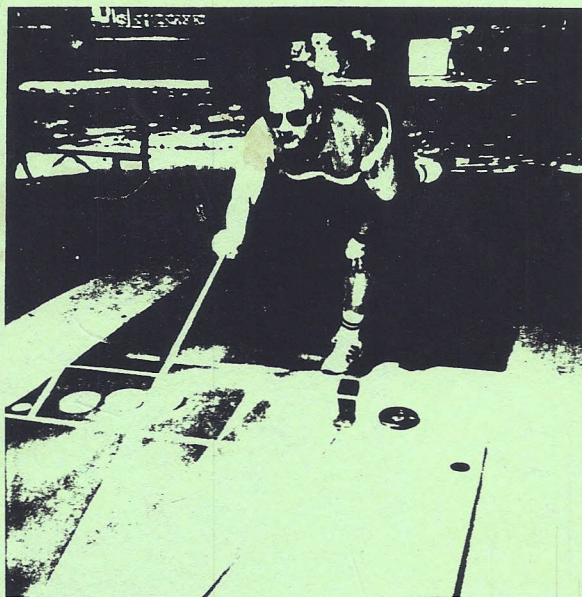


IMPROVE YOUR

SHUFFLEBOARD



A COLLECTION OF

52 ARTICLES - SERIES 9100

BY

LARY FARIS

THE WIDELY READ AND MUCH FOLLOWED

"SHUFFLEBOARD COACH"

FOR ALL SHUFFLERS

FOR BEGINNERS----FOR AMATUERS----FOR PROS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"SHUFFLEBOARD COACH" By Lary Faris - 1991

Page #	Title
1	Snuggling
2	Court Drifts Or Snow Drifts
3	What Is A St. Pete?
4	What Is A Tampa?
5	Hold To Your Aiming Point
6	The Shadow Knows
7	Responses To A St. Pete
8	The Most You'll Need Is A Broom
9	Responses To A 'Tampa
10	The Joy Of Shuffling
11	Team Championship
12	Seven Inches Is Enough
13	Double Scores
14	More Than Eye-Hand Coordination
15	Shuffleboard Formula
16	The Corner Of The Seven
17	Shuffleboard Is Like Chess
18	Fire The Manager
19	Cover Your Treasure
20	A Carport For Your Neighbor
21	Keep Your Kitchen Clean
22	The Best Shot In Shuffleboard
23	Meat And Potatoes
24	Kindergarten
25	Muddying The Board
26	Creative Excuse
27	Beware Of Bad Advice
28	A Lesson From Lew
29	Col. P. C. Bullard
30	Hueristics
31	Slow Lane Game
32	Three Person Shuffleboard
33	Nitty Gritty 1
34	Nitty Gritty 2
35	Nitty Gritty 3
36	Fun At Pot Luck
37	Hiding A Ten
38	Tournament Ready
39	Super Point
40	Lee Jordan
41	A Letter To Lee
42	Inside Shuffleboard
43	Better Clearing
44	Listen To The Experts
45	Underdog
46	Accept The Conditions
47	Creativity Is Needed
48	One To A Customer
49	Innovative Shooting
50	Letters From Readers
51	Courts Will Be Courts
52	There Is Nothing Like A Game

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INTRODUCTION

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
DATE _____
CLUB _____

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Use this book like a workbook. Mark in it. Mess it up. It's yours! Each column has a diagram. Draw your own disc locations on it. Write your own comments in the margins and on the blank pages opposite the articles. Write down what ideas you have and whether you agree or not with what I've written. Then write how you might use the information in a match. Later add what happened. Maybe an article will give you a related idea. Write it in the book, too. The blank pages leave enough room to even keep a log of your play.

I've heard some clubs have group discussions using "Shuffleboard Coach" articles as a text. Perhaps you might organize a group. Each member of the group has a book. A leader gives an assignment of two or three articles. Then each member of the group reads the articles in his or her book, marks key points or questions, and comes to the meeting prepared to discuss and to debate.

Mess up your book with your own thoughts--its your workbook.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS BOOK

"Shuffleboard Coach" is for everyone.

All shufflers want to improve their play. They want to shoot better and they want to choose better shots. They want to get the satisfaction of shuffling well and they want to win as often as they can. Reading and studying this book of 52 articles from the "Shuffleboard Coach" newspaper column should help.

My readers are both shufflers and non-shufflers. The non-shufflers read "Shuffleboard Coach" just out of curiosity. They want to see what all those shuffleboarders are up to. Beginning shufflers get instructions and tips that help them with the basics. The intermediates get to learn the inside strategy of champions. Finally, the experts tell me they read my column to see if I've got it right. They check me out.

A COUPLE OF COMMENTS

We've done our best to eliminate typos. My friends Bob Douthit and Charlie Griffen have helped in proof reading. If a few errors show up, forgive us, we're shufflers, not editors.

These articles are primarily focused on 75 point games, however the thinking to frame games as well.

Please remember, the articles are copyrighted and it is illegal to copy them without the written permission of the author.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I wasted the first couple of years of my life. That is to say, I didn't play shuffleboard until I was three. That was back in 1936 when my mother talked me into playing on the old kid's courts at Lakeside, Ohio. I entered my first tournament at five when my mother persuaded Bill Slyh, the director, into taking a chance that I knew all the rules and would behave.

Through the years, I've played in all sorts of tournaments--club, district, state, national, and international. I've played for fun and I've played for blood. I've won and I've lost. I've played all over the US-- in Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, Illinois, Kentucky, North Carolina, Florida, Arizona, Texas, Nevada, and California. I've played in Japan and in Canada. I've played on fast court and slow courts, in frame games and point games, and in pot licks and mixers. Once I played in 107 degrees and direct sun, and once I played at 15 degrees with ice on the court.

The highlights of my achievements include being in two shuffleboard Halls of Fame-- the Ohio and the National. I've won 11 National championships--7 singles and 4 doubles. I've won these national championships in four decades- the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's. At the International in Yokohama, Japan, in 1988 I was undefeated. Also along the way I've lost many, many games.

I have always been a student of shuffleboard. I'm just a fair shooter so I have to compete by using my head. Through the years I've collected several file drawers full of notes, diagrams, and articles about shuffling. I always wanted to write a book for shufflers.

In 1988, as I approached retirement after 33 years at Procter & Gamble, I decided to try to write a weekly newspaper column on shuffleboard, somewhat like Goren on Bridge. I bought a Macintosh computer to draw court diagrams and to use as a word processor. Then I wrote up a few samples, called the column "Shuffleboard Coach," and sent samples out to several Florida papers. I was stunned when I soon got a note from my secretary that a Jim Gourvellis, from the Port Charlotte Sun Herald had called. I returned his call and he said he wanted to use my column. Soon after that I talked to Bruce Giles of the Lakeland Ledger. Other newspapers followed and "Shuffleboard Coach" was off and running.

"Shuffleboard Coach" has appeared in newspapers in Florida, Ohio, Texas, and California. It has been translated into Japanese and appears in the Japanese Shuffleboard Association quarterly, "Happy Shuffling."

My wife Marilyn and I live at Lakeside, Ohio, and Sun City Center, Florida. We have three married children and four grandchildren.

SNUGGLING

I've never been a snuggler--a shuffle board snuggler that is. Boy-girl snuggling is fine, but shuffle snuggling never works out for me.

Shuffleboard snuggling involves shooting your disc so it just touches an opponent's disc, or at least is very close to the opponent's disc. That is, the discs snuggle. You already know what boy-girl snuggling is.

I haven't written much about snuggling because I don't use it as a part of my strategy. I'm more successful with the other strategy, board clearing. I seem to do much better clearing than snuggling.

Yet many of our best players use snuggling all the time and it works for them. So there must be something to it.

In some recent matches, I've tried out the snuggling approach and I've been learning. Here are a few principles to think about.

-Shoot to just tap the disc you're trying to snuggle. If you shoot to stop short of the target, you may stop very short.

-Shoot to be a little to the outside, maybe an inch, of the target disc. This should make it harder for an opponent to kitchen you.

-Have a good feel for the court. If you're been clearing for an hour, you likely don't have a good court feel and won't snuggle well, so don't try it. If you've been playing on the board, you'll likely have a good feel.

-Remember that court drifts are usually more pronounced when discs are going slowly. Thus if you're snuggling a seven, you'll likely find more drift than if you're removing the seven.

-Be emotionally prepared for some excitement. Once 3 or 4 discs are in and around the seven, most anything can happen.

The scoreboard is very important in snuggling. That is, know the score. Today's diagram is a good example.

In the game in the diagram, black opened with a deep seven and yellow snuggled. Black then tried to cut out the snuggle but hit it squarely, a typical snuggling result. Now the situation on the board has a black seven over a yellow seven.

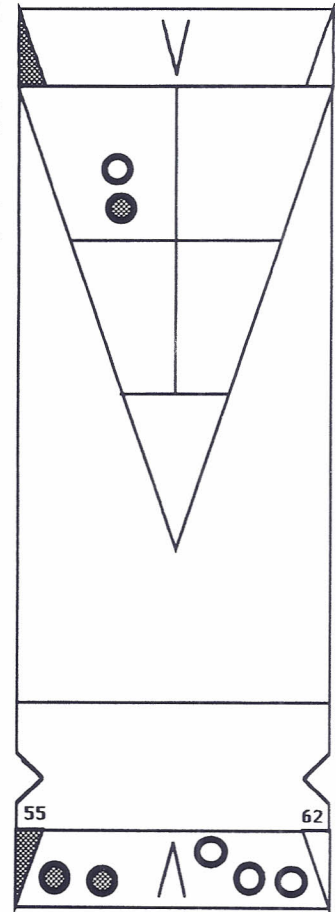
Look at the score. What should yellow do?

Well, the reason yellow snuggled was to try to pick up a score on the board. With that and the hammer, yellow goes out. Yellow now has that score on the board. He should keep it. That is, he should cover it.

True yellow is covering the black seven also, but that's what the snuggle game is all about--giving to get.

I'll keep studying snuggling. I'll likely win less while I learn, but I'll have fun. I'll pass on my learnings.

Let me hear about your snuggling--your shuffleboard snuggling, that is.



What Should Yellow Do?

COURT DRIFTS OR SNOW DRIFTS

In the winter months, folks who live in the North have to cope with snow drifts.

In those same winter months, shufflers who have gone to warmer climates get away from the snow but not from the drifts. Shufflers, in the South, must cope with court drifts.

Drifts are part of the game. Courts simply are not made perfectly flat, perfectly level. The surface contains unseen slopes and the paths of well-aimed discs are influenced by these slopes.

Shufflers usually say the discs drift. At other times, they say they curve. But whether they call it a drift or a curve, it's evident in their frustrated tone of voice that they'd like to call it something much stronger.

In Japan, the courts are straight. That is, they are perfectly level and flat. The discs go straight--no drift. Accuracy is higher and players can make shots that are usually considered too difficult on U.S. courts.

The Japanese courts are made by a special process. The problem is that they are prohibitively expensive. We can't afford them and they can't afford very many.

So until some innovator figures out how to make perfect courts at a low cost, we must cope with drifts.

One facet of drifts is that they usually behave differently for different shot speeds. That is, fast shots drift less than slower shots. This can often fool a player.

For example, yellow may have removed several black eights with shots hard enough to drive the black disc through the board. Yellow has learned that she needs to allow for about 2 inches of drift to the left, if she wants to hit black squarely to hold a yellow eight.

Yellow keeps the 2 inch-to-the-left drift in her mind.

Later yellow has the hammer and a yellow disc is on the 7/8 line. Yellow thus has a great chance to double, that is to tap the yellow into the seven while holding an eight.

She lines up the shot and allows the 2 inches of left drift. She shoots lightly, just hard enough to nudge the yellow off the line.

As the hammer disc approaches the 7/8 line, it slows as intended. But as it slows, it picks up more drift. Instead of 2 inches, it drifts 5 inches.

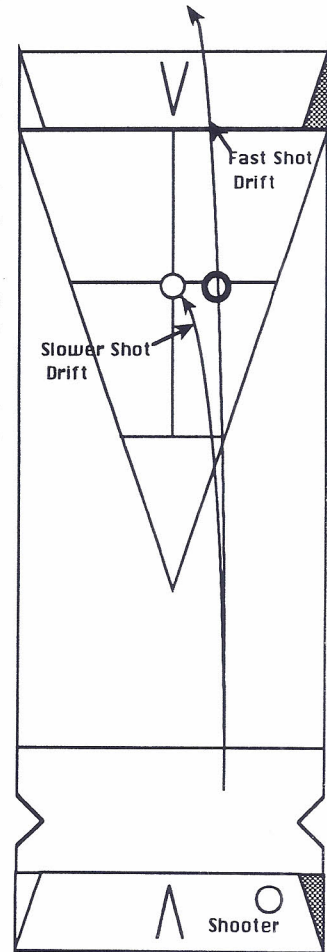
Instead of 15, yellow has two liners, both discs on the 7/8 line.

Have you ever seen this happen? Has it ever happened to you? I've seen it many, many times.

Often the shooter simply thinks she aimed wrong or the drift changed. The problem is that the speed was different.

Players must keep in mind that on a slower shot, discs will drift more than on a faster shot. Shufflers must take their shooting speed into account when allowing for drifts.

Yet no matter how difficult court drifts can be I'll still take them over snow drifts.



Shot Speed Effects Drift

WHAT IS A ST. PETE ?

The first shot in almost every game of shuffleboard is a St. Pete. This is true in frame games and point games. It happens in games in California, Texas, Ohio, and Florida and in games in Japan, Canada, and the U.S.

My columns are full of references to St. Petes. A computer check might reveal that it's the most frequently used word in these articles. My spell checker flags it again and again because it's not in the computer's dictionary. The computer wants me to write St. Petersburg.

Yet with all this frequency and familiarity, non-shufflers and beginners have no clue as to what it means. So while the word used most among shufflers is "St. Pete", the question asked most by non-shufflers is, "What is a St. Pete?"

Today's diagram shows a St. Pete. Yellow has placed it on the opposite side of the court, about the same distance as the point of the ten, and about halfway between the point of the ten and the far side of the court.

The key to the St. Pete is its two shadows. A shadow is the area beyond a disc that cannot be reached with a disc from one of the shooting areas, yellow's area or black's area.

The diagram shows the shadow against black in grey. It goes through the side of the eight and the heart of the seven. Again, discs in the shadow cannot be hit from black's shooting area.

The diagram also shows the shadow against yellow. It goes through non-scoring areas. Again, discs in the shadow cannot be hit from yellow's shooting area.

The shadows in the diagram make it obvious that the black shadow can be useful to yellow, but that the yellow shadow doesn't present much opportunity for black.

The key is that yellow can score in black's shadow area. That is, yellow can shoot to area of the good seven shown in the diagram and black will be hard pressed to remove it.

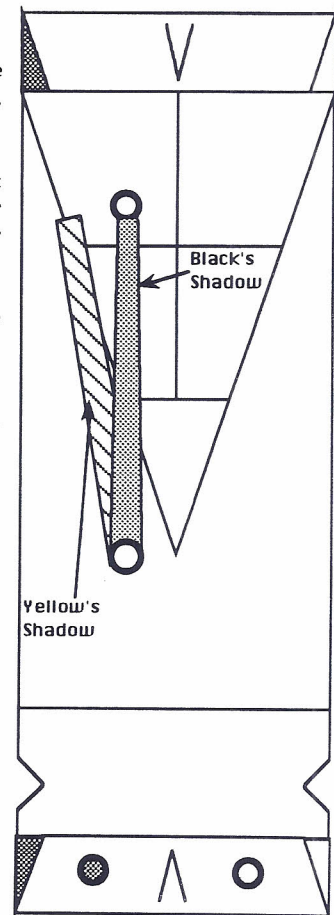
On the other hand, black can't use the yellow shadow as effectively. If black shoots into yellow's shadow, cross-hatched in the diagram, yellow can't hit the disc, but it's not in a scoring area and has no value.

Discs in the shadow area of a St. Pete are said to be "hidden". That is, as an opponent lines up a shot, he cannot "see" the disc because of the disc in front of it.

St. Petes, shadow areas, and hidden discs are the basics around which shuffleboard strategies are built.

Beginners should examine St. Petes thoroughly. Go to an empty court and place a disc at the St. Pete spot. Then place discs in various locations behind it. From the shooting areas, draw sight lines that identify the shadow area. Shoot discs, trying to hit hidden scores. Observe what can be done and what can't be done.

Who knows why this most common of all shots is called a St. Pete? Did it originate there?



WHAT IS A TAMPA ?

If the first shot in a shuffleboard game isn't the ever present St. Pete, it's most likely a Tampa. These two leading or pilot shots are much like their namesake cities. They have much in common, and yet there is much to differentiate them.

As with the St. Pete, experienced shufflers use the term Tampa as if all the world knows they are talking about a shuffleboard shot, not a fine Florida city. Beginners and non-shufflers hear the term used and ask, "What is a Tampa?"

Today's diagram shows a Tampa. Yellow has placed it on her own side of the court right beside the point of the ten. The side of the disc is just touching an imaginary line down the center of the court.

As with the St. Pete, the key to the Tampa is its two shadows. Remember the shadow is the area beyond a disc that cannot be reached when shooting another disc from one of the shooting areas, that is from yellow's shooting area in one case, or black's shooting area in the other.

The diagram shows the shadow against black in cross-hatch. It goes through the heart of the eight and the heart of the seven. Yellow scores in those locations, that is in the shadow, can't be hit by black.

The diagram also shows the shadow against yellow. It goes through the corner of the ten and then down the 8/8 line and the 7/7 line. Once again, discs in that shadow cannot be hit when shooting from yellow's area.

As with the St. Pete, the diagram makes it obvious that the shadow against black can be useful to yellow. On the other hand, shadow against yellow doesn't offer much potential for black because most discs in it would be on the 8/8 or 7/7 line.

The key is that yellow can score in black's shadow area. That is, yellow can shoot to a spot such as the good seven shown in the diagram and black won't be able to remove it.

On the other hand, black can't make effective use of the yellow shadow. If black shoots into that shadow, yellow can't hit the disc, but it's not a good score so there's no gain.

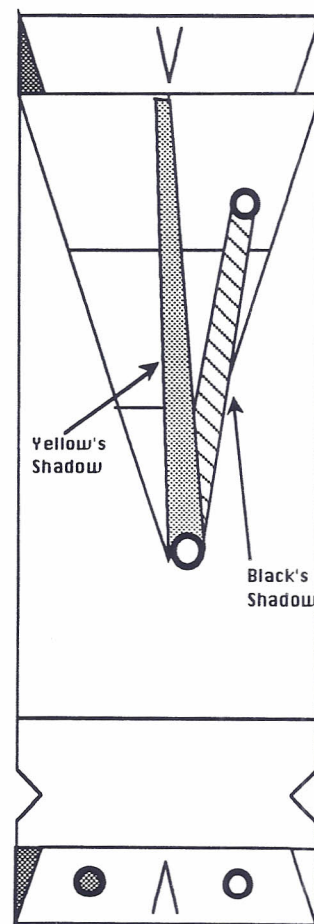
As with St. Petes, discs in the shadow areas are said to be "hidden".

Players use St. Petes more often than Tampas, mainly because if they are misplaced a few inches little harm is done.

If Tampas are misplaced a few inches, right or left, great harm is done. Go to an empty court and study the two shadows behind a Tampa. Observe what each color can accomplish. Then move the Tampa 4 inches to the side, that is, misplace it. What happens to the shadows? You'll see that the shadow for yellow moves off the 8/8 and 7/7 line. Black can then hide scores that are good.

Thus Tampas are effective lead shots but they are risky, they must be placed with care.

Is there another city that would like to have a shuffleboard shot named after it? How 'bout a Cincinnati?



Tampa Shadows

Many times we see shufflers fail to allow for enough drift. They know the court drifts to the right, but they allow for only three inches instead of six. Their disc drifts across the target and the shot goes awry.

On the other hand, you seldom see a player allow too much drift. It seems shufflers allow for too little but never for too much. Why is this? Why do players underplay the drift and even forget it yet seldom over play it?

My guess is that they move their aiming point. At the last minute, their eyes focus on the target point rather than the aiming point.

To discuss this, we'll need to establish some terms. In the diagram black is shooting at the yellow seven, labeled A. Black wants to hit it right in the middle at point X. That point is what I'm calling the target point. That is, the target point is the exact point that the shooter wants her disc to hit.

Because there is a five inch drift on the court, black must shoot her disc toward a point five inches to the right of the target point. This point is shown as O in the diagram. I'm calling it the aiming point. The aiming point is the exact point that the shooter aims her disc at.

If the drift is correctly figured, a disc shot at the aiming point will hit the target point. The shot will be a success.

Most players know all this and apply it effectively time after time. Yet occasionally, their eyes commit treason. They move from the aiming point toward the target point just before the shot is delivered. Thus the drift is underplayed.

We've all done this. Something in our head causes us to move our eyes toward the point we want the disc to hit rather than staying on the aiming point. All the drift allowance is cancelled. The shot starts out toward the target and, when it drifts, it goes to the left of the target and is a bummer.

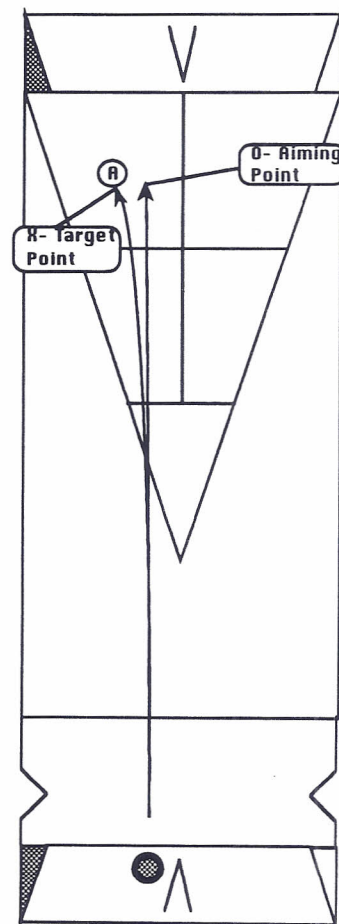
The spectators believe the player has underestimated the drift, and maybe the player does too. But what she has actually done is allowed the correct amount but then shifted her eyes from the aiming point toward the target point.

When I do this, it feels like some faulty mental process tells me that , because I focused on the correct aiming point , my disc knows where it should head. Then by moving my eyes toward the target point, I'm kind of leading the disc to the target, the point I want it to finally hit. I guess that's some sort of faulty thinking that I can communicate with my disc.

All the disc really needs is a shove toward the aiming point. The crooked court will make it drift. If there is a communication it's between the court and the disc not the player and the disc. (Wouldn't it be nice if we could talk to our discs—I guess we do sometimes talk to them and yell at them--what we want is for them to hear us and do what we say--wouldn't it be nice--.)

All players move off their aiming point occasionally. Often this happens on a crucial shot, late in a game. With the added importance of the moment, the player moves her eye at the last second, probably giving the shot a little extra help, help that it doesn't need.

Aim at the aiming point, not at the target point.



Allowing For Drift

THE SHADOW KNOWS

What's the most important line on a shuffleboard court? It's the line that isn't a line. That is, it's the triangle in the middle of the 10-off.

One of the first things shuffleboard beginners must be taught is that discs on that line are good 10-offs. Beginners wonder why the line is there. Why have a line that doesn't count?

I usually answer, smartly, "It's not a line, it's a triangle." Then I explain that it's there to divide the shooting area. It separates the half from which yellow shoots from the half from which black shoots.

Then come the big questions. Why do shuffleboard rules divide the shooting areas? Why can't each player use the entire shooting area?

Probably when the game first started, the shooting area was divided simply to keep players out of each other's way. Someone figured out that if one player shot from the right side and the other from the left side, they wouldn't be bumping into each other. For a sample of bumping, watch a left hander play a right hander when the right hander is on the right.

