

CHAPTER III

THE TECHNIQUE OF SHOOTING A DISC

In connection with this chapter the reader may refer to Chapter XV for some suggestions on practicing the principles discussed herein.

The most important habit to be cultivated in the game of shuffleboard is correct delivery; that is, the act of shooting a disc. A newcomer to the game is seldom aware of the importance of a good delivery, and probably he would not give it a thought if his attention were not turned toward it. But we know that a person's achievement in many activities can be limited by poor habits that he acquires early in his training. In this respect, shuffleboard is no exception.

It is doubtful whether anyone could produce a complete analysis of a good delivery that would be acceptable to every experienced player. Styles of delivery are quite individualistic. If one were to ask a randomly chosen player to explain the correct way to shoot a disc, the answer very likely would be a description of the player's own delivery offered as the perfect model. For this reason the following discussion on correct delivery is not presented here as the only way, but only as a logical and acceptable way, a way for beginning players to consider and for others to compare with their own style.

One would not expect an experienced player to change his delivery unless he is having serious problems with it. The changing of one's delivery, like the changing of any other entrenched habit, can create new problems in times of stress. Often, when the player finds himself in a tense situation in a game, he will unconsciously forsake his newly acquired style of delivery and will revert to his earlier one. The result is usually unfortunate because the player, being comfortable with either form, seldom realizes that he has changed. Because of this quirk in human nature, it is important that a new player adopt a sound technique at the beginning and practice until it becomes a thoroughly fixed habit.

THE DELIVERY

The following discussion is related to the right-handed player. A left-handed player should be able to adapt these principles to his own style of play.

Precision shooting involves five things: Posture, mental preparation for the shot, aim, body movement, and arm movement.

Posture. A delivery of two steps requires that the player stand with feet together, back bent, and eyes in line with the cue shaft. The right hand, which is holding the cue, will be from eight to twelve inches in front of the right knee. The left hand will be where it is most comfortable, perhaps on the left leg just above the knee, or hanging freely at the player's side; but, for reasons which are quite obvious, the player should not shoot his discs with his left hand in the pocket of his slacks or his jacket.

The cue is held with a light grip between the thumb and the first two fingers, with the third finger curled behind the rubber cue tip. Evidence of the very light grip on the cue is seen when even the best players occasionally drop their cue on the court after making a shot.

The disc should be positioned and the cue placed snugly against the disc. Then the player's eyes will leave the cue and become fixed on the target until the disc leaves the cue.

Mental Preparation. The key words describing mental preparation are relaxation and concentration. This formula may seem contradictory, but somehow it must be worked out because it is essential. One must approach the shooting of a disc in a relaxed manner, even though the winning of the game depends on that single shot. One must be able, mentally, to block out the spectators along the sidelines. One must forget the anxiety that comes from making a

poor shot in the previous round and losing the good lead he had a moment before. One must not allow himself to become the least bit irritated by the poor judgment of his partner at the opposite end of the court. Then, after all of this has been accomplished, one must concentrate. What a person is thinking about while he aims will, indeed, affect the shot.

Aim. It is not enough to look in the general direction toward which one intends to shoot, nor simply to look in a general way at the target. When placing a guard or shooting for a score, one must determine the exact spot on the court on which he wants his disc to stop, look directly at that spot, and concentrate on the length of the shot as well as the direction. When shooting at a disc, one must determine the exact spot, center, right edge, left edge, one inch from the edge, and so forth, toward which he wants the center of his cue disc to go.

Body Movement. The shot begins with a short step forward with the right foot. Although many players prefer to take one short step followed by a long one, the use of two short steps seems to have advantages. With two short steps the body can come virtually to a stop, and the delivery can be made chiefly with arm movement. When the arm alone is used to make the shot, there are fewer muscles to control, and the demands of coordination are less than when the body and the arm are working together. Since the precision adjustment must be made by arm muscles whichever way it is done, it should be easier for the arm muscles to adjust to the requirements of the shot when the variable of body motion is excluded. The key words describing the action in these two steps are balance and smoothness.

Arm Movement. Other body movements are performed just as smoothly. As the player takes his two steps, his cue does not move ahead. The moment his left foot is on the court and body movement has virtually stopped, he begins to move his right arm forward. There must be no pause in the shift from body movement to arm movement. The motion is continuous as the swing of the arm follows the second step so closely and smoothly that the body helps to give force to the shot. When a fast shot is needed, the disc is sent down the court with a zip; when a slow shot is used, the disc is placed with all the smooth-

ness and the precision that the player can command. In either shot the upper part of the body, the shoulders, will not be moving ahead noticeably as the arm swings forward.

