their perception of the game has increased, along with their accuracy and capability to perform more powerful and technically more demanding shots. Basic usage of spins.</p> <p>New power levels: 4 (much better performance than Lvl2), 5 (with mistakes) New techniques: SS, DS (improved breaking variant) New tactics: Trapping, OBP, MP</p>
Level 4 (Lvl4)	<p>Level 4 players can already be considered as "advanced". Although they're still miles away from being masters, that doesn't mean they can't go toe to toe with "pros" if they know what they're doing. This level can be considered as improved Lvl3, as real advanced play begins with Lvl5. However, techniques and tactics you've acquired by the time you reached this level make you a potentially deadly opponent. Your accuracy still oscillates, adding spins often doesn't work very well, so don't rely on technique too much. According to strategies you apply and the play style you developed, you can either be hunter or prey.</p> <p>New power levels: 5, 6 (with occasional failed shots) New techniques: PS, SWS, RS (frequent mistakes) New tactics: PP (simple), REP, DSS (simple), improved performance of existing tactics</p>
Level 5 (Lvl5)	<p>If you reached this level, congratulations! Now you can truly call yourself an advanced player. You have great accuracy, and you perfected other technical elements (e.g. spins). With technique you've acquired, you can finally begin to develop <i>successive play</i>. It's the kind of play which includes planning your moves ahead, advanced positioning of primarily the white, but also other balls after every shot, in order to create yourself opportunities for easy pots. Successive play allows you to dominate over your opponent and control the game better. However, if you decide to continue with the <i>individual play</i>, you're not making a mistake. In individual play you make your move and then plan the next one according to the position of the balls after your shot. Attempting successive play before Lvl5 is highly not recommended. Even at Lvl5, your successive play, if you decide to use it, will still be partly unreliable. We'll talk more about both types of play soon.</p> <p>New power levels: 6 (with much safer performance) <i>NOTE: We won't talk about PLs</i></p>



	<p><i>anymore. You should just know that with each following level the safety of performing even the most powerful shots increases.</i></p> <p>New techniques: increased performance in all techniques, Swerve (optional, with minimal efficiency) <i>NOTE: This is the last time we mention swerve. This technique is optional and very few people ever attempt to use it. Your swerve skill is unrelated to your general level, as it depends only on the time you practice it, so we won't include it in the description of player levels anymore.</i></p> <p>New tactics: significant improvement in all existing tactics (especially PP), BP (low efficiency, optional) <i>NOTE: Just like swerve, BP is unrelated to player levels and won't be mentioned anymore.</i></p>
Level 6 (Lvl6)	<p>Players of this level are close to being masters. When performing direct shots, their accuracy is almost unmistakable. Effectiveness of nearly all other types of shots is also tremendous, but there's still a large room for advancements. Successive play now serves you as an unstoppable weapon, as there are few situations which leave you without solution. You can safely perform any shot, regardless of power. Don't forget, though, to combine your technical capabilities with corresponding strategies, and make you opponents tremble in front of you.</p> <p>New techniques: JS <i>NOTE: JS can be applied back at Lvl2, but its efficiency is negligible until Lvl6.</i></p>
Level 7 and above	<p>These are the true pool masters. Having practically perfect technique, there's no situation they can't react to properly. Performing direct or indirect shots means little difference to them, as they usually accomplish their plans either way. If they have developed strategically as much as technically, they'll know their eventual weaknesses and boundaries and make sure the opposition doesn't take advantage of them. When you're at this level, over confidence can be your worst enemy. Always keep in mind you're not a god, no matter how good or experienced you are. <u>Never underestimate your opponents.</u> If you're not careful and keep performing attractive yet ineffective shots instead of finishing off the opposition the quickest way possible, you can face defeat even from players several levels below you. Remember your reputation gives them extra motivation to beat you, so never put your guard down. Don't overestimate your own capabilities and you'll have the upper hand against almost any opponent.</p> <p><i>NOTE: There's no top level in player development. As long as someone keeps improving in technique and general performance, their level rises accordingly.</i></p>

## Chapter 4: Strategies and Play Styles

Let's begin the final chapter in this guide by defining two fundamental terms: *strategy* and *play style*.

**Strategy** refers to your general approach to the match and the set of tactics you use to deal with various situations in order to fulfill the primary aim of your strategy. In more simple words, strategy consists of a certain number of tactics and the methods for applying them to achieve an



objective defined by the strategy itself. Every strategy has to be solid and compact, but also fluent, as all its elements are well-interconnected and precisely coordinated, as they share a single goal.