This innocent beginning, grounded in practicality and courtesy, has turned out to be the key to shuffleboard strategy.

Why is this? Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of the kitchen? The shadow does.

When a disc is placed in the upper part of the board, it prevents a shooter from shooting into the area behind it. That is, it "covers" a part of the court.

The part of the court a disc covers looks much like a shadow. In the diagram, the shadows extend from the cover disc back through the area behind the disc to the end of the court.

It's possible to identify this area on a real court by using a long string. Place a disc near the point of the ten. Have a person at each end of the court hold the string tight and low on the court. The player on the shooter's end should hold his end of the string by the triangle on the yellow side. The player at the other end should move the string so that it just touches the edge of the disc.

A third person can use a piece of chalk and draw a light line under the string. Then do the same with the player at the shooter's end holding the string at the outside of the shooting and the player at the far end having the string run by the other side of the disc.

The lines should define an area that a player shooting yellow couldn't hit. That's what I've called a shadow.

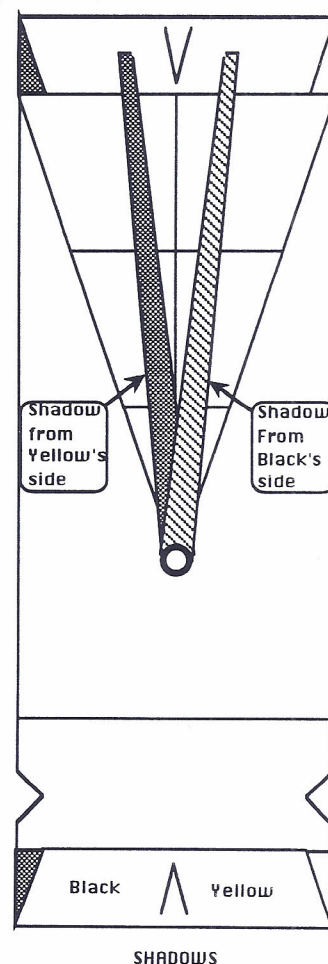
Now do the same for the black side of the 10-off. Be sure to leave the cover disc in exactly the same place.

The result should be two shadows about as shown in the diagram. That is, there is a part of the court that black can shoot to but yellow cannot. And there is a part of the court that yellow can shoot to but black cannot.

The shadow knows this. Now we do too.

Shuffleboard strategy is built around shadows. Study them. Experiment with them.

Be sure you know why the line that doesn't count is the most important line on the court. The shadow does.



RESPONSES TO A ST. PETE

The most common first shot in a round of shuffleboard is a St. Pete pilot. I've described this St. Pete opening in great detail in this column.

Once the purpose and execution of the St. Pete is understood, the question that logically comes up is what to do against it. That is, just what does a shuffler do when her opponent has opened with a St. Pete?

Here's where the intrigue of shuffleboard unfolds. There are not one or two responses to a St. Pete, but eight totally unique and different replies. Eight.

Most of these have their place in shuffling tactics and strategies just as different basketball defenses have their place in that sport.

Before we look at these, make a list of your own. Remember, I'm identifying clearly unique and different responses, not simply variations such as clearing on the left versus clearing on the right.

Here we go. Your opponent has opened with a St. Pete. What shot do you take? What are the responses?

1. Clear the St. Pete. This is the most common response. Use it when you're even or ahead.

2. Clear the St. Pete and try to roll to a Tampa or St. Pete of your own. This is a risky shot. Few players use it in tournament play, because it can backfire and remain a good hide-cover for the opponent. I don't use it, but it can be fun and rewarding.

3. Kitchen the St. Pete. The dumbest shot in shuffleboard, yet players use it again and again. It's hard to do and even if successful, the 10-off is always open and very easy to remove.

4. Plug the hiding route (also called filling-in). That is, place what amounts to a Tampa beside the St. Pete. This can stir-up a game, but it can backfire. It's best saved for fun games.

5. Set your own St. Pete. Now you've each got one. Then you can try to outhide each other. Since you have the hammer, you may be able to come out ahead. It's risky. Tournament players seldom use it. When there is such a big drift that I'm sure my opponent can't hide behind his St. Pete, I sometimes try this.

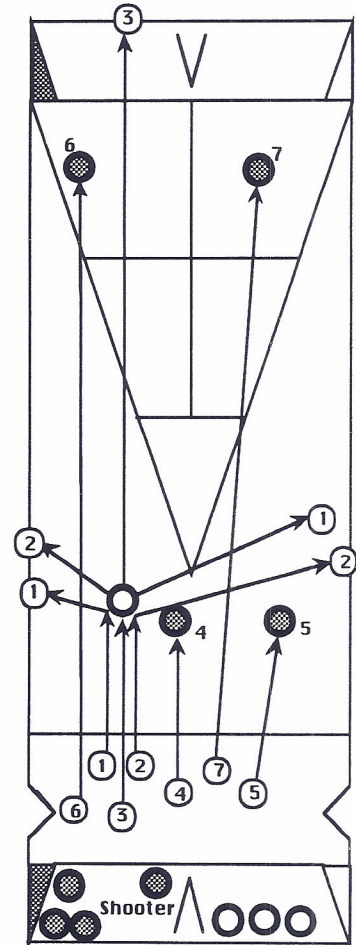
6. Suicide Alley. That is, go down the outside of the court and try to score behind the St. Pete in the corner of the seven. It's a risky, desperate shot. Folks who can't clear may want to use it, but they'll get 10-offs frequently.

7. Go to the scoring board. This is the standard response when a player is behind. Go directly to the big triangle and get a good score. Then the opponent has to clear it or get drawn into a kitchen game. It's the second most common response after the cleaning shot.

8. Shoot off the court. I seldom see this. Players sometimes resort to this if they are about to go out and the opponent is a super kitchen player. Shooting to the edge of the court is considered more sportsmanlike.

Now I'm sure I'll get some mail because many of you will come up with a 9th or 10th response. I hope so.

Meanwhile, I settle for these eight and see if I can remember when to use which and why.



RESPONSES TO A ST PETE

THE MOST YOU'LL NEED IS A BROOM

Dear Coach: We recently moved to Florida and would like to build a shuffleboard court in our backyard. Would you please advise us on how to do this? We enjoy your column. From A Florida Reader.

I've received several letters along the lines of the above. Folks have discovered shuffleboard, are enthusiastic about it, and want to have a backyard court. I appreciate the interest and motivation behind the desire.

I answer all my letters from readers. (As I've said before, the ones who send self-addressed, stamped envelopes get answered first). Here are some of the things I point out in my court building letters.

It's very important to look at the potential cost right at the start. A good court will easily cost \$3000 to \$5000. If that amount sounds like a 20-off to your budget, forget it. You won't get it cheaper.

Also, before you get serious, look over the prospective location in your yard. A court is big. Check the diagram. While the basic court is 52 feet by 6 feet, with gutters and benches it's 59 by 10, and you'll need room for the construction activities, so add some more space. Do you have an area this big?

The site needs to be flat, no slope or hillsides. When fill dirt is used to level a site, the court will always surely settle unevenly and wind up being very drifty.

Are you still there? You'll want to get a contractor who has built courts before, and there aren't many. Nidy, of Winter Garden, Florida, is one of the most widely used. Many sidewalk builders will say they can build a court, but if they can't show you an example of their shuffleboard work, forget them. Our courts have two many fine points that well-meaning, but inexperienced contractors don't know.

Once your court is built, you'll need to stain it, line it, seal it, equip it, and landscape the area around it. You may want to try this yourself, but you'll be happier with the result if you use experienced professionals.

When you're done, hold your breath when you shoot your first disc. Keep your fingers crossed that it doesn't drift. After all that work and money, if you end up with a curvey court, you'll want to take up boxing and get your head smacked.

Probably all this has made you as tired as it has me. Perhaps too tired to play and that's what we started out wanting to do.

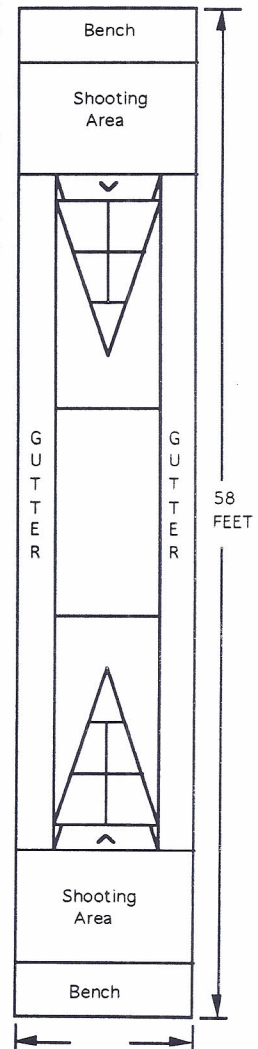
As an alternative to building your own court, why not join the local club? There you'll find courts already built and maintained. They will already be stained and lined. Most of them will be level. Other players will be ready to shoot with you.

All you'll have to do is sweep one off!

In no way am I against backyard courts. They are very handy and can be lots of fun. I knew a man who designed his house so he could have one in his basement. Harold Edmundson, the National Shuffleboard Association President, has one in his backyard and plays on it in the snow with his good friend Bob Douthit. I had one built in a park near my house.

On the other hand, playing at the local club is much simpler. Just grab your cue and head there for a morning of fun.

The most you'll need is a broom.



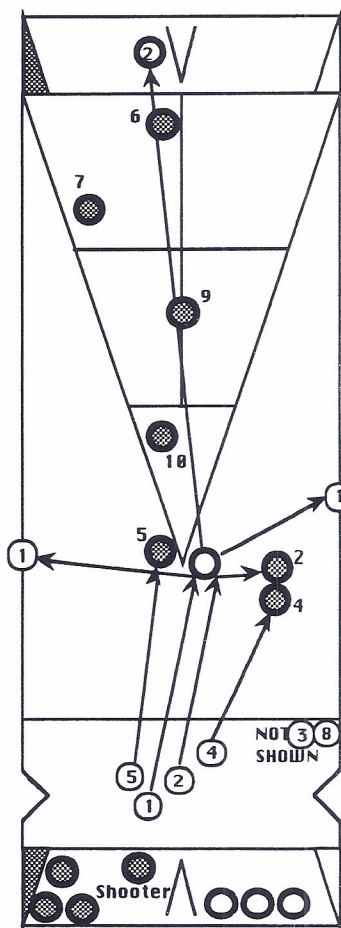
RESPONSES TO A TAMPA

The St. Pete and the Tampa are both basic pilot shots in shuffleboard. Both are placed on the top of the board to set-up a hidden score on a later shot. Both cast shadows over the scoring area that greatly favor the shooter. BUT there the similarity ends.

The St. Pete and Tampa create tactical situations that are as unlike as a bay and a gulf. They create different opportunities for the shooter. Most importantly, they call for different responses.

In a recent column, I identified eight possible responses to the St. Pete. Here are 10 possible responses to a Tampa.

1. Clear the Tampa. When ahead, this is certainly the safest choice.
2. Drive the Tampa to the 10-off and roll to a St. Pete. This is a great shot because it sets up a double problem for the opponent. Suddenly she faces both a 10-off and a hiding problem. If the shot isn't successful, there's little downside. Just be sure to drive the Tampa through the 10-off and be sure to roll at least 12 inches to the side.
3. Play the Tampa for a 10-off. Never do this directly. Always roll to the outside as in the previous response.
4. Plug the hiding lane. This is often called filling. It's a poor response to a Tampa because the outer hiding route can't be completely covered. A well-placed plug shot will still leave the outside of the seven uncovered.
5. Counter the Tampa with a Tampa. This could lead to lots of fun but also lots of losses. Probably both players would get 3 scores, and that's not good when it's your hammer.
6. Score a deep seven near the 7/7 line. This spot is almost hidden yet it's dangerously close to the 10-off.
7. Go to the scoring board. This is certainly a good selection when behind. Keep the shot far enough away from the centerline so that the opponent can see it. After all, you're trying to create a board game and a possible 10-off shot. It makes sense to be sure your lure is in the open.
8. Shoot off the board. As with the St. Pete, when you are in a game situation in which a 10-off would be a total disaster, you might shoot clear off the board. Sometimes players shoot to the very edge, a more sporting location.
9. Shoot to the 8/8 line behind the Tampa. Often this option pays off. Sometimes it backfires. While the disc on the 8/8 line is not a score, it can be used later for a double (16!) or it can be used to combination out an opponent's eight. It's a bit like a Trojan Horse, in that it looks innocent but holds potential power. (But partners may not see it that way. Keep it for singles.)
10. Finally, the 10th response is to hide a 10. This is a dandy shot, especially on the sixth disc of the round. It can unnervify an opponent. Usually part of the good 10 will be open offering the opponent the choice of a difficult clipping shot or a countering hide that still leaves her two points less. Play the shot very close to the Tampa and be sure to get it into the 10. If it lands on the 10/8 line, it's a possible double on the hammer.



RESPONSES TO A TAMPA

With these 10 responses to a Tampa and the previous eight responses to a St. Pete, shuffleboard is exposed as complex. With that complexity comes the intrigue and enjoyment.

If you haven't tried shuffling, give it a go. If you have, go play another game. And let me hear from you.

THE JOY OF SHUFFLING

I've been asking shufflers why they play shuffleboard. What are the benefits of our game? What are its values? What does it do for us? Why would someone want to take it up?

In answer to my questions, shufflers have enumerated many more reasons to play than even I, a lifetime lover of the game, expected. Today I'll share these with you. If you're a player you'll perhaps recognize many of your own feelings. If you are a non-player, maybe you'll find among the benefits a reason to try our game.

Here are what might be called "The Joys of Shuffling."

1. Mentioned most by shufflers are the social benefits of playing. The game puts us in contact with friends--new friends and old friends. Shufflers talk, exchange ideas, laugh together, and care for each other. Shuffleboard gatherings have a festive or picnic-like atmosphere. An esprit-de-corps develops and lasting friendships are made.

2. Exercise is a second often-mentioned value. It can begin with getting a broom and sweeping the courts, extend through the game, and continue to walking home or at least walking to the parking lot. Shufflers are on their feet, they're moving, they're bending. An exercise leader probably wouldn't provide a better workout.

In many locations play is outside in fresh invigorating air. In others it's inside in air conditioning away from heat and humidity. In either case it's energizing and stimulating.

Many older shufflers hint that they might not still be around if they didn't have shuffleboard to get their bodies moving each day.

3. Shuffling provides folks a challenge. There's a basic challenge to get going, to get to the courts at the right time for play. Then there's the physical challenge, the opportunity for the ambitious to get better by practicing a little, by losing a few pounds, or by improving stamina a bit.

There's the mental challenge of learning the tactics and strategies of the game. Beginners must learn the basics. Advanced pros must look for the small edge they'll need to win a big match. Players feeling the challenge get their mental juices going.

4. For many, shuffling offers opportunities for activities other than playing the game. My mother loved to organize and manage. She'd rather arrange a tournament and direct it than play in it. She had a great time. Many people like to promote shuffleboard, to recruit new players, and to publicize results. For me, shuffleboard provides an outlet for my writing urge.

Some shufflers like to become officers of clubs. They like to chair meetings, arrange tournaments, and organize things. Many go on to district, state, and national offices.

Still others like to work on the courts and the equipment. I know a retired shop teacher who spent 15 great years working on the courts, the scoreboards, the bleachers, and all the other equipment.

5. What about honor, glory, and money? Yes, they're a great part of shuffling too. Winning a tournament can be very satisfying. Pride is at a peak. Winning a National Championship can put a player's name in numerous publications. Money is small, but a treasured prize. Winning can be a winner.

6. I think the most important benefit is that shuffling gets us up and going. It gets us out of the house, away from the TV, away from our aches and pains and problems. It keeps us alive.

Who knows what kind of trouble we might get into without our shuffling? We might be standing around on street corners, or cruising the avenues in our cars, or getting into serious trouble.

So if you want to have friends, get exercise, meet a challenge, and maybe win honor and glory, try shuffling. At the very least, it may keep you out of trouble.

TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

Here's the scene. Your team championship depends on you. You and your friends have played other league teams for many weeks. Now you're even with the rival neighboring team, tied for first place in the league in the last week of the season..

You must win today's match against a good team from a community to the north. Play started at 1:00 and all afternoon the matches have been close. Your own final game has been a little slower than the others. That is, all the other games are now finished and everyone is watching you finish your last frame.

Already the league manager has figured the standings out. If you win your game, your team wins the league. If you lose your game, you're second and your neighboring team gets the trophy.

Pressure? Yes, there's pressure. It's down to your last shot. You've not had a good frame and you're in a pickle, as the diagram shows.

You're yellow and ahead 23-8 in the last frame. It's your hammer. You're looking at a board that has a black eight about half covered by a black Tampa. Also on the board is a very ominous looking yellow kitchen deep in the 10-off.

What shot should you select? You know everyone is thinking right along with you. You can feel their attention. You can anticipate their second guessing. More pressure.

Let's look at the situation. You have a 15 point lead, but there are 18 points against you on the board. You must do something. That is, you must remove a score or make one yourself.

You have three possibilities. One shot would be to knock out the opponent's black eight. This score is about half open and the shot is one that most players can make.

Another shot would be to remove the 10-off. Simply hit it on the edge and watch both discs roll off the court. The game, match, and league championship would be yours--if you didn't miss or stick.

Finally, you might try to score an eight on the open side of the board. This is an easy shot. Most players can make it 6 out of 10 times.

What shot would you choose? How would you decide?

There's no clear answer on this one. All choices can work out fine. All are acceptable.

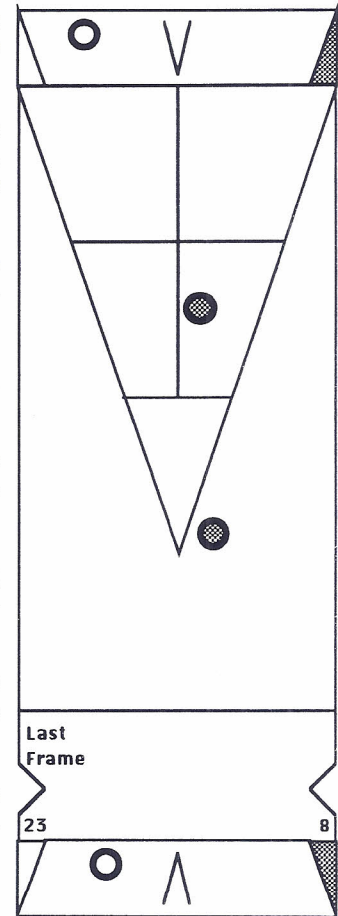
Trying to knock out the eight seems to me to be the weakest choice. A nervous player could easily miss, knick the Tampa, or hit the eight a little and watch it roll into the seven. I think I'd avoid that choice.

Removing the kitchen is maybe a little tougher than it looks because it's a deep 10-off. A direct hit will remain in the 10-off--and there goes the team trophy.

Shooting to score an eight looks like the surest choice, especially if you've scored there in previous frames. Blot out the spectators, focus on the eight, and shoot exactly how you did the last time you scored there.

Watch your disc glide down the court into the eight. Watch as it stops clear of the lines. And listen as your teammates cheer and applaud.

Shuffleboard, like baseball, can roll along through a season and seem to be routine. Yet, like baseball, the tension is gradually mounting. Finally at the end, world series time, the pressure and suspense is tremendous. Enjoy it.



WHAT SHOULD YELLOW DO?

SEVEN INCHES IS ENOUGH

"How many inches in front of the yellow seven," shouted black to the players at the other end of the court.

One of those players walked out in the gutter and studied the position of the yellow seven. "About seven inches," he yelled to the original questioner.

What in the name of sevens and ten-offs was that all about? We hear it often from experts during tournaments but to the average player or beginner it may sound strange. They ask, "What's going on?"

More often than not, the question comes on the seventh shot of the round. For example, in a round in which yellow has the hammer, black may inquire before her own last shot.

Let's back up a bit to establish the base for the tactic black is hoping to implement. Her goal is to present yellow with a short seven in order to steal yellow's hammer.

A short seven is a seven that is only two or three inches past the 7/8 line. In that position it is difficult for an opponent to score her own shooter when removing it. That is, if black has a short seven, yellow can remove it but the yellow disc will likely stop on the 7/8 line. On a deeper seven, the yellow disc would stop clear of the 7/8 line and be a good score.

Thus presenting the hammer shooter with a short seven is a tactic that may well prevent her from scoring her hammer. She'll have to remove her opponent's good seven. But, unless she hits it on its side and gets a lucky roll, she'll end up on the 7/8 line. The same advantage holds true for short eights and short tens.

Now back to our question, "How many inches in front of the yellow seven?" Black wants to know if she can use the yellow seven as a backstop to get herself a short seven. She's thinking ahead.

If the answer is less than six inches, she'll not likely succeed. Her disc will touch the 7/8 line after removing the yellow seven. Yellow won't have to shoot at it with her hammer.

If the answer is seven inches to about nine inches, she'll have a great opportunity. Since discs are six inches in diameter, a backstop eight inches from the 7/8 line will stop a disc two inches from that line. That disc becomes a short seven.

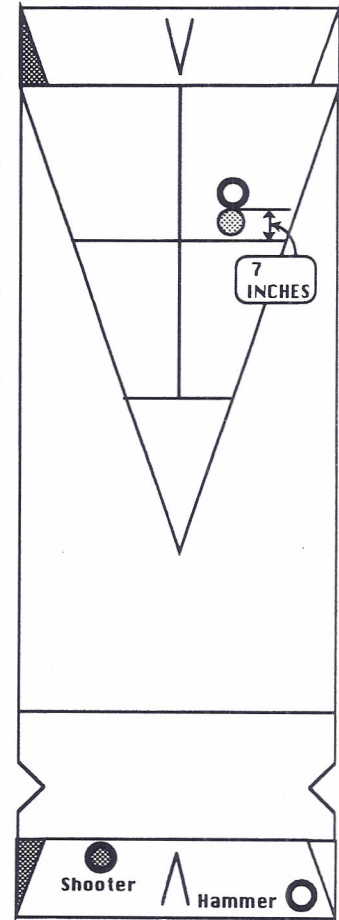
If the answer is more than 10 inches, the black seven will be too far from the line. That is, it won't be a short seven, it will simply be a good backstop for the hammer shot.

So that's what the yelling is all about. A player is allowed to ask about the position of the discs. She is not allowed to walk to the other end and look for herself. She has to yell her question and a referee or player must answer it.

(The rule is a bit strange. Perhaps it would be better to simply have the player use her own judgement without the shouted question.)

When the answer comes back, "About seven inches," the shooter says to herself, "Seven inches is enough. Good, I can use that disc to get a short seven and steal my opponent's hammer."

Baseball is called a game of inches even though ball parks are large. Shuffleboard is also a game of inches even though courts are 52 feet long.



BACKSTOP FOR A SHORT SEVEN

DOUBLE SCORES

A single score is good, a double score is twice as good.

Creating two good scores with one shot in shuffleboard can put a player on the road to a win. He can do this by bumping a liner such that his shooter stops in a scoring area and the liner is moved off the line into a scoring area. It's as simple as that.

There are three types of doubling opportunities--when the liner is on the 7/8 line, when it's on the up and down line, and when it's on the outside line. Each is different and each calls for a different approach.

The 7/8 Line Liner. Doubling on a 7/8 line liner looks easy and sometimes it is. The shooter sees one of his discs in the middle of the scoring area and mostly in the eight. He shoots at it, hits it lightly and, bingo, he's got 15 points, a seven and an eight.

Drift is the principle problem on this shot. The shooting disc will be gliding to a stop as it nears the 7/8 liner. It will be picking up the maximum drift, more drift than if it had been shot hard enough to remove a good eight.

Thus, a little extra drift will need to be anticipated. If a shot to remove an eight calls for two inches of drift allowance, allow three or four inches on a softer doubling shot.