The hand that holds the cue swings directly below the shoulder, close to the body, like a pendulum. The player's eyes are fixed on the target point toward which he has been looking since the short moment of concentration. At the end of the shot, the hand follows through and continues to rise after the disc has left the cue, which remains in contact with the court. If the cue rises from the court at the end of a slow shot, the player's grip on the cue has been too tight; but after a fast shot, the momentum of the cue may sometimes cause it to rise from the court.

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS WITH DELIVERY

So many words are required to present a complete analysis of the delivery sequence that a beginning player may feel that the foregoing discussion is unduly complicated and drawn out. This criticism is not valid, however. The entire delivery sequence should be practiced until it becomes habitual, and despite the importance of concentration, the beginner should learn to do it quickly and easily because prolonged concentration seems to diminish accuracy.

Shufflers have many problems with their delivery, and each one can be analyzed in the light of the principles discussed above. The following problems are the most common ones.

Poor Aiming Technique. Notice sometime the delivery of the players at the opposite end of the court. Occasionally, one sees a player preparing to shoot, and no one at the other end of the court is sure of what he intends to shoot at. Although these players seem to get their discs approximately where they want them, their shooting would surely improve if they would begin their shots with their eyes over the cue.

If a player is conscious of a sideways movement at the end of his delivery and still he has made a good shot, the movement was probably a correction of poor aim. This might indicate that the player has a problem with his aiming, or it could mean trouble as described in the next paragraph.

Throwing Out the Arm. Forgetting the pendulum motion and raising the elbow away from the body as one shoots causes more trouble than any other problem. A player who fails to

notice this fault in his delivery may make mediocre shots day after day never realizing his potential ability. One should keep the pendulum in mind with every shot. Let the arm swing under the shoulder with the hand so close to the body that it brushes lightly against the clothing. A technique that is certain to help a player with this problem is to stoop and shoot with the cue close to the court. To do this, a player must use the pendulum delivery. Several shots made in this manner may be all that will be necessary to bring the player back into correct form.

Follow Through. Some players, after performing the shot smoothly right up to the end, will give their cue a final jerk, sometimes a complete circular twist. Observe, too, that these players are often shooting inaccurately.

The Fast Shot. Sometimes players, finding themselves in a situation where a fast shot is needed, forget to use the same delivery they have been using all along in their regular play. The result is usually a poor shot. Fast shots are noted for being less accurate than slow shots, but the unreliable nature of a fast shot can be minimized by exercising the usual care in the delivery. Really, a fast shot should not be less reliable, since the player needs to concentrate on only one thing, direction. Distance is not a consideration when one makes a fast shot.

Looking at the Cue. Occasionally one sees a player looking at his cue again just before he shoots. He does not realize that he does this, but he does it every time he shoots. This distracting habit should be avoided. While the player is looking at his cue, he is neither aiming nor concentrating.

Changing One's Mind. Another fault in delivery that must be mentioned, though it is not likely to become a habit, is the changing of one's mind in the middle of a shot. This kind of shot usually fails, and a player should guard against it. One should avoid changing his mind while shooting even in such little things as which side of the disc to strike or how far down the court to shoot a disc. When one simply must change his mind, he should stop and take the time to concentrate on the new shot.

Tension and Loss of Composure. In the case of some players whose normal delivery is

smooth, there is a tendency for their cue to shake when they are trying hard on a difficult or an important shot. But the products of tension are not always visible, and, unfortunately, a very small amount of mental strain will impair a player's shooting.

Tension may result from no more than a losing attitude that a player has almost unconsciously developed toward a particular opponent. Other times it may arise from situations in a game that cause the player to have an undue concern for his success as a player. Tension may result from many things, but in its most pernicious form it is related to the player's personal background rather than to a definite situation in a game. A player must analyze these feelings and learn to take some positive step to control them. One should avoid negative thinking when wrestling with this problem because negative thinking usually contributes to the problem rather than to the solution.

Without a question the best remedy for tension is the acquiring of playing experience under pressure, and this is one of the important benefits to be gained from playing in leagues and tournaments. Skills that are developed under pressure will sustain a player the next time he is under pressure, while the skills that are developed in private practice will have to be tempered in fire to be dependable. Tensions require an inordinate amount of self-discipline to overcome, but the result is worth many times the effort.

Momentary loss of composure is something else. The failure to observe the principles of relaxation and concentration will cause a serious loss of composure in critical moments of play. This is a common fault, and one does not have to play shuffleboard very long to observe some player ignoring these principles while immediately regretting his impulsiveness. When his disc has been glanced from a scoring position into the kitchen, a player may lose his composure for a moment, and shooting from the hip, as it were, he zips a disc down the court completely missing his disc in the kitchen. Such a loss of composure can last throughout the remainder of the game unless the player is able to ignore the irritations that result from the normal misfortunes of the game.

