



Instruction Special: The 20-Minute Warmup

UNDERTHEGUN?

Your match starts in 20 minutes + You don't know the table or the cloth + You're tight as a 4-inch pocket.

What do you do?

With tips from **MELISSA LITTLE**,
GA YOUNG KIM and other top
pros, we'll show you how to
loosen up, gauge the table and
get in stroke, so you can
hit the slate running!

BY MASON KING



YOU THINK you're so slick. You're about to play a \$100 set in an unfamiliar room, on a strange table, with cloth wetter than the Everglades. Or you're in Las Vegas for the amateur nationals and roll in 10 minutes before your first match, just in time for a nine-minute smoke break.

OK, hotshot — reality check. You need to warm up. And that means more than throwing the balls out and running a rack.

A passel of top pros let us in on their pre-match regimens. First, the table needs a full-fledged

diagnosis. How fast is the cloth? Where are the dead spots on the rails? How are the pockets cut? Then, you have get your body and mind in the game. Get the cue ball on a string. Clock your speed. Hone your touch. Solidify your pre-shot routine.

Take 20 minutes, if possible. Below, we've supplied you with plenty of drills, exercises and tricks to get you dialed in and acquainted with the table. And we've broken them down into five-minute increments, just in case you have less prep time than necessary. Good luck. The clock is ticking.

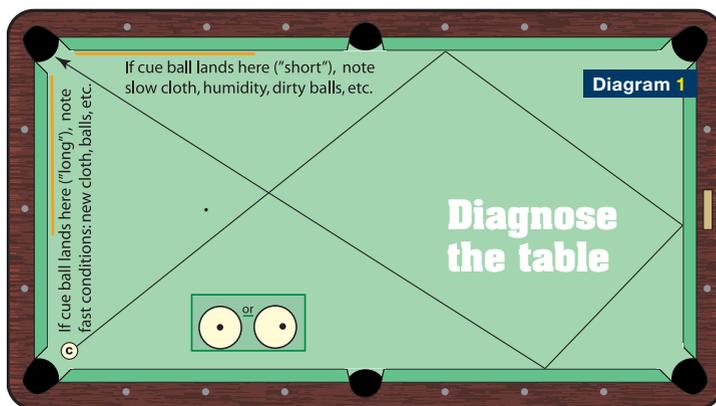


SIZE UP THE TABLE FAST WITH THESE QUICK TIPS **5** minutes

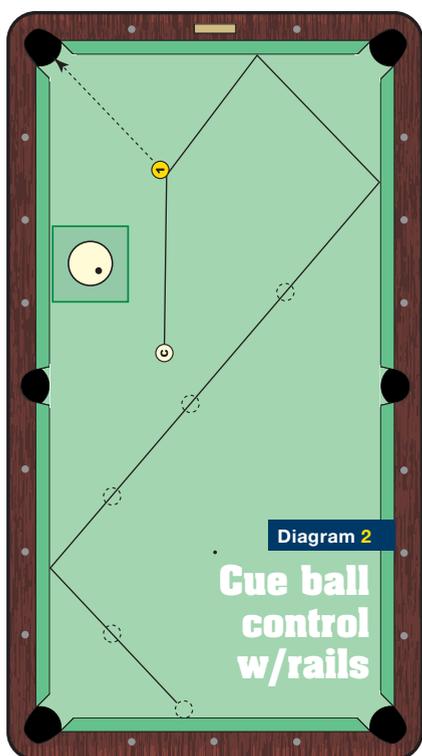
YOUR FIRST question is, "How is the table playing?" Humidity, worn balls, and/or thick or dirty cloth will create friction between the cue ball and both the table bed and rails, slowing down the balls and causing them to rebound stiffly off the cushions (aka "playing short" or "boingy"). The opposite goes for clean cloth, new balls, and dry conditions. With less elements creating friction, the balls will travel farther, with more speed, and will come off the cushions — even seeming to "slide" off them — at wider angles (aka "playing long").