Play style is a common term for a group of all strategies a player has acquired and the way they combine them according to various opponents and situations they encounter. Every skill you learn, all knowledge you gain, *everything* becomes a part of your play style. When you improve yourself as a player, you actually improve your play style. Completely depending on personal development, a play style is what ultimately defines a player.

## Strategy

Without having strategies playing the game would be impossible. Knowledge of tactics alone doesn't mean anything if you don't have a reason for employing them during a match. Based on their key objectives, strategies are divided into *offensive* and *defensive*. Each has a different approach to the game, which ensures them their strong points and weaknesses. A particular strategy may seem perfect to defeat another one, but at the same time it's fully vulnerable to some other strategy. Please remember that for every strategy there's a counter-strategy.

Strategies are also divided into *stationary* and *mobile*. Stationary strategies rely on keeping most balls on the table in place. Ball movement after each shot needs to be minimal and fully controlled, which makes the game resemble chess in certain aspects. If both sides use stationary strategies, after the breaking shot, a large number of balls usually remain on the same positions till the end of the match. On the contrary, mobile strategies get the most out of chaotic movement of the balls on the table surface. Unlike stationary ones, they're usually not obstructed by balls switching positions rapidly, as lack of shot control even gives them advantage in many situations.

We're going to describe the most important of all widely-used strategies, along with their usage, advantages and flaws. We're going to compare them in various areas in order to give you better insight into their function, and teach you everything countering your opponent's strategy with your own. After that, we thought it would be a good idea to give you some advice on how to play when odds aren't really in your favor. So, let's begin.

### 1. All-out offensive (AOO)

The most simple and technically least demanding of all offensive strategies, AOO is an ideal choice for beginners. Your primary goal when playing this strategy is to pot all your balls as soon as possible, preferably before your opponent finishes theirs. If you succeed, you have an advantage of several turns, giving you an opportunity to send the black in your FH while the opposition still deals with their own balls.

This strategy is highly mobile and completely based on individual play. It means you should choose a target you'll most likely pot without problems. Don't bother with positioning of the white or any other ball, as that will only decrease your potting chances. Once you make your shot and the white stops somewhere, take a careful look at your next move. Again, choose a ball which is the



easiest to pot. Think about positioning the white only when it gives you a certain advantage, while not decreasing your chances of potting the target at all. Also, try to avoid potting the white in cases when it would obviously benefit your opponent. Sometimes it's the best way to follow your instincts instead of pure logic when deciding on your next target. With experience, you'll get a feeling of which ball you're likely to pot and which you are not, regardless of how simple or challenging the shot may look at first glance. For example, a ball can be positioned directly in front of a hole, but you *know* you'll definitely miss it for some reason, while by looking at some ball in the center of a table, placed under a difficult angle, you already see yourself making the shot and potting it with ease. In that case, you should trust your own feelings. It will mostly pay off.

By playing according to your instincts and refusing to plan in advance you not only improve your chances of doing a better job in each separate move, but you also make your game highly unpredictable. Many opponents are more likely to be confused and make strategic errors when they have no idea what you're going to do next. Speaking of unpredictable, one of your main tools when using AOO are probability shots (OSS and ODS). Every time you estimate your chances of potting a target are low, feel free to use these tactics. They'll win you countless matches. Moreover, if your opponent uses a stationary strategy, his/her plans will be doomed to failure. Just remember all safety measures when performing probability shots and you should be fine. If your opponent blocks you, by applying probability shots, even if you miss, you'll disrupt their defenses and have the open ground in the next turn. That's called *defense breaking*. Even though there are quite a few exceptions, you should remember the cardinal rule of all-out offensive: **WHEN IN DOUBT, USE FULL POWER.**

When dealing with the black, there are two kinds of approaches. If you managed to finish off your balls while the opponent still has to take care of their own, then you can safely take your time until you acquire a good shot at the black. Don't go for the pot directly; it's a much better idea to steadily position the ball next to your FH (even if it takes two or three turns) and drop it when the chances of missing are minimal. However, if the opposition already took care of their balls, then you can't simply move the black around as you're going to create multiple chances for your opponent to finish the game in their favor. Use the defensive safety shot instead. Always make sure they don't get a clear shot at the black, even if it means you're unable to position the black where you want it. Taking a mindless shot at the FH works from time to time, but in most cases you're either going to miss and leave yourself open for a counterattack, or pot the black in the wrong hole yourself. Be patient and wait for the opponent to make a mistake first and finish them off with far less trouble. Although this may seem more like the simple defensive strategy than AOO, remember that your approach always needs to be flexible according to the situation, which sometimes means combining characteristics of different strategies.