Distance is, of course, important. Remember, it is better to shoot too soft and wind up with a single score than to shoot too hard and wind up putting the liner in the 10-off instead of the seven.

The 8/10 line offers the same doubling opportunity. Eighteen points can put most games in the bag.

There is a special case when the 7/8 liner is not at all in the eight. That is, it's mostly in the seven, and just touches the 7/8 line. This disc can be just barely nudged on the side so that it moves a few inches into the seven and the shooter goes into the seven also. Many players call this a "drag" shot.

The Up-and-Down Line Liner. A disc sitting in the middle of the 8/8 or 7/7 line can be hit from either side to get two scores. It's not as easy to accomplish as the 7/8 line double.

It's important to concentrate on distance. It only takes a small bump. Often I've seen players shoot too hard and lose both scores.

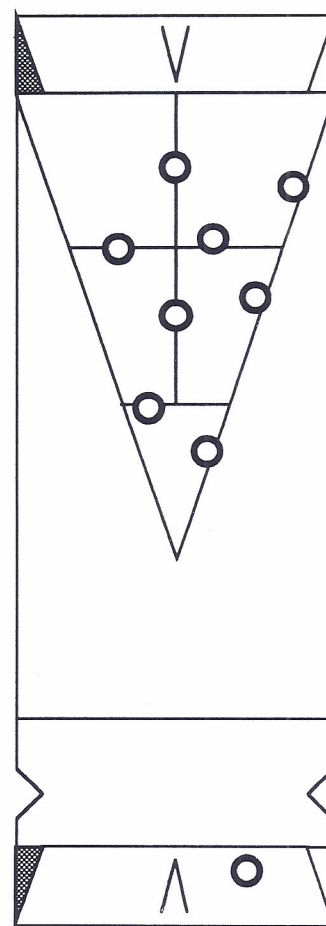
When the liner is not centered on the line, the shot is perhaps easier. Some players hit the fat side, some hit the thin side. I like to be drifting into the liner rather than away from it.

In either case, allow for the drift.

The Outside Line Liner. A disc barely touching the outside line can be hit just slightly on the inside. The liner will go forward into the scoring area and the shooter will roll just a little to the inside for a second good score.

This can be accomplished anywhere on the outside line for two sevens, an eight and a seven, two eights, even two tens.

Doubles scores are great. In a tight match in a National Tournament, Jay Snoddy made an eighteen point double with his hammer using an outside liner on the side of the ten. We had had 50 points. Suddenly we had 68 and needed only seven to win. I was the lucky partner and after we won I gave Jay double thanks for his double.



POSSIBLE DOUBLES

MORE THAN EYE-HAND COORDINATION

I played dartball at the church the other night. It was my first try at throwing darts. I wasn't much good.

Many of my teammates had expected that I would be a superb dart thrower. After all, they reasoned, if he's good at shuffleboard, he should be good at darts. "They're both simply eye-hand coordination, you know," said one of them.

Well he was wrong. While shuffleboard does require eye-hand coordination, it also calls for a great deal more. The eye-hand part of shuffling is but a small part of our sport.

Let's look at a game situation and examine all the steps in delivering a shot. Yes, eye-hand coordination will be a part, but it will be the last step in a total of five.

First, the situation. Yellow leads 67 to 66 and is shooting her hammer. On the board she has an eight and a ten-off while black has an eight. The discs are positioned as shown in the diagram.

Here are the five steps involved in delivering yellow's shot.

Step 1. Select the proper shot. What shot should yellow try to make? Should she try to remove her ten-off? Not likely because it's half covered by the yellow eight. Should she shoot a ten? No, that's too difficult. Should she remove the black eight? Yes, that looks good, but should she hit it directly or try to reverse the ten-off with it? In this case the reverse is probably the best choice.

This choice involves study, logic, and probabilities. Many factors effect the choice including the score. Experts might argue for a different choice. Step 1, shot selection, is complex.

Step 2. Study the angles. Trigonometry now comes into play. (I hope that doesn't scare would be beginners.) Just exactly where on the black eight should the yellow disc hit to make the black eight go toward the yellow ten-off? Most players go by experience guided intuition.

Technically., a line from the center of the ten-off through the center of the black eight will point to the target spot. In this case that would be about one inch to the right of center on the good black eight.

Step 3. Make court allowances. Almost all courts drift and have peculiarities. Each is different. Allowances must be made. Let's say there is a drift from right to left on this court. Our shooter has learned during the match that discs will drift about two inches to the left.

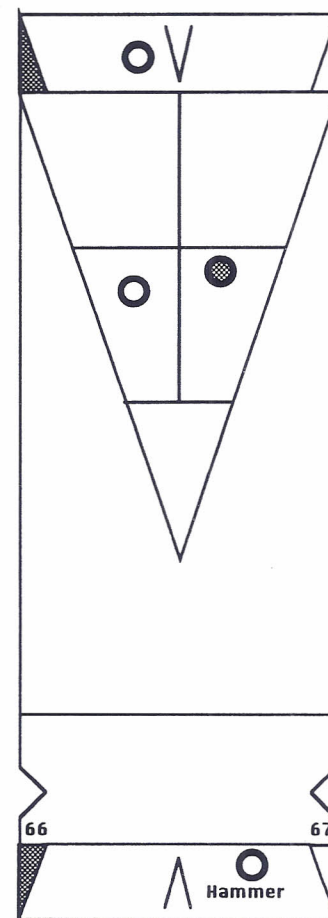
Now the target moves two inches from the spot determined in step two. That is, the target is now three inches to the right of center on the good black eight.

Step 4. Risk management. Our shooter wants to remove the ten-off, but she also wants to try to hold her shooting disc in the eight. That is she would rather not roll her shooting disc to the right to the outside line of the eight. She therefore takes about one-half inch off of her target point. She'd rather miss the ten-off on the right than the left. Now her target is 2 1/2 inches to the right of center on the good black eight.

Step 5. Finally, use eye-hand coordination. Our shooter should now deliver the shot as accurately as possible. It's the time for careful execution.

I'm only fair at execution. I wish I could shoot better. When I win, it's usually because I did a good job on the first four steps and a passable job on the last. I've seen many excellent shooters mess up on the first four and wind up losers despite excellent eye-hand coordination.

So that's how it is that I can play a decent game of shuffleboard and a lousy game of darts.



YELLOW'S CHOICE?

SHUFFLEBOARD FORMULA

In our scientific-technical society, formulas are a common form of shorthand. By using letters and symbols, they define relationships in abbreviated form.

If we applied that approach to shuffleboard, what would the formula look like? Perhaps this:

$$SE = S + E + A + I + F + D$$

In this formula:

SE = Shuffleboard Excellence

S = Strategy

E = Experience

A = Accuracy

I = Imagination

F = Fitness

D = Determination

Look over my list. Are there any factors that surprise you? Are there any that you can improve? Let's look at them one-by-one.

STRATEGY. Selection of the right shot is vital, often the difference in a win or a loss. To improve your strategy, study the play of experts. Ask them why they take certain shots. Think along with them while they play a match.

EXPERIENCE. You can't beat experience, the great teacher. What works and what doesn't work can only be determined in actual play. What works on paper may not work on the concrete because it's only on the court that all the many facets of shuffling come into play. To improve this factor, play and play and play.

ACCURACY. I love to play on days when my accuracy is high. When my wife asks, "How did it go today?" I love to answer, "Great, I was shooting where I was aiming!" How do you improve your accuracy? Get your shot mechanics correct and then practice and practice and practice.

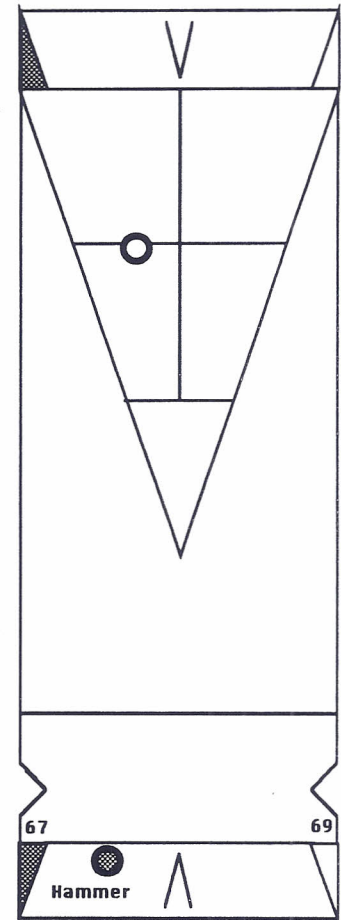
IMAGINATION. Despite study and experience (and reading my column each week), new situations and opportunities come up in every game. They must be exploited creatively, with new tactics applied on the spot. Imagination can be spurred by keeping an open mind. When faced with a new complex situation, try to think of all the ways you can handle it before selecting your shot. Give innovative options a chance.

FITNESS. I'm biking, jogging, and going to a gym for work with weights. Others stay fit by playing eight to ten hours a day. All things being equal, the fitter player will win.

DETERMINATION. Have you ever seen the look on an expert's eye when he goes on the court for a big game? If you have you've seen concentration, you've seen a look of steel. Winning big in shuffleboard takes every ounce of effort a shuffler can muster. The experts have all the other factors--determination often makes the difference.

Study the formula and work on each factor. Have you ever played Jumble, the letter game? Can someone rearrange the letters in my formula (SEATFD) to form a word? I wasn't able to. If you can, send me your answer. Thanks.

In today's diagram, black has a tough choice. She can score an eight on the open side, the right side that is. Or she can use the liner on the left as a bumper for an eight and perhaps kitchen it. I'd use the open side. What would you do?



WHAT SHOULD BLACK DO?

THE CORNER OF THE SEVEN

Stealing an opponent's hammer is one of the basic strategies in shuffleboard. The hammer, or last shot in a round, is like the serve in tennis. That is, it's a big advantage and whoever has it usually cashes in.

When your opponent has the serve, or the hammer, if you can prevent a score you've done well. In shuffling, preventing a score with the hammer is called "stealing the hammer." In tennis, the term is "breaking the serve."

There are a number of tactics players use to steal a hammer. One of these involves using the part of the seven that's near the 7/10-off line and near the outside line.

This is called the "corner of the seven" and I'll discuss its use today.

The basic idea is to have the player shooting last looking at an opposing disc in the corner of the seven when he gets to his hammer. Retaining a score while removing such a disc is difficult. There's a very good chance that this tactic will steal the hammer.

In a typical game, yellow, shooting first, will put up a St. Pete, and black, with the hammer, will clear the St. Pete. This can go on for three exchanges. Then yellow, with the seventh discs of the round, can shoot for the corner of the seven on the opposite side of the court. If he succeeds, he will likely steal black's hammer.

That's the basic pattern--but it's not that simple. There are many subtleties.

First, there is the danger of shooting the last yellow disc into the 10-off instead of the seven. That's a disaster. Experts will guard against this by feeling their way into the corner. That is, on their third and fifth shots, they'll shoot toward the corner to get a feel of the court. They'll deliberately shoot too soft, safely testing the speed of the court in that area. Then on the seventh shot, they are calibrated, they can zero in on a score without risking a 10-off.

Second, the best court for this corner seven tactic is one that drifts toward the center from the outside. With an in-drift, the hammer disc will sometimes hit the seven on the inside, perhaps causing the hammer to go in the kitchen while the seven rolls harmlessly off the side of the court.

If the drift is toward the outside, avoid the corner seven shot. In a National finals, my opponent presented me a corner seven. I shot my hammer toward it and I got more drift to the outside than I had expected. My hammer hit the corner seven on the outside and clipped it into the 10-off. My opponent said I was lucky; I said he shouldn't have used a corner with an out drift.

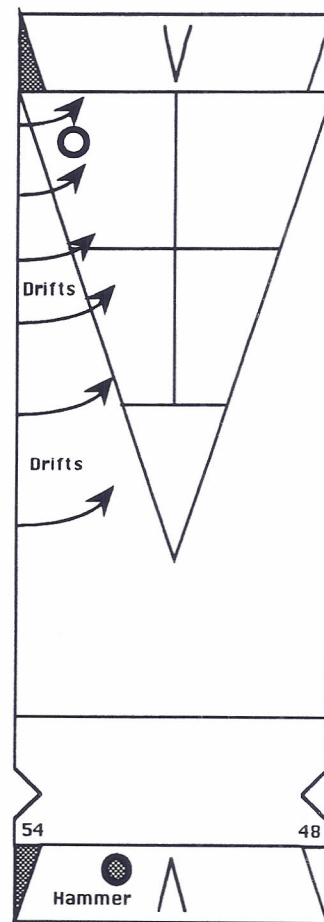
Another type of court that makes the corner seven attractive is one with slow outside lanes. On this type court, the hammer shot may stop short, never even reaching the seven.

Finally, it's important to consider timing during the game. I prefer to use the tactic early in the game to get a feel for it. Then I save it for later, toward the end of the game and use it only if I'm behind.

If it's used more than 2 or 3 times, the hammer shooter gets calibrated. That is, he learns the drift and speed and then the corner seven often winds up being knocked into the kitchen by the hammer.

Those are some of the in's and out's of the corner seven tactic. Give it a try. Maybe you'll steal a hammer.

One last point. I seldom use the tactic in a doubles match. It frightens partners. They're afraid it will wind up in the 10-off. Save the tactic for singles.



GOOD SPOT FOR A CORNER SEVEN

SHUFFLEBOARD IS LIKE CHESS

Chess is acknowledged to be the most mentally demanding of games. Players spend their lives studying it. Computers have yet to conquer the strategy.

Shuffleboard is often thought to be simply a game of skill. Those not familiar with our sport see it as demanding accuracy and precision. They see similarities with bowling where the focus is on excellence of execution.

We players know that to play good shuffleboard we must be good thinkers. Yes, we must have bowling's excellence of execution, but we must also be able to handle a heavy dose of the mental demands of chess.

To develop this point, I'll refer back to a situation I presented in this column last fall. Today's diagram shows the situation.

My column that day covered another topic. The diagram wasn't discussed. I simply asked the question, "What shot should black take? Further I invited readers to respond.

Very quickly, I received a super letter from Dick Whitaker. Dick and his wife Pat are among the very best players in the world. They shoot with great accuracy they can analyze situations with the best.

Dick wrote and said he looked forward to my column each week. He went on to say that in the situation in the diagram, I'd left him dangling. There were unanswered questions. Specifically,

1. What game is it? First? Second? Third?"
2. Is it the head or foot of the court?
3. Is it a drift court?
4. Is it a slow or fast court?

Dick is absolutely correct! To analyze a shuffleboard situation, you need answers to all these questions. I could add several more.

5. Who is your opponent?
6. Is it singles or doubles?
7. How are you shooting today?
8. Are the discs waxed (I do not like to play with waxed discs.)

I'm sure we could add eight more questions.

The point here is that shuffleboard forces players to use their minds. It has some of the mental demands of chess. Dick is saying, it's a complex game and before we select a shot, we need to consider many things.

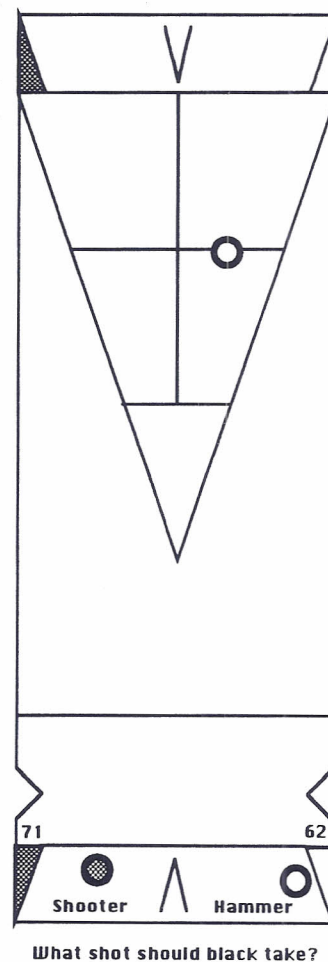
Dick goes on to say he sees two choices. He says he could, "(1) Put in a high eight and take my chances on him or her killing my winning block and doubling, or (2) knock the block off." He adds, "This all depends on where the game sits; pressure means everything."

I'm sure, if Dick or Pat faced this in a real game, they'd consider all the complexities, as a chess master does, and then they'd select the best shot and execute it well.

In the actual game, black chose to cover the yellow disc by shooting out in the St. Pete area. He left the outside corner a little uncovered and there was a slight drift toward the center. Yellow, with the hammer, went down the outside and nicked the liner, dragging it into the seven along with the shooter. The result was fourteen points and a win.

Jay Snoddy used to talk about storing information in his computer and he'd point to his brain. He was right. Shuffleboard calls for computer-like thinking. It's a lot like chess.

What are some of the factors you consider when selecting a shot? Let me know.



FIRE THE MANAGER

Every sport has its key decisions. In football, a coach must decide what to do on 4th and 1. In baseball, the manager must decide to stay with his starter or go to his reliever.

Often there's no clearly correct answer. Often, if the coach or manager's choice works, he's a genius. If it fails, he may lose his job. Yet there's no proof the other option is better or worse.

So it is in shuffling. Decisions must be made--especially near the end of games. If the chosen shots work out, the player's a genius. If they fail, the player may lose his partner. Yet no one knows what would have happened if the shuffler chose the other options.

Sometimes all a player can do is make his choice and hope for the best.

Today's diagram shows a difficult situation. Yellow is shooting the hammer and is ahead 67 to 64. He looks at an open board and sees a short black seven. It's about 3" past the 7/8 line.

What are yellow's options? What facts should yellow consider? What shot should he choose?

It's partly clear that yellow has three options. He can (1) ignore the seven and score an eight. He can (2) hit the seven on the right, removing it while trying to roll his shooter to the right for a seven. Finally, he can (3) hit the seven directly, removing and playing it for the 10-off.

Which choice would you make?

I hope you're all saying, "Coach, you didn't give us enough facts." If you are saying that, you're right. You do need more facts.

Here are some more. It's singles; you're at the head of the court; it's the third game. It's the finals of a major tournament, and your opponent is the best shuffler in the world.

And some more. The court drifts 3 or 4 inches to the left. It's running well, the discs are not waxed, and you've got excellent control of your shots.

Now can you decide? You should go for the eight, option (1). Against a super player, it may be your only chance to win. You can make an eight over 60% of the time. That's good odds to win a game against a super player.

If you make it, you're a genius. You beat the best. If you hit a line, you are called a fool, someone who blew a chance to beat the champ. It works just like in other sports.

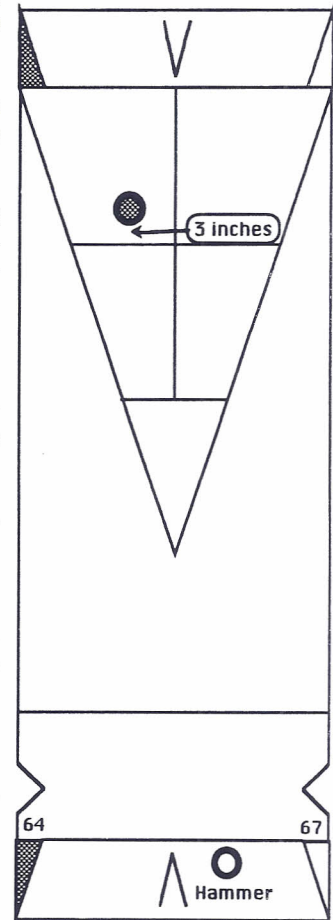
Now would you make a different choice if the facts I gave were changed?

What if I'd said it was doubles? And again, you're at the head of the court. In that case you'd want to use option (2). That is, you'd get rid of the seven for sure and try to roll to a seven of your own. After all, you have a partner who also has a hammer.

But if you chose to shoot an eight and made it, you'd be a hero. You took a lesser option but it worked out. You're called a genius. Just like in baseball.

Let me know what you would have done in today's situation. Would you have shot an eight? Would you have liked more information?

Do you know other intriguing situations? Send them to me and I'll review them in future columns.



WHAT FACTS DOES YELLOW NEED?

COVER YOUR TREASURE

When pirates wanted to keep their treasure, they'd put the chest in the ground and cover it. When shufflers want to keep their good scores, they should do likewise. They should cover their treasures.

Covering in shuffleboard means putting your disc in your opponent's shooting alley so that she can't hit your good score. It's said you have "covered" your good discs.

Covering is one of the most important aspects of shuffling, yet it is one of the most ignored in our thinking. While shufflers talk often about 10-off shots, doubling, hiding, clearing, and scoring, they seldom discuss the fine art of covering.

It deserves more of our attention. Today I'll discuss three of the key points in covering.

A first consideration in covering a good score is how close to the good disc should your cover disc be. If, for example, you have a good seven on the opposite side of the board, where do you put your cover? Do you put it close to the seven or out in the St. Pete area?

If you place your cover in the St. Pete area, you have a nice cover but you're bound to leave at least an edge of your good seven exposed. If you're off just a little to one side or the other, you leave more than just an edge exposed and your treasure will disappear just as if Gasparilla had found it.

On the other hand, if you place your cover closer to the good seven, say three or four feet in front of it, you open up the door for a combination shot. While the closer cover will reduce the exposure of the edges, it opens the combinations and becomes a high percentage shot.

What do you do? Most shufflers split the difference. They cover sevens at a point six or seven feet above the good disc. They are deeper than a St. Pete, but not so close as to make the combination easy.

A second consideration in covering is to remember the court drift. A disc shot into the covering area will drift just as surely as a disc shot into the seven.

Remember, the covering disc will be slowing to a stop. It will therefore be picking up the maximum drift. A previous shot may have gone through that area and continued on a straight course but that disc was on its way to another location. It was moving fast as it traversed the cover area. Your cover disc won't be moving fast, it will be slowing to a stop and it will drift.

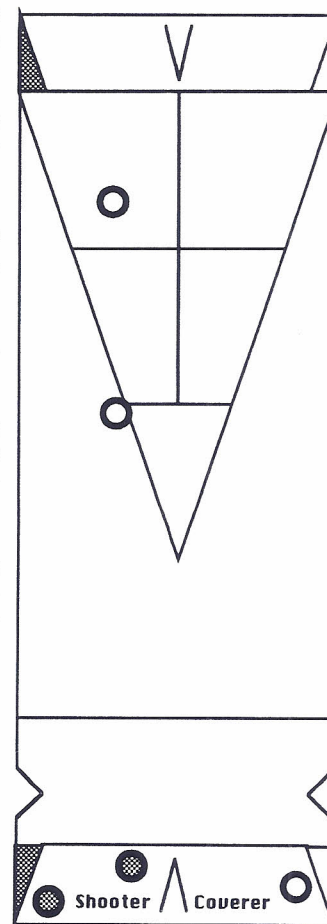
The drifting problem is multiplied because your opponent's route to the treasured score will likely drift in the same direction your misplaced cover did. That means, for all practical purposes, your disc will be wide open if you forget the drift when covering.

It's as if you dug a hole and buried your treasure but didn't refill the hole. You may just as well have put the treasure chest on Gasparilla's ship.

Finally, when shooting your cover shoot, move your disc to a launching spot close to the triangle. (Do not shoot from the location of the yellow disc in the diagram.)

Shooting cover shots from near the triangle will line the shot up at an angle similar to the angle your opponent will be using. Therefore, if you shoot a little too hard or a little too soft, you'll still have an effective cover. Your shot isn't as sensitive to distance.

The diagram today shows a properly covered seven. Gasparilla will have problems getting to that treasure. Scores are hard to come by in shuffleboard. When you get a good one, keep it. Cover your treasure.



COVER YOUR TREASURE

A CARPORT FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

Covering. Protecting your good scores. Guarding your treasures. Covering.

I've written before that covering is a very important, but often neglected, aspect of good shuffling. When a shuffler is fortunate enough to have a good score on the board, he certainly should take care of it with a properly placed cover shot. I've written in previous columns about how to do this.

