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RELEASE DATE: 12-31-96
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SAM AAND GLENN

It's the end of 1996 and the thought comes into my mind that shuffleboard should be like other fields and give some "bests" for outstanding achievements made during the year, like Oscars and the Heisman trophy. I'll leave it to the official shuffleboard organizations to do this but I'd like to make two nominations in this column.

For the New Equipment Award, I'll nominate Sam Allen. Sam has done it again with a new cue he's calling the "buggy-whip." I fell in love with it at first sight and used it in the first singles tournament after I tried it. It finished second, not bad at all for a maiden voyage. The cue is made of special hollow graphite that Sam gets from his supplier. It's not the same as the flimsy fishing poles some try to use, but rather, it's stiffer while still light and flexible. It's selected special for Sam. The black shaft is just .180 inches in diameter at the head end and a nice small .625 at the hand end. The head, or fork, is specially made from an exotic aircraft alloy that is light and will take a chrome finish. The cane tip is another specially made item and has a very large flange.

The advantage of the old bamboo cue was that it absorbed some of the vibrations of gliding on the concrete and many of us thought that gave us a nicer feel. Maybe that's imagination but maybe it's not. The thin graphite shaft gives that bamboo feel. In addition, the thinner shaft gives less diameter for the wind to blow against, and with more weight in the head than the shaft, the cue seems to blow or move less in the wind than larger cues, even though it's light. It's not wind-proof and the wind can blow your body or the disc, but I felt like it was a help when I used it in a cross wind. I love the small shaft at the hand end because my hands are small. Before this, I could never get a small hand-end in a graphite cue. The big flange is great and Sam says that's a special too, but, alas, the mold is gone. I'm wishing you'll all encourage him to get another mold.

You can get the cue at Allen R Shuffleboard Co. Inc., 6595 Seminole Blvd., Seminole, FL 34642. Phone, 813 397-0421. I believe the price is \$60 and that's a bargain for what Sam has in the cue.

For the Shuffleboard Promotion Award, I'll nominate Glenn Peltier. Glenn has produced a video on shuffleboard and an audio tape too. And while others talk about fewer shufflers at our amateur tournaments, Glenn is giving lessons on Fridays and Saturdays at Allen R. Shuffleboard. Glenn has won the Florida Masters four times and it's much to his credit that he's giving so much back to his sport. Check out his lessons by calling Allens.

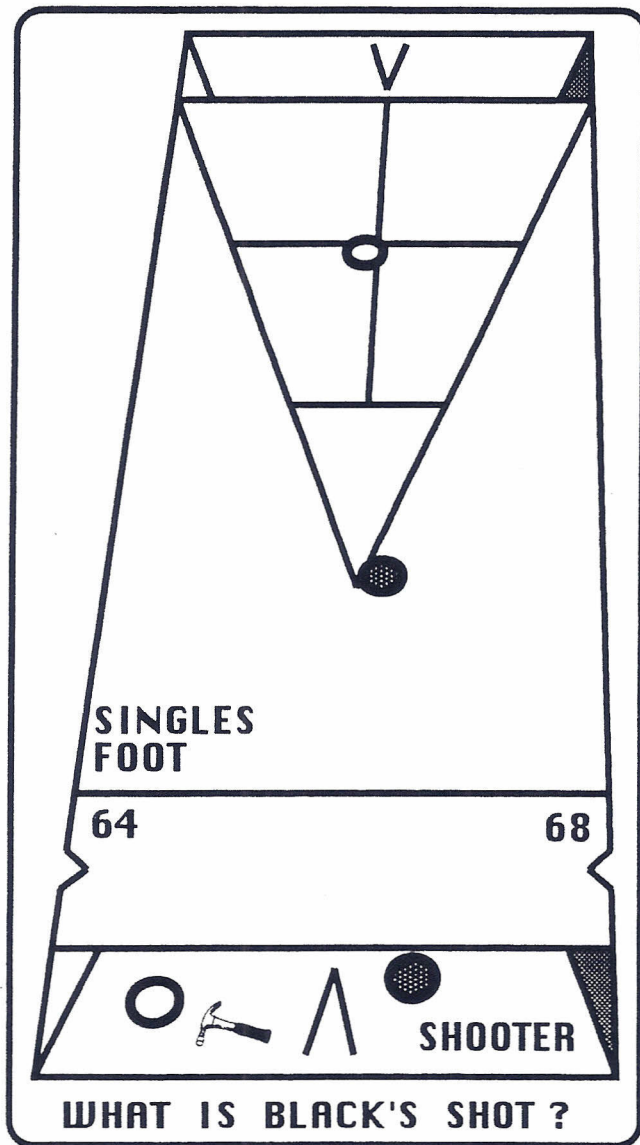
There are many others who should get awards too, but I only have 600 words each week and I'd better leave it with Sam and Glenn for this year.

Now let's start the new year off with a puzzler. Yellow has the hammer and is behind 64 for yellow to 68 for black in a singles game. On the board are a black Tampa and a yellow disc at the 7/8 line cross, mostly in the yellow side 8. Black is about to shoot the seventh shot of the frame, his last. What should he try to do? His choices are to cover the yellow disc with yellow-side Tampa or to take his hide behind the black Tampa. Which is the right shot? And why?

I can report that I gambled and hid an 8 and won when the opponent couldn't make the double. On the other hand, in another game, in a similar situation, I was shooting the yellow discs and my opponent made his black score but I made the yellow double and won that one too. The message is that you're better off being lucky than smart. Happy New Year.

Lary Faris has played shuffleboard 60 years, has won a record 12 National championships, and is a member of the National Shuffleboard Hall of Fame. Questions and comments are invited and can be sent to Lary Faris, 223 Jasmine, Lakeside, Ohio 43440 or to 1414 Fox Hills Dr, Sun City Center, FL 33573 in the winter. You can Email him personally at 102404.621@compuserve.com or at LWZE73A@prodigy.com.

1q97-x1d



RELEASE DATE: 1-7-97
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BARBER SHOP TALK

"When I first came to Florida, I could beat anyone in town in a game of pool, and I could beat them soundly. Now, I have to look all over the county to find someone I even have a chance against." Those statements came from an old fellow in the barber chair. I was listening while I waited for my own hair cut.

"Do you practice still?" asked the helpful barber. "No, at this age, all practice does is makes you tired," moaned the hair cuttee. "I never get better, just tired-er."

Since I had planned to practice shuffleboard that afternoon, I got to wondering. Would the practice help me or would I just get tired. Well, I asked the guy his age and he said he was 92. I asked him when practice stopped helping and he said about 5 years ago. So shufflers, if you're not 87 yet, you're not off the hook. Practice you must, if you want to get better.

Today I worked on one of the most difficult shots in shuffleboard--shooting across the board from the number 4 spot (see diagram). That's the shot we use to hide behind a St. Pete. It's a difficult shot to execute for several reasons. As a starter, shufflers often don't get their bodies all the way around to the needed angle. After that, the feet get messed up because the concrete is often not level in that area and there may be a joint between the court and the apron to deal with. It may feel awkward to the feet. And for me, my rear often bumps a post at the end of the court.

Beyond that, the area of the court that the disc goes over, while the cue is pushing it, is often uneven and pully, that is, it seems to pull the cue one way or the other. The surface there is not as smooth from wear as the surface going straight out of the number one spot and the painted lines that the disc crosses are all at angles and have unworn paint. Maybe there is even dirt or extra glass, or less glass, to bother the disc's route.

And to make it more difficult yet, the mind and eyes seem to want to steer the disc and cause the arm to go out from the body during the shot. Wow. With all those problems, it's a wonder we can shoot from there at all.

So that's why I thought practicing shooting that particular shot was a good idea. I think it helped. Time will tell, but I do have more confidence when I make shots from there now. But for sure the old guy was right about one thing--the practice did make me tired. One the other hand, the haircut gave me shorter hair and that kept me from getting too hot.

Now to start a fight, a fun fight, I hope. You are about to shoot the first shot of the frame and you want to shoot from the number one spot. Your opponent has put one of his discs as close to the point of the triangle as he can. (See diagram.) It bothers you to have it there, right beside where you are about to shoot from. Can you move the disc?

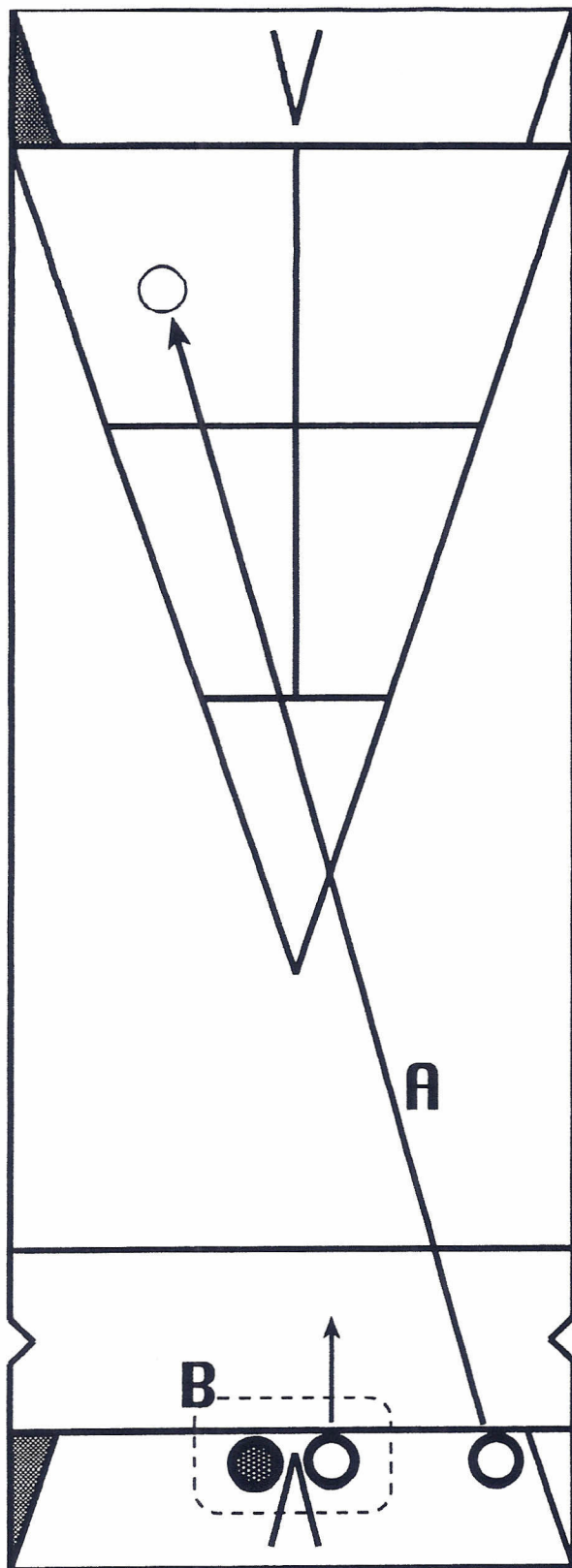
One of my friends says, with a smile, "Don't you dare touch my disc. I'll move it right back with my cue." I laugh and answer, "Hey, it's my shot and the rules say you have to stand back with your cue up and out of the way." He says, "Then I'll call the Tournament Director." I yap back, "Don't you make a disturbance while I'm shooting. You are to stand back and shut up. Call the Director on your shot not on mine." So eventually, the Tournament Director would have to be called. How would he rule?

I think it's OK to move the opponent's disc if it bothers the shooter. I think it's good sportsmanship to allow this. On the other hand, I can see that a player might take advantage and move all the opponent's discs, splattering them around and causing trouble that way.

Shufflers, we'll never solve all our problems with rules. Let's just be good sports and have fun. Happy New Year.

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1q97-01d



**PRACTICE SHOT (A) and
POOR SPORTSMANSHIP (B)**

RELEASE DATE: 1-14-97
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MARY ELDRIDGE AND FLORIDA POINTS

Do you know how many points all-time great Jay Snoddy made? Do you know who is the all-time point leader of the women shufflers? Do you know how many points you have? Do you know Jane O'Loughlin has over 600 points? Do you know what points I'm talking about and how I know?

I'm talking about Florida shuffleboard points. They are awarded to the top four finishers in the main bracket and top two in the consolation in Florida Shuffleboard Association State-wide Tournaments. The winners get 10,8,7,5 for the top four placements in singles and 2,1 for the top in consolation. In doubles it's 5,4,3,2 and 2,1. In the State Championship doubles, it's kicked up a bit to 8,6,5,3 and 2,1. The points have changed some through the years but not significantly.

How do I know about lifetime points? I bought Mary Eldridge's new book, Florida Pro Shuffleboard Points Handbook 1996. It's a beautifully done 42 page book giving background of the point system and then pages and pages of shufflers and their points. They are summarized from number one down to 156th for both men and women. Then in alphabetical order are all the players who ever got points and their totals. Her summary says 2072 shufflers have won points.

I was surprised that I knew 18 of the top 20 men and 14 of the top 20 women. Guess I've been playing a long time. Mary has a fun summary of which couples had the most points together. Current players, Dave and Gloria Stott were 17th at 400 and moving up fast. Maybe someone should marry Jane O and start at 10th with her 600. That all reminds me of the question about what baseball brothers hit the most home runs and the answer is Hank Aaron and his brother. Hank hit 744, I think, and his brother hit one or two. I guess if you don't have a playing spouse, you don't get on that list. Fun.