Using AOO reduces your chances of protecting yourself, so it's advisable to use a form of *passive defense*. When you have one or more of your balls positioned directly in front of several holes, you should avoid potting them. By leaving them on the table you keep those holes blocked for your opponents, forcing them to either relocate or pot those by themselves, or to aim their balls at other holes. In the worst case, your opponent will lose one turn while dealing with your blocking ball (unless they manage to somehow relocate it and pot their own ball at the same time). If they decide to shoot at other holes, they're much more likely of making a mistake, leaving you an open table to go after the next target. Moreover, if you keep some of your balls near the holes, your chances of potting something using probability shots are greatly increased. At the same time, those blocking



balls will mostly prevent the opponent's balls, the white or the black from dropping accidentally.

*NOTE: When you deal with the opposite situation, if you estimate the opponent's blocking ball will be potted sooner or later, rather drop it yourself and try to pot one of your own balls together with it.*

To conclude, when playing all-out offensive, safety isn't your primary concern. You need to be ready to take losses (which also include occasionally potting your opponent's balls) and keep pushing the offensive to outplay the opposition and finish the game before they do. Your greatest asset is the fact there's no effective defense against AOO. No matter how skilled or experienced your opponents are, if they choose any defensive strategy, they'll soon discover they can't stop you. By using probability shots and methods of improvisation from *any* position, you'll be able to overcome even seemingly impenetrable defenses. If the opposition wants to defeat you, they'll be forced to play offensively as well. Unless they're level 5 or above, they probably won't be able to rely on successive play. It leaves them only one option: using their AOO against yours. If they haven't practiced this strategy enough, you'll almost certainly have the upper hand. Just don't do anything stupid and you're going to win the majority of those matches. If they're skilled with AOO as well, there's not much you can do about it. Play your game and hope you drop your balls before they do. If you have no options but to defend yourself, use the simplest of defensive tactics to reduce their chances of potting anything in the next turn as much as possible. You can also try setting traps, but as unpredictable the AOO is, you can only guess in which direction the balls will move after the opposition makes the shot. But the worst enemy to your strategy is the mighty successive offensive, often employed by technically advanced players (at least lvl5 or 6) who mastered successive play. Their superior aiming and positioning skills give them an upper hand against any AOO player. However, being the dominating player won't ensure you victory. As an underdog, you'll have to search for weaknesses in their play style and do your best to take advantage of them. But we'll talk about it later. In general, the more a successive offensive player relies on stationary play, the better your chances of winning the match are. However, maybe the greatest flaw of successive offensive is its vulnerability to defensive strategies. In order to efficiently play against such opponents, you'll need to apply simple defensive along with AOO. A combination of these two technically not particularly challenging strategies can create nightmares even to pool masters.

**Type of strategy:** offensive

**Type of play:** almost completely individual

**Mobility:** highly mobile

**Minimal level necessary:** level 2

**Excels at:** level 4 and above

**Advantages:** technically not demanding; unpredictable; often relocation of opponent's balls; impervious to defenses; flexible and good for improvisation; defense breaking ability; secondary pots boost your morale and drop the morale of your opponents

**Disadvantages:** risky; sometimes unreliable; occasional relocation or potting of your own balls (or the black); missing your shots leaves you vulnerable

**Most effective against:** any defensive strategy

**Counter-strategies:** successive offensive



## 2. Simple Defensive (SD)

As its name says, this strategy isn't particularly demanding in terms of technique, but it does require a steady hand and a good sense of shot power. Without it, many of your defensive moves won't work out the way you planned. So, before you decide to make it your primary strategy, we advise you to practice accurate ball positioning until you're capable of controlling at least the easiest of your shots. SD can be used in two main ways. It can either act as a support to your primary offensive strategy, or it can be your basic strategy itself. The approach to the game in these two cases is utterly different, and we're going to explain them both.

