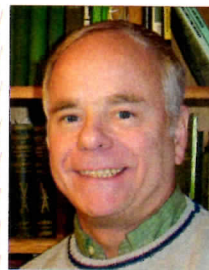


# RACK-RUNNING DRILLS

The challenge of standard layouts with a variety of requirements.



**L**AST MONTH I introduced a family of drills that covers the entire range of pool abilities from total beginners to top pros. I described 18 different levels over that range. Let's look at those sorts of drills in detail and how you can use them to help your own game and the game of someone you might be teaching. Since last month the drills have evolved a little.

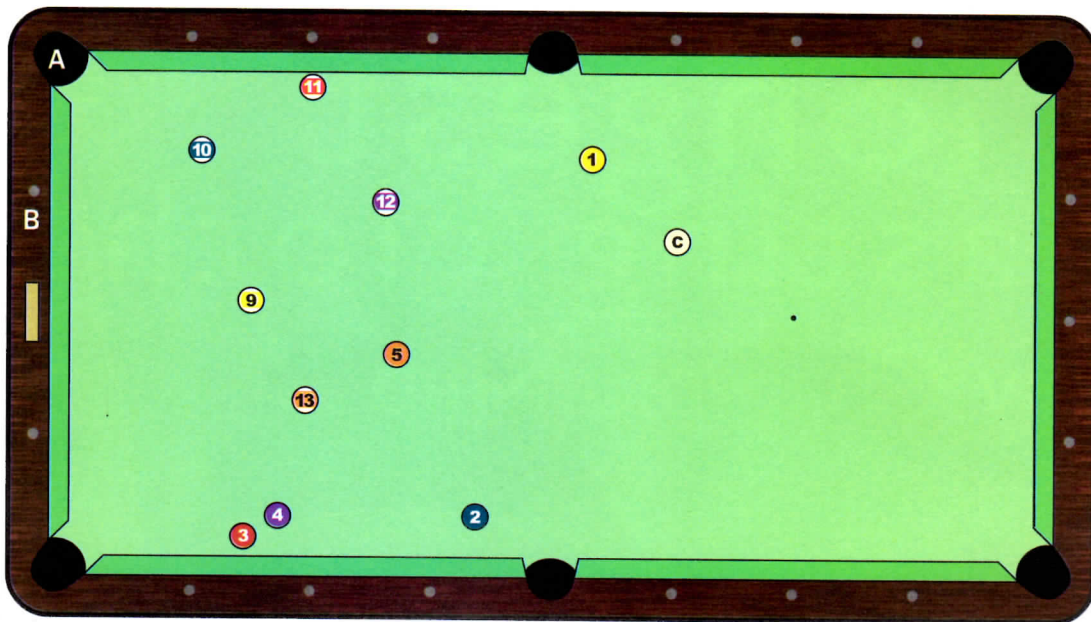
The basic idea is that the shooter will run racks of balls with various additional rules to make the task easier or harder. The shot common to all levels was the open, free break. I've added something to that below.

The first difficulty adjustment was in the number of balls in a rack which was six, ten or fifteen. I think that's plenty of steps. Those are all triangle-shaped racks.

The second knob on difficulty is how many times during the rack the shooter gets ball in hand. The easiest levels give ball in hand every shot while at the tough end, it's ball in hand for only the shot after the break. For levels in between the shooter gets ball in hand every two, three or five balls.

Next, the requirements of the shots change to make things tougher. The easiest level has the shooter hitting balls directly into pockets without using the cue ball. Normal shooting may specify any order, color pairs (1-9, 2-10, etc.), numeric order, and a new one: stripes and solids.

Another factor of difficulty is how many good shots are required to successfully complete the drill. Last time I proposed a total of 30 in a row, which



is an even number of racks for each of the three rack sizes. Let's modify that so while 30 good shots may be the gold standard, going for a smaller number, say one or two racks of a level, will fit some players better and make the goal more achievable. It will also allow a player to fit several different levels into one practice session.