Today I want to discuss two serious watch-outs in covering. These are two hidden traps, ones that can quickly give the advantage back to your opponents.

If you're not alert to these traps, you'll possibly help your opponent. It would be like building a carport to protect an automobile, but mistakenly putting it on our neighbor's lot. It won't do you any good and it will sure help him.

First is the problem of placing a cover disc in a spot that gives an opponent a chance to hide a disc himself. The diagram shows such a situation.

Yellow has a good seven on his own side of the board. It's near the outside of the seven area. Yellow wants to keep the seven so he covers it. The problem is that a proper cover for the good yellow seven is a St. Pete for black. Black can't remove yellow's seven, but black can score one of his own to counter it.

A similar situation would arise if the yellow seven was close to the center line. In that case, a proper cover would also be a Tampa for black and offer black a great chance to hide an eight.

What's the correct shot in these situations? Usually it depends on the score. If yellow is behind, going to the scoreboard for a second score is a good idea, especially if yellow has the hammer. If yellow is ahead, perhaps a tighter cover would work, one that was three or four feet above the score and therefore more difficult to hide behind.

Of course, if yellow's ahead and needs a game, he will be happy to have one score each. He's pleased to give up a hide to keep his score.

The second watch-out is one that I have been burned on many times myself. I like to cover good scores tighter than most players do, that is I often put my cover about four feet over the score. I don't like to have my covers out in the St. Pete area.

The danger here is that sometimes I shoot too hard and get my cover disc into the scoring area. For example, if I have a seven as shown in the diagram, I'll sometimes shoot my cover too deep and get a good eight. That's a disaster.

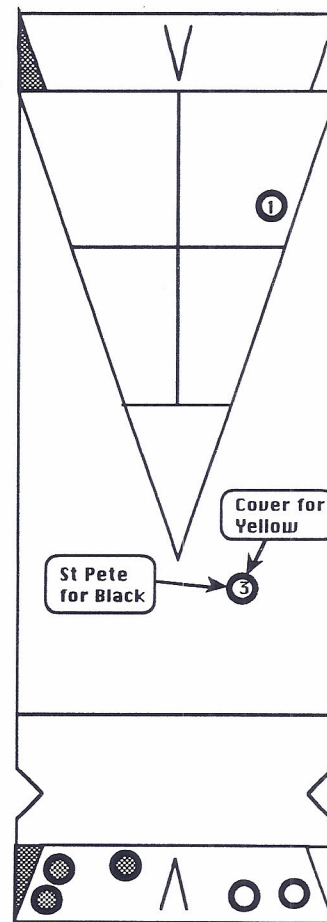
Then I've allowed my opponent to reverse the eight and sometimes even kitchen it. So I've kept my seven, but given up too much securing it. Sometimes I lose the seven too.

This also often happens to me in the ten. I'll try to protect a seven with a Tampa and I'll shoot a good ten. In my effort to put a lock on my seven with a tight cover, I opened up an opportunity for my opponent. Watch out!

Covering is one of the basic aspects of shuffling. It's one that beginners learn very quickly. It's one that wins games. Yet it's one that we sometimes get careless on. It's one that, if we don't watch out, we may help our opponent.

Don't build your carport on your neighbor's lot.

Have I covered this topic well? Let me hear from you.



WATCH OUT !!

KEEP YOUR KITCHEN CLEAN

Get out your Comet Cleanser and your box of Spic-n-Span. Today's column is about keeping the kitchen clean.

That should be natural for me. After all, I worked for Procter and Gamble for 33 years. It should be natural for me for a second reason. After all, I've played shuffleboard for 54 years.

In shuffleboard, as in cooking, it's vital to keep the kitchen clean. Unfortunately, the parallel continues. Just as we sometimes forget to clean our home kitchen, shufflers sometimes forget to clean out their shuffling kitchen.

Today's diagram shows a good example. Yellow is ahead 62-50. Black has the hammer at the head of the court which is running well and has no significant drifts.

Yellow led out with a St. Pete. Black, who's behind, went to the board on the opposite side and scored an eight. Yellow tried to clear the black eight but, as so often happens, stuck.

On the fourth shot of the round, black's second, black had what he wanted, a yellow eight to try to kitchen. Black made a good shot, kitchening the yellow eight and holding his own black eight.

The black shooter rolled a little to the right and the yellow 10-off went a little to the left. The positions are shown in the diagram.

It's now yellow's shot, his third, the fifth of the round. What does he do? What's yellow's best shot choice?

As I've often advised, think over all the options before selecting one. In this case, yellow can:

- (1) Try to reverse the black eight and yellow 10-off.
- (2) Remove his 10-off.
- (3) Hide behind his St. Pete.

Are there other good options? What do you think yellow should do?

It's time for the Comet Cleanser and the Spic-n-Span. Clean the kitchen, option number 2. That gets yellow out of trouble faster. It holds his 62 points.

So often, shufflers try the reverse. It just leads to more trouble. Even if the reverse is successful, yellow leaves an open eight that black can use to try his own reverse or to try for a straight-in kitchen. That's really handing black an opportunity.

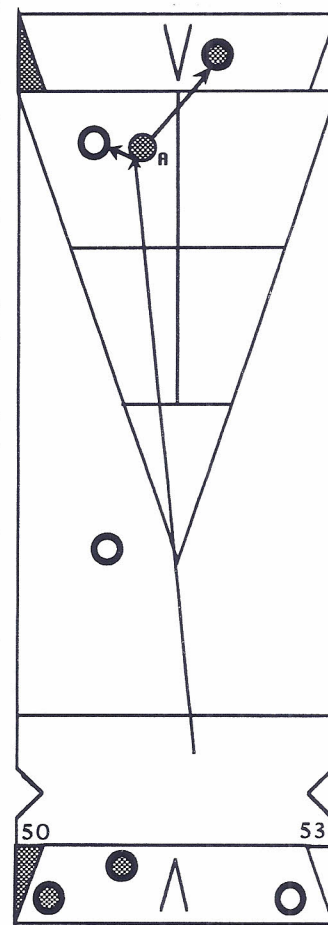
I watched Al Volmer use option 1 a number of years ago in a key match. He stuck as yellow did and then when David Karaska had kitchened him, he tried a reverse. He replaced the eight and barely missed the kitchen.

Karaska promptly kitchened Al a second time for 8 and 20-off. Al looked down the board dumfounded and muttered, "How on earth did I get 20-off?" Well, he left a dirty kitchen.

Why did I include option 3? Most shufflers wouldn't try it. I wouldn't. I include it to help open-up thinking, to get shufflers to think creatively. It's not really a bad option. In fact, it could lead to some very interesting shuffling. Try it sometime (but not in doubles).

Kitchen cleaning is very important when you're ahead. Don't try reverses, shoot at the 10-off directly.

I enjoy your comments. Keep me posted on your thoughts.



GREAT SHOT BY YELLOW

THE BEST SHOT IN SHUFFLEBOARD

Someone asked me, "Coach, what's the best shot in shuffleboard?" She wanted to know the shot that is most productive.

I thought about that. I decided it's not shuffleboard's equivalent to a grand slam or a 99 yard touchdown run. Those are sensational and so are scores like 16 and 20-off. But they are more luck than deliberate, more based on opponent's mistakes than great execution.

The best shot in shuffleboard is like the hit-and-run in baseball. It's based on finesse and it really puts the opponent in a hole.

It could also be called a hit-and-run but kitchen-and-hide is more descriptive.

The situation develops along these lines. Yellow is ahead 53-50. Black has the hammer at the head of the court which is running well and has no significant drifts.

Yellow leads with a St. Pete. Black, a little behind, goes to the board and scores a seven on the opponent's side. Yellow clears it.

Black goes to the board again. She decides to switch sides and goes past the St. Pete on the black side of the board. She scores a seven as shown by the diagram at A.

Now yellow has the set-up for the best, most productive shot in shuffleboard: the kitchen-and-hide.

Yellow could clear the seven. That would be the conservative move. Yet she could miss or stick if she tried that.

A great choice is to hit the seven on the left, just a bit, enough so that the shooter rolls behind the St. Pete and the black seven goes to the center of the 10-off.

Now black is in a real jam. The diagram shows a hidden yellow seven and a black 10-off. Black can't do much but remove the 10-off. Then yellow can hide an eight or double cover the seven. Either way, yellow's headed for a win.

Executing the kitchen-and-hide takes care but isn't extremely difficult. If there is a drift to the left, I'd forget it. The shooter may hit the St. Pete or it may drift too far and leave a seven black.

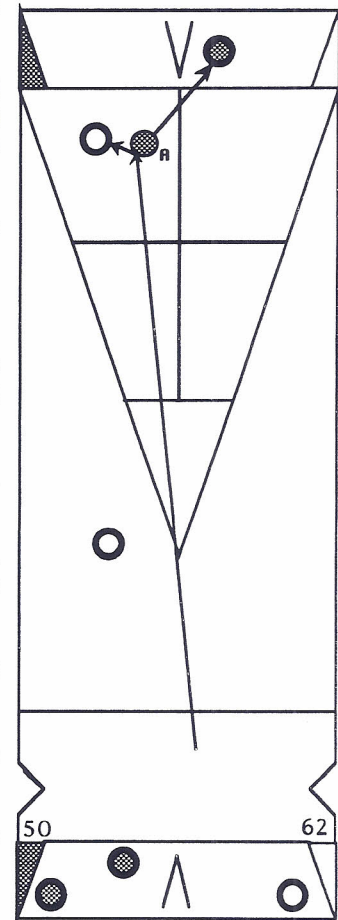
If there's a slight drift right, or no drift, it's a straight forward shot. The shooter just needs to keep in mind she must hit the seven on the left.

It's vital that the yellow seven, the shooter disc, rolls behind the St. Pete. It doesn't do much good to hide the 10-off and expose the yellow seven—that's an invitation for a reverse. The yellow seven must be hidden.

In this game, after black has removed her 10-off, yellow may well want to hide an eight. With 53 points, she's three scores from 75, but one must be an eight. She may as well grab it now.

When should the kitchen-and-hide be used? Only when you are a little ahead. It pushes the game nicely. If you're behind, it's fine too but you won't see the situation. If you're way ahead, stay conservative, stick to a block at a time.

What's your favorite basic shot? Have you ever tried the kitchen-and-hide? Let me hear from you.



GREAT SHOT BY YELLOW

MEAT AND POTATOES

"That's the meat and the potatoes of shuffleboard."

I was playing at Mirror Lake in the 70's when I heard that meat and potatoes statement from across the courts. I knew exactly what it meant.

I knew immediately that Jay Snoddy had just made a 10-on and 10-off on his hammer. His opponent had tried for a short 10 and had gone in too deep. Jay had hit it square, replaced it, and put it in the 10-off.

"That's the meat and the potatoes," was one of Jay's favorite announcements. And you listened, because he was just about invincible. For over a decade, he and Bob Litts and Lew Tansky won just about everything in sight.

Now if your opponent gives you a fat 10 on your hammer, of course you take the shot, that is, you go for 10-on and 10-off, meat and potatoes. But what if the opponent's disc goes to the 10/8 line? Then do you take the shot or do you ignore the discs and simply go for an eight?

Players argue this on both sides. The usual argument is that you leave the dead disc on the line and shoot to an open eight. This is the more certain shot, an almost sure eight. Further, it keeps the eight shot grooved--it may not be meat and potatoes but it's good bread and butter.

The argument for shooting the eight continues with the thought that shooting the 10/8 liner for the kitchen may not work out. You may roll on it and not keep a 10. Further, you may shoot too soft and give away a seven instead of a 10-off.

This all adds up to a strong case for shooting an eight.

On the other hand, 20 points is a whole bunch of points. It deserves Jay's apt description. It's worth a gamble, after all, it's two and one-half eights, or almost three sevens.

Further, trying the shot gives you some experience in the 10 area. You'll get a good reading on the drift and on the speed needed for a 10-off. This all may be very valuable data later on when you may have to shoot a similar shot with the game at stake.

Add to that the fact that the shot to the eight is not a clean shot. The 10/8 liner will affect the route a touch. That makes it a little less likely for you to succeed and takes something away from the staying-in-your-groove argument.

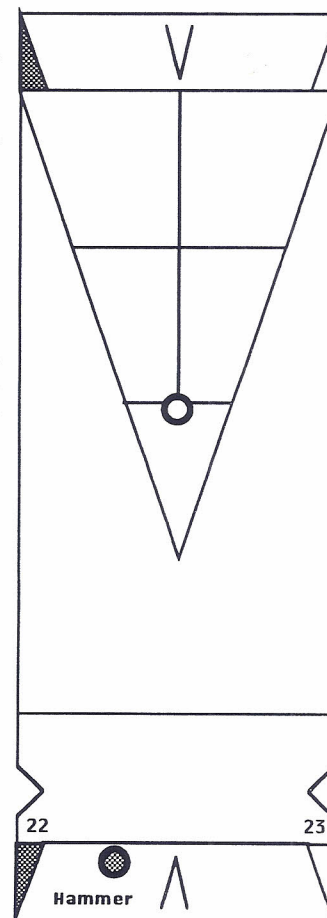
That all adds up to a strong case for shooting a 10-on, 10-off shot. Which would you select now?

I've usually taken the eight shot and left all liners alone. Now, in the future, I think I'll change a little. If I'm shooting decently, and if the court is running well, and if the liner is more than half in the 10, and if it's in the center--that's a lot of ifs--but if all the ifs are OK, I'll try the 10-on and 10-off shot.

Of course, this has to be fairly early in the game with roughly even scores. Later in the game, the scores will dictate the choice.

But I like the idea of getting experience in the 10 and I like the idea of getting 20 points.

I'll take meat and potatoes over bread and butter.



MEAT AND POTATOES ?

KINDERGARTEN

There is a fine book out called something like Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. It has to do with getting the basics right.

The same philosophy applies in shuffleboard. I might say, "Everything I need to know about shuffleboard, I learned from Bill Slyh before I was 5." He taught me the basics and they haven't changed in half a century.

Others might say, "Everything I need to know about shuffleboard, I learned in my first lessons." That's probably correct. If Helen Jacobs, who likes to introduce new shufflers to our game, was the teacher, I'm sure it was. She covers the basics as well as anyone can.

What are these kindergarten-level basics? I'll take a shot at identifying them.

- Score points
- Remove opponents' points
- Cover your own good scores
- Hide when you can
- Shoot carefully
- Watch the scoreboard
- Have fun

Let's look at these one-by-one.

Score points. The object of the game is to make more points than one's opponents. To do this we must score. Often we get so caught up in St. Petes, kitchens, and clearing shots that we forget to score when we should.

Remove opponents' points. This is our defense. If an opponent scores, we should remove it. As my mentor Bill Slyh would say, "Knock your opponent's block off."

Cover you own good scores. We must take care of what we have. I've written several articles on the art of covering good scores.

Hide when you can. Watch the experts. If they have even half a chance of hiding a disc they'll take it. The whole strategy of the game centers around getting a score behind a disc. Don't get caught up in playing kitchen so that you miss good chances to hide (see diagram).

Shoot carefully. Some players shoot before they're ready. They're so anxious to make a shot, they shoot from an off-balance position. Line up the shot, position your feet, body and hands, eye the target, and shoot--keep your head level.

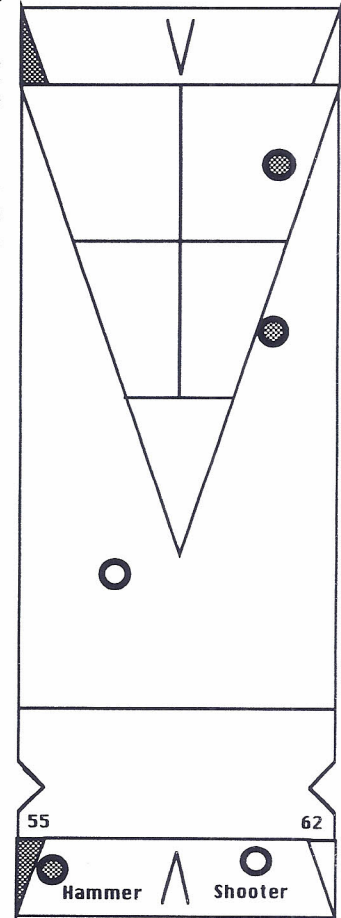
Watch the scoreboard. Even experts sometimes fail to have an eye on the score. They'll shoot a 10 against an opponent who has 66 and the hammer. Know when you're ahead, know how far from game you are or what frame you're in. Know how the hammers are rotating.

Have fun. This is the most important of the seven basics I've listed. Shuffleboard is for our enjoyment. Play hard, try to excel, but keep it in a fun context. Be humble in winning and a good sport in defeat. Tomorrow's another game and today was enjoyable.

Of course, there's more to life than what was learned in kindergarten and more to shuffling than my list of seven. If there wasn't more to shuffleboard, I'd never have to write another column--yet I've got enough topics built up for several years.

The point is--get the basics right. When it gets complex, and it will, keep in touch with those basics, don't lose them.

By all means, score points and have fun.



MUDDYING THE BOARD

Clearing the board is a basic strategy in shuffleboard. Each opponent's disc is whammed in the side so that both the shooter and the target zip off the court and bang into the gutters.

With both discs safely off the playing area, the board has been "cleared." At the end of a round of clearing, the shooter has an almost open board to score her hammer.

The player whose discs are being cleared--perhaps she should be called the clearee --appears hard-pressed to do much but stand and watch, supply targets one-by-one, and hope the clearer will miss.

Yet the clearee is not totally without weapons. There are a number of things she can do to make the clearer's task more difficult with the object of having discs remain on the court.

To contrast with the expression "clearing the board," the anti-clearing tactics might be called "muddying the board." I'll cover a number of them today.

One of the best ways to make life tough for a clearee is to move the target disc around. If the clearer is setting St. Pete after St. Pete, only to see them whammed off the board one-by-one, she can move them around a little. For example, if the clearer hits a St. Pete on the left edge, move the next St. Pete to the right a bit. Then, if the clearer stays in the previous groove she may miss.

In moving the St. Pete, move them left and right and also long and short. This is like a baseball pitcher moving his pitches inside and outside and also high and low.

Most clearees will set two St. Petes and then a Tampa. The switch to a Tampa certainly changes the look for the clearer and often leads to a miss or stick; that is, it muddies the court.

Another tactic for the clearer is to change the pace. For instance, the first two targets can be set after a normal pause and then the third shot very quick. Often a clearee can get the clearer caught up in the clearee's pace.

For example, against an excellent clearer, I decided to pick up the pace. As soon as he cleared, I'd shoot my next disc. He got so he'd shoot as soon as my target stopped. After four rounds at that fast pace, he was tired and started missing.

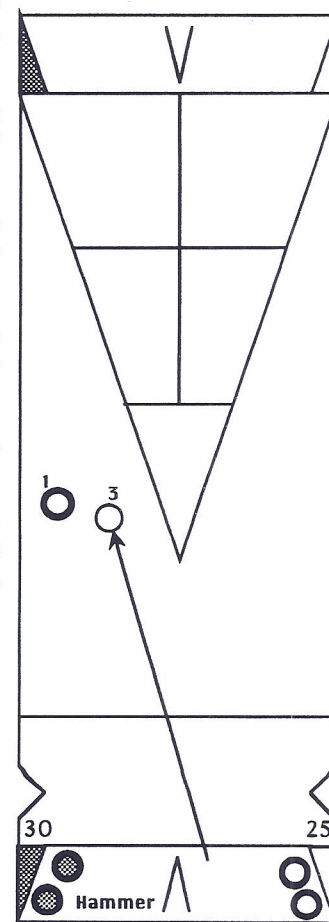
Some players say, "Don't you ever miss," or other distracting comments to the clearer. I don't think such statements are good sportsmanship. Avoid them.

Finally, try to take advantage of any scraps (uncleared discs) left on the board. For example, the clearer may have cleared a St. Pete but moved it only to the edge of the court. The clearee can then put her next St. Pete close to that scrap and greatly hinder the next clearing shot.

The diagram shows perfect use of a scrap or uncleared disc. The next disc is placed to the inside of the scrap and a little higher on the board. This makes the clearer's next shot much more difficult.

The clearee is not a helpless victim waiting for the clearer to blast all her discs off the court. She has some fun tactics. She has a great chance of muddying the board.

What are your muddying the board tactics? Let me know.



YELLOW MUDDS THE COURT

CREATIVE EXCUSE

Today I'll cover three items--a creative excuse, a letter from a reader, and a shuffleboard situation.

First the creative excuse. Harold Hertzig of Winter Haven, Fla, was playing at Lakeside, Ohio, last July in the Summer Nationals. Harold's a very fine player but one of his shots somehow went awry. Harold announced, "Bugs got under my disc and moved it three inches while I shot." We gave Harold the creative excuse award. Let me know any funny excuses you've heard.

Dear Coach: Can you tell us where to get rules for shuffleboard and where to find out when the major tournaments are played?---From a number of readers.

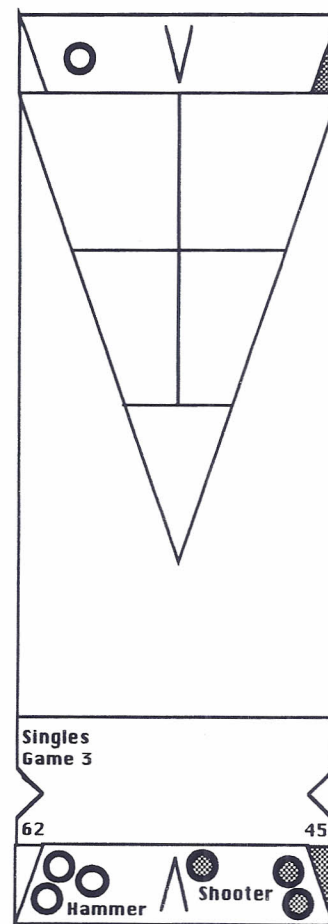
Answer: I receive many letters from my readers and I answer them all. I appreciate the letters and the stamped, addressed envelope when it's provided for my response.

One of the most common requests is the one above. Apparently rules and tournament schedules are hard to find.

My suggestion is to go to one of the major shuffleboard clubs. These are the ones with many courts and regular play. These clubs should have a copy of the rules and of the Florida preview.

The rules are printed for us by Sam Allen, President of Allen R Shuffleboard. Copies are distributed at clubs around Florida. If you can, stop in at Allen's, 6585 Seminole Blvd, Seminole, Fla, and get a copy of the rules and meet Sam. He also has shuffleboard books (which readers ask about) and equipment.

The Shuffleboard Preview is published in September or October each year by the Florida Shuffleboard Association. It contains schedules for the district, state-wide, National, and International tournaments. It also has the up-to-date rules. Each club gets copies for members. Someone will have one you can look at.



I'D COVER THE TEN-OFF

Today's diagram shows a tough decision situation. The score is 62 yellow, 45 black. It's the 3rd game of a singles match, yellow has the hammer.

Black led with a seven. When yellow tried to clear it, he rolled into the kitchen (maybe a worm got under it). Black, then shooting his second shot, the third of the round, had a tough decision.

Black could cover the 10-off or he could score a seven on the black side of the board opposite the 10-off. Which would you do?

I was the shuffler shooting black. I looked at the score and decided my opponent needed a 10-off more than I needed a seven. I chose to cover the 10-off and I did.

My opponent couldn't hit the 10-off so he drove my cover block toward it and succeeded. He removed the 10-off and that eliminated my threat.

I think I made the right shot and I'd do it again. In fact, on my opponent's next hammer, the same tough decision came up. I again covered the 10-off and again he drove my cover block into it and got off the hook.

There are many good arguments for choosing the other option, that is, for scoring a seven. Yet with the score 62-45, I'll stick with covering the 10-off.

What's your choice? Let me know.

BEWARE OF BAD ADVICE

Varying opinions on shuffleboard tactics are welcome in our game. There are many choices on shot selections and it's great fun for shufflers to debate, analyze, and argue about these.