Now the questions in the first paragraph. I won't answer them for you. You have to buy Mary's book. Her address is Mary Eldridge, P.O. Box 2284, Pinellas Park, Florida 33780-2284. Send her \$5 per copy and although she didn't ask for it, I'm sure a dollar for postage and handling is appropriate. It's a bargain.

Mary started playing in Florida in 1964 and made Pro in 1966. I first met her in 1969 when I flew down from Ohio to play in the National at St Pete and I was very impressed with her play. She has many honors and is a member of the Florida Hall of Fame. I'm most impressed that she won the Florida Masters during Mae Hall's heyday. Now that is an outstanding achievement. Mary is 9th on the all-time points list but not playing much now. Yet she can move into 5th with not too many points. Let's hope she comes back and plays our game again.

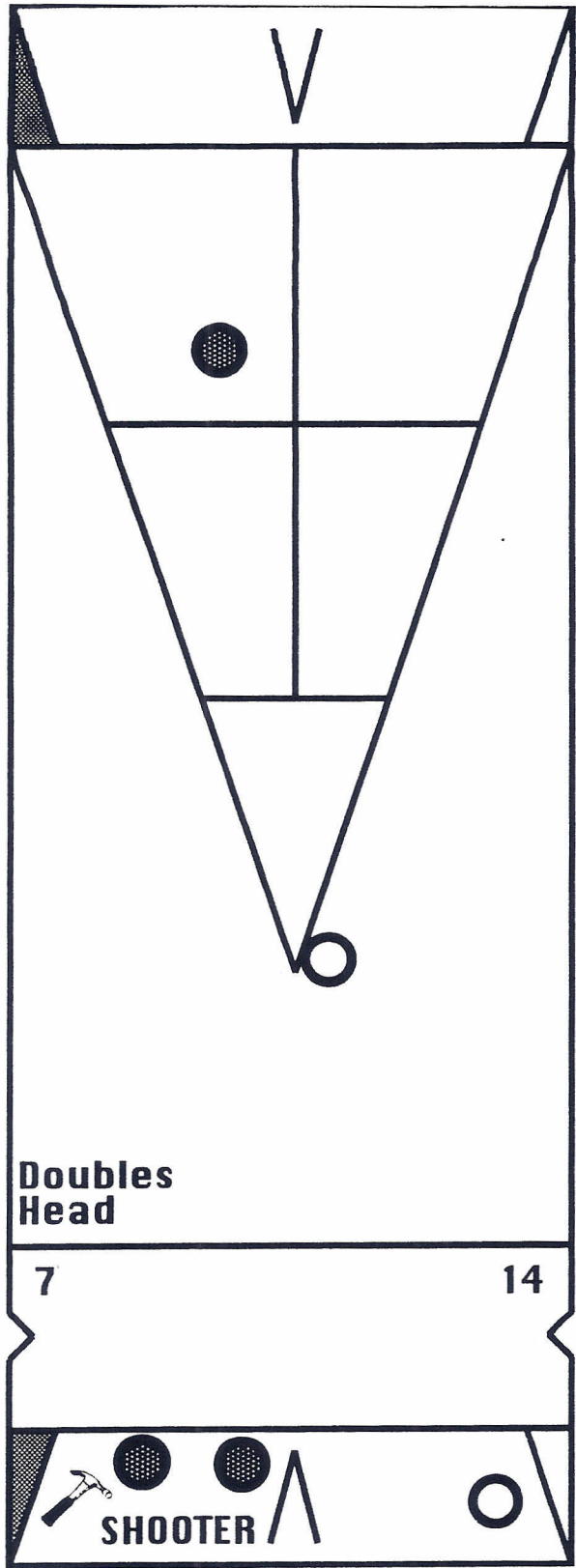
Mary, thanks for the great book. It's a must-have for all Florida shufflers.

Today's diagram shows a rather simple situation that is a real puzzle to me. The score is 14 yellow, 7 black and of little significance. Black is about to shoot the 6th shot of the frame. He has a 7 on the board on his side but yellow has a Tampa on his. Now what is black's shot? If he covers his black 7 with a black Tampa, yellow will hide behind his own Tampa and then black will have to shoot his hammer around the Tampas and at best get two scores to one which is just par for a hammer frame and gains little. What would you do?

I asked a couple of good shufflers and the answer I liked best was to try to hide a 10. Another was to hit the yellow Tampa toward the kitchen while trying to roll the shooter to where it covered the black 7. Yet another was to score an 8 above the seven, near the 8/8 line. That's not bad either. A favorite of mine is to shoot to split the 8/8 line planning to double on the hammer or to use it to remove a yellow score. Let me know what you'd do. Mary Eldridge, what would you do?

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1q97-02



WHAT IS BLACK'S SHOT ?

RELEASE DATE: 1-21-97
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FLU SHOT

"That was more like a flu shot than a kitchen shot," called a shuffler to his friend who had just messed up his chance to put the opponent in the 10-off. Everyone laughed. Later, when the shuffler had to shoot through about a nine inch hole to hit his opponent's seven, his friend yelled, "That hole was big enough to drive a truck through." "Yea, but I'm not a truck driver," shot back the shuffler.

I went home that night and watched basketball on TV. They interviewed a player who was to guard Michael Jordan. The player said, "I've got my hands cut out for me tonight." My brain, scrambled by a day at the shuffleboard courts, almost let that one get by me.

Maybe that's how we sometimes feel when we go up against a tough opponent though. We feel we've got our hands full and we feel we've got our work cut out for us. And we're so rattled about it that we combine the expressions like the basketball player did. I'd mess up my words if I was facing Michael Jordan. (But I bet I could beat him on a shuffleboard court.)

Dave Minnich, a fine shuffler has a great philosophy about facing the very best shufflers. He says, "I'm not afraid of anyone. After all, it's not like boxing. He can't hurt you." Very true. The worst that can happen in a shuffleboard match is that you'll lose it. No bruises. No black eyes. No broken bones. Think about it next time you face a great player. Go for it.

Enough humor and philosophy for today. What about shuffleboard strategy? Today's diagram shows a puzzling situation with more than one option. It's a doubles match with play at the head and yellow has the next two hammers. Yellow leads at 64 to 60. It's the seventh shot, yellow's, and on the board she sees three discs. There is a yellow 7 on the black side and it is covered well by a yellow St. Pete. Also there is a black 10, a high one.

What are black's options? What shot should she take?

Black can try to remove the yellow 8. It can't be clipped out on the side, but it could be removed by driving the yellow cover into it. Another shot choice for black would be to cover the 10. A gambling black could go down suicide alley for a 7. Finally, black can simply shoot to the St. Pete spot on the opposite side of the board to block the scoring area. What shot would you take? Are there other choices that I'm missing?

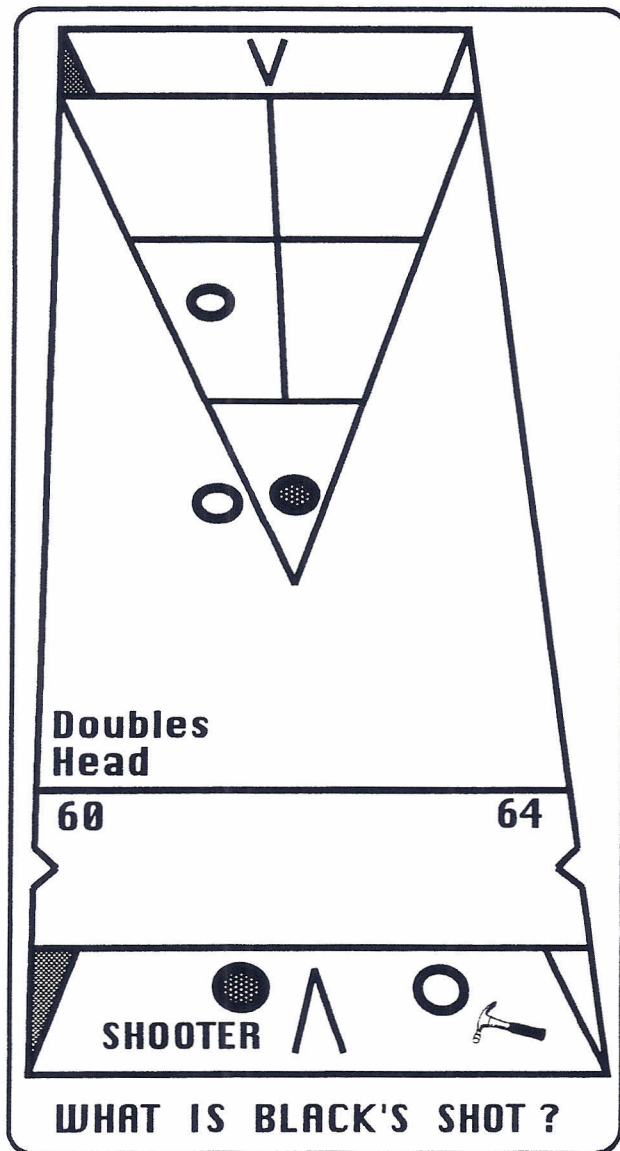
It would be nice to send the game to the other end of the court with yellow still needing two scores to go out. But this is almost out of the question. So black must think more toward simply keeping the game alive. It looks to me like the best way to do this is to block the board by setting a St. Pete on the yellow side. With most of the scoring area covered, yellow will almost surely remove the high 10 and settle for her one 8. That's about the best black can hope for. And there is the outside chance the removed 10 might hit the yellow 8 out of the scoring area.

Driving the yellow cover into the yellow 8 is too much of a long shot for me. Covering the black 10 forces yellow to shoot for game and that's not a good deal. Going down suicide alley is a long shot and it still leaves half the board open for black's hammer to score and win.

Let me know what you think. Also let me know of any humor you hear on the courts. I'll pass it along in this column.

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RELEASE DATE: 1-28-97
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LUNCH TIME

"Tougher when you lose, isn't it, Lary." I had just joined Ernie Nolder and Jimmy Herold for lunch in the Bradenton Club clubhouse after finishing second in the National Singles. Atlee Miller had soundly beaten me. He'd played a great game that morning. "Yea, I'll get him next time, but he sure shot well today. Beautiful shots."

"You won't lose weight eating that pie." "The note at the counter said it was sugar free," came the response. I won't tell you readers who said either of the above, but I'll say the pie was great and that the person who made it deserves a hug.

From Ernie, who's always thinking about strategy and tactics, "Why don't you write a column about this. You have a good score and want to cover it, but the cover will also give the opponent a chance to hide one of his own. What do you do?" "Sounds like a good question, Ernie, I'll have to think about that one. I've seen it many times and it is a puzzle."

I went on and said that after nine years of writing Shuffleboard Coach I was getting weary of it. Ernie encouraged me, saying, "Everyone in our park looks forward to it each week and as soon as they read it, they're talking about it. Sometimes they agree, sometimes they don't." That's good to hear. I hope they don't agree, I just write it to try to make them think.

I've shown Ernie's situation in the diagram. I must say first that the case comes up most often when the player is behind and he's going to the board as kitchen bait. His opponent misses his clearing shot. Well the answer here is obvious, put a second score on the board, that's what you're doing, providing bait for the kitchen.

But let's say the score is as it is in the diagram, 60 yellow, 55 black, singles, black's hammer. It's the 5th shot of the frame. There is a yellow eight, on the black side, near the 8/8 line. Does yellow cover his good 8? If he does he'll give black a good hide. What should yellow do? Cover or shoot somewhere else?

In this case, covering the good 8 looks risky because it sets up the possibility of black getting two scores to yellow's one, and while that is simply a gain of one disc on a hammer, it also puts black at 70 (or 69 or 71). Yellow will have 68 and the next hammer but is vulnerable with the score 68 to 70 against him.

So if that's risky, what else can yellow do? The obvious is to score another disc. He can go to the yellow 7. Of course, that leaves him open to a kitchen. And in fact, it leaves him open to two kitchens, a real disaster. Or maybe the second score can be a snuggle on the yellow 8. No telling what that will end up though.