How to diagnose a table? **Diagram 1** is the classic three-rail, corner-to-corner kick, suggested by, among others, Ga Young Kim, Melissa Little and John Schmidt. Using center-ball or right-hand English, watch where the cue ball lands. Then adjust your English and speed accordingly.

If, for example, the table is playing short (see top orange stripe in diagram), "that's bad," says Schmidt. "It makes playing extremely difficult. You either need to clean the cue ball off, or, if the humidity is super-high, you need to adjust your stroke. That knowledge adjusts my position



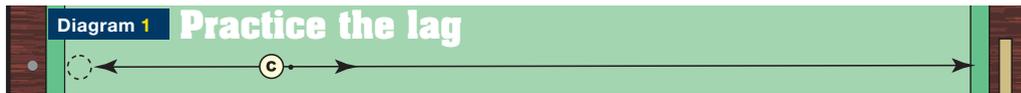
play in my mind, without even playing the match. I already know it's going to play short on particular shots." Also, pay attention to how the cue ball behaves off each rail. Look out for dead spots.



RODNEY MORRIS suggests this three-rail position shot (**Diagram 2**) that will help you check the action off the rails. It also will help with your control, plus allow you to let out your stroke. Practice landing the cue ball at the ghost positions marked. Again, adjust English as needed. By the time you're moving the cue ball to the foot rail, your arm should be warm. Still, Corey Harper suggests setting up easy shots, as in **Diagram 3a**, both as a warmup and to trigger the positive mindset that comes from sinking balls. Next, set up a straight-in shot along the rail (**Diagram 3b**). Some pocket sides will bobble balls hit with too much speed, so take a moment to find the pocket's tolerance level.



10 minutes
DIAL IN YOUR STROKE WITH THESE EXERCISES

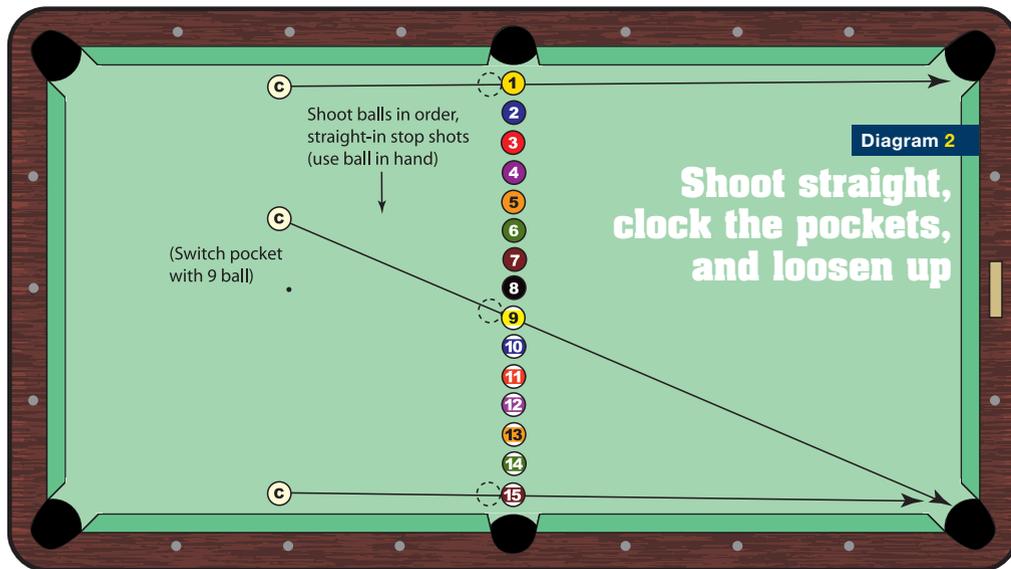


IT MAY seem obvious, but some folks don't practice the lag. Taking 30 seconds to find the right speed (**Diagram 1**) gives you a big advantage. "It's nice to win the lag and maybe put a three- or four-pack together," says John Schmidt.