Players should listen to the discussions and take part in them. They're fun. But beware of would-be, self-appointed experts. Their advice may be flawed.

Because I write this column, readers often send me examples of questionable advice and ask my opinion. While I'm far from perfect, I couldn't have won 10 National Championships using poor shuffleboard strategy. Readers appreciate this fact and value my comments.

Recently a reader sent me a printed article with the question, "Is this good advice?" I read it and was aghast. The recommended shot selection was not correct. My reader was correct in questioning it. Watch out for poor advice, even if it's published.

The situation was one shown in today's diagram. It's black's hammer in a doubles frame game. Black is ahead by 15 points and there are only two hammers to go after this one. There is a 6 to 8 inch drift to the right.

What is black's correct shot? Where should black shoot her hammer?

The article suggests that black should shoot for a score on the right side of the board, which it calls the "open side." The writer's thinking here is that the lead is large enough already to win the game and that trying to kitchen the open seven involves unnecessary risk.

Let's think about that. The game is far from being in the bag. While there are only two hammers to go, they both belong to yellow. Black has a 15 point lead, and if the article's recommended shot goes as planned, the lead will be 26. If the hammer hits a line it's only 18.

While a 26 point lead against two hammers is pretty nice to have, it's far from a lock. An 18 point lead is shaky. It would be nice to have a little bigger lead, if possible.

Playing an open seven for the kitchen is not a high risk shot. While the kitchen is not a certainty, removing and replacing the seven is quite achievable.

Executed properly, that shot alone would make 24 points, for a total of 27 for the round and it would produce a 42 point lead. If the kitchen wasn't successful, it's a 32 point lead. At worst the shot might stop short of the yellow seven and leave it. That would give a 25 point lead (and that's only 1 point less than the article's best outcome.)

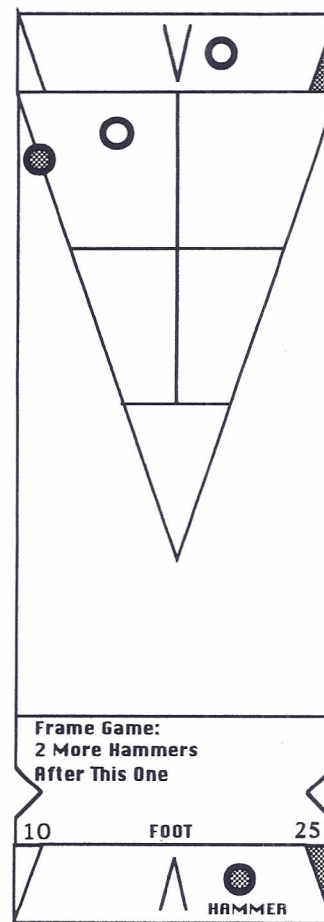
Thus playing the seven for the kitchen is a proper shot selection.

OK, now I'll go back to the article which stays away from playing the seven for the kitchen because "black might forget the drift" and go into the kitchen herself. If we accept that as an unnecessary risk (even though I don't think it is), what then is the correct shot? What's the super conservative shot?

The article is still wrong because it recommends shooting for an eight on the "open side", the right side. Shooting for an eight is fine. But make the shot on the left side where the seven might stop an overshot disc, not on the right where there's an opponent's 10-off to stop a disc that got away. The right side is not "open" at all. It has a big fat 10-off as a backstop. Shoot for the eight on the left.

That's my assessment of the situation. It's fun to have different opinions. Debating them gives spice to our game. Just be careful who you listen to. Proven winners usually have better advice than self-appointed experts.

Do you agree with today's shot selection?



Where Should Black Shoot?

A LESSON FROM LEW

My friend Lew Tansky sent me an interesting shuffleboard situation several months ago. Lew's one of the all-time all-timers, one of the very best who ever played our game.

Lew asked, "Can a pro with more than 550 points still make a dumb mistake? The answer is yes, if he's me."

Well, Lew didn't make many mistakes. We'll give him this one, learn from him, and thank him for sending it to us.

Lew was playing doubles and was at the head of the board. He had 67 to his opponent's 53 in a 75-point game. It was his opponent's hammer.

On Lew's last shot, the seventh of the round, Lew looked at a board that had a seven (Lew's) on his side and a possible double (his opponent's) on the 7/8 line on the opposite side.

What shot should Lew have selected?

As I've recommended before, try to list all the possible shots before deciding which is best. In this case there were a number of possibilities for Lew.

- 1) He could cover his seven.
- 2) He could clear his opponent's double.
- 3) He could score an eight off his opponent's 7/8 liner and try to kitchen it.
- 4) He could score an eight above his opponent's 7/8 liner.
- 5) He could score an eight above his own seven.

Lew says he chose to cover his seven. He lost when his opponent doubled the 7/8 liner and his opponent's partner scored the next hammer from the foot of the board.

Lew's choice wasn't all that bad; after all, it gave his team 74 points and that put a lot of pressure on their opponents. When Lew's partner faced the last round, he didn't have the hammer, but was ahead 74 to 68, a position from which there are some tactics that have a chance of working.

Lew says he should have scored an eight over his own seven. "That way, my opponent could not take his double and the very worst that could happen would be an amazing shot that removed both my scores and left my opponent with an eight and me with a 10-off." Lew says that's bad, but "It would not set them up to go out."

Lew's right. An eight above his own seven would certainly keep the game alive.

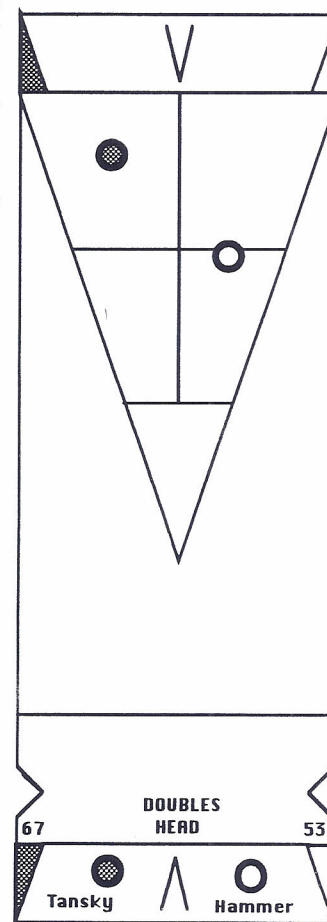
As an alternative, why not an eight above the 7/8 liner (4). That's a pretty good choice too, because it almost certainly keeps Lew's seven and maybe keeps two scores (and a win). But it does open the door for an opponent's double and a chance to win from the foot.

I might have tried to score an eight off the 7/8 liner and to either drive the liner clear through or to the kitchen. That eliminates the double for sure, and at worst would leave me with minus three and my opponent eight.

Maybe you can think of a better choice. That's as good as Lew and I can do.

Lew is not only a great player, but he's also a great teacher. We thank him for sharing with us. If you ever get to the Mirror Lake courts in St. Pete, look him up.

P.S. Would the choice have been different if the opponents had 52 points? 51 points? Let me know what you think.



Where Should Tansky Shoot?

COL. P. C. BULLARD"

Col. P.C. Bullard published How to Play Shuffleboard in 1958. It is the most thorough shuffleboard book to date. Unfortunately, it is now out of print. Luckily I have a copy.

Bullard spent many hours at the St. Pete courts studying how the very best played the game. The introduction says, "He would usually be at almost any major tournament. When not playing he could be found sitting in the top row of the grandstand, busily writing down situations and how the experts play them."

The Colonel's book covers all aspects of the game. Does anyone have a copy? Does anyone have a copy they'll part with?

On page 77 Bullard presents a situation similar to one Lew Tansky sent me that I covered in a recent column. Seems certain interesting situations repeat themselves. They are "classics."

Bullard says Rex Farewell (one of the Mirror Lake greats) faced the board shown in today's diagram. It was a singles match.

Rex, shooting red with the hammer, has a possible double on the 7/8 line. Black had a seven on the opposite side of the board a high eight above it. Rex led, 68-67.

What shot should Rex have selected? Let's look at all the possibilities. Rex could:

- 1) Remove the black eight and try to roll it to an eight of his own.
- 2) Hit the black eight straight, hoping to also remove the seven and to perhaps leave a black in the 10-off.
- 3) Double on the 7/8 liner.

In making the shot selection, Rex had to keep in mind two key points, points I have been making frequently in these columns.

First, Rex had to check the score. Second, Rex had to consider which shot was most likely to succeed.

In this case, referring to the score, choices 1 and 3 look good because they win the game. In 1, a rolled eight gives yellow 76 versus 74 for black. In 3, a double gives yellow 83 versus 82 for black.

But which shot is most likely to succeed? Choice 1 is difficult to carry out. Rolling on a high eight works out less than 1 time in 4 for most expert players. It does remove the eight and leaves black with 74, a point short of game--but also with the next hammer.

Choice 2 is very hard to execute. Perhaps the 2 scores can be removed more often than an eight can be rolled 1, but even if they're removed, yellow doesn't score and the game isn't closed.

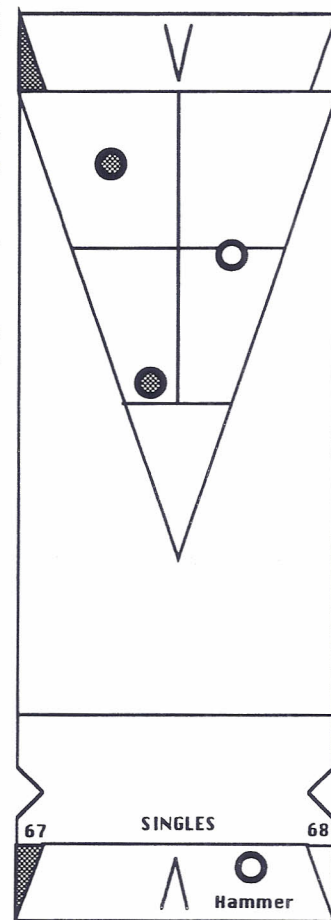
Choice 3 is almost a sure thing, at least on most courts. Most players by the end of a game have a good enough feel for the court to make fat doubles over 75% of the time. The downside is that a miss loses the game.

What's your choice?

Rex Farewell chose to double on the liner (3), made it and won the game. I think he made the proper choice.

Now what choices would you have made if it was a doubles match and the situation was at the head of the court? Should yellow select 1 or 2, keeping black from going out, and thus giving his partner a chance to win with the yellow hammer from the foot.

Send me your comments.



Where should Yellow Shoot?

HUERISTICS

There's an expression in baseball that says, "When at home play for the tie." In bridge, an adage goes, "Against a no trump bid, lead your fourth highest of your longest and strongest." In business, they often say, "Take care of your core business first."

These expressions are called "rules of thumb" or hueristics. They are short expressions that quickly and succinctly communicate a key tactic or principle. They are similar to adages like "don't take any wooden nickels" or "a stitch in time saves nine."

Shuffleboard of course has rules of thumb addressed at its tactics. There are a number of these that float around and get expressed. Some are great advice, others aren't so hot.

In today's column I'll cover several of these and comment on their validity.

"Don't go on the board too soon." If you believe in board clearing and are good at it, this is good advice. Even when down a score, if you have the hammer, clear rather than start a board game. Of course, if you don't clear well, forget it.

"Don't try to kitchen a St. Pete." I agree 100% with this one. It's a foolish shot to try.

"If it's on the line, leave it on the line." This refers to a situation in which a trailing player might be tempted to put his opponent's liner in the kitchen. The danger is that the shot will go awry and the liner will end up a score rather than a kitchen and perhaps put that player out. It's good advice but the rule can be broken.

"Let'em get their own scores." This is the same idea as the previous rule of thumb. Don't hit non-scoring discs into scoring areas for your opponent. Make the opponent earn the scores. When I won my first National Championship in 1969, my opponent gave me my winning score with his hammer. I had the next hammer, true but I was getting nervous. I might not have scored it yet. The expression is a good one.

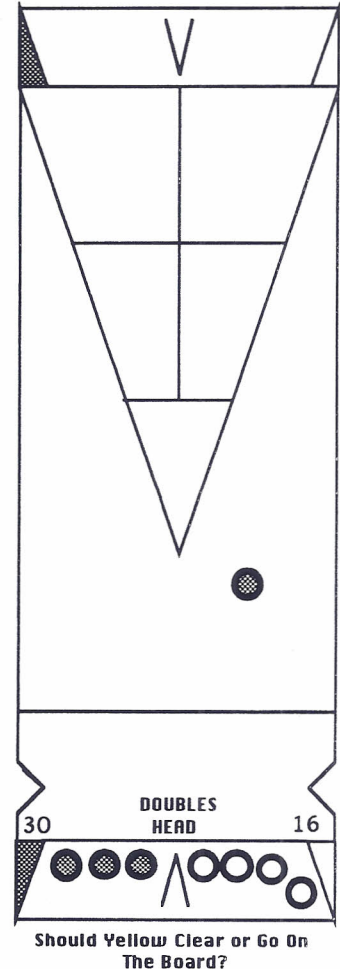
"Always take your hides." This is a super reminder, but not always valid. It seems we players sometimes put up our pilot blocks and then get involved in a board game. We forget to take perfectly good hiding opportunities. It also applies to the seventh shot of the round, "take any hide, no matter how limited". Yet, break the rule if ahead and on the verge of going out because a kitchen could result.

"Don't play kitchen on a slow court." The great Web Smith was a believer in this rule of thumb. The danger here is that, on a slow court, you'll give away sevens when you try to kitchen your opponent. They can be costly (and they can break your partner's morale). I buy this one. A recent match started at 4:00pm. I knew that it would last until dusk and that the court would slow down. I said to myself, "This match is going to be lost by one of us giving away a seven when trying for a ten-off." Sure enough, at 6:45pm my opponent tried to kitchen me and left me a seven instead. I won.

"Anyone who can pick up a cue can beat you." I got that from Jay Snoddy, as good a player who ever shot a disc. Jay was almost invincible, but he knew he could be beat. An underdog could get hot, catch Jay on a bad day, and whammo. We used to laugh and say, "Watch out for the real old guy with a cane." Yes, no matter how good you are, anyone can beat you. Never take an opponent lightly.

I have lots more of these on my list and I'll cover them in another column. Meanwhile, send me "rules of thumb" you've heard and I'll add them to my list.

Today's diagram refers to the first rule of thumb above. What do you think?



SLOW LANE GAME

Almost every day I find letters from you readers in my mail box. I really enjoy hearing from you. Keep them coming.

I answer all the letters I get. First I answer the ones that include self-addressed, stamped envelopes. That really helps. The others I answer as soon as I have time and stamps.

Several recent letters have offered ideas on how to speed up our game, especially tournament games. While most of the ideas will do just that, speed-up the game, I'm not in favor of them because I'm not in favor of speeding things up.

Shuffleboard is a slow lane game. It's great for folks who have plenty of hours and not a lot of time-consuming duties and responsibilities. It can fill long days with exercise, mental challenge, and good friends.

So why speed it up? We've got lots of time. Let's enjoy the slow pace.

Suggestions made by several readers:

"Dear Coach: To speed up our game, why not have only one call on close discs rather than three?"

Coach's Answer: As background, in tournaments, a referee (a first caller) makes the call on whether a disc close to the line is good or not. She tip-toes onto the court, usually gets on her hands and knees, looks over the disc and straight down. If the disc is touching the line she puts her palms face down and waves her hands back and forth. If it's clear of the line and good, she points her index finger at it with a jabbing motion.

After this first call, the player on the disappointed end of the call can look at the disc. If it's very close and the player thinks the call may be wrong, she can ask for a second call. The second caller, who covers several courts, gets summoned by a communications technique called "hollering". This disturbs adjacent court players, but wakes up the caller. She arrives and makes her call.

If both first and second caller agree, the call stands. If they don't agree, a third caller is summoned, usually the tournament director. This takes a while, because the director must be found, diverted from other duties, and guided to the proper court. Here the director makes the final call. Play resumes.

Yes, this took some time, just as it took some time to write about it. But why the need to hurry?

While all this is going on, the players get a chance to rest, fans get a chance to discuss shot selection options, and everyone gets a chance to feel some tension build.

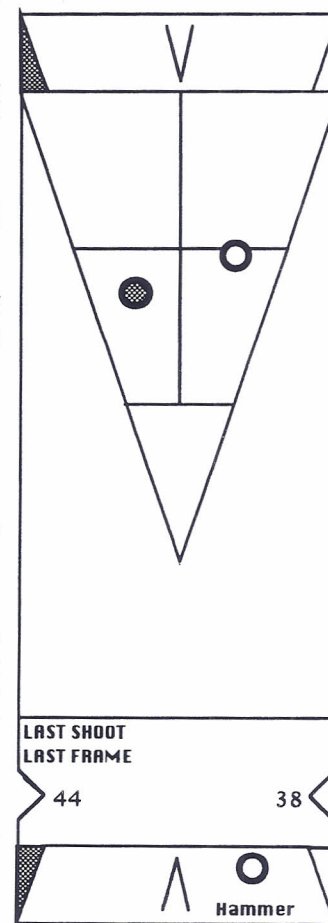
The purpose of the three calls is to try to avoid a biased call. Experience has shown that occasionally, a court referee can have a grudge against a player and possibly lean the wrong way on close calls. With three calls, this problem is corrected.

The three calls also increase the accuracy of the call. One poor caller is balanced by two good ones.

So I'm in favor of having three calls. I don't mind going to the replay booth for "reviews" in pro football either--as long as they get it right.

We've got lots of time, let's enjoy it.

Today's diagram is for your study. Yellow can replace the eight or double the liner. What information does yellow need to consider to make the proper shot selection? Let me know.



Where Should Yellow Shoot?

THREE PERSON SHUFFLEBOARD

You readers are just great. I love your letters and questions. Keep them coming. Here's a recent question.

DEAR COACH: I would like information on how three players can play on one court. The way we do it, one player has to walk and play the other two players. Is there another way? --Arcadia, Florida..

COACH'S ANSWER: It's not unusual to have three players at the courts looking for a game of shuffleboard. We're familiar with singles, two players, and with doubles, four players. I've also written on how a single player can practice alone. Now, can we accommodate three players?

One way to shuffle with 3 is to simply play a doubles game with one player walking (as mentioned in the Arcade player's letter). In this format, one player plays one color at both ends. The other two players play the other color, one at each end. To balance things, they can play three games with each player walking one.

In this approach, the rules and strategies are the same as in doubles. It makes for a fine game, but puts quite a burden on the person walking. He not only works harder, but he must learn the drifts at both ends of the court. It's a tough row to hoe and usually the player stuck with it will keep looking around as he walks and plays. He's hoping to spot a new arrival, a fourth player to even things out.

Another three person game evens out the walking and introduces some strange strategies. I enjoy it as a diversion. It goes like this.

The game starts with two players at the head end and one at the foot. The player with yellow shoots first and the eight-shot round is played. Scores are entered on the scoreboard by names, not by color. There are three columns, one for each name.

After the round, the person who shot yellow walks to the foot, stays on the same side of the court, and shoots yellow again, with yellow going first again. This player is now, of course, playing against the player who was at the foot during the first round.

After the round, the scores are again entered. Then the player who shot black walks to the head of the court and shoots black again. Yellow shoots first again. And so it goes until one player reaches 75.

Yellow always shoots first. Players move counter clockwise. After play from the head, the yellow player walks and plays yellow again. After play from the foot, the black player walks and plays black again.

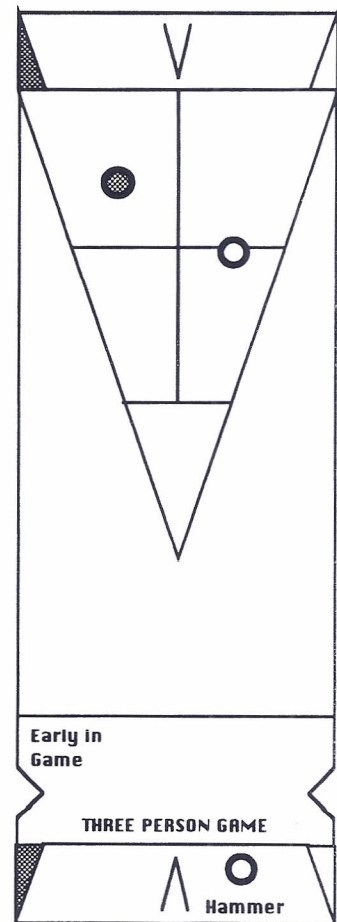
As seen from an individual's point of view, the sequence is to go first twice in a row, sit out a round, then get two hammers in a row, and sit out a round.

It doesn't take long to discover that a selfish game will win. Players learn in a hurry that defense has little value, scoring their own discs is what counts. Never play 10-off, that only helps the player watching from the other end.

Study the situation in today's diagram. What shot would you take in a regular game? Then what shot in a three person game?

Three person shuffling is fun because it requires us to think, to figure out situations and to adjust our strategy. Yet it has some deep flaws and isn't appropriate for steady use or tournaments.

Give it a try. Do you know other 3 player formats? Let me know.



Where Shouldg Yellow Shoot?

NITTY GRITTY 1

Let's get into some of the real nitty-gritty of shuffleboard tactics today.

You're playing tournament shuffleboard. You really want to win. Your opponent is tough. It's early in the game and the scores are even. It's your hammer. Your opponent, shooting yellow, leads with a St. Pete.

You shoot to clear the pilot and miss. Your opponent moves his disc to the outside of his launching area and shoots for a hidden seven, a good score behind the St. Pete.

His hiding shot is a little off. He gets a good seven, but it's only half hidden. He didn't get it in far enough and you can see half the disc from your shooting area.

Now, it's your shot. What do you do?

The sequence I just described should not be a stranger to shufflers. It happens all the time. I can count on it coming up in almost every game I play. So can you.

It follows that we should know how to handle it, the half hidden seven situation. Let's take a close look and analyze it. Perhaps first you'd like to think about what you'd do.

There are a couple of principles worth keeping in mind as we look at alternatives. For one, remember that it's your hammer. You're going to have the last crack at the situation. For another, remember that you've already made an errant shot and your opponent has an advantage. That's now water over the dam.

Have you started to examine possible shots, responses to the situation? I always suggest listing all the possibilities before selecting one. You might:

- 1) Shoot hard and knock out the seven.
- 2) Clear the St. Pete.
- 3) Join or snuggle the seven.
- 4) Score on the opposite side.
- 5) Use suicide alley.
- 6) Try to kitchen the seven and roll to opposite seven.

Shooting hard and knocking out the seven, (1), gets rid of the problem, but leaves the same St. Pete for a second hiding attempt. Here you have to judge the court and your opponent. Will the next attempt be more accurate or is it a difficult hide, one that may lead to an even more open disc on the second try.

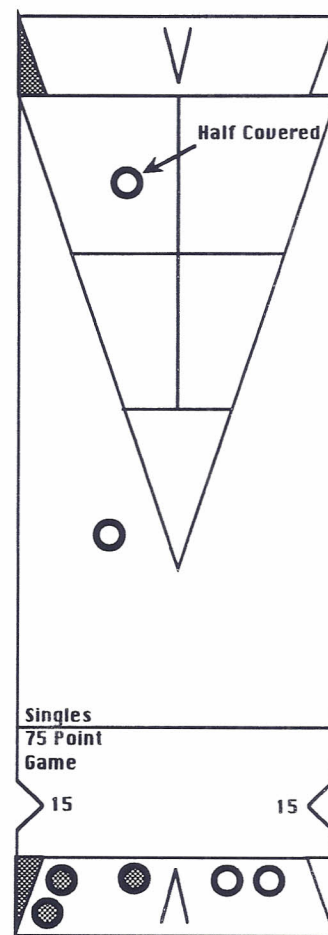
Clearing the St. Pete, (2), gets rid of the offending disc. Yet your opponent can easily replace it. But if he replaces it and covers the seven, the St. Pete will be more to the inside and offer you a hiding route on the outside. Again, judge the opponent and the court.