Distractions. External distractions, which have already been mentioned, can be blocked out without too much trouble, but certain dis-

tractions that are inherent to the shot may become real problems. They have been called mental hazards.

Certain shots seem to be difficult for no other reason than that they involve an element that diverts the player's attention from the main purpose of the shot. That is, something related to the shot interferes with the player's concentration on the exact spot at which he desires to shoot. Again, the prescription is self-discipline, but this remedy must be combined with solo practice (Chapter XV).

Mastery of these shots is essential if one is to become better than an average shuffleboard player. Some examples of shots that have a particular distraction, or mental hazard, are:

1. Shooting past a guard to spoil the opponent's score;
2. Shooting for a score when the opponent's disc lies nearby on a line;
3. Trying to spoil the opponent's score when the player's own disc lies in a scoring position nearby;
4. Shooting the hammer (last shot of a half round), especially when it is the winning score.

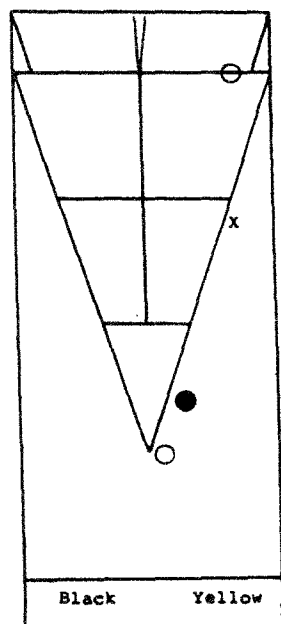


Figure 7

ANALYSIS PROBLEM (FIGURE 7)

The following problem illustrates the principle of the mental hazard. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this chapter.

Yellow wanted to score his last disc where it would be safely hidden from his opponent's last shot. The best place seemed to be in the 7-area behind his own liner. Yellow attempted this shot, but his cue disc stopped short of the 7-area at X. What happened?

FOULS AND PENALTIES¹

All of the rules pertaining to the foul are observed even in fun games; but, of course, in fun games there are no penalties. The penalties should be rigorously enforced, however, whenever referees are used. In this way the new players will become acquainted with the game as it is played in tournaments.

Discs on the Line. No disc in the player's starting area may touch a line when one of the discs is being shot. The rule covering this situation is somewhat complicated and reads as follows: "Players shall place their four (4) discs within and not touching lines of their respective half of 10-Off area. PENALTY—5 off. Penalty not applied to a player until he has played a disc. Discs must be played from the clear from within the respective half of 10-Off area. If disc played touches front or back lines—PENALTY—5 off. If disc played touches side line, or triangle—PENALTY—10 off, offender's disc removed, and opponent credited with any of his discs displaced. All displaced discs shall be removed from the court immediately after scoring of opponent's displaced discs."

Stepping on the Baseline. The player must be careful, when shooting a disc, that he not step on or over the baseline. The penalty is 10 points off.

Where to Stand. The players may stand in the alley between the courts before and while shooting, but they may not stand on the adjoining court. While standing in the alley area, the player must not step over the extension of the baseline for any purpose other than to gather his discs (Figure 2). The penalty is 5 points off.

¹ Rules of the National Shuffleboard Association.

What Constitutes a Shot? "A disc is played when it leaves the starting area, except for jockeying." Jockeying is the moving of a disc in a circular motion to insure that no particles of dirt lie under the disc.

Hesitation Shot. The player must not stop the motion of his cue once the disc has started forward. A variation in the speed of the shot is not a foul. A hesitation is a momentary stop. The penalty is 10 points off; the offender's disc will be removed and the opponent will be credited with the score of any of his discs which were displaced.

Hook Shot. A hook shot is a shot in which there is a noticeable change in the direction of the cue during the delivery. A shot must be delivered in a straight line with continuous forward

motion of the cue. The penalty is 10 points off; the offender's disc will be removed and the opponent will be credited with the score of any of his discs which were displaced.

ANSWER TO THE ANALYSIS PROBLEM (FIGURE 7)

This is typical of what happens hundreds of times during a season on the shuffleboard courts. A shot that normally is easy to perform becomes quite difficult when it is complicated by a mental hazard. Yellow, of course, was afraid that he would bunt his liner into the kitchen. He overlooked the opportunity to backstop his cue disc against his disc on the K/7 line and, at the same time, shoot hard enough to drive the liner through the kitchen.