I'd say that if a player can reach 30 fairly often on a level, it is time to move on to a harder level unless they are really working on something more basic, such as stance or sighting, and just need a framework for their practice. Also, since there are many options to create new levels, once you get a 30, start working on a similar level that has different requirements.

The change to the break shot I propose is that the shooter gets to play two break shots at the start of each rack before taking ball in hand for the first shot. This allows the shooter to solve clusters and make the table more runnable with their second "break" shot which is really a free rearrangement shot from behind the line. Remember that any ball pocketed on the break(s)

returns to the table wherever the shooter chooses.

Also added this month are situations like eight ball with stripes and solids. With racks of six or ten balls, there is no room for the odd-ball eight. The goal is to run the stripes or solids and then run the other group. A ball in hand can be inserted after the first group to reduce the difficulty a little.

Let's look at some of the underlying principles that went into the design of these drills.

Unlike drills that have you repeat the same or similar shots for several or many repetitions, these drills provide constant variation in the shots you face, the position required and the game requirements of the situation. I think it is important to work on specific shots or position plays in isolation, but game-like problems are also needed. I think these drills provide a good source of specific shots to make up your list of "Work on these!" shots. You should note repeating, similar problems during the drills to work on later.

The different levels require different pattern strategies. If you are shooting in

numerical rotation, most of your planning will be to keep a good angle to move the cue ball to the next shot with occasional clusters to plan for. If you are working on one of the color-pair levels, you will be picking out which pairs will unlock other pairs.

Consider the diagram, which is just after your second break (which sadly tied up the 3-4 a little) so you have cue ball in hand. Plan your run of ten balls in these situations: numerical order with ball in hand again after five shots; any order with no additional BIH; color pair order with BIH for each pair; stripes and solids with choice of which to start with but no extra BIH.

Make your plans before reading on.

For the color pairs, the simple strategy is to take the pair that is easiest each time, but you have to deal with the 3-4. Since you get BIH after every second ball, you would usually like to find a way to move them on a second shot. For example, you could take the 5-13 to start with and break with the 13 shot but you have to be accurate in the angle you leave on the 13. In this layout you

could instead set up an ideal angle on the 13 to break them and be pretty sure of a shot on the 5.

Numerical rotation is relatively easy if your 3-4 break from the 1 ball leaves you a shot on the 2, which it should. The extra ball in hand after the 5 may help get you back in perfect line but is not very valuable this rack.

For basic pool (no order requirement) the 3-4 is again the problem, but you have many more options. For example, you could break them by playing the 10 in pocket A and taking the cue ball to the rail at B and then into the balls. It's good to clear up some balls before you do that though, so play the 11 with nearly a stop shot, the 12 in the side with a stop, and you have an ideal angle on the 10. Can you see a way to extend that pattern back so even fewer balls are on the table when you move the 3-4?

For stripes and solids, take solids first because they have the only major problem and take the 1, 2 or 5 first to break them, depending on which feels better. A good alternative is to play stripes first

ending with the 10 ball as in the basic pool order above. It's not as guaranteed to get the break, but you will have the chaff off the table.

You may be surprised by the number of ball-in-hands some of the levels have. That is intentional because it encourages the shooter to think frequently about exactly where the cue ball should be for each shot. The second break each rack also induces more thinking/planning.

Similarly the variety of ball order requirements causes the shooter to think about new situations and what can be done with the balls. It makes them solve new problems.

Here is an advanced requirement that one pocket players should like: Play any three balls at a time into the same pocket, picking a new pocket (maybe the same one) after each three. This can be done with any of the rack sizes, but with ten balls, the first group will need to be four balls. The easy version is to take ball in hand after each group.

If you come up with a variation, let me know and I'll add it to the list. My email is [jewett@sfbilliards.com](mailto:jewett@sfbilliards.com).

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