Both of these, (1) and (2), are solid responses to take away from the opponent's advantage and force him to re-establish. But watch out, especially when removing the seven, that you don't miss everything. Then the opponent can build more trouble. I usually try to knock the seven but play it so close that I often hit the St. Pete. I want to be absolutely sure I hit one or the other.

Joining or snuggling the seven, (3), is a fine shot if the court is with you, you're shooting well, and your opponent is nervous. It's risky but can lead to big scores. An opposite side score, (4) gives away too much to the opponent. Suicide alley, (5), is excellent if the court is with you. If you fail, the trouble is deep.

Finally, kitchening the seven and rolling to the opposite seven, (6), is great--if you can do it. I think it's too difficult to execute.

Study these options. In your next game watch for this situation. Decide how you'll handle it. Then see how it goes for you. You're now in the nitty gritty of shuffling.



What Are Black's Options?

NITTY GRITTY 2

Here's a situation that I'm not sure how to handle. It comes up often and is part of the nitty gritty of competitive shuffling.

You're playing tournament shuffleboard. It's early in the game and the scores are even. It's your outs, your opponent's hammer. You're shooting yellow.

You lead with a St. Pete pilot. Your opponent tries to clear it and misses. You feel a little tickle inside you. Great you've now got an advantage.

You take your hiding shot. It doesn't go in quite as far as you wanted but it's a good seven and it's half covered by the St. Pete.

Your opponent studies the situation and decides not to knock out your seven but to snuggle it. She does exactly that.

Now what do you do against the perfect snuggle? Have you lost the advantage of your St. Pete? Can you re-establish your position, build on it? Or are you now minimizing your loss?

This is nitty gritty tournament shuffleboard. If you're going to compete, you'll face this situation. If you're going to win, you'll need to be able to handle it.

Now I have to admit, I'm never really sure what to do myself. An opponent who snuggles well is a tough opponent for me. I'll analyze this situation and then I'll look for your answers too.

So, what are the possibilities?

- 1) Hit the snuggled discs hard and get all three discs (2 snuggled and the shooter) off the board.
- 2) Hide an eight.
- 3) Hit the black seven, the snuggler, on the outside (left side) and try to hit it to the kitchen.
- 4) Set a Tampa pilot.
- 5) Cover the two discs with what amounts to an opponent's Tampa.
- 6) Score on the open side.

Clearing the sevens (1) gets rid of the problem of the snuggler but also gives up the advantage gained from the original missed clearing shot. It's a safe shot.

Hiding an eight (2) looks good. It keeps you in a block stealing position. If you can do it, do it. The problem is that you didn't get the seven completely hidden on your previous shot. Does that mean, discs won't go in behind the St. Pete because of a drift? If that's true, the eight won't either. Yet another half hidden score isn't too bad. This is a decent choice.

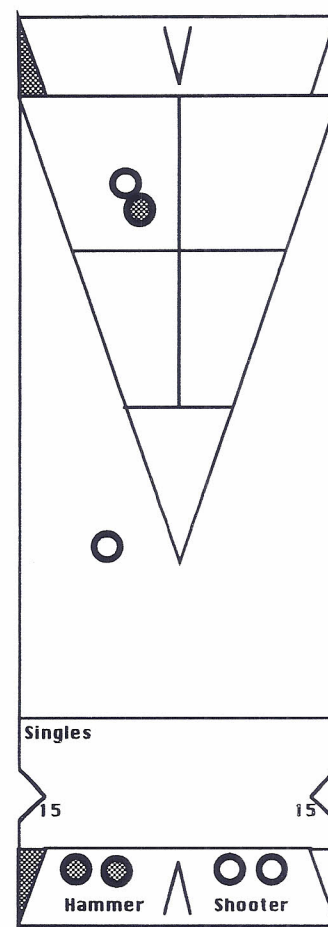
Hitting the snuggling seven for the kitchen (3), is great if you can do it. And the shooter may roll to a hidden seven. Wow. Let your opponent take a look at your fourteen and his ten-off. But can you do it? If your shot goes to the right you might see seven and 10-off against you. I'd leave this for the super shooters. It's too risky for me.

A Tampa pilot (4) is interesting. You're blocking up the head of the court on your opponent's hammer and creating a hiding route for yourself. Try it and see what happens.

Cover the discs with an opponent's Tampa (5). This doesn't do much. Score on the opposite side (6). Why get into a board game on your opponent's hammer?

See, it's a very difficult choice. I think the next time I see this, I'll try to hide an eight (2) unless the court is really against me. Then again, I might play it safe and clear the seven (1). But hitting the snuggler looks so good (3), maybe I'll try that on a good day.

What would you do? Remember, this is nitty gritty shuffleboard. It will happen.



What Are Yellow's Options?

NITTY GRITTY 3

Despite hours of practice, despite beefed-up determination, despite reading this column religiously, you have missed your opponent's St. Pete with your clearing shot. Further, your opponent has followed-up with a perfect hiding shot. Her good seven is precisely behind her St. Pete. You cannot hit it. It feels like the end of the world. To a shuffler, it may be.

Let's examine the situation and try to figure out how to handle it.

It's early in the game, the score is about even. You're shooting black and it's your hammer. So far, your opponent set a St. Pete pilot, you shot to clear it and missed, and then your opponent shot her perfect hidden seven.

It's the fourth shot of the round, your second. What should you do? Let's look at the options.

- 1) You can score an eight on the same side as the hidden disc (at A).
- 2) You can score a seven above and as close as possible to the hidden seven (at B).
- 3) You can clear the St. Pete.
- 4) You can score on the opposite side of the board (at C).

Now let's analyze and select.

Options 1 and 2 are about the same. While they can create trouble because they force your opponent to deal with them, they do open the door for a cut ten-off and hide shot.

That is, yellow can hit your eight (or seven) a little to the farside (left) with kitchen speed. If she shoots well and is lucky, she'll roll her shooter behind the St. Pete for a second hidden score and your disc will land in the kitchen. Now that's serious trouble.

I see these options used and used successfully. They sometimes work because yellow's shot can go awry. For example, if yellow hits the eight a little on the wrong side, (the right), the eight will replace the hidden seven and that seven will go to the kitchen. With that catastrophe for yellow, black's in great shape.

I leave options 1 and 2 for the gamblers.

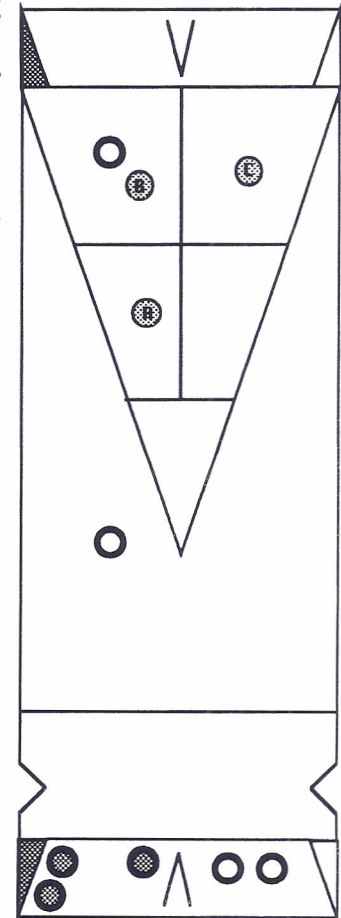
Options 3 and 4 return to the basic hammer protection strategies. That is, against an opponent's St. Pete, you can either clear it or go to the board. The fact that there's a hidden seven doesn't affect your shot selection. The seven has happened, you can't change that.

Many players simply go ahead and clear the St. Pete. That's what they set out to do at the start of the round. That's the disc that's causing trouble. Remove it.

Then yellow must replace it with another St. Pete and maybe won't do a good job. When there's an in drift, the replacement St. Pete will often drift toward the center of the court and leave the seven half open from the outside. The same shot will carry a shooter into the seven for a solid hit. I love that.

Option 4 stays in the basic strategy and has the attraction of perhaps creating a situation on the board that will jeopardize the hidden seven before the round is over. It's a good option if you're handling the board and discs well.

I hope you don't see many perfectly hidden sevens. But you will when you do, don't panic, it's only seven points, not really the end of the world.



What Is Black's Shot?

FUN AT POT LUCK

"Thanks for letting me play in your daily pot luck games," I called to Bob Reed as I headed for my car after an afternoon of good shuffleboard and new friends.

I'd stopped in cold at a Florida club where I knew absolutely no one and asked if I could join them in their regular shuffleboard pot luck. They had never seen me before, but quickly and politely put out the welcome mat and invited me to play. It was great fun and I met many friendly shufflers.

That's much of what shuffling's about -- making new friends and having fun. Shufflers all over our country and around the world are great folks.

Often readers write in to ask, "How can I get started in shuffleboard." I always write back and suggest that they go to their local club. I'm always sure that the club members will welcome the newcomer and that before the day's over, will have a new shuffler.

I said friendship and fun are much of what shuffling's about. The other part of the attraction is the challenge of the game, the part that keeps us physically and mentally in gear.

My day at the pot luck had plenty of challenge. One particular board situation that came up is quite interesting. I'll cover it in today's column.

It's the seventh shot of the round, the shot before the hammer. Yellow, the shooter, is looking at a board with a yellow seven and a black seven--that's 7 Up, as shufflers often quip. The sevens are on opposite sides of the board, well separated, and both about mid deep.

What is yellow's shot? Remember, it's black's hammer.

This situation falls in a category I call "double situations." There are actually two separate situations on the board. The shooter can't deal with both on one shot. But because two situations exist, he can't deal with just one in the way he normally would.

In the game I watched, a frame game, yellow was ahead and had been clearing the board. When he faced this board, he simply cleared the black seven with both it and his shooter leaving the court. He played it safe.

But wait, why did he want his shooter to leave the court? His opponent already had a seven yellow to try to kitchen with the hammer. Why not hit the black seven square and leave two sevens for the hammer player? The hammer shot could only kitchen one. The second would be sure to stay.

In the match I have shown in the diagram, the score is 61 yellow, 55 black. It's the same board situation. Now what's yellow's shot?

Here we think a little deeper. Clearing the black seven is still a poor choice. How about replacing it? Well, that will give black the kitchen shot and that would give yellow a three-off, a disaster at 61.

The option here for yellow is to cover the yellow seven, to forget the black seven. Then all black can do is score his hammer. That will move the score to 68 to 70 (at worst) with yellow's hammer coming up.

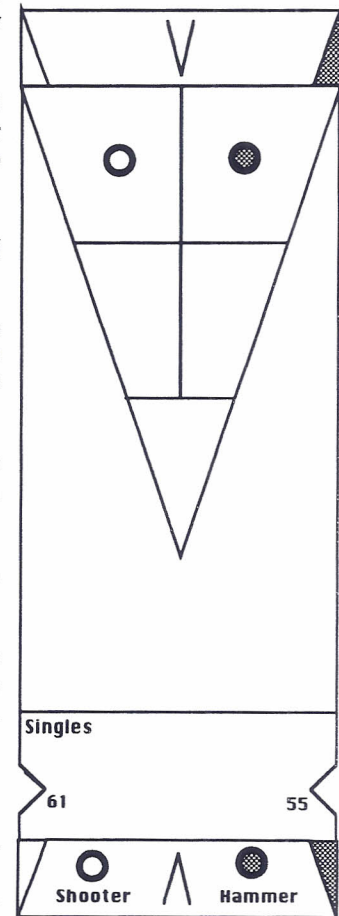
What should yellow do if the score is 61 to 61?

Double situations are tricky. We must stop a second and look at all the options and, as always, check the score.

For Bob Reed and his friends, a special thanks for the fun afternoon.

[At 61-61, yellow should replace the black seven and try to kitchen it.]

← [At 61-61 yellow should replace the black seven and try to kitchen it.]



Where Should Yellow Shoot?

HIDING A TEN

The board situations that I select for this column are ones that come up repeatedly in shuffleboard. They are what I call, "classic" situations.

I stay away from the very simple. They're too obvious to be of interest. Also, I stay away from the crazy, once-in-a-lifetime ones. They offer little for us to reapply.

The classics, the ones that come up every match or two, are the ones we need to study. They come up often enough that we need to recognize them but not so often that we can routinely deal with them.

They're perhaps like aunts and uncles. We don't see them every day like we do spouses and children, but they visit us from time to time and we keep familiar with them. At least that's the way my family works out. (I have a granddaughter I'd like to see daily but have to settle for somewhat less.)

Today's situation is a "classic" that doesn't show up in every game, but presents itself more often than we might think. In fact, it may be there many times and not get noticed. Let's get familiar with it.

Yellow is shooting the seventh shot of the round, the shot before the hammer. The discs on the board are as shown in the diagram. It's early in the game, scores are about even. What is yellow's shot?

There are three decent options for yellow. She can:

- 1) Bunt A straight into the eight for a hidden score.
- 2) Block up the board with a disc at B.
- 3) Hide a ten at C.

Any of these choices is fine with the right conditions.

Bunting A has little risk and a nice potential gain. If it works, yellow has a solid eight. If it goes awry, little is lost, black has the same hammer she always had. I like it when I have been shooting in that part of the court and know the drift around point A. If I haven't used that part of the court, it's a good chance to learn about it for later.

Completing the barricade of the board at B, to block out black's hammer routes is the conservative shot. There is absolutely nothing to lose and there's a good chance of stealing black's hammer. I use this shot most often.

Hiding a ten, C, is a grand shot. It's one of my favorites. It's why I chose this situation for a column.

The shot isn't as difficult as it may look. If there's some helping drift, the shoot hooks right in. If there's an out drift, you may not get a ten but you'll still hinder the opponent's hammer.

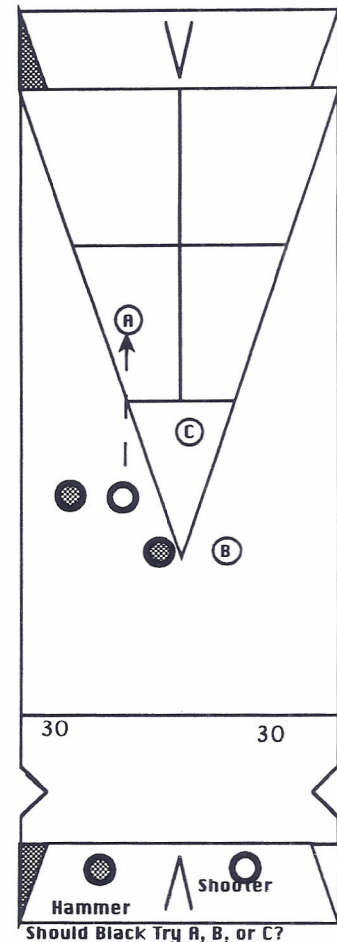
The advantages are great. Ten points is a big big boost. If yellow's score is at one of those spots like 50 or 57, where it's a few points short of the magic number, a ten is like two scores.

The biggest advantage may be the demoralizing effect on black, the opponent. Looking at a hidden ten can devastate a hammer shooter.

Sometimes they'll try to pick it out and will miss and not only lose ten points but also lose the hammer. At other times, they'll simply goof-up their hammer because looking at the ten raised their blood pressure a bit.

Watch for a chance to hide a ten with your seventh disc. It comes up more often than you may think. Anytime your opponent has a Tampa on his own hammer, you may have a try for hidden ten.

Have you ever tried this? Let me know. It's a classic. < Have you ever tried this? Let me know. It's a classic.



TOURNAMENT READY

Sooner or later almost all shufflers test their skills and tactics by entering a tournament. They may play regularly in pot lucks, team competitions, and pick-up games but before a season is over, most try organized, head-to-head competition.

Tournaments are the ultimate shuffling challenge. No matter how many enter, only four will reach the final two rounds, only one will win. Players must deliver on the court or they're out.

Tournaments are big attractions. Players sometimes get up at 4:00 a.m. and drive many miles to reach them. Others may go the night before. Some fly across the country to join. And even in club tournaments, where no travel is involved, players do get up a little more anxious on tournament mornings.

Players who join tournaments want to win. They want to do their very best. They need to be at a peak.

So the question arises, what should shufflers do to be ready for a tournament? What special efforts should be made during the two or three days just prior to the competition?

How does a shuffler get tournament-ready? Here are some hints.

First, a tournament player should be well rested. Although losers go home fairly quickly, winners keep playing and playing and playing. They must be rested or they'll fade, wear out, and lose.

For example, the weekend before a tournament is the wrong time to take a 600-mile drive to see relatives. It's the wrong time for a late Saturday night party. It's the wrong time for a 10-mile jog or a 50-mile bike ride. And it's the wrong time to work many hours in the yard and garden (I often use that excuse to get out of household chores).

Well-rested means a good night's rest, maybe a good long walk, maybe a diversion like a movie or a dinner with friends.

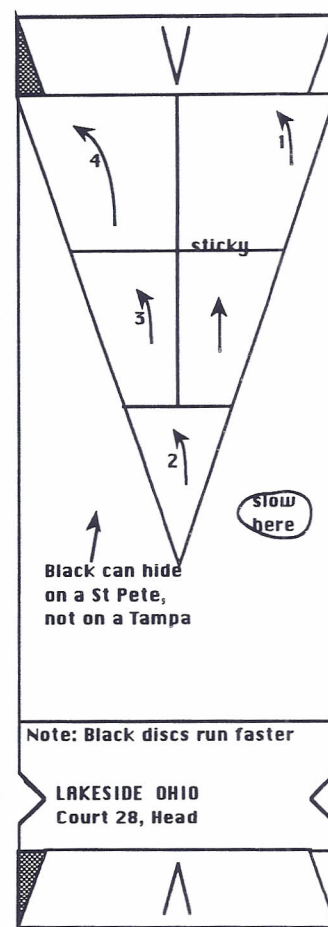
Second comes the question of shuffling or not shuffling the day or two before a tournament. The answer is that it depends. If a player has been playing a great deal of shuffleboard, a little more the day before won't hurt. But if the player hasn't played for a while, a long hard practice will simply result in stiff muscles on tournament day. Most players shoot a couple of games to stay sharp and let it go at that.

For sure, if you're at a new location and you don't know much about the courts, get out and play on them. Get a feel for their surfaces, a touch for the discs, a taste of where the sun glares and how the wind blows. Mark down the drifts and listen to what others are reporting on their experiences. Learn as much about the courts as you can. Today's diagram shows how notes might be recorded.

Players must spend some time before the tournament getting their living items organized. Are their clothes picked out for changing weather? Are the sunglasses handy and the sunscreen located? Are toiletries and pills ready to travel? Is there a need to take a lunch or some fruit? Players in tournaments cannot be worrying about where they'll eat, or where to get an oil change, or where to find an umbrella, or how to keep warm.

Finally, personal schedules must be cleared for the tournament's duration. Shuffling takes time. Tournaments last three days. Patience is a big part of winning. A player wanting to get the game over to get to the bank or the hair dresser or the supermarket will risk the game and likely lose. To compete well, a shuffler must be able to mentally say, "I have absolutely nothing else to do today, so I may as well stick with this game and outlast my opponent."

Good luck. Everyone can't win, but all can enter and do their best. If you try a tournament, be sure to be prepared.



A Well Studied Court

SUPER POINT

A single point can be big in any sport. It can be the difference between a super win or a super loss. Last year's Super Bowl went 20 - 19.

Shuffleboard is no different. A game is finished at 75 points, at 74 it's still a battle. That last point is big. Perhaps we could call it shuffleboard's Super Point. While the Super Point won't match football's Super Bowl, to a shuffler who's trying to win the third game in a three hour match, it can be as important as the last-second field goal.

Because the 75th point is so important, players must anticipate it. They must look ahead and see if it will be working for them or against them. They must consider that last, final point in their strategy selection long before the score reaches the 70's.

Today's situation is a good example. In the diagram, black is shooting the seventh shot of the round, his last disc. He has a good seven on the board. There are no other discs in the playing area. Black is behind with yellow leading 60 to 48. It's a doubles match at the foot of the court. The discs are running well and the court is straight.

What is black's shot? Let's look at the options. There are four.

- A) He can score an eight over the seven at A.
- B) He can cover the seven at B.
- C) He can snuggle the seven at C.
- D) He can score a seven on the opposite side at D.

Second, let's look at the influence that the score, and especially the final point, has on his shot selection. Yellow has 60 and will need an eight and a seven to reach 75. Two sevens won't make it, they'll leave yellow at 74, the one big Super Point short of going out. Black needs to keep this in the front of his mind.

Black should select a shot that will keep yellow from scoring an eight with his hammer. The way to do this is to keep yellow busy in the sevens.

Now let's look at the options again. Scoring an eight over the seven (A) may be a good selection at some scores, but here it gives yellow a great chance for an eight. It not only leaves the eight open, but it also gives a backstop. Sure a short eight would be great, but who can shoot one? I can't.

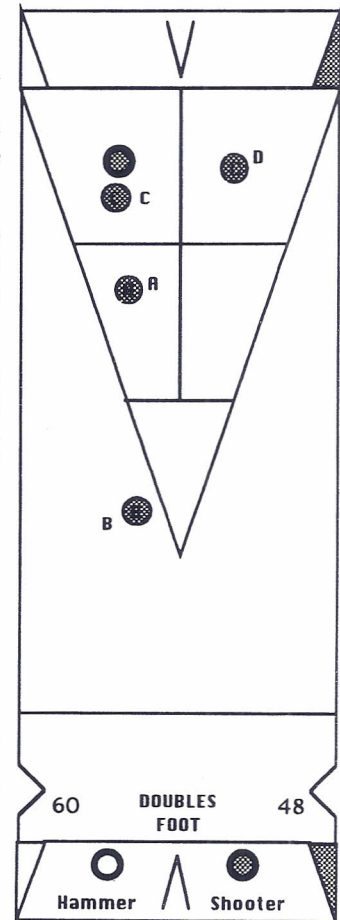
Covering the seven (B) keeps the seven but leaves the opposite side eight wide open.

Snuggling the seven (C) has great potential. If the good black seven is between 6 and 7 inches of the 7/8 line, a snuggle will work. This will put 14 points on the board, enough to raise black's score to 62 (with two hammers coming). Yellow will have to chase the sevens and while he may get a seven, and even kitchen black, he won't get an eight. The Super Point will be missing.

Finally, scoring in the opposite seven (D) is also a decent choice if the good seven is deep. Yellow will have to chase one or the other, he can't remove both, and he can't score an eight. The Super Point problem will loom. His score will reach only 67.

Players must always look ahead and adjust their strategy to fit the score. At 60, at least one of the final two scores must be an eight. A defender can select shots that restrict the scores to sevens and hold the total to 74, still the Super Point away from winning the game.

All sports are fun. Shuffleboard is one of the best. Shuffleboard is a super sport with a Super Point.



Where Should Black Shoot?

LEE JORDAN

One of the finest players in shuffleboard today is Bradenton's Lee Jordan. He's a very pleasant person and he's a super player.

I know all this because I've been lucky enough to be his partner in several tournaments. I've watched him play and I've gotten to spend many pleasant hours with him on and off the courts.

You can be sure he's a great player by looking at his record. He won the Florida Masters his first year as a pro; he lead the Florida Roll of Champs; and he's on his way to 200 points in the fewest years. Most recently, he won the 1991 Florida Masters in April. He wins in Florida and he wins in North Carolina. He's a sure Hall of Famer.

When I agreed to be Lee's doubles partner for 3 tournaments in early 1991, I was pleased because I knew I would get to study his style of play. I'd learn his strategy and his secrets and I'd report them to you in this column.

But, alas, I found no secrets in Lee's play--that is, unless hard work, endless practice, and attention to detail are secrets. Lee simply works extremely hard at being the best shuffleboard player there is. That's what I learned by watching him up close. There are no secrets, just hard work.

Let me give some examples. Lee and I finished second in a major state tournament at Lakeland. We played 7 tough matches, 18 games in three days. The sun was blistering at 85 degrees plus, the humidity was heavy, and there was no shade. We were on the courts being fried, baked, broiled, and burned for a total of 23 hours.