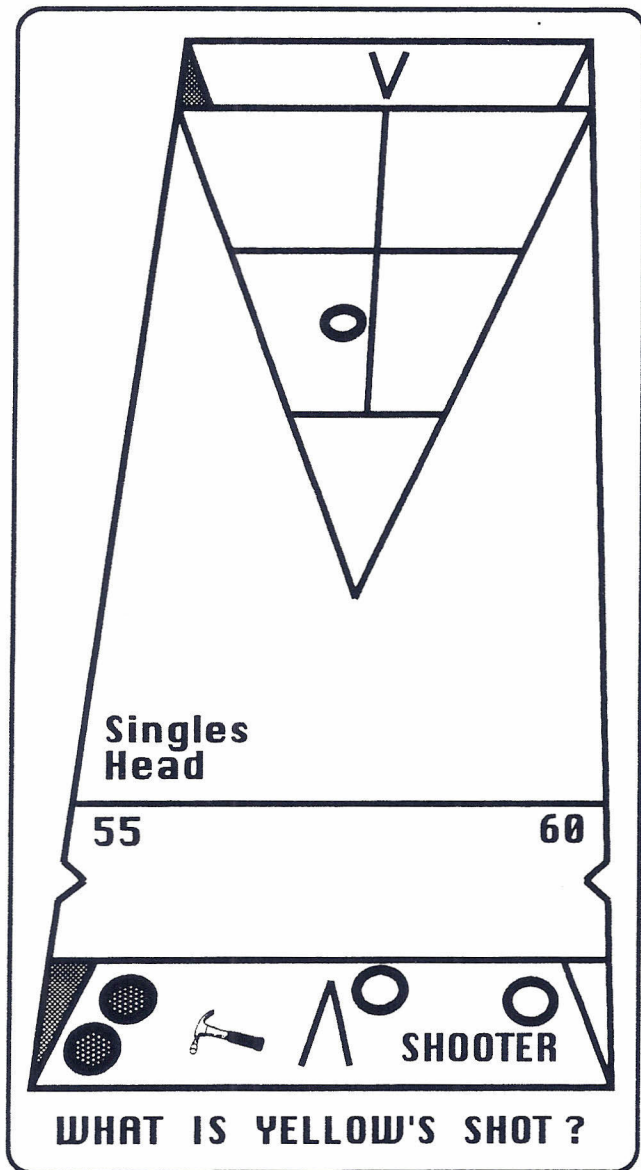
Creatively, there are two other things yellow can do. One would be to put up his own St. Pete. Then when black removes the yellow 8, yellow can hide one. It's easy to see that shot could backfire, but it's not bad because it could confuse the opponent into doing something wrong. Yet the shot that is about as good as any might be to clear the yellow. How's that shot for creative thinking. It doesn't accomplish much but it sure avoids a kitchen.

I've now gotten myself confused and probably you readers too. To confuse you more, change the hammer, change the score, make it doubles, at the foot, at the head.

I'm not sure what I'd really do. I'd likely study it a long time and then, depending on my feeling and the court on that day, I'd shoot. For sure, I'd be careful to do whatever it was I chose. Likely I'd cover the good 8, using the bird in a hand theory. But, I know for sure, I won't eat lunch with Ernie again. (Yes I will, he and Jimmy are great guys and ardent shuffleboard supporters.) Send me your answers.

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1q97-4d



RELEASE DATE: 2-4-97
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RICHARD MINTON

Richard Minton won his second consecutive National Singles Championship at Bradenton in November, 1996. Richard is a relative newcomer to the big time shuffling ranks, but he's here to stay. He was in the 1996 Masters and continues to play well. I watched him win one of his games on the way to the Championship. It had an exciting finish that I'll cover here for you today.

The match was non-walking singles. In game one, yellow had 68, black 69 And it was black's hammer. Minton, shooting yellow was on the ropes. Somehow he had to stop black from making his hammer and winning the game.

The situation came down to the one I've shown on today's diagram. It's the seventh shot of the frame, yellow's shot, Minton's that is. On the board is a black duck on black's side. It's on the 7/10-off line with plenty of it sticking in the seven. the court is running decent and both players know the drifts well.

What is black's best defense against yellow's coming hammer? Think about this before you read on. As I was watching, I was sure what I would do. Are you sure what you'd do? But Minton didn't do what I expected. Here's how it went.

Minton stepped up and shot a 10. He didn't use the duck. I was stunned, because I was focused on putting that duck in the kitchen. But I was open to a new idea so I watched to see how it went.

Well Minton's opponent had to play the 10, of course. Now think for a minute how you'd play that 10? Would you hit it softly, just laying your shooter against it? Or would you play it firmly for a 10 and 10-off? Or would you shoot a little harder trying to hold a 10 but removing the black 10 from the board for sure? That's the second question for today, how to remove the 10 if you are shooting yellow.

Now the yellow shooter played the 10 softly. That's a real no-no. Yellow's first job is to get the back disc off the board so black can't win. Yellow cannot pussy-foot around with a soft shot. I've seen the soft shot stop short for a loss. I've seen the soft shot settle in the ten without removing the black 10, for a loss. Most often, though, the soft shot will be OK on speed but, because it's slowing to a stop, it will pick up more drift than expected and it will veer off to one side. When it veers, it will either remove the 10 but hit a line, or leave the 10, for a loss, or likely hit the 10 into the 8 and roll off to a line for a loss.

I've seen that soft shot backfire many, many times. It's a disaster. I can see it coming. I wasn't able to predict Minton's shot, but I sure could predict disaster as I saw, yellow's disc coming down the court very slowly. Yellow did pick up extra drift. Yellow did hit the 10 on the edge. the 10 did go into the 8. And yellow's shooter did roll to a line. And black did suddenly win.

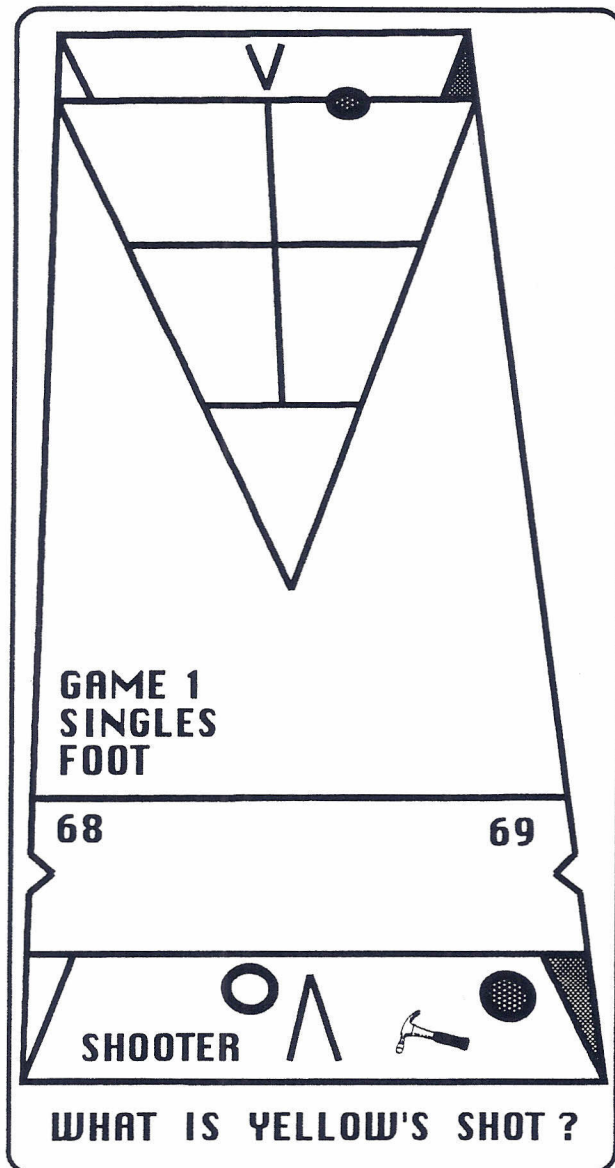
I asked Minton why he shot the 10 instead of playing the duck. He said he felt the duck would likely just set up a reverse and not accomplish much. I think he was right. Nice decision there, Richard.

(Note, three weeks later I saw a fine player shoot soft on a 10. I cringed as the shot drifted slowly down the board. It stopped short of the opponent's 10 and the opponent's won instead of the shooter.)

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2/4/97

1q97-05d



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GO FOR GAME

Pat McCoy asked me this question: "If you have a lead of 70 to 69 and are shooting the hammer against a short 8, do you remove the short 8 or do you try to score?" Now this was during a singles tournament so I assumed it was singles. "I suppose I'd try to score an 8 and win the game." Pat said with a smile, "I knew you'd say that," and she accented the "you" like I was a bit unique in my answer. Well maybe I am and maybe I'm not. What would you do?

Some would argue that you can't leave the winning points on the board, and they may be right. On the other hand, I think it depends mostly on who you're playing and how things are going that day. When I face this situation, I usually hear the great Web Smith whispering in my ear. When I asked him about a similar situation back in 1968, he said, "Often it's good to go ahead and win a game if all you have to do is score a disc. Especially against a top player this is true, because you may never have another chance to beat him." I shorten that to, "If you have a chance to score and win, do it."

Sure there is risk. Hit a line and you lose. But you may lose anyway. Leaving the score at 70 to 69 with the opponent's hammer coming doesn't usually lead to a win, does it? Say you make the 8, six out of ten times, that's 60%. Can you survive the opponent's hammer 60% of the time? I doubt it. And of course, if you establish a reputation of "going for it", that won't hurt in future matches either.

Now having said all that, I'll report to you the finish of a game in the semi-finals of the National walking Singles in November 1996, at Bradenton. I was playing tough and experienced Maurice Baker and had won the first game. I had a nice lead at 53 to 25 and he put in a 10 against my hammer. I ignored it and scored an 8. I liked the idea of getting to 61 and hammers were going in for me that day.

Things moved along and pretty soon it was 69 to 42, my hammer, and again Baker defended with a 10, a fat one at that. He's awfully good at scoring 10s when he needs them. Well, since it was a fat 10, I went for it and went a little to the side and rolled a quarter inch onto the outside line. (Now, I did not play his 10 for the kitchen. That's not needed, and giving away a 7 wouldn't be a good thing to do, would it?)

The game moved along and soon it was 69 to 47, my hammer. Baker this time put in a high 10 so I ignored it and tried to put the game away. But I hit the line. On my next hammer, the score was the same but Baker had to remove a kitchen so he couldn't shoot a 10. I had an open board. But remembering I'd hit the 7/8 line before, I shot easier and, oh-oh, stopped short. I was getting nervous and wondering where the Zeus of shuffleboard had gone.

Now I'd had three chances to end the game and, even though I was clearing beautifully, I had many doubts in my mind. Maybe you've been there. I kept thinking how close I had been to winning the match and I just knew he'd likely win a third game and out I'd go. It's an awful feeling when it seems the worm has turned and luck has fled and legs are tired and spirits are about shot.

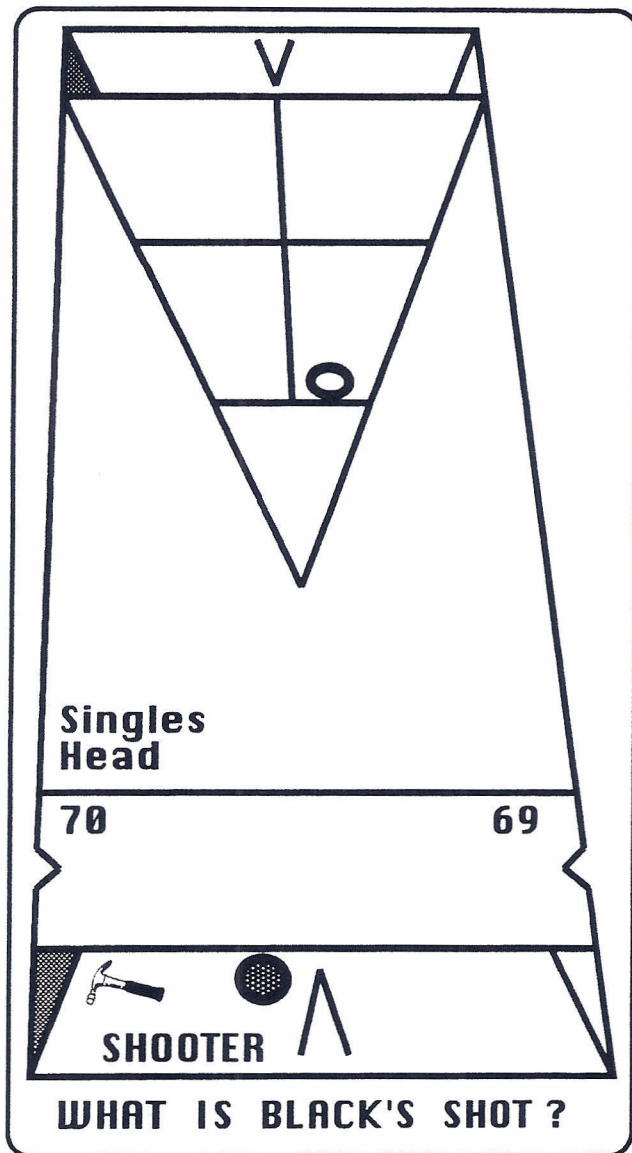
Again, the game got to my hammer. This time the score was 69 to 55 and Baker again shot his darn 10. It was holdable. I should have gone for it and kept him from getting to 65 for sure. But I had had enough of the game. I had already missed three chances to go out. I wasn't going to pass on a chance to win with a simple scoring shot. Not against Baker, he's too good.

So I shot for the 8 and luck had one last break for me that day. The disc stopped dead in the middle.

There, in one game, are several different ways to play the situation where a score will win and a liner will either lose or severely jeopardize the game. Take your choice. Sometimes one works, sometimes the other does. If you're lucky like me, you'll keep getting chances until you make it.

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1q97-06d



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PREPARATION FOR THE MASTERS

I have written several columns on the drilling and practicing. I feel that, while playing against opponents is *important in improving shuffling skills, drilling and practicing by one's self is also necessary and valuable.* Most players don't do this. But I do.

As the 1996 Masters approached, I decided to practice every day there wasn't a tournament to play in. I wanted to be at the top of my game and I wanted to work on two specific shots. In today's column I'll tell you about one of those practice sessions, hoping that you will pick up some tips and maybe be inspired to practice, yourself.

