

Chapter 23

Drilling It Home: Practice Techniques

In This Chapter

- ▶ Maximizing your practice time
 - ▶ Using drills to isolate certain skills
 - ▶ Keeping practice lively with a few games
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So some hotshot kid walks into a pool hall, thinking he's destined to be the next great hustler. He starts tooling around on a table, making a few shots but missing plenty more. After an hour or so, he walks up to the counter, where an old-timer is jockeying the cash register with his face buried in yesterday's sports page.

"Hey, mister," the kid says. "You know I'm going to be the best pool player ever?"

"Oh, yeah?" the old man replies. "Well, I hope you're ready to give up your little girlfriends. And I hope you're ready to quit playing baseball. I hope you're willing to sleep on pool tables for the next 10 years, playing 18 hours a day, stopping only to shovel food in your face or lay your head down for an hour or two — because that, and a truckload of natural talent, is what it'll take to be the best."

The kid's a little put off by the crotchety old man. "Oh, well," he says. "I'm just going to go home and play some video games."

While (mostly) a joke, this story shows how becoming the best isn't easy, but you can shorten the learning curve if you practice effectively and efficiently. In this chapter, I tell you how to practice and what to practice so that you can get better without limping around with a stiff back from sleeping on pool tables.

Chapter 6

Playing Nice: The Etiquette of the Game

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the subtle guidelines of table-side behavior
 - ▶ Understanding how pool players interact
 - ▶ Defining what is and what is not sharking
 - ▶ Treating the equipment with respect
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I may not need to blather on and on about how pool is a cerebral game, best appreciated by the socially refined, but a certain code goes along with the game. The unwritten rules of the poolroom are many, though not totally extraneous to the game, but you should be fine if you read through this chapter once.

Golf is a game that is repeatedly compared to pool — both games require quiet concentration on a stationary target. And just as you can commit social suicide on a golf course (for example, by walking through another player's putting line), you will have plenty of opportunities for faux pas at the pool table.

Besides the specific situations I talk about in this chapter, just remember to be a good sportsman and use common sense. This advice may sound like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised how many disputes arise from completely avoidable circumstances.

In this chapter, I talk about some general dos and don'ts. From there, I get into the subject of sharking — deliberately distracting your opponent. And finally, I run through a checklist of things you need to know about the equipment you're handling.

Competing Graciously

While hundreds of entries in the rulebook dictate what you can and can't do with the cue ball, very few outline how you're supposed to interact with your opponent. In the following sections, I offer some clarification on these unwritten social niceties.



The best way to end misunderstandings is to avoid them all together.

Set the record straight

Whether you're competing in a friendly game in your basement or in a week-end tournament at your local hall, you *need* to be absolutely clear on the rules that are in effect for your game. To this end, a few rules are constantly changing, depending on where and with whom you're playing. Before you get to lag for the break, make sure that you know the answer to these questions:

- ✓ **Is the table open after the break?** Sometimes, if you make one stripe, you're stripes. Other times, the table is still *open* (stripes and solids have yet to be assigned to players). Make sure that you know how pocketing balls on the break will affect how you choose your balls. (See Chapter 18 for detailed info on the break.)
- ✓ **What needs to be called?** Many leagues dictate that you need to call which ball is going into which pocket. Other leagues let you count *slop* — unintentionally pocketed balls. Know what you need to call so that you aren't called for a foul.
- ✓ **Do three consecutive fouls result in a loss?** In many amateur leagues, this rule doesn't apply, but it's worth asking.
- ✓ **Are there any house rules?** It seems every table has its own set of rules. Ask whether the house has any special rules outside the ordinary. You may be surprised how often you discover a rule you wouldn't have thought of.

Ask when you don't know

So what if something pops up while you're in the middle of a game, and you're not exactly sure how to handle it? Simple; just ask.

In Chapter 22, I talk about the importance of carrying yourself with confidence. When you're at the table, you have to come across as someone in total control. Well, here's an exception — don't just assume you know the proper ruling for one thing or another.

If you have any doubt about a certain ruling, just ask your opponent. Double-checking before you shoot ensures that both you and your opponent are on the same page.



Some league systems allow for another player on your team to coach you at the table. While asking for a clarification of a rule usually doesn't constitute a coach, you should avoid asking your teammate a question because others may construe it as asking for advice on the shot.

Get extra eyes for close calls

If you or your opponent line up a shot that may lead to controversy — for example, if the cue ball may hit the intended ball first — asking for somebody to watch the shot is perfectly fine. Usually, you can find an experienced player in the pool hall who can give you an unbiased pair of eyes. Ideally, this person is a certified ref, but you're not going to see too many of those wandering around your pool hall or your basement.

For an example of when you may want to ask for a third party to watch, look at Figure 6-1. You're stripes, and you've got the 11 ball in your sights. Because you're going to shoot the 11 in the corner pocket, you could possibly hit the 4 ball first. The dotted line ball shows about where the cue ball will need to be to pocket the 11, which is in close proximity to the 4.

In this case, have somebody watch so that she can act as an arbitrator should any dispute arise.

Figure 6-1: Hitting the 11 ball into the pocket without hitting the 4 ball first may be a tricky enough situation to warrant extra eyes.