Let's deal with the supportive role of simple defensive first. If your primary strategy is either all-out offensive or successive offensive, defending won't be your primary concern (especially in the case of the former). However, sometimes it's impossible to perform an effective offensive move because it would almost certainly end with a miss, leaving you completely vulnerable to a counterattack. Therefore, we give you several simple yet effective defensive methods which will keep your opponents on the back foot, allowing you to push on with your offensive without taking too much damage in the process. When playing offensively, you shouldn't waste too many of your turns on pure defense. But in cases when you have no good targets available or your opponent is about to get a clear shot at the black, do your best to obstruct their plans. You only need to use the defensive in critical situations, or when it gives you a clear advantage. Usually you'll return to classic offensive play in the next turn like nothing happened. It's extremely important you find the simplest solution before attempting a defensive move. SD doesn't tolerate unnecessary complications. You should mostly refer to turn skipping and enclosure. They're the safest to perform, but are enough to minimize your opponent's chances of scoring. We advise you to employ blocking only when you spot a well-positioned blocking ball would inflict considerable damage to your opponent's strategic situation, or benefit your own. Relocation is an excellent tactic when you want to unblock a hole or push the black to a safe position. Don't exaggerate with DDS, but when you see your opponent has several balls positioned near a hole and is planning to pot them one by one, feel free to apply it. And don't forget about trapping. It's maybe the best form of defense.

Now a few words about SD as your primary. You're supposed to perform the simplest possible yet the most effective defensive move in literally *every* turn. Your goal is to force the opponent to start each of their turns in a partially or completely blocked position. It will drastically drop your opposition's probability of successfully hitting any target. And when they miss, you're only supposed to go after balls you're *practically unable to miss*. Even if the shot you intended bears a minimal risk of failure, you should rather go for defensive. Your primary tactics should be TS, enclosure and blocking. Relocation and DDS are not recommended, unless you're capable of securing the white with a DSS at the same time. Most players shouldn't even think about a move like that. After all, DSS is a part of another defensive strategy, not SD. It's a better idea to use trapping once the number of balls on the table is reduced. When utilizing simple defensive as your main strategy, you're like a hunter waiting for the opportunity to strike. And each mistake of your opponent can be an adequate opportunity. You should know it takes a lot of concentration and patience to play this way. However, only a patient hunter gets the prey. In addition, playing this way makes your opponent irritated and nervous, increasing the number of their failed shots. Take your time and **instead of going after your targets, let them come to you.**



The supportive version of SD is widely used by both novice and experienced players, which can't be said for SD as a primary strategy. It's mostly because it's rather challenging to play that way, not to even mention the time and nerves it takes to keep that strategy going despite all the risks and eventual losses. Moreover, nobody likes to wait only for perfect opportunities, as the beauty of the game is taking chances and going for difficult shots. Players sometimes combine SD with advanced defensive in order to broaden their defensive arsenal and increase their offensive skills at the same time. However, most players use either AOO or successive offensive as the basic strategy, while SD serves them for defensive actions. It's an effective combination we definitely recommend to beginners. If you still want to go that far and base your entire play style on SD, you need to know your games won't be particularly exciting and attractive to watch, but once you get some skills and experience, you'll be a hard target for many powerful opponents. You'll do extremely well against players using successive offensive, as that strategy is highly vulnerable to defense, but you'll be capable of going toe to toe with other simple and advanced defenders as well. If you plan to stand a chance against most AOO players, though, you'll have to master at least one more strategy (preferably AOO as well, as it's the easiest and fastest to learn). We already mentioned it's futile to go up against an AOO player using any defensive strategy, but SD is an absolutely terrible choice. It's like running out in the open in the middle of a warzone carrying a dartboard in front of your face. Just do a favor to yourself and your reputation and don't do it.

**Type of play:** individual

**Mobility:** partially stationary

**Minimal level necessary:** level 2

**Excels at:** level 5 and above

**Advantages:** simple yet effective; provides a safe solution in dangerous situations; useful against superior opponents; negative psychological effects on the opposition; can be used in almost any situation (flexible and good for improvisation); trapping capabilities

**Disadvantages:** requires a good sense of power (steady hand), as well as patience and player's ingenuity; even the tiniest mistake can ruin your defense; performing defensive moves costs you turns; completely vulnerable to AOO; playing this way often takes time

**Most effective against:** successive offensive

**Counter-strategies:** all-out offensive

### 3. Successive Offensive (SO)

While two previous strategies were more or less adapted to beginners, SO is technically incredibly demanding and therefore employed only by advanced players and masters. This is probably the only strategy which relies completely on successive play. When using it, your objective is to pot your target, but also position the white for the next shot. It obviously requires planning ahead and choosing in which order you want to pot your balls. Unlike its sister strategy, AOO, successive offensive is all about stationary play and great overall control over the shots and the game itself, though it uses the same form of passive defense like the AOO (leaving blocking balls in front of holes). It's arguably the best choice if you want to be the dominating player in the match.