I parked near the courts, which in my location are almost always empty in the afternoon. I carried my broom, glass, wax, two cues, and discs to court number six. The reason I use number six is that it has a three inch drift. To have a good practice I feel that I should shoot against a drift because most every court I compete on will be drifty. Six has an average drift. Further, I've played on six many times and therefore know the drift and won't have to waste practice time and effort mapping an unfamiliar court. I can get right to work.

I sweep the court and then bead it and finally I put a little wax on my discs. Then I'm ready? No, I need to loosen up. So I do a little stretching, some in my legs, but mostly in my shoulders. Practicing stiff and not warmed up would be useless. Then I shoot all eight discs down the court, hard, without really aiming. Again, I'm loosening up my shoulder. I then shoot eight more, hard, this time aiming at some target behind the 10-off.

My practice starts with four frames of board clearing. I do this first to continue the warm up. The routine is simple. I set a St. Pete and clear it. Then a Tampa and a clear; then an 8 and a clear; finally, a 7 on the other side and a clear. Four frames of this is a good start-16 soft shots and 16 clearing shots. I take it seriously and try to concentrate as if I were in a game. Its not a time to relax and pick up bad habits. If I miss more than one or two of the clearing shots, I'm unhappy and often shoot another frame.

Then I shoot for distance. There are lots of ways to do this but yesterday I used a drill where I shoot four yellows to the sevens, spreading them across the court. Then I used the blacks to try to kitchen the yellows, one at a time. I was just fair and would have added a couple more frames but I wanted to work on hiding.

Hiding is the most important shot in shuffleboard. It's the shot which gains the points a player needs to win. Its a very basic shot. I like to practice it. So for several hammers, I put up a pilot and then tried to hide. It's not as easy as it looks and we tend to forgive bad hides because the misses aren't big losses, they are missed opportunities. But they hurt us just the same. During the practice I worked on my picking-out shot by nipping out hidden scores to clear the way for the next hide in the drill.

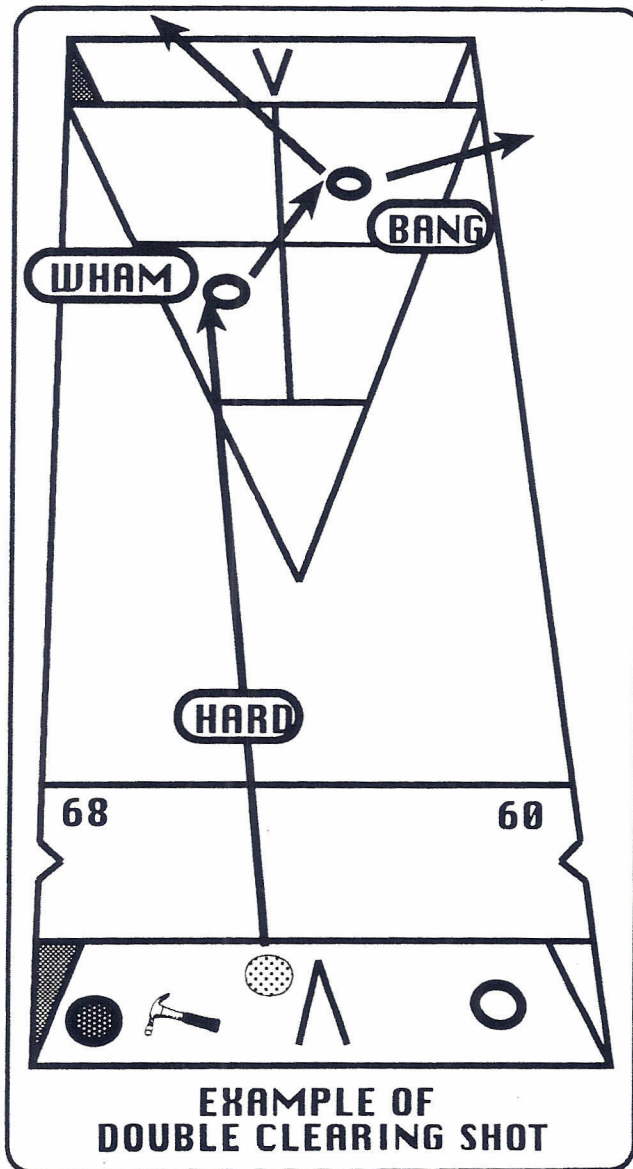
Next I practiced the shot I am trying hard to get good at, one that often means the game. Its the hard shot used to clear two discs. This need occurs after an error, often late in the game. For example, a player is ahead and nearing 75 and is clearing, but misses an open 7. The opponent then shoots a second score. Now there are two discs that need to be cleared. The great Glen Peltier, winner of four masters, executes this shot extremely well and I'm sure it's one of the things that makes him better then others. I want to be good at it, too, because it is effective and because it tends to demoralize the opponent who thinks he's got an advantage and then sees it suddenly disappear. So I worked on this shot for about 15 minutes and I think I'm improving.

Finally I wound up the session with a turkey shoot, trying to score all eight. I was awful. I limit my practices to 45-60 minutes. I lose concentration if I go longer and develop bad rather than good habits.

Today's diagram shows the double clearing shot I practiced. Try it your self. I'm sure you'll need it.

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FOOTBALL AND SHUFFLEBOARD

The phone rang Saturday afternoon. It was my old high school buddy, Ted Scharf, calling from his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he's an MD.. Last summer I had gone to our 45th reunion and he hadn't made it so he wanted to find out what was new and, of course, chat about the old days. We talked especially about football, which we had played together for four great years.

It reminded me of two things to report here. One is that in late August of my Junior year in high school I was at Lakeside, as usual, and playing in the adult shuffleboard tournaments, singles and doubles. Suddenly I got word that football practices had received permission to start before Sept. 1 and in fact would start that very evening. Seems the schools were allowed practices for conditioning and they were scheduled in the evening when it was cooler.

I couldn't miss a practice and I couldn't miss the shuffle tournaments, either. So I did both. I'd play shuffleboard all day, then in the late afternoon we'd hop in the car and dad would drive me the 55 miles to DeVilbiss High in Toledo while I slept. That's likely a unique accomplishment. Well maybe you wouldn't call it an accomplishment, but I bet no one else has ever played tournament shuffleboard and organized football the same day.

The second reminder that came from my chat with the old friend is that in playing football, I blew my right knee, what they now call the terrible triad, cartilage, tendons, and a complete destruction of the anterior crutiate ligament. And if you think about a right handed shuffler with a two step delivery, you'll recognize that the right knee is critical in that as the body rolls forward, all the weight is on that knee for a second.

Well, lately the knee has been bothering me. I'm sure you all have problems too. How do we handle them is the question? Well, if its bad the first step is your doctor, and a long explanation to him or her about shuffleboard being important in your life, so he or she doesn't under estimate the problem. My doctor is very helpful. His daughter swims and he knows the importance of sports to a person's well being.

Then, also, is the adjustment on the courts. You simply have to play around the injury or pain. For me, it means I no longer can shoot with my knees bent. If I do, my right knee yells and screams, and it buckles and my shot goes wild. If I keep my knees straight, my right knee seems to handle it OK. So that's the way I have to learn to shoot.

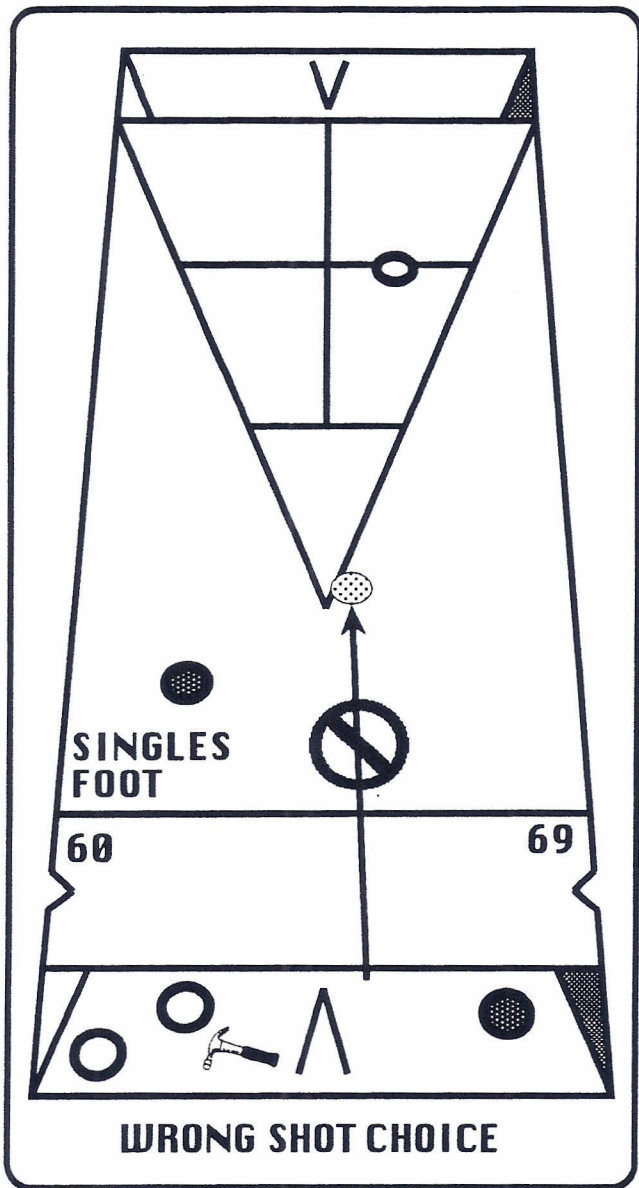
The message here is two fold. First, never give up on your self. If you have a hurt, adjust and go on. Don't quit. Second, in adjusting, keep every thing else as it was. What I mean is, don't change your cue, your shoes, your shirt, or any other variable. Keep them all constant so you are only changing one thing. That way you can handle it much better.

Today's diagram I drew after I lost an important game by covering a 7/8 liner instead of clearing it. I've shown the situation and shot with the "no-no" sign on it. But now as I write this, I'm wondering if it really is the wrong shot, one that shouldn't ever be taken. What do you think? Maybe just because my opponent made two outstanding shots to win, it's to his credit and I shouldn't shy away from the shot. After all, If I try to clear I could easily stick or miss and either of those could lead to a loss too.

Study the situation and decide what you'd do. If you play very long I'm sure you'll face it.

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1q97-08d



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HAVE A PLAN

I heard on the TV that an NFL quarterback had worn his contacts in the wrong eyes for a whole season. He had the left contact in the right eye and vice-versa. Well now, football players have a reputation for not being too smart. Yet, that's only by reputation. Actually they are very smart, so it was surprising to hear of that mix up.

However, I have to report that Pat McCoy found herself reversing her contacts too. Now Pat I know and I know she a bright lady. That's a fact. So we have to attribute the reversed contact caper to the absent minded professor syndrome. I guess bright people get the big picture but maybe miss a detail or too. (Now Pat will say I likened her to a football player.)

All this leads to today's diagram. It looks so simple, no discs in the scoring area. In fact none have been shot. Black is about to lead and is ahead with the score at 60 for yellow, 69 for black. The simple question is: what is black's shot? The more complex question is: what is black's strategy for the frame? Think about these for a minute.

The easy answer is that black should step up and set a St. Pete pilot. Oh? Well he can do that but it's one way to loose the game. I did it once before I thought, and I lost. (maybe I had my glasses on upside down, or my head.)

Black must think before he shoots. He does have a little lead and if all goes well he has a chance to go out with his hammer in the next frame. But he must do two things this frame to have that happen. First he must stay out of the 10-off and second, and this is even more important, he must keep yellow from going out by making two scores.

If he sets the standard St. Pete, he opens the door to trouble. Against a St. Pete, a smart yellow player will likely go right down suicide alley. Sure he takes a chance doing that, but he's behind and the risk is warranted. If he can hide one that way and then score a hammer, he's out. Sure black can hide too, but yellow will have the last crack at the situation.

The solution for black is to set a wide St. Pete. Move it over a foot so that suicide alley is blocked. Then yellow will have to go to the open board and black can do his clearing to protect his lead.

Now that we've got black clearing, we find the other problem, staying out of the 10-off. Of course, a stick is a stick and it may get kitchened. But so often the shooter's disc hits the target hard and solid and then rolls to the corner of the seven rather than off the court as intended. We've all seen this both for us and against us.