After that tournament I didn't want to see a disc or cue or court. I needed to get away from shuffling. I needed R&R badly.

But what about Lee? The very next day he was at the St. Pete courts at 6:30 AM. He swept the court, beaded it, and practiced his shooting. He had played superbly at Lakeland, but he was out practicing just 18 hours later.

Lee says shuffleboard is a seven day a week proposition. He says you really have to get your shot grooved. He wants to be able to hit within one quarter inch of his target. He says you have to spend many hours on the courts.

Lee plays by himself--as much as 6 hours at a time. He climbs fences to play, when courts are officially closed. Lee also plays with sparring partners. He has several friends who are expert shufflers. Lee will play against them for hours and hours on non-tournament days. Sometimes to increase concentration he'll put up a nominal prize.

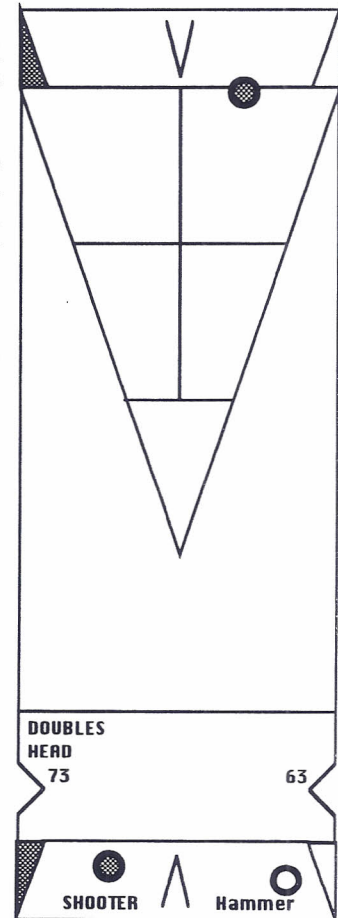
In tournaments, Lee reads the court drifts instinctively. He learns every bend in every inch of the seven. And he learns those from the number one and number four shooting spots. He records these.

Shufflers, I have no secrets to report. Lee doesn't have a trick I can pass on to you. There isn't a shortcut to shuffleboard prowess. It's just simply hard work.

Lee Jordan is the epitome of shuffleboard excellence. He practices and practices and practices. Besides all his shuffling skill, he's a super person.

Today's diagram shows a tough situation in a doubles match. The shooter, black is down one game and in trouble here in game two. It's yellow's hammer at the head of the court. That means yellow's partner will also have a hammer. Black is ahead 63-73, but if both yellow hammers are scores, yellow will win the game and the match. The court is pretty straight and the discs are running well. What is black's shot.

Think about this. Discuss it among your friends. Let me know what you think and I'll report your answers in a future column.



WHERE DOES BLACK SHOOT?

A LETTER TO LEE

Lee Jordan won the 1991 Florida Masters in April, the top shuffling achievement in the state and probably in the world. He's one of the great, great shufflers.

He's a friend of mine and I've been corresponding with him on court recording and shot grooving. In today's column you can listen on to this conversation. This is part of a letter I sent to him last spring.

Dear Lee,

I'm pleased to report some good progress in my shuffling. Much of this is due to your suggestions.

I started, as you do, by charting courts in great detail. I've been working on this for about three hours each afternoon for two weeks.

Since our courts aren't open yet this year, I sweep and then glass my "court for today". I use two sets of discs, that is 16 discs at once (matched). This allows me to test the same spot many times without switching to the other end or pausing to gather discs too often.

(I tried four sets, 32 discs, but that was a real mess. When I had about 30 of them on the board, I called to a friend walking and asked him, "What's good, Bob?" He looked and saw six 8's, nine 7's, and five 10-off's and was dumfounded.)

You indicated you shoot from four spots--#4 and #1 on black and #1 and #4 on yellow (I call #4 the outside and #1 the center). I'm using those spots too. Discs usually drift the same direction from each spot but vary in amount. For instance, discs shot at a corner seven might drift four, three, two, and four inches when shot from the four spots I mentioned.

As you know, occasionally one of the spots, usually a #4, drifts the opposite way. These are especially important to record and remember.

You mentioned shooting at five locations in each 7, 8, and 10--wow. That's a whole lot. I've compromised a bit with fewer spots but I also test the hiding lanes and bump shot locations.

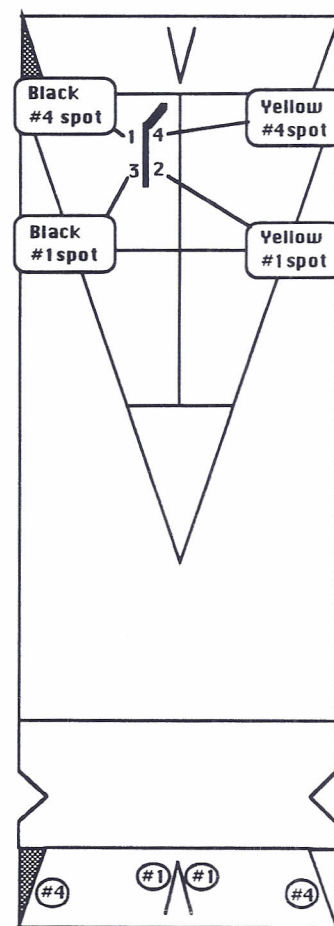
Once a court is charted and recorded, it usually exposes a logical pattern of hills and valleys on the concrete surface. I've sometimes used a six foot level on the surface and it usually verifies what I've learned by shooting.

Years ago I took pictures of each court after it rained. The puddle patterns would verify my charting but also often revealed some secrets that could be used to advantage in competition.

However, it all backfired in 1968 when I was playing Web Smith in the National Championship semi-finals. I was very nervous. He was at his peak then and kept all his court readings in his head. I kept my reading and pictures on cards in my shirt's chest pocket.

While gathering discs, I bent to pick one out of the gutter and all my cards and photos fell on the court and then the wind blew them all over several courts. I had to chase them down and then they were all mixed up--and so was I.

Web made great jest of this and I was done.



Example of court recording

INSIDE SHUFFLEBOARD

This is taken from a letter I wrote to Masters Champ Lee Jordan. It gives you a look at inside shuffleboard.

Dear Lee,

You mentioned that court charting would help groove my stroke. Because I've been having stroke problems, I was anxious to try this to see if it would work.

Right now the results are impressive. Most of the wiggles, the inaccuracies, and the undependability I experienced in Florida last winter is gone. I'm able to control my shots like I did in the good old days when I beat Jay Snoddy, Lyle Wood, Ken Worden, and Rosaire Biron in National Finals. I don't mean that I'm super accurate, but far fewer shots are going awry.

I hope my shot stays grooved.

It seems that shooting at spots and charting the drifts causes the shuffler to find an accurate, reliable groove. If the shots aren't precise, the drifts can't be read--sometimes each shot appears to drift a different amount but the shooter, not the court, is at fault.

By the way, when I started this practicing and charting, I decided to add weights to my cue. There is so much crosswind in Florida that it seems weights are needed. Jay Snoddy used weights all the time, wind or not. He felt adding and removing them, depending on the wind, messed up his shot.

So I've got four ounces taped to one cue and three to another. At first I was very bothered by this but gradually I've adapted to it and now it feels quite normal. What do you think?

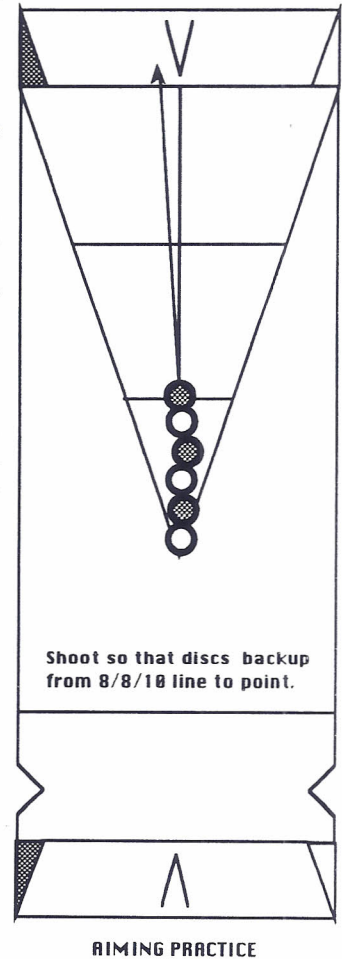
There is great satisfaction in having a court well read and a shot well grooved. The first level of reward is to be able to shoot according to the chart data and to see my disc go exactly where I want it to go.

An exercise I use to verify my stroke is to pick a spot like the top of the 8/8 line, and to shoot to hit it squarely so that my shooter remains exactly on line with where the target was. I shoot four or five more times and the discs gradually move straight to the point of the ten. When it works, it feels great [see diagram].

The second level of satisfaction is to take on an opponent in a practice game. Here I watch my accurate shooting produce points while my opponent, missing by an inch or two, messes up. I'm doing very well in these games.

The final level of satisfaction will be to defeat the very best in a tournament match. I've got lots more work to do, but I'm so confident of the track you put me on that I'm anxious for the tournament season to arrive.

Note: After I wrote this, I won second in the Summer National Singles Championship and first in the North American Singles. My stroke was in good shape in tough competition but there is still need for more improvement.



BETTER CLEARING

This is the final column taken from my correspondence with Masters Champ Lee Jordan.

P.S. We've written before about your promise that long hours of court recording would not only allow me to know how the discs drift on a court but that it would also improve my aim and groove my stroke.

I observed earlier that I thought this was happening. The more I shot to learn and study drifts, the more accurate I got in my delivery.

Now I have more success to report. Yesterday, I decided to test my "grooved" stroke in a court clearing exercise. I wondered if that part of my game had improved too.

As background, through the years I've been a good board clearer. I developed a very hard clearing shot and my monster clears would bounce discs all over the park. They'd rattle under benches bounce & roll 30 feet away (and get lost), and they'd hit and hurt other players. Yet they were effective and won games--the classic but unsafe way.

I often practiced shooting a St. Pete, then blasting it, a Tampa, then banging it, and 2 board shots, blowing both of them off both. If I went up & down the courts and played each end three times, I'd have 24 clearing attempts.

If I hit 20 of 24, I was OK. By hit I mean hitting the target on the side so that both the shooter and the target went off the court. Fewer than 20 was poor. I sometimes got 21 or 22 of 24 and would be quite pleased..

When Florida went to the hard-shooting penalty, I had to drop this shot. Like others, I couldn't afford 10 point penalties and besides the game is better if no one shoots hard. I've messed around with soft, harder, fairly hard and all varieties of speeds--without great success.

So I was excited to try my newly grooved soft stroke on clearing. And WOW, I cleared 18 in a row, then missed on number 19, and finished with 23 of 24! I went another 24 and missed only numbers 17 and 19. I shot an extra 2 clears to reach 50 in total. That gave me 47 of 50 or 94%, an excellent score.

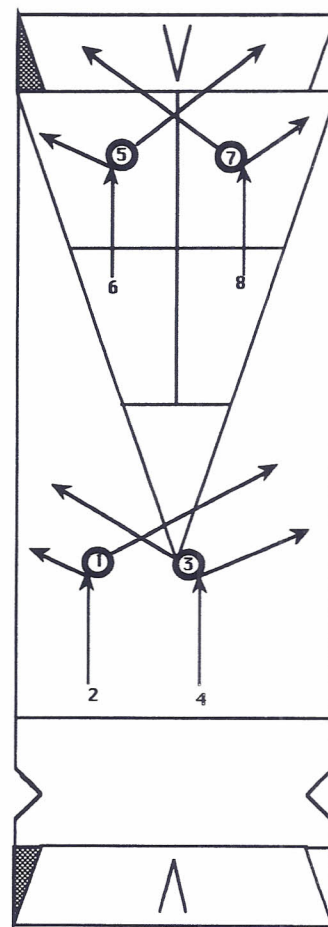
Now I'm anxious to see if this works in a match and under tournament pressure. I think it will because I can feel the groove and it's getting natural and automatic.

Oh my, now to put all this together--court recording, grooved shooting, efficient clearing, tactics, strategy, nerve control, wind proofing...

Shuffleboard is certainly intriguing and fascinating.

I hope you've learned from these letters to Lee Jordan. If you really want to see shuffleboard at its very best, go watch Lee in a tournament.

Many readers have asked how old I am. They are surprised to hear I'm 58. Because I've been playing shuffleboard 54 years, they expect me to be much older. I started to shuffle when I was 3 (maybe I've now been playing 55 years). While I've usually been considered young, I didn't feel that way in the National Singles last summer. I was in the final four for the 13th time--but it was the first time I was the oldest of the four. I lost in the finals to a 17 year old who wasn't born when I won my first National Championship.



Clearing Practice

LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS

"When you're trying to double, shoot like you're shooting eights." I listened to my partner, Charlie Griffin, pass that piece of advice on to me just before a match.

It went in one ear and out the other. I'm like most shufflers. I'm too stubborn to listen to suggestions from other players. We all think we know how to play, so why do we need advice from someone else?

If I'd kept listening I'd have heard Charlie go on to say, "You see an awful lot of doubling attempts go in the 10-off. People shoot them too hard. They push the target disc into the 10-off.

"All the shooting disc needs to do is to tap a liner to double it, so shoot soft. Shoot doubles as if you were shooting for an eight. If your shot stops short, you'll have one score, if it goes deeper, you'll have two. And you'll not put your own disc in the kitchen."

Good advice. Solid advice. Charlie's a fine player, a student of our game.

Actually, I did listen to him, I just didn't heed his advice. For in our very next match, I had a chance for a double, one that would have salvaged a nearly lost game. I forgot what Charlie had said.

I didn't shoot eight-speed. I shot too hard, kitchen speed. I shot my own liner disc into the 10-off. The game slipped away. I'm glad I couldn't hear what Charlie was thinking.

So what's my point here? It's to urge shufflers to be more open to advice and to coaching and to suggestions.

First, of course, we must be sure the advice comes from a sound source. In my case, Charlie Griffin is a proven player, an expert, a winner. He should be heard.

Once you know your getting well-qualified help, listen to it, remember it, follow it. Jay Snoddy, a great, great shuffler, is definitely a person to listen to. He's as expert as an expert can be. He gave me some advice on doubling a few years ago. Referring to a disc on the 8/8 line, Jay said, "Most people try to double those on the thin side. I hit them on the fat side."

What Jay meant was this. Double candidates on the 8/8 line usually are much more to one side than to the other. Often an inch or so of the disc is in one eight and four inches or so of it is in the other eight. Jay has observed that most players try to hit the disc on the one inch side, the thin side. He has also observed that they miss or that they hit the disc too hard and end up with two liners.

Jay shoots for the fat side, gets one score for sure because his shooter won't roll to the outside with a solid hit. Then the liner goes on into the seven. That's Jay's way to play the shot.

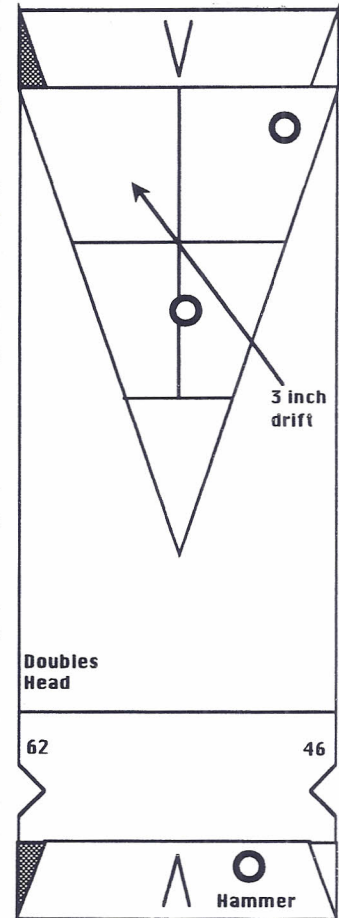
From my own experience, and every one of our own experiences is expert experience, I've learned that it's better to hit a disc when your shooter is drifting into it rather than when your shooter is drifting away.

Psychologically, it's harder because you aim at space to the side of the disc, but from a trigonometry stand point, it's a much better shot. I go with the experts in the trigonometry book.

So with all that advice, how would you shoot for the double shown in today's diagram? The court drifts to the left 3 inches. Would you shoot for the left side or the right side of the 8/8 liner? How hard would you shoot?

Review the above expert advice.

In a recent game, I saw the experts ignored. The player aimed at the left side of the target liner and shot too hard. Her shooter drifted to the left, missed the liner and went into the kitchen. Listen to the experts!



How Should Yellow Shoot?

UNDERDOG

All sports have upsets. The favored player or team doesn't always win. The better player or team sometimes gets beat. If upsets weren't possible, no one would bother to read the sports pages. A computer could do rankings and pick all the winners.

Shuffleboard is like all the other sports. While some players are much better than others, they don't always win. Upsets are frequent. Outcomes are far from certain. As my father used to tell me when I'd ask who he thought would win, "I don't know, that's why they play the game."

That's all fine from a spectator's point of view. But how does it look to a participant? Specifically, how should a shuffler approach a match in which she is the underdog? What does a player do to come through with an upset.

There are at least three strategies that may be employed to try to beat a better player. I'll call them: 1) the "Hope for a Bad Day" approach; 2) the "Pesticide" approach; and 3) the "Las Vegas" approach. Let's look at these.

1. "Hope for a Bad Day" approach. Using this approach, a shuffler sticks to the basic shuffleboard strategies and tactics. She plays the best game she can, staying with the normal tactics of our game.

The hope here is that the opponent has an off-day. While the opponent in this case is a better player, that may not be so every last day. Maybe, this is a day that the opponent isn't feeling great, isn't thinking well, or isn't at all lucky.

The strategy positions the underdog to take advantage of this. She's playing her basic game and doing her best. If the opponent isn't on top of her game, the underdog can win. This is the most often employed strategy.

2. "Pesticide" approach. Using this approach, the underdog plays a gritty game, just hanging in there, always forcing the better player to deal with pesky little situations.

In baseball, this would be a pitcher who hasn't got a 95 mile an hour fast ball. Yet he throws all sorts of off-speed curves and keeps the great power hitters off balance. In tennis, it's a player who keeps hitting the ball back, using spin, using placement, but not driving the ball hard in the normal winner's way.

In shuffleboard, it means taking all hides, doubling on hammers, playing some kitchen. It means moving pilots around, using corner sevens, keeping the game alive. Sometimes the better player eventually gets worn down and makes a bad shot--and loses.

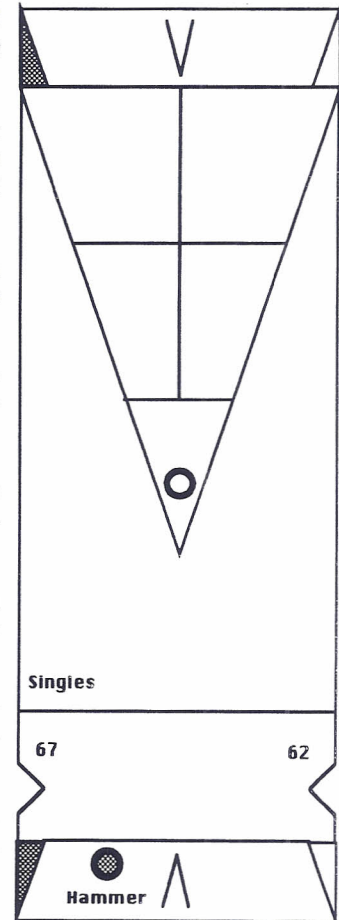
3. "Las Vegas" approach. Using this approach, as you can guess, the underdog gambles. She plays some low percentage shots, hoping to be lucky.

For example, the Las Vegas shuffler will use her hammer to try to kitchen an 8/8 liner, she'll try for short 10's, she'll play in the 7's even on the opponent's hammer. She'll attempt shots that usually don't work but, with luck, may.

This approach usually leads to quick defeat. When I'm the better player, I like to see my opponents use it. I figure, sooner or later, the odds will get them, and like the "house" in Las Vegas, I'll win.

Which approach should be used? It's a good start to simply be aware of them and to be deliberate in employing them. I use a combination. I start with a straight game, hoping for an opponent to have a bad day. Then I get pesky. Finally, I may gamble at the end to win.

In today's diagram, I went for the eight and beat a better opponent. The right shot was to hit the ten. Yet I figured, I had a chance to win and it might be my only chance. Once in a while, Las Vegas can be beat. Once in a while the overdog gets upset.



ACCEPT THE CONDITIONS

I wish all shuffleboard games could be played under perfect conditions--ideal weather, straight courts, no distractions, identical discs-- everything absolutely perfect.

But they aren't. Conditions can't be perfect. Games must be played with what we have.

A while ago I was in a match with a fine player. He began to talk about the poor conditions. He mentioned fans distracting players, the cool weather, a nasty drift on the court, and the uneven discs. He claimed other sports weren't that way.

At that time, I let him talk. Why argue with an opponent who was getting so aggravated it affected his game? Soon he lost and went home blaming the conditions.

Today in this column I'll argue with him. I'll argue that all sports are sometimes performed under poor conditions and I'll argue that the players who accept this and deal with it positively and creatively are the ones who will win.

Is it true that shuffleboard is alone in being played in less than perfect conditions, sometimes awful conditions? Let's think about that.

A few years ago I watched the Cincinnati Bengals beat the San Diego Chargers and go to the Super Bowl. That game was played in minus 15° temperatures. The wind chill was something like minus 50°. The Bengals accepted this, adjusted and won. The Chargers didn't, and lost.

Not too long ago, the Boston Celtics were in the NBA finals and that play-off goes on into June. They had a home game but no air conditioning at Boston Garden. They played in 90° heat. That's a little higher than perfect temperature. They won.

We've all seen golf played in heavy winds, track run in the rain, and marathon's run in high humidity. We've seen the baseball World Series played in a 40° drizzle, October weather. Someone always wins.

So shuffleboard isn't unique. If fans are moving around, a shuffler must concentrate and block them out, just as a North Carolina freethrow shooter does when he plays at Duke where fans wave their arms and yell behind the basket.

If it's cold, shufflers must put on more clothes. The best approach here is to put on many layers of loose clothing. Keep them loose to allow freedom of movement. Use layers so as the day warms up, items can be gradually removed.

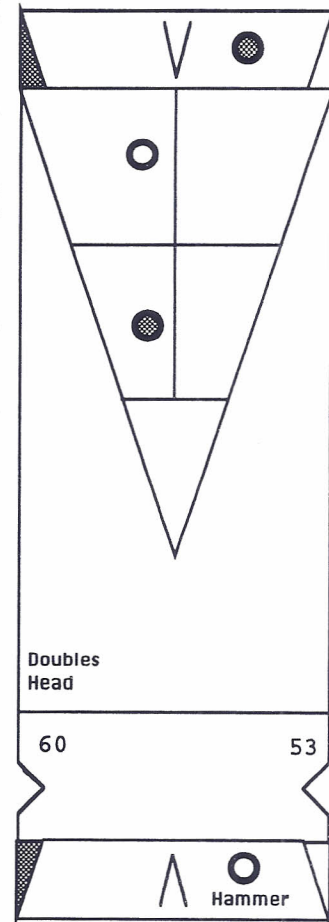
If the discs run at uneven speed, figure out which are fast and which are slow. Then use that information tactically. If the court is drifty, read the drifts. If the shooting area is slippery, adjust your steps. If the court is damp and slow, shoot harder. If the wind is blowing, try to shoot between gusts.

Accept the conditions and adjust to them. Do your best with what you have. Let your opponent get agitated and frustrated. Let your opponent waste shots.

Remember, someone will win. It will be the player who accepts the conditions. It can be you.

Today's diagram shows a touchy situation for yellow, shooting his hammer. The problem is that shooting to replace the black eight will run the risk of seeing it hit the yellow seven or the black 10-off. How should yellow make this shot?