However, this kind of play has three grave weaknesses which often cost SO players victory, even against much inferior opponents. One is a major vulnerability to defensive strategies. Players take advantage of its dependence on stationary and successive play to effectively block or obstruct any SO opponent. SO players are simply forced to either play from ridiculously challenging positions, or switch to defensive as well. Considering the fact all SO players are at least level 5, with their experience and high self-confidence they often overestimate their own capabilities and risk too much, missing their shots. And that's exactly what their opponents want. This leads us to weakness number two. When an AOO player misfires, due to high usage of probability shots the white tends to stop on an excellent defensive position quite a few times during a match. Although it's unintentional, it usually prevents AOO players from taking damage if they fail their shots (similar to the function of DSS). This can't be said for SO, though. Taking into account that in SO shots are mostly low-powered and completely concentrated on white positioning after the collision with the target, the chances of white ending up blocked for the opposition in case the shot is missed are much, much lower. It means that, comparing to AOO users, SO players are two or three times more vulnerable to counterattacks if they miss their target. The last flaw of this strategy comes to surface in direct conflicts with AOO opponents. Although they're unable to dominate the game the way you do, their uncontrolled shots, especially probability shots, will keep displacing your balls all around the table, sometimes rendering your plans useless. To efficiently deal with them, don't plan too far ahead. It would be the best option to make plans one turn at a time. The exact order of balls you imagined to pot during, let's say, three or four turns, most likely won't exist after your opponent's first turn. Keep your plans flexible in order to keep the opposition on the back foot (this particularly refers to AOO opponents).

There are several methods for reducing your opponents' chances of taking advantage over your flaws. First, don't complicate more than necessary. If employing this strategy, the usage of highly accurate shots, multiple reflections, spins, jump shots etc. is often inevitable. However, many SO players tend to shoot at difficult targets even though they have easier ones on their disposal, usually because they make unrealistic plans or simply to feed their ego by demonstrating advanced technique. What they mostly demonstrate, though, is a lack of intelligence after they miss a shot which even most professional players would be unable to hit. It's true the opponents will respect you when they see your technical skills, but showing them off this way will only bring you a defeat. Don't overestimate your abilities and never forget that in pool simplicity is the key, regardless of which strategy you apply. Next, don't make SO your *only* strategy. When you find yourself in situations you're practically unable to hit something and position the white at the same time, forget about positioning and switch to AOO. Once the situation is clear, feel free to return to SO and take full control over the match again. If you consider AOO too risky or you haven't practiced it, use simple defensive. It works excellent together with SO, as you can either make a powerful offensive or keep your opponent blocked, depending on your needs. To make a conclusion, we advise you not to risk too much with SO as this strategy is made for playing safe. Just keep things as simple as possible and you should have the upper hand over most opponents.

**Type of play:** successive

**Mobility:** stationary

**Minimal level necessary:** level 5

**Excels at:** level 6 and above



**Advantages:** allows domination and full control over the game, more reliable than AOO, your technique can discourage the opposition

**Disadvantages:** requires advanced technique, depends on stationary play, planning in advance sometimes turns out to be a flaw, vulnerable to defensive and counterattacks, AOO players can ruin your plans

**Most effective against:** all-out offensive

**Counter-strategies:** defensive strategies

#### 4. Advanced Defensive (AD)

This strategy has characteristics of both SO and SD. It's technically even more advanced than SO. Your goal is to pot your target and place the white on a good defensive position simultaneously. In case you miss, you won't leave a clear shot to your opponent. The entire strategy is actually based on the defensive safety shot. It takes the most accuracy to be performed successfully as in SO your objective was to position the white for the next shot, which would make the shot itself less difficult. Here, you need to locate a good defensive position for the white, and in case you potted your target, make the next move from that position, regardless of how challenging it is. You always need to go after your balls and defend yourself simultaneously, something only the finest players are capable of. And considering the fact that even an average, technically much inferior AOO player will most likely cause you trouble, sometimes this strategy simply isn't worth it.