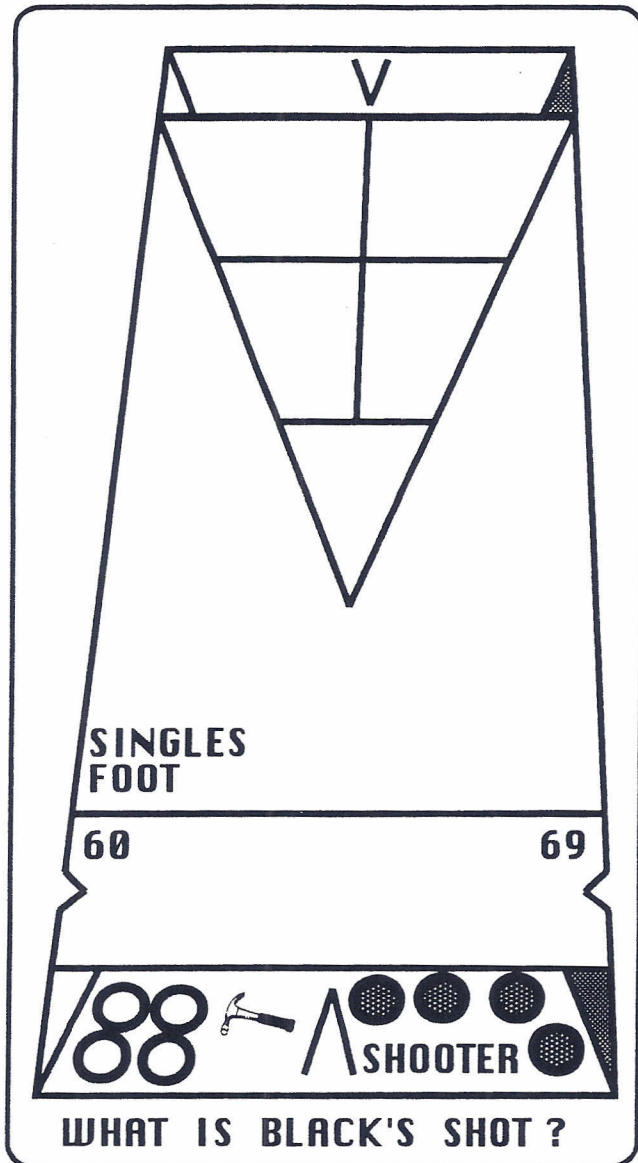
By having moved the St. Pete out, we have protected the corner on yellow's side. It can be protected even more by making the St. Pete a deeper one, down about at the extension of the 10/8 line. Sure that makes it harder to hide behind, but black isn't really planning to hide this frame. What it does, is makes it harder for yellow to shoot around if he's after a rolled 7 in the corner.

Back to this week's question of where black should lead. The answer is to set a wide and deep St. Pete.

Now an extra hint for black. If on the 7th shot yellow has an open score and black is clearing it, black absolutely must hit the yellow score out, even if the black disc sticks. At that point the first priority is to keep the game alive. Staying out of the 10-off is second to that. I've seen many games lost at the last minute when the black shooter misses the last clearing shot in similar situations. Hit it. If you miss, even someone with their contacts in backwards will score a second disc and win.

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NEARING THE MASTERS

I'm writing this just before the 1996 Masters. It's Thursday, and on Monday at 9:00AM, I'll be in Winter Haven to face the other seven top Florida men shufflers, three games against each, twenty-one games in total. All the 1995-6 tournaments are over, 30 of them. The circuit that started last October 9, is now finished. This year the top men are and their points are: Skip McCoy, 61; Glen Peltier, 52; Lary Faris, 51; Rosaire Biron, 47; Jacques Bergeron, 43; Richard Minton, 43; Don Bladorn, 38; Bob Douthit, 34. It is known that Biron and Douthit will not play and the next finishers in line are Carl Eby, 30; and Buck Buchanan, 29. If anyone else cannot play, Maurice Baker is the next substitute.

I'm trying to do my final preparations. My big worry is to get my stroke grooved. There have been so many windy days this winter, that my shooting stroke has been pretty much ungrooved. Every time the wind blows during a shot, we have to make corrections with our wrists and arms, twisting them all sorts of ways to fight the wind and to correct the direction, which the wind has messed up. This, at least in my case, has caused some bad habits to develop. How do I work on this?

Well, in Monday's tournament at Clearwater, I had hoped for a nice calm day. But that didn't happen and there I was (and all the rest were too) shuffling in a cross wind, again. Luckily for me though, in the second round I was assigned one of the inside courts. So I took the opportunity to try to do some grooving. My hard shot was just fair, it was OK, but it wasn't smooth and it wasn't dependable. My speed on it was inconsistent and I could tell from my follow-through that I wasn't doing it the same each and every time. My softer shot had problems also. My wrist wobbled a little and again my follow-through showed I lacked a grove. Results in direction were fair, but my distance was inconsistent, that is, kitchens were hard to come by and hammers didn't go to the middle of the eight. Aim was fair.

I was lucky and kept winning and kept getting assigned inside courts. So I kept looking for that smooth, effective grove. I got closer, but even though I finished third, I still don't feel I'm shooting as well as I can and need to. Mind you, I'm looking for perfection here, because perfection will be needed next week.

So now I have some choices I must make. I need to work on my stroke, something I do by myself on my own courts; I need to go to Winter Haven and get used to those courts and to chart drifts and curves, and I need to let my weary shuffleboard muscles rest a little. So what do I do?

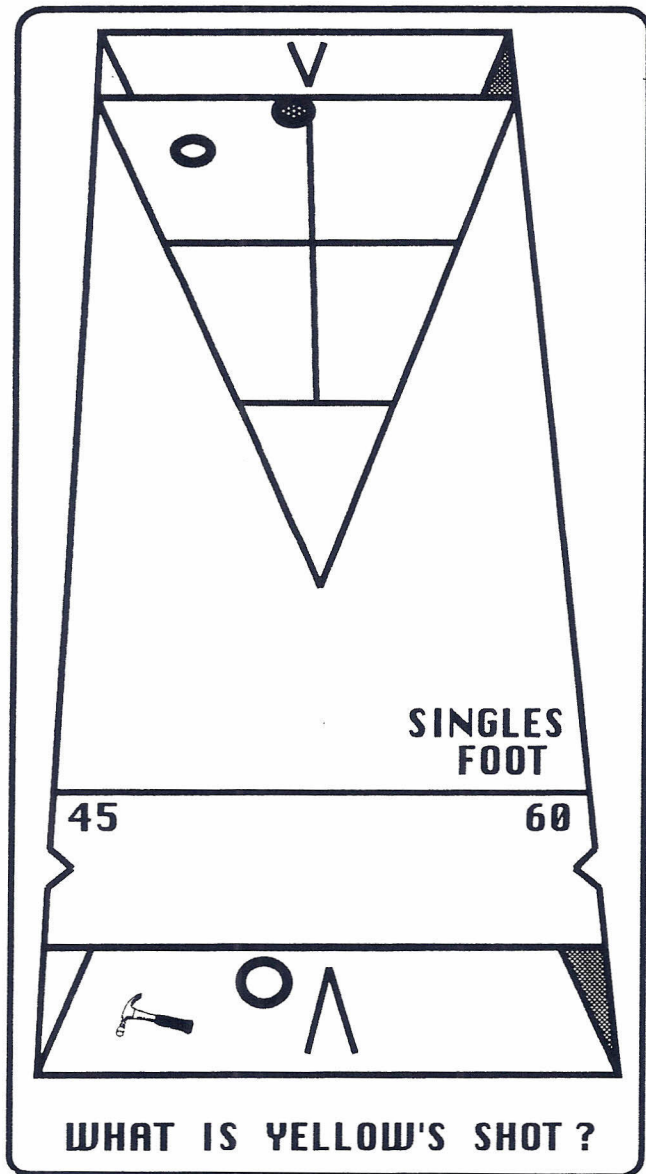
Well, today was rest day, but I decided to go to the local courts for shooting practice by myself. But by the time I got there the wind had come up, darn the luck. Tomorrow, I plan to go to Winter Haven to learn those courts as best I can. That's Friday. Saturday, if the wind doesn't blow, I'll do more shooting work at home. Then Sunday, I'll go to Winter Haven to practice against my opponents, who will be doing their own versions of getting ready.

I've had a bad break. My cane tip, which has been very comfortable all winter and which has been a winner, is on the verge of wearing out. The end of the cue has just about poked through it. Now what do I do? Try to get by with the current one, or do I shift to a new one? Shifting is not easy because I must use my knife to cut it and shape it to my preference and then I must round the cuts with sand paper, and then it still doesn't have a nice surface pitina that seems to come only with repeated use. Oh my, I'll go with the current one as long as it lasts but I'll have the best replacement I can find ready to use. Or then again, maybe I should start using the replacement now, to get used to it. See, I'm messed up on that and worrying. Not good.

During the Masters I made several mistakes as you will read in later columns. One was in a game in which I had been behind at 5 to 63. I had made a great comeback and was at 45 to 60 when I faced the situation I've shown in the diagram. I should have simply scored, hopefully an eight. Instead, I went for the big play and tried to kitchen the 7/7 liner and hold a seven. I hit the liner through the kitchen and left my hammer on the line. A couple of frames later, I could have won the game if I had just 8 more points. Bad mistake.

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JUST BEFORE THE MASTERS

The great Florida Masters, the toughest test in shuffleboard, always starts on a Monday and runs three and a half days as the top eight men and the top eight woman play round robins to determine the year's two champs. Here are some of the things I did as the start approached.

Friday before. I drove to Winter Haven to study the courts with my friend Buck Buchanan, who was also in this year's Masters. He had been mapping the tourney courts for a couple of days and shared what he had learned. We tested each of the eight courts we would play on, verifying what he had learned, finding new drifts, and sharing what tactics we might use on each. The drifts are not to my liking because they tend to run toward the outside and I seem to do better on courts that drift toward the center, because this helps a person using a Tampa. Also, the discs ran extremely fast, faster than I like.

This was an excellent workout. I began to get the feel of the courts and it gave me data to use and to think about as I developed my tactics and strategies. After the three hour work out, I rechecked the motel I will stay at and made sure they would have a refrigerator for me. I rested the rest of the day, actually we went to a movie that night, but in the back of my mind I kept thinking about how I would play those courts.

Saturday. I had several tasks to do to keep preparing. First I needed to pay bills and get other routine chores out of the way so I wouldn't have to worry about them while I was away. Then I had to get my packing organized and done. I surely needed the right clothes. The weather was forecast to be warm, but I couldn't trust that. I needed also to get some food organized so I could make my lunches and have breakfast in my room. I had noticed a Publix near the motel so I could get whatever I forgot.

Importantly, I needed to get to my local courts for an hour of practice, that is, working on my delivery and aim. We've had so many windy days, and I've had a sore foot so often, that I've lost the smooth shot I use when there is no wind and I'm totally healthy. I needed to work more to find my good grooves. The workout was a good one but I'm still not shooting as good as I've been in the past.

Finally, I needed to get my court map cards up to date and marked. Buck and I had learned much and I needed to get it on the 3X5 cards I carry with me. At the same time I kept thinking about how I would handle each court. I decided to use my first three-game match to try different tactics. It would be more important to learn than to win at the start. At least that was my approach. Oh, yes, I reread the rules to be sure I knew all the little violations and technical stuff. I found I wasn't sure about one item on appeals so I made a mental note to clarify that with a referee.

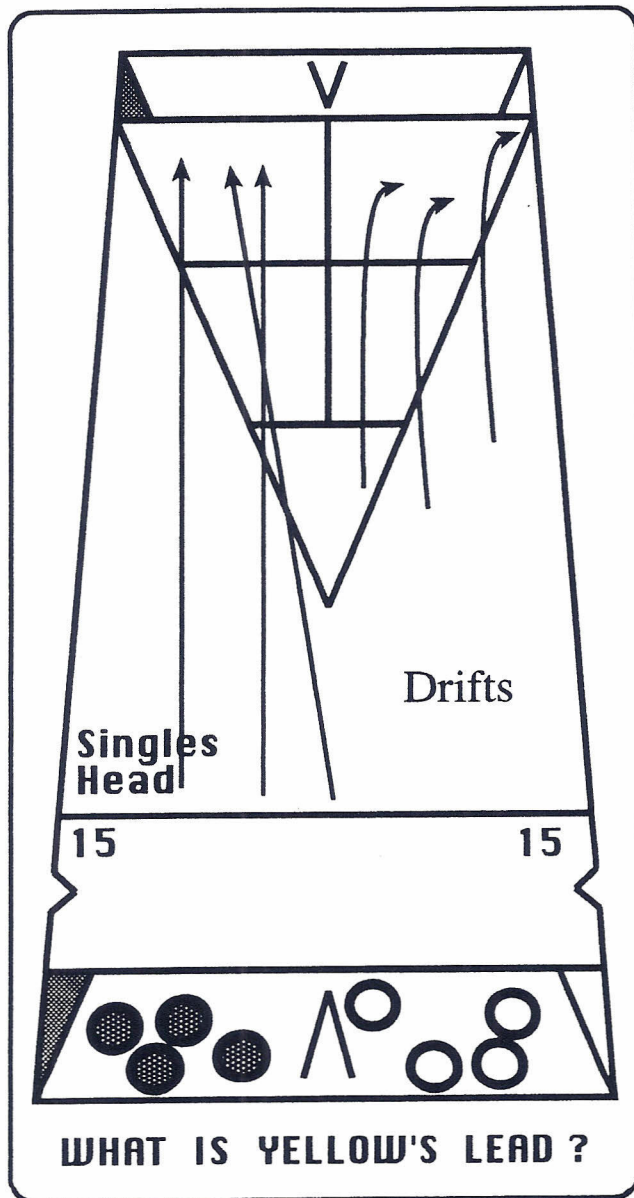
Sunday. Getting real close now. I packed the car and got my food ready. I planned to leave at about 11am so I could be at the courts just after lunch, the usual practice time. I want to play a few games with tough opponents to keep getting aquatinted with the drifts and speed. The paper says it may rain in the afternoon, so if others get their practice done in the morning, they will have an advantage. But I will study the puddles and learn from that.