In **Diagram 2** is a practice drill suggested by Shawn Putnam that can help you in several dif-

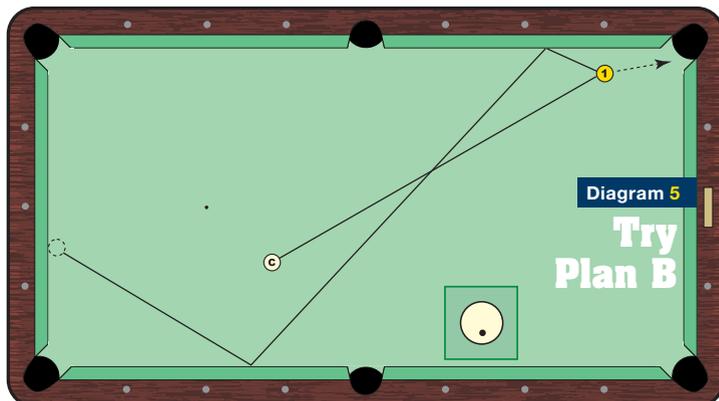
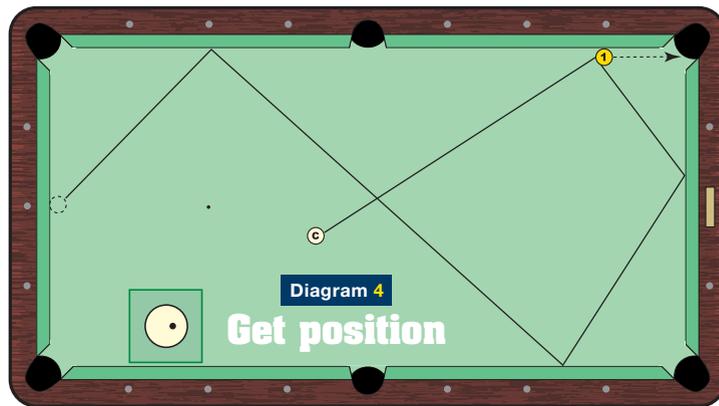
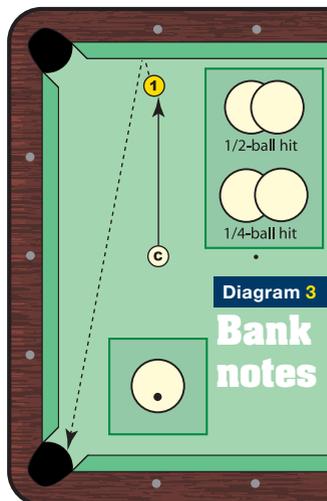
ferent ways in the minutes before your match. Set up the balls as shown, then take ball and hand on each shot so that it's straight in. First off, the deliberate and repetitive nature of the exercise helps you get in a rhythm. Practice your routine of relaxing, breathing and stroking on each shot, and it will become automatic. If you stroke each as a stop shot, you'll be able to

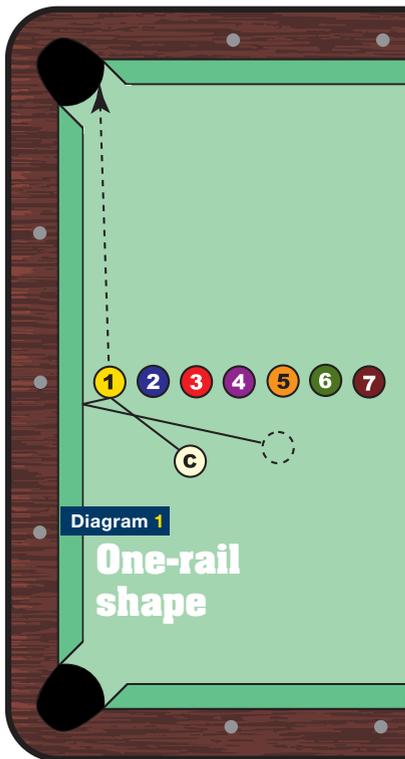
diagnose your stroke by whether the cue ball drifts to the left or right. This exercise also gives you a look at the pocket openings from several different angles. Hence, you'll be able to find the right aiming spot for every shot. To top it off, you'll be cooler when you face your first straight-in shot of the match.