If you really made this far and want to give AD a try, there are a few things you need to watch out after. Most importantly, just like with the SD, *be patient*. Even the easiest ball available will often be too difficult for you to pot it safely, taking into account you'll be forced to shoot from your own defensive positions once you potted your first target. So don't worry about making the shot. Just make sure you place the white on the chosen position and wait for your opponent to miss. Then drop one or two of your balls you're capable of hitting without failing. One you have no more safe targets available, choose the easiest one possible, but keep the white in mind. Blocking the opposition is the key, potting the target is only optional. When possible, you should also set up traps in order to deal the highest damage possible. This type of play gives you an edge over SD players, as you'll usually be able to pot your balls faster. It's an even better choice against SO, presuming you can use this strategy without making a lot of mistakes.

What you should avoid is employing AD against AOO. Your chances of winning are no better than if you use SD. This only shows it's risky to play with only this strategy. Combine it with everything you've learned while developing as a player, as you couldn't have reached the level necessary for using AD without learning at least something about AOO, SD or some other, less popular strategies first. When it's too challenging to shoot at a target and block your opponent in the same move, rather switch to SD and wait for a better opportunity. Always take safety measures into account and you should do well with this advanced strategy.

**Type of play:** mostly individual

**Mobility:** partially stationary



**Minimal level necessary:** level 5

**Excels at:** level 6 and above

**Advantages:** provides safety to your game while ensuring better offensive capabilities comparing to SD, works well against stationary strategies

**Disadvantages:** requires advanced technique, shouldn't be used alone, takes time and patience, mistakes leave you open for counterattacks, vulnerable to AOO

**Most effective against:** successive offensive and SO-SD combination

**Counter-strategies:** all-out offensive

### Asymmetric Play (AP)

Asymmetric play is a term which refers to playing against superior opponents, when odds aren't really in your favor. Many inexperienced players facing this kind of situation tend to mentally surrender even before the start of the match, or refuse to play in the first place. We'll give you some advice how to fight toe to toe even when the difference between player levels is significant. Before we even start, bear in mind there's no shame in defeat, especially when playing against much better opponents. Try to learn as much as possible from the match regardless of the outcome and in case you were outplayed, you'll soon be ready for a rematch.

Approach to this kind of game varies according to which strategy the opponent uses. Your best shot is to take advantage of their weaknesses. Therefore, we'll cover all four cases.

**1. All-out offensive** – These opponents usually won't be technically much superior to you, but you may find their strategy extremely difficult to beat. What most players do is switch to defensive and attempt to block the opponent in getting a clear shot. But what they forget is that an AOO player doesn't require a clear shot. Next thing they see is usually the opponent blowing their defenses apart and potting one or more targets at the same time using a probability shot. And before they manage to set up their defenses again, the opposition already cleaned the table of their balls and is on the black. And that's no end to their mistakes. They tend to panic and try to pot their own balls as fast as possible, which results in a missed shot and a clear opportunity for their opponent to finish them off. And the part about the black doesn't refer only to matches against AOO players. This is a common mistake against *any* player. If you find yourself in that kind of situation, especially against superior opponents, then use your own balls to block or obstruct the opponent. Never allow them to get a good shot at the black. Be patient and wait only for clear shots to pot your own balls. However, it would be wiser to prevent that situation if possible. When dealing with a better AOO player, don't use their own strategy against them, as they'll probably have more success than you. SO is obviously out of question, as you'll never encounter a *superior* AOO player once you reach level 5 or 6. This means you'll have to improvise. Always go for clear shots at your balls when possible, but don't pot any ball if it blocks a hole. This way you reduce their chances of dropping their targets, no matter if they used planned or probability shots, at least for some time. Next, you should consider trapping when possible. Turn the probability against them. Place the white on positions from which they're more likely to hit your own balls or the black. That way they'll either have to risk or find another solution. Use enclosure only when it will clearly drop their chances of potting. Sometimes it's a good



idea to intentionally block a hole when you get an opportunity. And if you have the courage, you can always attempt to place the black next to a hole. Then they'll have to either relocate it and lose a turn or give up on probability shots and most other shots in their arsenal. And if they're willing to risk defeat, better for you. Just be careful and don't pot the black yourself. Remember all of this in your next match and you should stand a better chance. Nevertheless, it's impossible to predict anything when it comes to AOO, just try to improvise and instead of outplaying the opposition, try to outsmart them.