Because I had done so much ahead, I had time to spare before I left. So I typed this column. You are right up to date. Today's diagram shows a typical Winter Haven court. One side is straight, in this case the black side, while one side, in this case yellow's, goes toward the gutter. 1. Should yellow use a St Pete or a Tampa? 2. Which side should black clear to? 3. Is it a good court for snuggles? 4. When black leads, which pilot should be used?

Have you answered them? 1. Looks like a Tampa lead would be useless, so I'll use a St Pete. 2. I usually clear to the short side and nothing on this court changes that. 3. For me, no court is a good one for snuggles, but I could try one in the black eight, maybe. 4. Did I fool you? Black never will lead at the head of the board in walking singles. Lastly, I'll take a good luck charm. See you at the Masters.

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THE MASTERS BEGINS

On April 1, the 1996 Florida Masters Shuffleboard Tournament began. On Sunday, the day before, the players and officials gathered in Winter Haven to practice and to get aquatinted with what was being planned. I was all eyes and ears. As a rookie participant, it was all new to me. I was curious about everything. I wondered what to wear for pictures and to the closing banquet. I heard the press would be there. I looked over the courts and shot on each one that the tournament director said we would use. It was exciting to be a part of the event, finally.

The Masters is the very top event in all shuffleboarddom. Stories about it floated up to Lakeside over 30 years ago after it started in 1960. I'd hear the names of shuffleboard greats like Web Smith and Bill Folberth tangling in the last three games. I heard May Hall's name again and again. I decided I wanted to play in it someday. After I retired, I watched it several times. It has some terrific shuffling, with the top eight men and the top eight women from the 6 month long Florida shuffleboard winter circuit tangling for the highest spot on the mountain.

I stayed at a motel in Winter Haven and got up early to get to the courts to see all that was to take place. It was drizzling and I wondered how that would effect things. I was one of the very first at the courts. Gradually folks arrived and I chatted with many. The Director called to me and had me sign the release. Wow, no entry fee. Then I met the sponsor and heard that Lisa from the Ledger would be there later. I had talked to her on the phone about this column once and was anxious to meet her and to thank her for some help she had given me.

The tournament director had us draw our number. I was three and I quickly learned the other player's numbers too. Carl Eby was 1, Don Bladorn was 2, Skip McCoy was 4, Richard Minton was 5, Richard Buchanan was 6, Jacques Bergeron was 7, and defending champ Glen Peltier was 8. I looked at the schedule to see who I played first and what court I would be on. I would be playing Buck Buchanan on court five. I rushed to tell him that.

The Opening ceremonies were lively. Appropriate remarks were made and then each of us stood and told our name and Florida club and home town. Then the sponsor was introduced and said a few words.

Finally we went outside to see that the drizzle had stopped and the courts were about ready. The tournament director called the courts and opponents. I was surprised to hear I was playing Peltier on court seven, not Buchanan on five. I went to the schedule and it still said player 6 on court five. A couple others were puzzled. Suddenly, I noticed that the games the director had called were from the woman's schedule. I went to the director and pointed out that he had the men and women reversed. Sure enough, he agreed and called all back and called new courts and new opponents. It was an honest error that was easy to forgive.

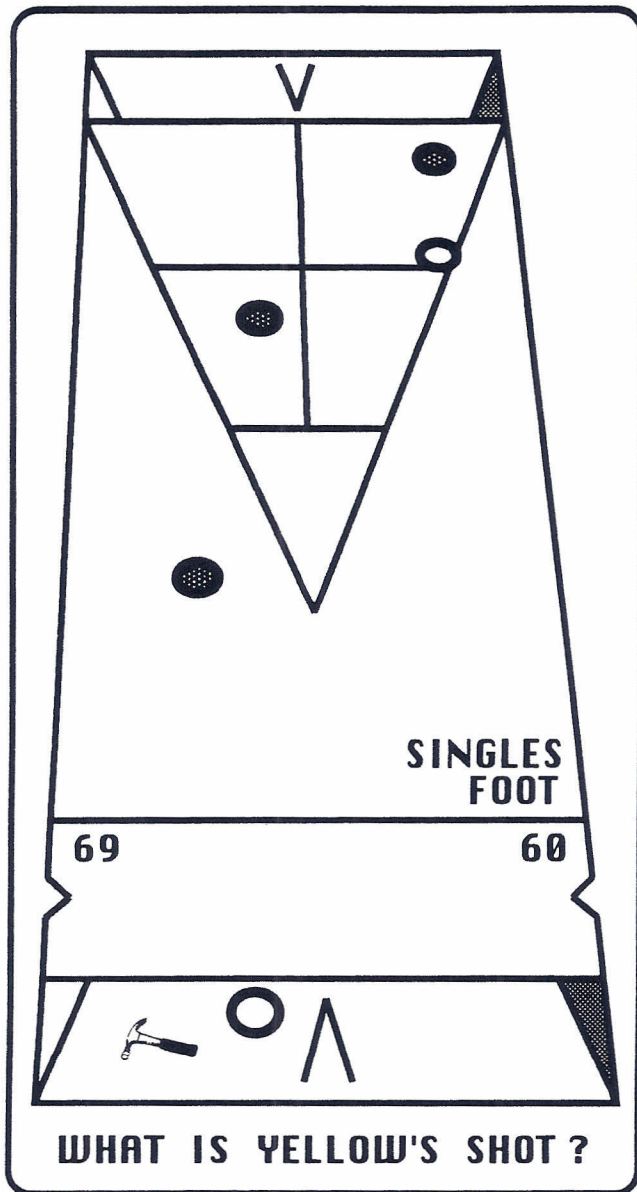
Now I report all this to give you a flavor of the festivities, but also to let you see how far I had let my mind drift from its need to focus on playing. My mind was all over. It was not on playing a solid game. I was not concentrating on the task at hand. It was a problem that stayed with me the entire Masters.

So right away, I lost my first game. I bore down and got the second but after leading all the way in the third, I made a dumb shot at the end and threw away a likely victory. I've shown the play in the diagram. for some silly reason, I chose to go for my winning score when my opponent had game on the board. I hit the 7/8 line by a half inch and lost.

Of course all the spectators knew I was wrong and they pointed it out to me when I left the court and at lunch. This would also continue the entire Masters, that is, players in the gallery, who had finished way behind me in the circuit standings, would get their satisfaction by critiquing my shot choices. I had to get used to that. It was another mental distraction I let bother me. I was being a first class rookie.

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1q97--12d



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BLADORN

In the Florida Masters every player is a winner. Each has come through a grueling season of 27 state-wide tournaments that took them all over Florida from early October to the end of March. They've played on all sorts of courts against all tough opposition. They are clearly the best of the best.

I was happy to be in the group on April 1, 1996. I'd had a good year. My singles record was superb winning 18 matches and losing only three. But the eight shufflers in the Masters were the very best in the world and even a slight mistake could be costly. I made not one mistake, but several. One of them was in a game against Don Bladorn, a fine Florida shuffler from Wisconsin.

I was playing black and was ahead with the score at 60 yellow and 69 black. Play was at the foot and I had the lead. My hope was that I could stay out of the kitchen and when play went to the head, I hoped to score my hammer for a win. It looked simple.

I led with my normal St Pete. And just as quick as my disc stopped, I saw Bladorn move his shooter to the far outside. Well immediately I said, "whoops" (or worse), to myself. I knew that Don was going to go down suicide alley. That would mean I'd have to live through holding my breath, hoping his disc would stop too soon, or go into the kitchen. I knew what I had done wrong. Do you?

I should have moved my St Pete about three or four inches further to the outside than usual. That has two purposes. First, it prevents the opponent from using suicide alley. Second, It protects the outside in case one of my clearing shots should roll to the outside of the seven. It's a basic tactic. I can remember using it in 1967 in my first National in Toledo. But on this day, I didn't do it.

Now against many players I would have gotten away with it. They either wouldn't have tried to use suicide alley or, if they did, they would have made its name come true by shooting into the 10-off. But Masters players are not just any players.

So Don used suicide alley and got his hidden 7. Well I still wasn't too worried because I did have a 9 point lead and even if he got two scores, if I could get one, I'd win. So I just shot a 7 myself beside his and behind the St Pete too. Don wasn't to be outdone, he used the alley for another 7. I said to myself, I can do that too, and scored a second 7 myself from my side. I was happy so far but I realized I had allowed Don a chance to get to 74 and so I was on thin ice.

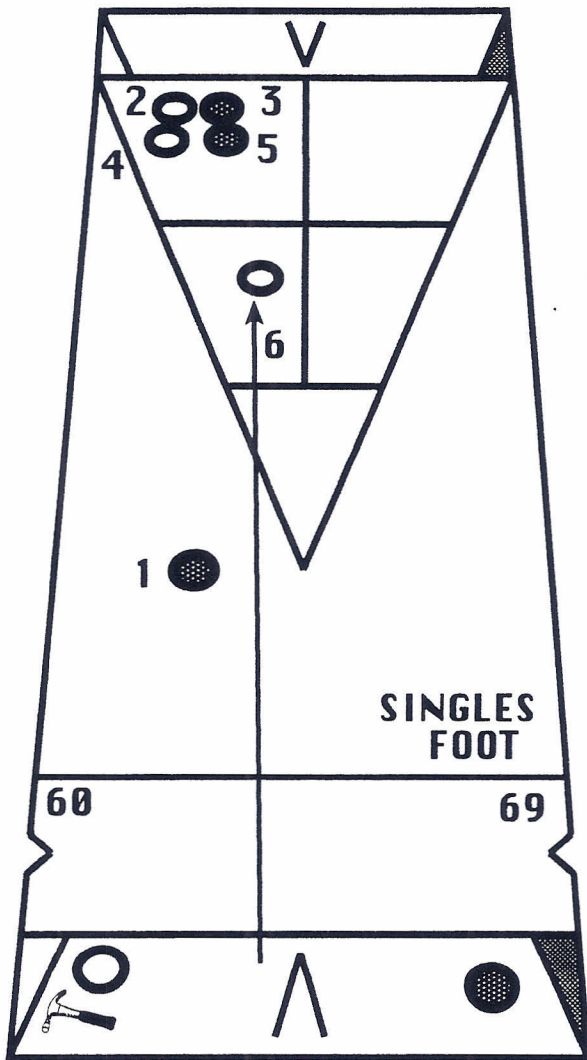
Well, Don made a nice shot choice and scored an open 8, over the 7s. I've shown it in the diagram. I was OK still but had to get rid of the 8 and then hope Don didn't score a 10 on his hammer. Now in getting rid of the 8, I had to hit it on the left so that it didn't mess up my 7s. I took the shot but I nipped my St Pete. Yikes.

Don sat a minute to figure the score and to relax. Although he had 12 on the board, I had 14 and he was still 1 point short of a win. He had his hammer coming and all he needed to do was to score. I hoped he would hit a line, but I had given him his chance and he took it and he made it.

It was a tough loss for me. I'd been careless with my St Pete, made two nice 7s, but then missed on a critical shot. I felt bad. Gosh these Masters players are tough. They deserve to be there. In 1997, the Masters is played at St Pete's Mirror Lake courts. Go and watch the very best.

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1q97-13d



SHOT CHOICE THAT WON

RELEASE DATE: April 8, 1997
(Please do not publish before this date)

SUMMER SHUFFLING AND FRIENDS

Get ready for summer shuffling. It's all over the place. New Jersey, North Carolina, Canada, Michigan, and Ohio all have summer shuffling circuits. You don't have to give up our game or lose track of shuffling friends, just because it's summer. I can say that from personal experience.

Last June, as I have for years, I drove to Carey, Ohio, for the first tournament on the Ohio summer circuit. I hadn't shuffled for two months, not since the last tournament in Florida. I had been busy with the trip home, getting things ready for the summer and seeing our family. I hadn't gone near a shuffler or a court.

As I drove down Jefferson Street toward the Carey courts, I could see Bob and Dorothy Spillman, standing in the street smiling. It was a welcome sign. I've known the Spillman's for 10 years. He's an inventor and poet, she was on the USA team at Lakeside in 1995. Last year they traveled to Ireland and spent several days with a family there that has one of Sam Allen's portable courts. They love shuffling. Then I spotted Wes Marousch crossing the street, another welcome sight. Wes Marousch passed away last fall, but he was a happy sight in June. I was quickly beginning to feel at home and in good company.

As I parked, I could heard my partner, Bob Douthit. I always hear him before I see him. He talks all the time and has the kind of voice that carries. He's a great shuffler and is second in Ohio in all-time points. In Florida he qualified for the Masters twice and was second last year in the tough Champion of Champions Singles at Clearwater. He's been National singles champ twice. Bob's fun to talk to, always kidding and remembering every shot of every game he's ever played. He has a Ph.D. in chemistry.

Soon I saw Buck Buchanan and Kay. They drove over from Pennsylvania. I've only known them for about 5 years but have enjoyed getting to be friends with them and also playing doubles with Buck. They are wonderful people. I shook hands with Buck and then realized I had ignored Kay so I gave her a hug and apologized for leaving her out. She said, "They always do." Now I doubt that.