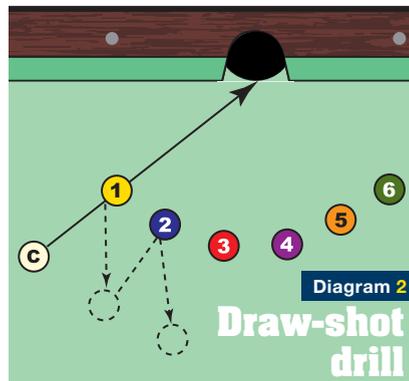
WHILE, IDEALLY, you don't want to put yourself in the position of needing to bring a bank shot, it certainly helps to practice them. Again, you'll need to get a feel for how the rails are behaving, so set up the shot in **Diagram 3**, suggested by Melissa Little. First attempt a 1/2-ball hit (you can help take throw out of the equation by using center-ball draw) and see where the 1 lands. You may need to adjust to a 1/4-ball hit.

In **Diagrams 4 and 5**, also from Little, we have more variations of the multi-rail position shots seen on page 37. The cue ball in **Diagram 4** will show a fondness for scratching in either the bottom-right corner or the top side pocket, so deduce the speed and English required to miss those traps. If you are confident in your ability to draw the ball and want to simplify the cue ball's path, try the two-rail backspin shot in **Diagram 5** — this time avoiding the bottom side pocket.





NOW THAT your stroke is warmed up and you know the table's tendencies, try some baby position moves that will help refine your touch before the match. Line up the seven balls as shown in **Diagram 1** (provided by Corey Harper), and take ball in hand for the first shot. The cue ball should hit the rail and rebound for position on the next shot. You then play from that position for the next shot. Keep going until, inevitably, you end up with bad position on one of the balls down the line. Then you can practice being a shotmaker.



IN **DIAGRAM 2** is a quick draw-shot drill suggested by Bob Byrne in his "Standard Book of Pool & Billiards." Starting from the position shown, see if you can pocket the balls in order from one end to the other, using draw to gain position. The trick is to use various parts of the pocket depending on the angle of the shot and position needed. Look Ma, no rail!

HERE'S ANOTHER drill from Shawn Putnam, in which you can put together everything you've been practicing so far. Try to pocket all the balls, as placed (**Diagram 3**), one at a time. The hitch: You can't make contact with any other ball, even when you play position. It makes you learn and build your own pattern," Putnam says. "You obviously have to clear out a pocket, and then another, then a side, and so on. It can be any pattern you want. But it teaches you how to work the cue ball around the table without bumping other balls."



HOW OFTEN do you seriously consider the effects of throw when playing? It can make a difference on long shots, so Putnam has devised a way to figure out just how much (**Diagram 4**). "Different

balls, tables and cloth throw differently," Putnam says. "I'll set up a cue ball just off the rail. I'm over-cutting it to the outside corner of the pocket. When the friction from the cue ball takes hold of the object ball, it will

throw it toward the center of the pocket. Sometimes there is no friction. So, now I have to change the way I aim. I know I can't overcut the ball and make it straight in the pocket."