**2. Simple defensive** – In case you're facing a player who's effectively blocking you with their SD, don't even attempt to avoid their defenses. If they're experienced enough, they certainly won't leave any significant holes in their defense. We also advise you not to choose a defensive strategy yourself if your opponent is clearly a better defender. You'll make more mistakes comparing to them, allowing them easy counterattacks. Instead, break right through their defenses using OSS, ODS and DDS. The knowledge of probability shots can save you from defeat in situations like that. No matter how advanced defenses the opposition tries to set up, you can always take care of them in a single blow. Just watch out if they attempt to set traps. However, blasting away probability shots all the time isn't the best solution on the long run. After you have a more or less opened table for shooting, switch to an offensive strategy (preferably AOO, unless you're skilled enough with SO) and go after as many targets as possible. Repeat the same procedure as long as your opponent sticks to SD. Although it can be risky, this is your best shot.

**3. Successive offensive** – These opponents can be really tricky to beat. Using their superior aiming skills, they tend to punish even the smallest mistake you make. When facing SO, a classic procedure would be switching to SD. If the difference between player levels is considerable, though, pure defending isn't very likely to bring you victory. That's especially the case if you're not a particularly good defender. A much more effective method is combining SD with AOO. SD should be your primary, as you should always try to keep your opponents away from acquiring clear shots. However, SO players usually rely on long-term planning when facing inferior players. It means they count on most of the balls remaining on the same positions so they can pot them in a specific order. And it's up to you to prevent it. Probability shots are your best solution, as they create chaos and make long-term planning useless. Next, you need to watch out if the opponent has a cluster of their balls near a hole, and if that's the case, take care of that with a DDS. We wouldn't suggest blocking as SO players are particularly good eliminating the blocking balls and potting their own in one or two turns. However, there's nothing wrong with passive defense, although its efficiency will probably be limited. When going after your balls, do your best not to leave yourself open for a counterattack if you miss. SO players can be devastating when there are absolutely no defenses in their way. And there's one more thing you have to be careful about. If the black is positioned near a hole, SO players have a tendency to choose an exact order of potting so they pot their last ball in that specific hole. In case their plan works out and they acquire that FH, they'll most likely finish the match in the same turn. Your goal is to relocate the black at all costs before they take care of their last ball and buy yourself some precious time. Good luck.

**4. Advanced defensive** – Not much to say about this one. The measures you apply should be more or less the same as when dealing with SD opponents. Break through their defenses and be offensive, but also pay more attention to your own defense. AD players generally have a much better aim than SD ones. When your chances of potting your target are small, rather go for a defensive move and



prevent the opponent from dropping theirs as well. Nevertheless, you need to adapt your approach to the game according to each individual opponent, their advantages and weaknesses, as well as your own. This doesn't apply only to AD users or superior players in general. This is the main rule when dealing with *any* opponent. Never use the same patterns in your game and be unpredictable. Regardless of the opposition, your most effective weapon will always be the element of surprise.

## Play Style

In the beginning of the chapter we already mentioned that your play style consists of everything you've learned: technique, tactics and strategies. It also defines how you employ and combine them in various situations. How you develop your play style is completely up to you. None the less, we're ready to give you some advice in order to increase the quality of your learning and development. Depending on your experience and personal preferences, you should know in which skills you should invest, which tactics and strategies you need to practice and so on.

When you grab a stick for the first time, you have to learn how to perform a simple direct shot. Take the white, choose a spot on the border and just keep shooting until you're capable of hitting it without too many mistakes. Later, when you begin playing actual matches, you'll get the opportunity to practice your direct shot in a real game. Once you get the feeling, broaden your arsenal with IDS and CHS. You'll also need either PS or SWS for breaking and powerful shots in general. At this point, you're ready to start playing with a strategy. We'd advise all the beginners to start with the AOO. It's the simplest strategy to learn and use, with amazing efficiency once you acquire some experience. Moreover, it gives you the basic tools to deal with your opponents' defenses. Stick with the basic AOO tactics until you get accustomed to the strategy. RP, OSS and ODS are sufficient (MP is optional). Later, you'll want to practice with the other offensive strategies as well, but you'll have to learn some defensive moves as well. Practice the basic tactics of SD and incorporate them in your play style. By that time you should already be an average player, with AOO as your primary strategy and SD as a backup. It should be enough to deal with regular opponents. From that moment on, how you're going to continue your development depends only on your personal wishes. Remember there's no good or bad play style. It's only important that you build your play style according to your own preferences and feel comfortable using it. Keep that in mind and there will be no player you'll be unable to defeat.