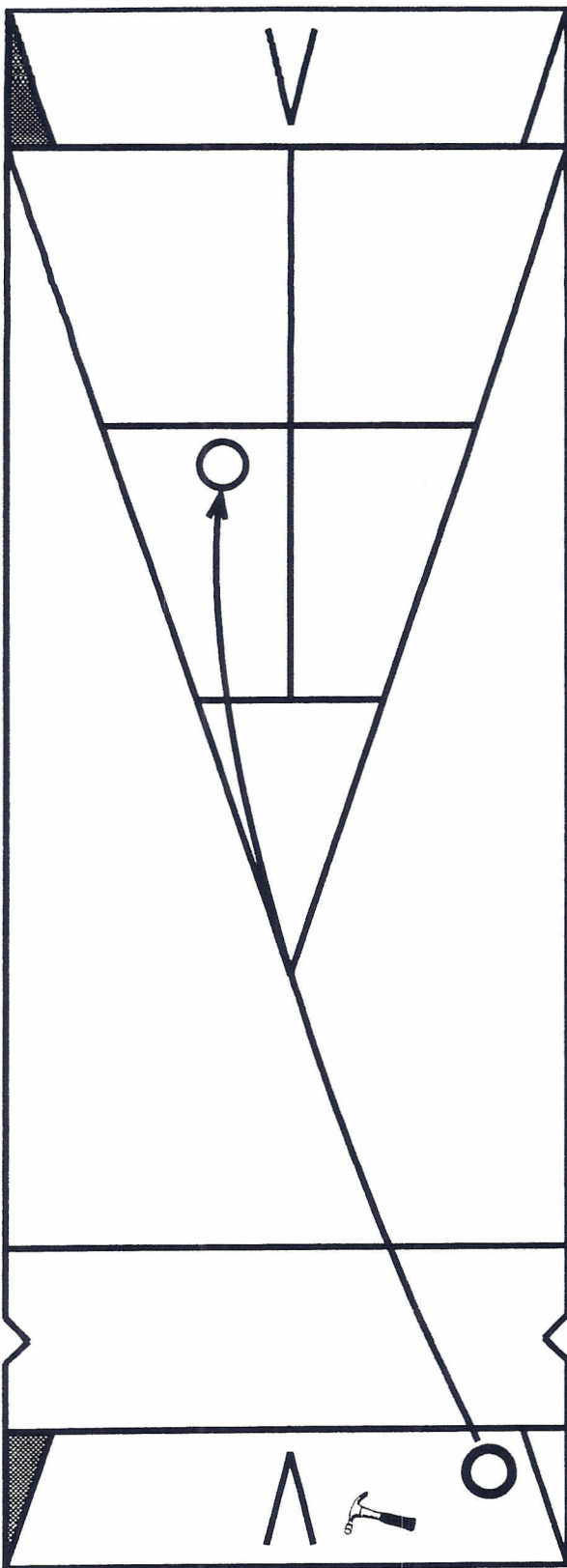
Next I saw Mary Shiley who I have known since the late 50's! Mary and I always talk about some of the shufflers we knew 30 to 40 years ago, shufflers like Snoddy and Brunner, who aren't with us anymore. So many great ones who were super friends. And then I found the Rayles who do such a great job leading the National Shuffleboard Association. We've been friends for 25 or more years. Soon I talked to Art and Pauline Crowe, Devere and Evelyn Cole, Harold and Mary Shiley, Harold Donelson, the Hundley's, Harold Edmonson and so many more I can't remember them all. So many friends.

I was happy to see Pat and Ship McCoy and gave Pat a hug when Skip wasn't looking. Skip was the reigning Florida Masters Champ, having won in April at Winter Haven with a sensational 17 and 4 record. Of course, Pauline and Junior Kenny were there to be inducted into the Ohio Shuffleboard Hall of Fame. Pauline had a big envelope with her that contained their pictures, to be placed in The Hall of Fame. The envelope had big letters that said "HANDLE WITH CARE." She kept holding it in front of her like a sign, unaware of what it said until we kidded her about it. Then I saw Phil Grimes who edited the Ohio yearbook and soon said "hello" to Earl and Marian Mencil from my Lakeside club. So many friends. Shuffleboard courts are full of them. Lonesome? Come see us.

The courts at Carey are wild. They have big drifts. The question then comes up, "How do you shoot a hammer from the color on the right if the drift is 2 feet or so to the right?" It's especially tough when the right side of the court is covered and the shooter must shoot cross-court. If the shot is made from the number one spot, the disc must be aimed at the outside of the board and the drift will bring the disc into the center and cutting across the court from left to right, headed straight for the up and down line, the idiot line.

I often shoot this hammer from the number four spot. This will make the disc travel much more up and down the court after the drift and much less likely to hit the up and down line. The diagram shows this. At the same time I should tell you that my friend Bob Douthit doesn't like that shot and doesn't take it.

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1Q97-жс

HAMMER WITH BIG DRIFT

RELEASE DATE: APR 15, 1997
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EXCITING FINISH

In many sports it's clear as to whether players are on offense or defense. For instance, in football the team with the ball is on offense, the other team on defense. In baseball, the team at bat is on offense, the team in the field on defense. In golf, even in match play, who is on offense? It's not clear. Nor is it in tennis or even in basketball when an aggressive full court press has more elements of defense than offense.

In shuffleboard, there is no clear cut defense or offense situation. In fact on a given shot a player often must decide whether to be offensive or defensive. Couple that with shuffleboard's unique feature of needing to reach a certain point level to win and then add in the 10-off feature, and you have the basis for many exciting finishes. Here's one from a recent game.

Two very fine Florida players were playing at the head of a court in a doubles match. Game three came down to these two shots. How would you have played them? The score is 73 to 71 with yellow leading. Black has the next two hammers. The first six shots of the frame have been taken and as black prepares to shoot the seventh shot, his fourth, he must decide whether to play offense or defense.

On the board is a yellow 7, on the yellow side, medium deep, and centered but a bit closer to the center line than the outside line. I've shown that in today's diagram. What should yellow do with the seventh shot? He waited a long time to decide. What would you do in that situation?

One option is a defensive one. That is, simply cover the good yellow 7. After all, it's the game point, save it. Of course the problem is that yellow has but a two point lead and if black scores a ten, black will win. but black hasn't scored his 10 yet and has only a 50/50 chance of doing that, at best. Yellow can even make it tougher for black by biasing his cover shot to cover a quarter of the ten. That's the defensive approach. It has a lot going for it.

The offensive option is to shoot another score. With a second score on the board, black can't win with a 10 so he'll have to go after the score. And with yellow having a 2 point lead, black will have to remove both yellow scores or he will have to remove one and kitchen it. So where does the second score go? It can go in the other 7, it can go in the 8 on the yellow side, it can snuggle the 7 that's already there. Shufflers will argue about where to put it because each of those locations has advantages and disadvantages. But the main thing is to get it somewhere, the shooter must make the shot a good score.

I'm not really sure which shot I'd take. Or am I. I had a very similar situation against the same person playing black, who I'll tell you now was the great Rosaire Biron, and because there was a black disc covering the 10, I covered my winning score. But Rosaire tried to bump in a 10 and I held my breath as his bumped disc entered the ten and then I sighed with relief as it went a couple inches too far. But in the case in today's column the 10 was wide open.

The player covered his 7 and biased the cover shot toward the 10 so he covered at least a bit of it. A fine choice. But Rosie promptly stepped up and shot his 10 for a win and he and Jacques Bergeron, his fine partner, went on to win the tournament.

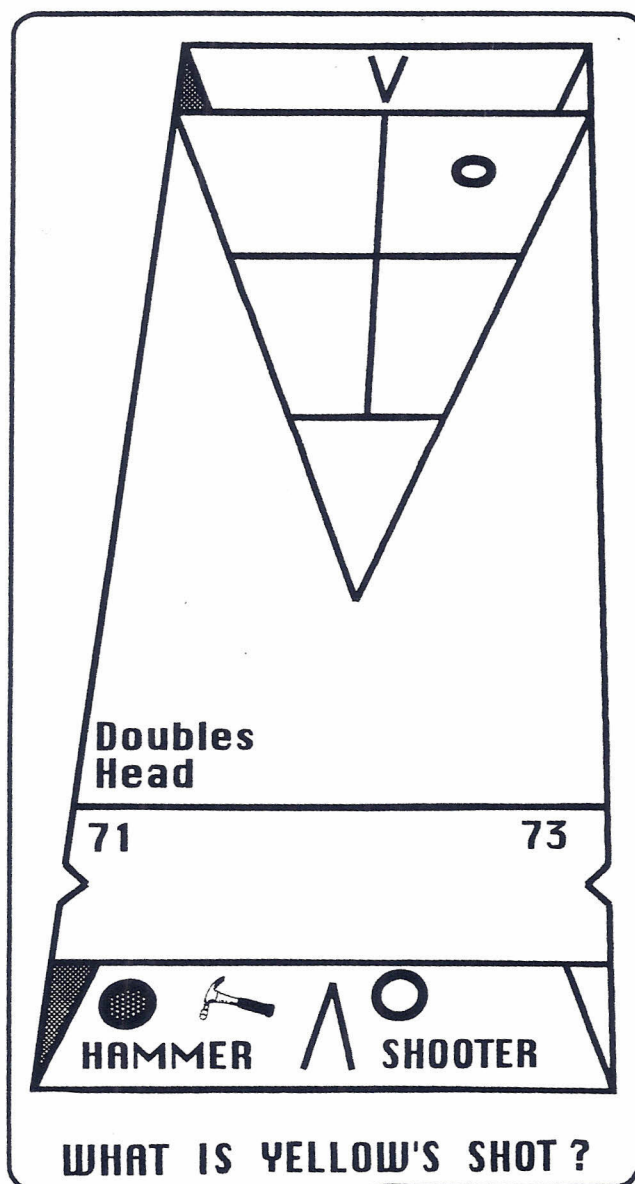
Would you have played it that way? If yellow scored an 8 above his 7, would it have given Rosie a more difficult shot? Who knows. All shots would have been exciting and so is our game.

So, offense or defense? Or am I mixed up? Maybe covering the good 7 is really offense. After all, holding onto the winning score is pretty much an offensive move. And maybe scoring a second score is really defense because it is keeping black from shooting a 10. It's clear that in shuffleboard, there is no clear defense or offense and that is part of the special excitement in our sport.

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4/15/97

2q97-02d



RELEASE DATE: APR 22, 1997
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SUMMER SHUFFLING

My good friend, the late Helen Jacobs, used to say, "Shufflers may spend the winter in Florida, But the game of shuffleboard spends it's summers at Lakeside." Helen, of course, was promoting Lakeside as she always did. Helen is now gone, but the shuffleboard program and facilities she left at Lakeside after her nine years as President of that club will be a memorial to her for years to come.

Helen was certainly right in her thinking that shuffleboard does not stay only in Florida during the summer. It definitely goes north and not just to Lakeside, but to a number of places. So shufflers don't hang your cues up in April. Take them north with you and keep right on shuffling.

This summer, 1997, will be a tremendous one in Hendersonville, North Carolina. They have 14 tournaments scheduled including the great International with the USA, Japan, and Canada. That's to be played August 24 to 30, and Canada will be defending both the men's and women's titles. I'm sure the USA will be out to take those titles away from our friends to the north. The International is a gala event and the International President says that the Hendersonville club will carry on the tradition of festivities and pageantry. It's worth attending just to watch. The Japanese are wonderful.

Going to Canada this summer? There's lots of shuffling there too. There are 11 tournaments listed in the 1996-7 Florida Preview for Canada for the summer of 1997. They are all over Ontario at Thedford, Chatham, Goderich, London, New Market, Woodstock, and Midland. Canadian President, Roy Norman promises a great summer. Join them and see how Canada produces so many shuffleboard greats.

Michigan and New Jersey also have summer tournaments. Thomas Moore is Michigan President and Beatrice Hepler is New Jersey Pres.

Of course, my state, Ohio, has a great summer circuit. I count 15 tournaments including five for kids. The first tournament will be at Bluffton, Ohio on June 5. Come and see if you can beat Bob Douthit and me. Lakeside will again host the National Championship starting July 21, and there's no longer a gate fee for the shufflers, just a small fee for court usage, thanks to good negotiating by Skip McCoy and Paul Prescott. come spend a couple of weeks with us and see if you can beat defending National Champ, Tom Brown.

Of course if you travel further you'll find shuffleboard in Texas, Arizona, and California. But be careful of those fast courts. If you do get out there, be sure to try the courts, you'll be amazed.

All the summer schedules except the western ones are listed in the Florida preview. As for me, I'll look forward to seeing you at Lakeside.