Here's a case where bumping the black eight toward the area where the 7/8 line crosses the up and down line will do fine. It doesn't have to be knocked off the court. Be sure to make a good 8 for yellow. That will position partner to go out. Even if the black 8 remains good, a 2-off will hurt black badly.



Where Should Yellow Shoot?

CREATIVITY IS NEEDED

Take a look at today's diagram. It's black's hammer, yellow is shooting the fifth disc of the round. What shot should yellow select?

When I saw this, Charlie Griffin, a very smart shuffler, was playing yellow. He was looking at not one, but two good pilots for black. How could he defend against both? If Charlie removed the Tampa, black could hide behind the St. Pete. If he removed the St. Pete, black could hide behind the Tampa. If he tried to remove both, he'd likely hit only one or hit both but leave his own disc.

It looked disastrous. As they say, "What's a poor shuffler to do?" Charlie studied it and found something he could do. He came up with a creative solution. Can you?

There was no way to play defense against black's double opportunity. So why not play offense? Why not hide a score of his own?

Charlie shot down suicide alley. (I haven't shown this on the diagram to keep from giving away the answer.) He went down his own side of the court and scored a key seven yellow behind the St. Pete.

Normally, suicide alley is a "No-No". It's difficult to get into the seven, it risks a 10-off, and it leaves a hiding opportunity for the opponent. However, in this case, black is already in trouble and must take a chance. There is no safer shot that accomplishes anything.

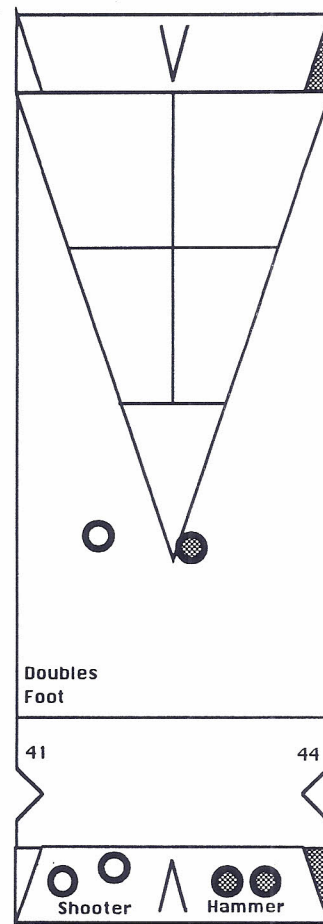
Charlie scored his seven. Then black hid behind the St. Pete. Then Charlie went down suicide alley again for two sevens. It was black who was now in trouble.

Black, shooting his hammer, could either score an open score or he could play combo-kitchen with the 3 sevens. If he simply shoots a second score, he'll have lost his hammer (in effect) and the game will have moved to 55 to 59 with yellow having the next two hammers. That's threatening.

If black plays the sevens, he must risk hitting his own good seven into yellow's seven, hoping to gain more than he loses, but needing a large rabbit's foot to succeed.

Charlie's shot choice against the two pilots on disc 5 was creative. The situation is one that occurs just once in a while. It's not a standard one that has a standard response. Charlie had to think creatively. He did.

We need to be alert as we play. Most board situations are ones we've seen many times and know how to handle. We need to watch for the unique ones. We need to keep our creative minds open.



Where Should Yellow Shoot?

Dear Coach: In the summer I go north to Ohio. Can you tell me where I can play shuffleboard there? -----
Bradenton Area Reader.

Dear Reader: Ohio has a fine schedule of tournaments during the summer months. They're held at Carey, Toledo, Springfield, Akron, Canton, Upper Arlington, Greenville, and Lakeside. They start in early June and go to September. The Summer National Championship is held at Lakeside in mid-July.

Other states have summer schedules also: New Jersey, North Carolina, and Michigan. In addition, there are tournaments in Canada.

To find out about these, go to a major Florida club and ask to see a Florida Preview. The summer schedules are toward the back.

If readers know of any other summer shuffling, let me know. I'm often asked this question.

ONE TO A CUSTOMER

"You raised your head too quickly." That came from my helpful and observant partner who was sharing his observation with me.

During the match, I had twice missed sevens that I was trying to clear. The shots had felt jerky, but I wasn't sure what I had done wrong. My partner's observation was very helpful. He had been watching me shoot. He knew my usual delivery style. So when I varied from my own style, he detected it and was able to help me.

So often I'm asked, what is the best way to shoot? I have to answer that there are as many shooting styles as there are shooters. There are thousands of good styles. But, please, only one to a customer.

What I mean is, select your best style and then stay with it. Don't change. Be true to your own. Get in your own groove and stay there.

When selecting your shooting style, there are some basics you may want to follow.

Follow through--reach. Most good players have a loose arm swing that extends way out in front at the other end of their shot. It's almost as if they're reaching for the end of the court. That's follow-through. Pitchers must follow through, basketball players must follow through, quarterbacks must follow through. So should shufflers.

Keep Your Head Down. As a shuffler's arm comes up at the end of a shot, the head and shoulders must stay down. It's the arm that follows through, not the head and shoulders.

Comfortable and Natural. However you shoot, it must be comfortable and natural for you. All our bodies are different. They work in various ways. In shuffling this means different players have different natural deliveries. For instance, some like one step, some like two. What's important is that a shuffler feels normal, unstressed, and smooth.

Don't experiment often. Occasionally, I get tempted to try a new shooting style. This always messes me up. (Unfortunately, since I've been writing this column, I've experimented a lot so that I can write about it. That doesn't help my game.) My recommendation is to be content with your own style. Trying other approaches will mess you up too.

Use Mental Power. Focus your mental energy on your target and what you want your shot to do. This will keep you from monitoring your shot execution and in turn from goofing it up by thinking too much.

Shoot the Same Every Time. This is where I started. I've watched all the great players. They all shoot differently. Yet they shoot the same, absolutely the same, every time. There are many great styles to select from.

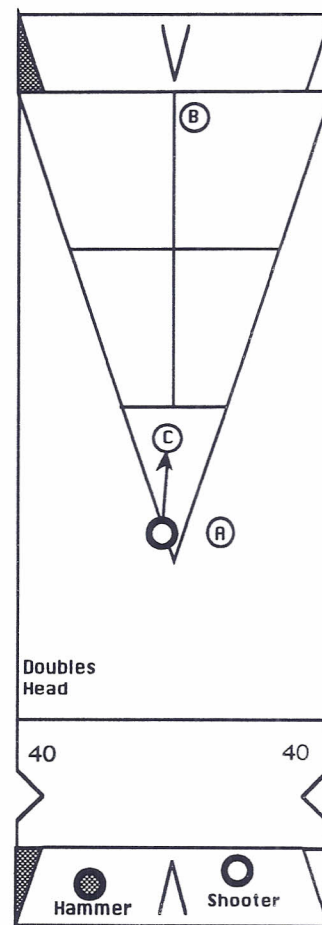
Yet, there's just one for each customer.

In today's diagram, yellow has these choices. A. She can put her disc near the Tampa area (A) to hinder black's hammer. B. She can try to half-hide a seven deep near the 7/7 line (B). C. She can bump the Tampa to a 10 or an 8.

I prefer C, bumping a 10. It's not difficult and if it doesn't work, there are still two discs hindering black's seven.

Of course if black is ahead, it may be better to do A and try to keep her from getting close to game.

This shoot doesn't come up often. Do you know why?



Where Should Yellow Shoot?

INNOVATIVE SHOOTING

Frank Berger is one of the very fine tournament shuffleboard pro's in Florida. He's an expert we can learn from.

A while back, Frank was on the threshold of winning his 200th Florida tournament point. He's probably done it by now. That's a level achieved by few. He was inducted into the National Hall of Fame at Lakeside, Ohio, in 1991.

One day at a tournament I had a chance to chat with Frank about his shooting style, a style that's unique, innovative, and at least for him, productive. He was completely open, very willing to share.

I'll review our discussions in today's column. Remember, this is a matter of style. It suits Frank fine, it may not be for you. I don't use his style, but I want to think about it and try it out for feel and effect.

If you saw Frank getting ready to play, the first thing you'd notice would be that his cue has a heavy weight on the shaft near the fork. Many players use weights on windy days to keep their cues from blowing. Frank keeps his weight on all the time.

Frank's reasoning is that playing without a weight on calm days and with a weight on windy days would mess up his delivery. He keeps it simple by using the weight all the time. Jay Snoddy advocated this same approach.

As you watch Frank play, the second thing you'll notice is that his cue is on the short side. He cut 6 or 8 inches off it because he is short. It gives him such great control, I wonder if we all shouldn't shorten our cues.

A few weeks ago, I suggested shorter cues to a group of shufflers, and challenged them to tell me why 6' 3" was the right length. I asked, "Where did that come from?" One of my friends laughed and speculated, "I'll bet they're 6' 3" because that's a good length for raking in the discs." And then we use it to shoot!

If you watch Frank play, you'll notice that he doesn't look at his target when he shoots. That's one technique that causes folks to do a double-take. But it's true. Frank lines up his cue shaft with his target, then he looks down at his disc. As he shoots, his eyes stay on his disc; they never return to his target his disc is on it's way.

Frank says he controls his speed better that way. He says, "All I have to think about is distance." He's great at shooting eights, tens, sevens, and kitchens. It doesn't work for me.

If you look closely at Frank's cue he has a marker about 10 inches from the end. He says he uses this to position his knees on a windy day. Then, to my surprise, he adds, "You see, when it's windy, I shoot with one step, when it's not, I use two." I was flabbergasted.

Those are Frank Berger's innovations. I pass them along to you for information. I'm not recommending them, but we need to be open to new approaches.

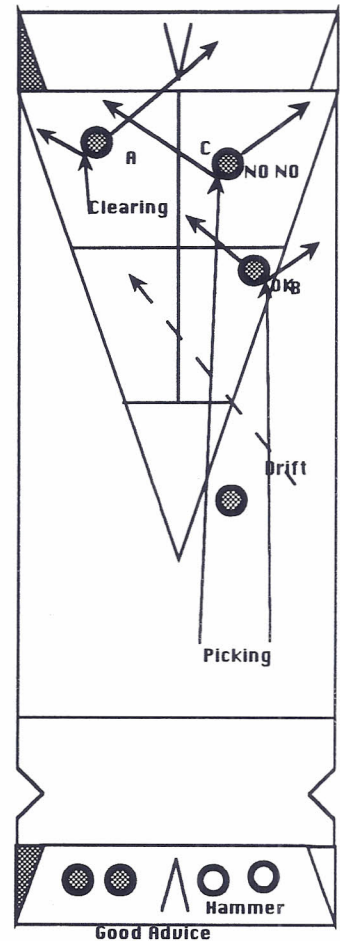
I'm going to experiment with them. I'm curious most about the shorter cue.

Frank also passed along two sound pieces of playing advice. I've shown them in the diagram. The court has a drift from yellow toward black.

Frank says always clear on the downhill side of a disc. Your shooter will roll off better. (A in diagram.)

When picking out half-hidden discs, Frank says go for the ones in which the drift brings your shooter toward the target (B); but avoid those in which the drift runs away from the target. Sound advice.

I'm sure Frank will get his 300th and 400th points and play shuffleboard for many years. Yet if he ever gives it up, Frank Berger seems a natural for the fast food business.



LETTERS FROM READERS

My mail box is much busier since I started this column. Each day I get letters from readers. I appreciate them and answer them all. I answer first the ones with self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Stamps, at 29 cents each, add up, so please provide them if you want a response. Here are some questions from recent letters.

Dear Coach: I live in a trailer park and would like to learn how to play shuffleboard. The ones who I see play are very good and I do not want to bother them. Is there a book on shuffleboard? Could you send me some instructions for beginners? --Bradenton, Florida.

Dear Reader: Congratulations on your interest in playing shuffleboard. You've chosen a great sport. To get started, go ahead and bother the good players. Tell them you're interested in learning how to play and I'm sure they'll help get you started.

There are several books on shuffleboard that are available at Allen R Shuffleboard in Seminole, Florida. These may help but you also need advice from a real person on the courts. I have written many columns of instructions. Someday I'll put them in a book. But for now, just keep reading my columns each week. That should help, too.

Dear Coach: I've been told I'm a kitchen player and I do have good luck at it. Is this wrong? Should I change to a more standard way of playing? --Clearwater, Florida.

Dear Reader: Play kitchen as much as you want to. It's fun and it's a great part of our sport. Some people will try to tell you it's poor sportsmanship. That's not so. Ten-off play is a basic, exciting, and very fair part of our game. Isn't there an expression that goes, "If you can't stand the kitchen, stay away from the courts?" (Did Harry Truman say that?)

If you play for kitchens in almost all the situations you face, you'll win many games but you'll lose an awful lot too. Kitchen play is fun, but it's not the best strategy all the time. Use this approach only when it fits the situation.

In today's diagram, there's a chance for two yellow kitchens. But it's not the time for black to try for these. She should clear the yellow seven or snuggle on it.

Dear Coach: Our yellow discs seem to run faster than your black discs. Is that true or do we imagine it? --Clearwater, Florida.

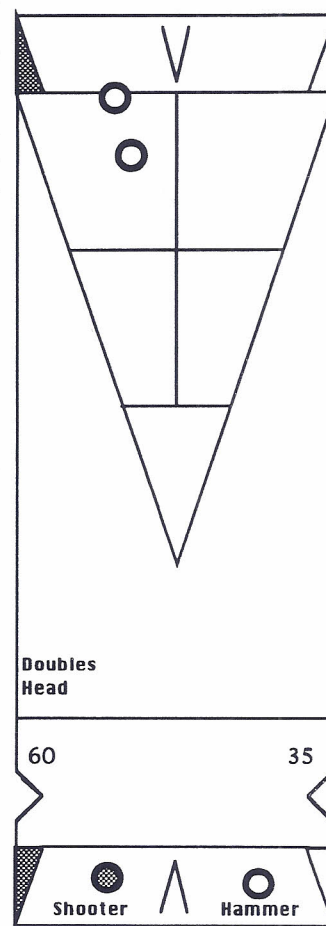
Dear Reader: Today's discs seem to have irregularities from color to color. If your yellows seem faster or slower, it's not your imagination, they probably are. You can take two sets and group the eight yellows and the eight black into two new sets. Then paint 4 yellows black and four blacks yellow. You may then have two even sets--but you may not. Discs are a frustrating problem. I like to use an old set I bought from Sam Allen in 1967. It has red instead of yellow and all 8 discs run great. They don't make these any more.

Dear Coach: We enjoy reading your columns. We're thinking of making a court on an extra lot we have. Do you have any information? --Harlingen, Texas.

Dear Reader: If you're in an area where there are shuffleboard clubs that meet at locations with many courts, stick with them. A lone court usually gets lonesome. A big part of the sport is meeting people and playing in tournaments. Only the multi-court locations can provide them.

If you're determined to build an isolated court, be sure you get a contractor who has built courts before and can show you his work. I've seen many more unused botched courts than I have good ones. Be sure you've got an experienced expert.

Keep the letters coming. I like to hear from you. And let the newspaper know you're reading "Shuffleboard Coach." They need to hear from you too.



Should Black Play Kitchen?

COURTS WILL BE COURTS

Sometimes our kids act up in ways that don't make a lot of sense to us adults. The youngsters just do things that to us are not logical or helpful. We've learned to accept this and we use the expression, "kids will be kids."

Sometimes shuffleboard courts act up in ways that don't make a lot of sense to an experienced player. The courts carry our discs in ways that aren't logical and are definitely not helpful.

We can write this court misconduct off with an expression similar to the one we use for kids. "Courts will be courts," says it well.

Like kids, courts seem to have a mind of their own and a thought process that doesn't match ours. Why else would one shot at an eight drift 2 inches to the right and the next shot at the same eight go 2 inches to the left?

Yet courts aren't kids. Courts don't think. Courts are literally and figuratively concrete. They don't change between shots. They can be studied and understood--even if kids can't.

With suggestions and encouragement from Lee Jordan, the great shuffler who's the current Florida Masters champ, I've been charting courts with a level of meticulousness higher than I've ever used before. I'm finding that courts have even more drifts than I've accused them of, but also that they can be read, recorded, and then relied upon to repeat themselves.

I've been studying a court nearby. Here's what I've learned about the drifts in the sevens. First, I know that I must study at least 6 spots deep in the sevens. That is, the corners, the middles, and the insides near the 7/7 line. Second, I know that the drift will be different depending on which spot I shoot from. Red #4, red #1, black #1, and black #4, all produce different drifts.

Finally, I know that speed affects the drift, usually, the slower the shot, the more drift.

The diagram shows the charting I've done on my sample court. The arrows show the direction of drift in six spots. The numbers by the arrows show the inches of drift at about 10-off speed. The numbers by the arrow head are for shots from the #4 shooting spots (black left, red right) and the number at the end of the arrow from the #1 shooting spots.

"Courts will be courts?" Maybe, but with detailed study, they'll behave for us.

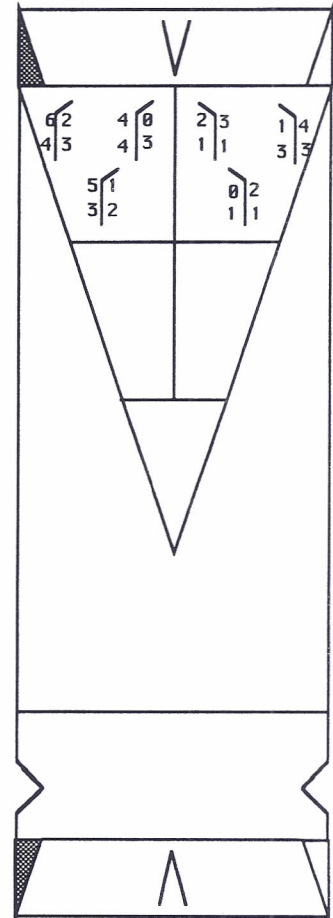
When studying court drifts, it's a good idea to get familiar with the hiding lanes. Can yellow hide behind a Tampa or does the disc pull out in the open? Can yellow hide behind a St. Pete? Can black?

How about the pilots themselves? Does a Tampa drift a little? Many games are lost on drifting Tampas. If it drifts, can the other color hide behind it?

Also test the pick-out shots. If black hides behind a St. Pete, pick (or knick) the hidden disc on the inside? The outside?

How do the outside lanes run? Do they go in? Out? Are they slow?

Courts are complex. To really know one involves a full day's study.



Court Recording Example

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A GAME

In many of these columns I've written about the need to practice shuffleboard. I've suggested going to a court by yourself to groove your stroke and to learn court drifts. I've underscored the validity of practicing by pointing out the great Lee Jordan practices daily and he is the current Florida Masters Champ. I've tried to make it simpler for you to practice by suggesting practicing formats you might use.

With all that, I may be overstating the case for practicing. While it will improve your play, it is not the end or the purpose of shuffling. It's simply a preparation for competition. After all, to parody the Broadway show song title, "There is Nothing Like a Dame." The game, the match, the head-to-head competition, the tournament--that's shuffleboard.

There are many factors that come into play in a game. And it's this many faceted nature that makes our shuffleboard game exciting. Here are some examples.

Psychology. After I shot black discs and lost the first game of a match to Glen Peltier, the leader of last winter's Florida Roll of Champs, he said to me as we traded colors, "You'll like these yellow discs." I knew he was working on my mind, but I couldn't figure out his thrust. What was it he was trying to do to me with that statement? I pondered that puzzle for a while instead of studying the game. I still don't know what he was up to.

Weather. Shuffleboard games, like football and baseball, are played in all sorts of weather. Wind gusts, drops of rain, burning sun, and freezing cold change the game drastically and call for on-the-spot creative answers to the new situations. This can be fun or frustrating.

Nerves. Many times I've seen players shoot potential game winning hammers right on through the eight and the seven into the 10-off. Many times I've seen a player forget the drift on the final shot of the game. Nerves. With a match at stake, all sorts of things can happen to our human control systems.

Patience. Shuffleboard requires reaching 75 points. A player can try to do this in a hurry, but it will take a long time. On the other hand, a player can be slow, playing a disc at a time, and reach 75 quickly. Patience. Hurrying the game can be a disaster.

Stamina. Shuffleboard, played on long hard courts, calls for days that are also long and hard. When legs and bodies are fresh, shots go well. When legs and bodies are tired, shots go poorly. Stamina. In a recent tournament, players reaching the finals played 8 to 10 hours a day for 3 long days in 94 degree heat.

Creativity. Shuffleboard is an old game but it continually presents new situations. Discs wind up in all sorts of positions on the court. Top players find creative ways to use new positions to advantage.

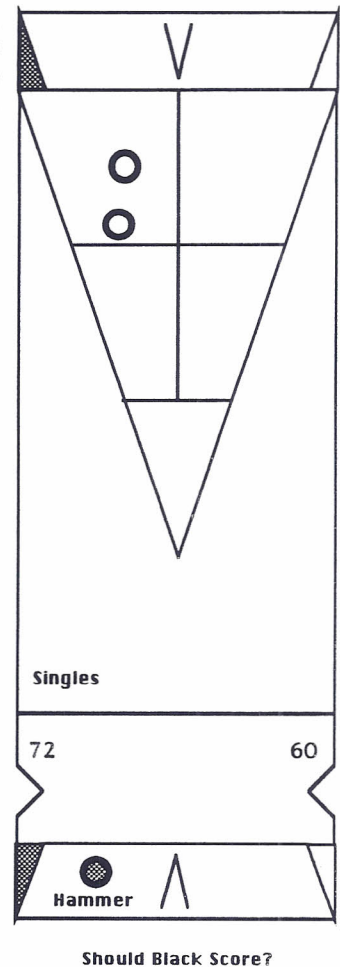
Tactics. We all love to argue about shuffling tactics. Try the situation in today's diagram.

"There is Nothing Like a Game" to bring out all the features of shuffleboard. Of course, if you want the original title, I like Dames, too.

Today's diagram shows a nasty situation for black. Should she score on the open side for a win? What if she hits a line? Should she shoot hard to remove the two yellow sevens? What if she only gets one out? Should she shoot at the black sevens to roll her shooter to a score hoping to remove at least one of the sevens if she fails to roll? Should she hit the sevens directly hoping to kitchen one of them?

This is where shuffleboard has a dimension beyond chess. In chess, the player simply decides the best move to make and then the chess piece does what it's supposed to do. In shuffleboard, the player must figure into her thinking probabilities that the discs will or won't do what the player intends.

In the problem, I'd suggest the player choose the shot that on that day and that court she thinks she has the best chance of making.



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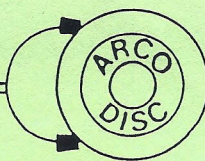
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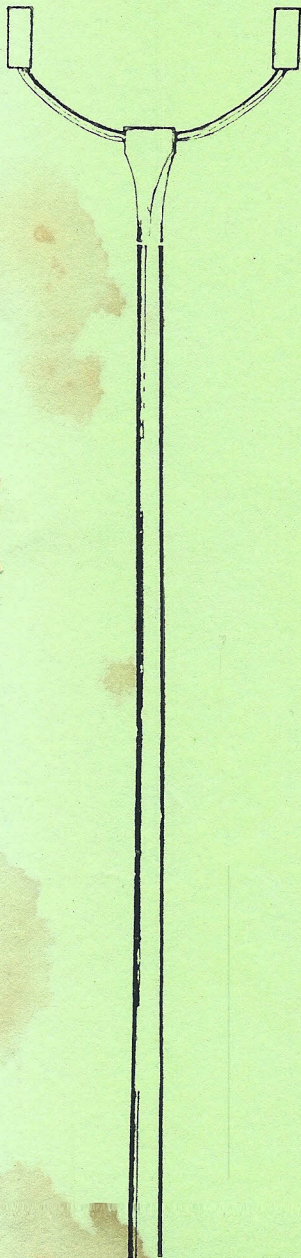
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