In order to help you with your development for the last time, we'll present in short the basic strategy combinations and their qualities, so you can decide on what kind of path to choose. The more strategies you learn and incorporate, the more flexible your game becomes. Speaking of the four primary strategies, there's an important rule: **“Master one, and you're skilled. Master two, and you're devastating. Master three, and you're unstoppable. Master four, and you're a legend.”**

**1. All-out offensive + Simple defensive** – As we already said, this is the best combination for beginners. Using AOO as your primary, you can deal with any defenders and offenders of similar level or below. When facing superior offenders, like SO players, use SD to help you out. This kind of play style is generally very flexible and excellent for improvisation, allowing you to adapt your play to various opponents.



**2. Successive offensive + All-out offensive** – This is a great combination for advanced players who rely on successive play, as AOO negates SO's greatest flaw: vulnerability to defensive. With this play style, you use SO as your primary until the opponent switches to defensive. Once they attempt to block you, use AOO's defensive breaking ability and clear the table of their defenses. Then simply proceed with SO and finish them off.

**3. All-out offensive + Advanced defensive** – This is a rare combination, as few players advanced enough to employ AD would stick to AOO as their primary. However, your general objective with this play style would be to keep going with AOO until you encounter a superior offender, or find yourself in a dangerous situation where AOO is too risky to be used. Then switch to AD and preserve a great deal of offensive capabilities, while staying safe at the same time.

**4. Successive offensive + Simple defensive** – Another common combination. Stay with SO as your primary, but when you're supposed to defend yourself, like from an equal or superior SO player, SD moves will greatly help you out.

**5. Advanced defensive + Simple defensive** – This combination is used only by ultimate defenders. AD serves as your main strategy, but whenever you find it too challenging to shoot at a target and perform a defensive move at the same time, switch to SD and go for pure defense. *NOTE: This combination is still very vulnerable to AOO.*

**6. Successive offensive + Advanced defensive** – Only the most technically advanced players would employ a play style like this. Combining SO and AD according to their needs, they take care of both offensive and defensive needs with ease. But this combination still has one weakness: it has no effective solution against defenders of similar technical quality.

## Team Play

Assuming you usually play pool with a larger group of friends, you're supposed to know the basics of team play. We already said there's no player limit per team. Also, the teams don't need to be equal in numbers. Unlike most sports and game, in pool the team smaller in numbers actually has an *advantage* over the opposition. It's mostly because when two or three players constantly have to shift every turn, their concentration drops. Also, the more players there are in a team, the more different play styles are forced to work together. If that's the case, we have a few tips about organizing your play as a team.

First of all, be aware of technical level of each player in the team. Never ask a novice player to perform something beyond their capabilities, as it certainly won't work the way you planned. It's a common strategic mistake. Also, know the play styles and general strong points of different players. Let each player make a move they can do best. For example, never force a defender to shoot a complicated chain shot across the table. Leave the challenging shots to the most experienced players in your team, while instructing the beginners to hold of the opponents with simple defensive moves.

Problems arise when one player uses SO or a complicated defensive strategy, depending completely on stationary play, while the other is an expert in AOO but isn't capable of good shot control. Every time the AOO player gets the turn, they'll ruin the plans of their teammate. For such a



combination to work out, the stationary player should stick to making plans turn after turn. If they're using SO, that shouldn't be a major issue, but defensive never works well with AOO. Either the defensive player should give up on defense and do their best to aid their AOO teammate, or the AOO player is supposed to stick to the simplest SD moves and low-powered shots. Neither solution is ideal, but it's hard to make such a combination work out any better.



## Conclusion

Congratulations! You reached the end of this complex guide. We tried our best to make you familiar with 8 Ball Pool. We hope our experience will serve you as an example in your development. Don't forget the instructions in this guide and we predict you a bright future as an excellent pool player. In case you don't think all of the lessons sat in the right place, it would be a good idea to re-read the manual. And remember: **practice is the key to success!**

If you want to give us a feedback about this guide, share your opinion or ask us some additional advice, we'll be very grateful if you contact us. Also, if you think this guide contains mistakes, or some topics which need to be clarified further, feel free to let us know. One more thing: we'd like to hear everything about your personal experience as a player, if this guide helped you and how. We look forward to your e-mails.

Thank you for using *A Beginner's Guide to 8 Ball Pool* and good luck in your games!

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Balls with Triangle: <http://www.dollardays.com/wholesale-billiard-balls.html>

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