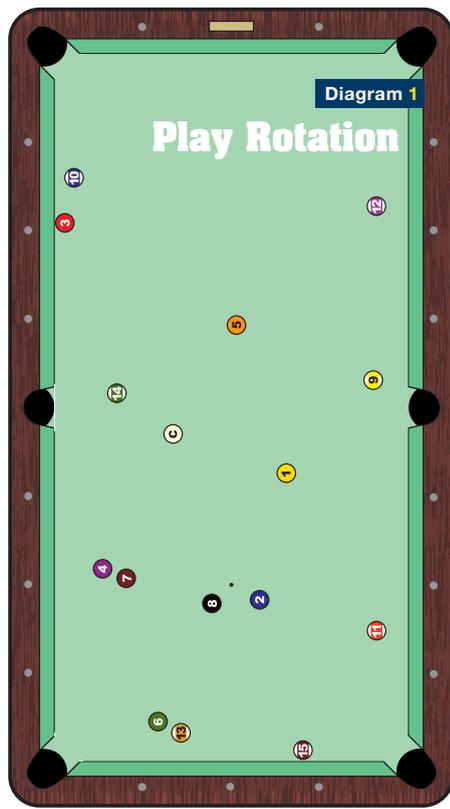
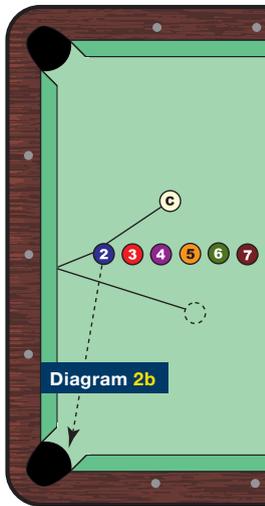
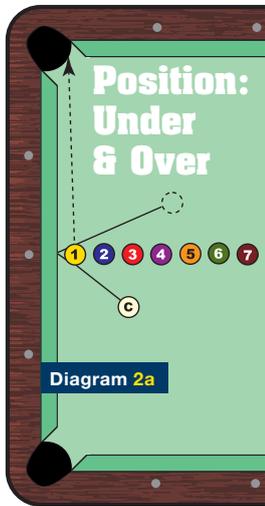




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WITH FIVE minutes before your match, you could throw out nine balls for a simulated runout, or you could really challenge yourself with a rack of rotation (**Diagram 1**). "With all the balls on the table like that, you have so many little areas that you'll need to weave in and out of," says Corey Harper. "When you get into a 9-ball match after practicing this, it's easy. It looks wide open. There are huge areas to get the cue ball to go through, compared to what you were dealing with before."

IF YOU want to spend a little more time getting into a groove with position play, try this follow-shot version of **Diagram 1** on page 39. Again, start with ball in hand, but here you should follow underneath the line of balls to the other side, getting position for the next ball (**Diagram 2a**). Then shoot for the opposite corner, following back to the original side (**Diagram 2b**). Keep going back and forth until you totally lose the cue ball.



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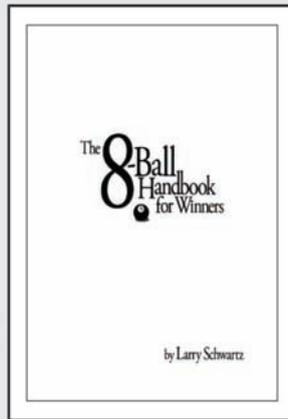
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SHAWN PUTNAM:

Check out other players. Before your matches, you should go in the arena and watch a good player play his match — like the final three or four games of his match — and you can just

look and see how hard he is hitting the ball and how the table is playing.

For example, if you think a guy hit a ball too hard and the cue ball comes up short, you automatically know that the table is going to be playing a little bit slow. You'll have to put a little more emphasis on striking the ball harder.



RODNEY MORRIS:

When you see a lot of the upsets in a tournament, they usually come in the first day. It's that both players don't know the table. The skill level becomes closer, because

the better player is not dialed in yet. When both players are not dialed in, the weaker player has a little better chance. And as the tournament goes on, the better players are playing a lot better, because they have the speed of the table down.

If one person doesn't have the speed of the table, that means getting hooked, or getting a harder shot that he doesn't want, or an angle he doesn't want. And when you are playing on unfamiliar equipment, the shots that you are not comfortable shooting are the ones you miss. You might not miss the 1 or the 2, but because you were out of line on the 2, and then the 3 and then the 4 and then the 5, the next thing you know you can't even shoot the 8 because you are so far gone that you can't get back in line.



JOHN SCHMIDT:

I see guys trying to fire in balls and shoot tough shots when they're warming up, and I think you need to work more on your position play, so

you don't have tough shots during the match. ... I might shoot a couple long straight shots real quick. I also would break a couple times to see if the corner ball goes from whichever side, and I would try to get my touch down.

The best thing for playing well is to stay down on the shot and follow

through. It sounds simple, and we all say it, but, under the gun, it's not easy to do. If you take the cue back on your stroke smoothly — because when you're nervous, you'll snatch it back quicker — and follow through, you'll be amazed at how good you'll pocket balls. Just don't do it against me. 🎱




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