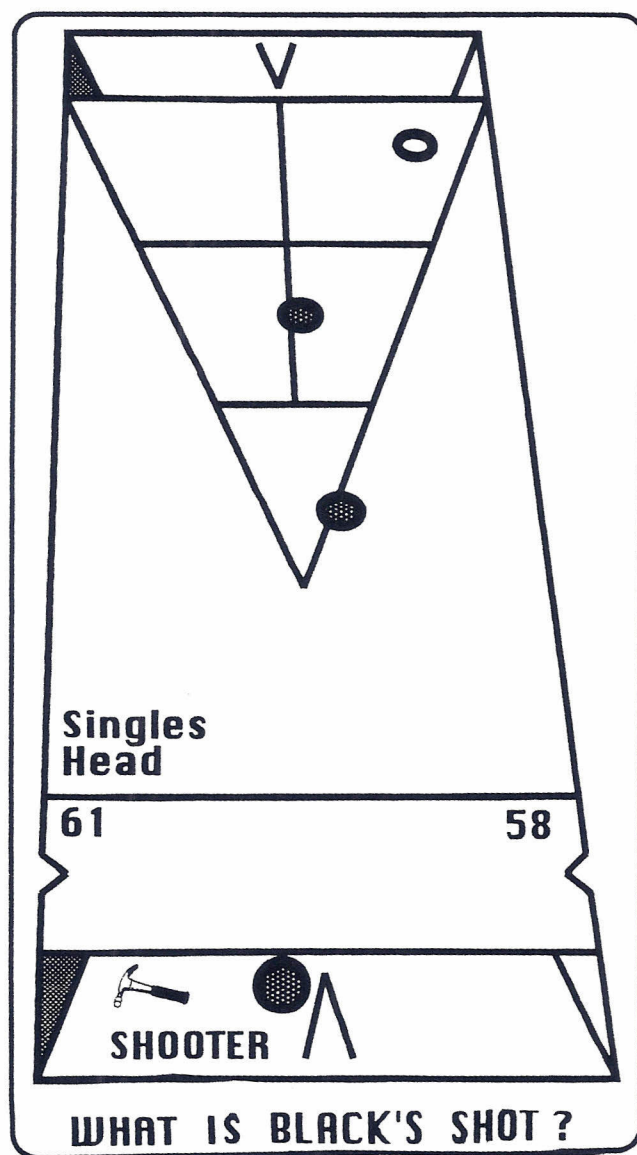
Today's diagram shows a situation from a Florida tournament in a game between two top players. Black is ahead at 58 for yellow and 61, black. Black also has the hammer. It's singles at the head of the court. Black is about to shoot his hammer and sees the situation shown in the diagram. There is a yellow 7 about half covered by a black near the 10. Also there is a black disc on the 8/8 line. What is black's shot?

In the match, black never hesitated and shot for the yellow 7. I was surprised and moved over in line to see if there wasn't a big drift black was counting on. No drift showed up and the black disc just kissed the yellow 7 and slid on by, leaving it good, about as I had expected it would.

I think the better choice was to score an 8 or to even try to double the 8/8 liner. The 7 was already a lost cause and besides it would take yellow only to 65. I'd shoot an 8 close to the liner, hoping for a double but getting a score for sure. Let me know how you would have played that shot.

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2Q97-03



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DIRTY TRICK

I've played shuffleboard so long that I've seen many cycles, phases, and stages. For instance, back in the 60's and 70's, our sport was rent with dirty tricks and gross attempts to psych-out opponents. Most any thing that wasn't specifically outlawed in the rules seemed to be OK to do. Unsuspecting players were fooled and arguments would breakout. Many shufflers look back at the good old days when the huge St. Pete Mirror Lake Club was king and in its heyday. Yet that club was where much of the poor gamesmanship originated. Yesterday isn't always like we picture it.

Then in the 70's and 80's things got better. Rules prevented tricks like a player shooting twice in a row when he was in a jam with 20-off and an opponent having 22 on the board. Shooting two blocks in a row called for only a penalty of 10-off, lots cheaper than the mess on the board would give. A big rule change was the one that requires a player to stand aside with his cue erect while his opponent shoots. That stopped players from jiggling their cues in the shooting area while their opponents shot.

With the changes I mentioned, and many others, the general mode of the competition changed from anything-goes-gamesmanship to good sportsmanship. In the current era, players are playing to win on the court with shooting and strategy and not with tricks and psychs. They respect each other and are friends off the courts. It's a clean game. I think some of this is due to the rule changes but much is do to the leadership of some of today's great players. Watch our greats--Glenn Peltier, Jane O'Laughlin, Rosie Biron, Mary Eldridge, Skip McCoy, Rita Cronkhite. They are fine sports. They win without dirty tricks. They loose gracefully.

I write all this because one of the dirty tricks of old has re-emerged and is causing trouble. Wilber Estes, in his excellent book, Modular Shuffleboard, which you should all buy, tells that a player shooting yellow has an advantage when shooting for color because on the fourth shoot she can shoot to the spot her opponent has been zeroing in on, leaving that opponent to find a new, untested, area of the court for the fourth shot. This is called, "taking an opponent's spot." It not only messes up the shot but it leaves the victim disconcerted that she has been dirty tricked.

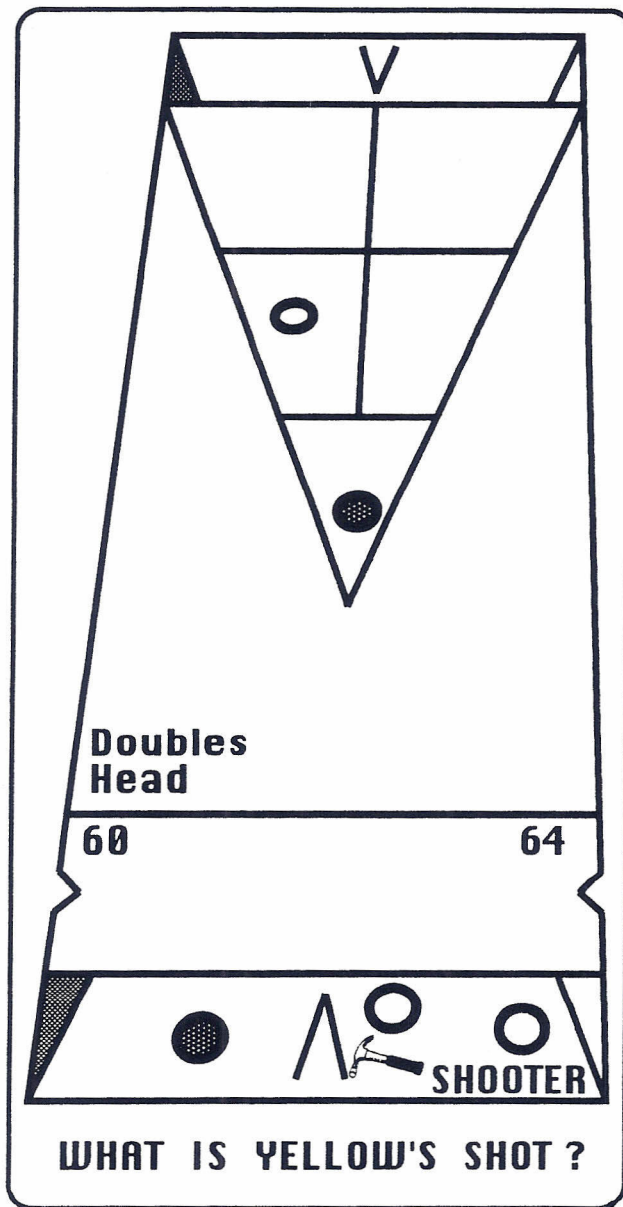
Years ago, when dirty tricks were the norm, I used this ploy often, especially against inexperienced opponents whom I knew would get upset. But I stopped about 15 years ago when it back fired. I was playing in the National Doubles with a fine partner. We were the favorites to win. In the quarters, we got to a third game. Our opponents were good players but they were not having a great day and one of them was anxious to go ahead and lose so he could get on the road to his relative's house 600 miles away. Well, I had yellow in the color lag and I "took his spot." It made him so mad he woke up, played like an man possessed, beat us soundly, and put us on the bench watching, not playing, the rest of the tournament. I've never used that dirty trick since.

Now, if players persist in "taking the other guy's spot" there will have to be a rule. A simple rule is to have yellow shoot all four discs, leaving the last one, and then black shoot all four, leaving the last one. That's the way we do it before the game when we are shooting our discs to check out the court--one player, then the other. (We used to do that taking turns, one shot at a time, but players developed ways to mess up the other's practice, so that was changed to the current one player at a time.) Or maybe someone else will find a better rule.

Now for a situation to make you think. Today's diagram shows yellow, with the hammer, about to shoot the sixth shot of the frame. He faces a high black 10 and has a yellow 8 of his own on the opposite side. The score is 60 to 64. What is black's shot? Answer next week along with further discussion of what black then does with the seventh shot.

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2q97-04d



RELEASE DATE: May 6, 1997
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DON'T GRIP YOUR CUE

Shufflers often ask me, "How do you grip your cue?" They have seen pictures of proper grips for golf clubs, tennis rackets, and baseball bats. They wonder how to best grip a shuffleboard cue.

Well, I answered that in the very first Shuffleboard Coach column I wrote in 1989. My answer is the same now as it was then, "Grip your cue as little as possible." Now that's a little on the wise-guy side so I'd better explain it.

The connection between your cue and your hand is a pivot point. It needs to be loose and free because the angle between your cue and your arm changes almost 180 degrees from backswing to follow-through. To allow the needed pivoting to occur, the cue must be held very lightly. That way, the cane-tip on the end can slide in the very loose hold of your finger tips.

Before shooting, most experts hold, or rather hang, the shootong arm at the side of the body in a very natural, relaxed position. The cue tip can then simply lay on the slightly curved index finger. Some experts use two or three fingers but they are always loose and relaxed. This is enough to hold the cue, which is very light weight.

The second finger (or third or fourth) is slightly more curled and rests against the end of the cane tip. This is the pushing contact point and transfers the force from the hand to the cue to move the shot forward. Finally, the thumb rests very naturally on the side of the cue tip opposite the index finger. Its function is simply to keep the cue from falling out of the loose grip of the fingers.

As the shot is made, the fingers and thumb are very relaxed and the cue tip simply floats in the pocket. At the end of the delivery and follow-through, with the arms extended, the thumb and fingers form a kind of loose tripod that keeps the cue from going down the court with the disc. (Often a good player will "shoot his cue." No harm is usually done.)

If your cue has a handlebar grip on it, don't grab it. You aren't on a bike. jJust hold it loosely as I have described. A firm grip and a stiff wrist make for a clumsy and inaccurate shot.

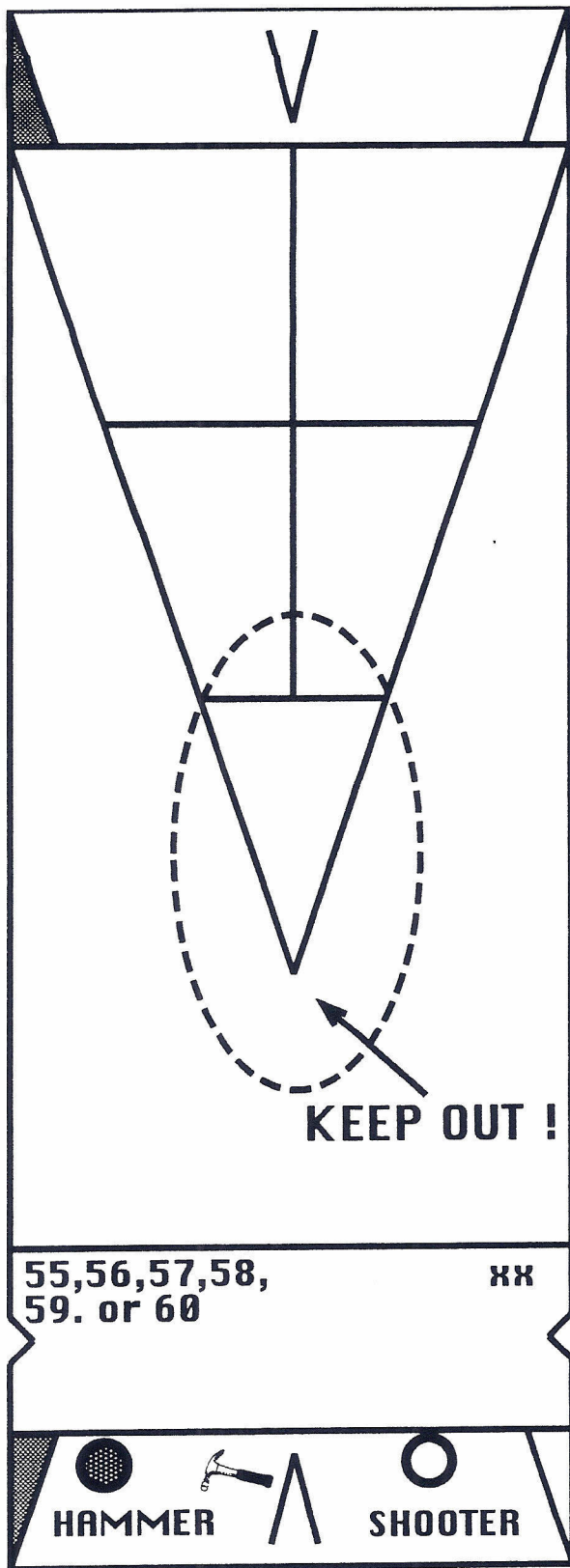
I realize that different shaped hands and different habits may require different ways of holding the cue. I've described the one that the best players use. It seems to make sense. Try it. If you have a better one, let me know.

Today's diagram shows a no-no that I see violated again and again. When your opponent has 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, or even 60, do not give her a 10 to shoot at on her hammer. That's just what she needs. Now of course, no one just tries to shoot a big fat 10 in those cases. Where we go wrong is trying to shoot a short ten and getting too deep. Then the player says, "I really didn't mean to shoot a 10." Well what I'm saying is that we shouldn't go anywhere near the 10. Even trying for a short 8 is dangerous because that can end up in the ten.

So I'll restate the advise this way. At those scores, against an opponent's hammer, don't shoot with in 2 feet of the 10. Try a corner 7 instead.

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2q97-05



STAY AWAY FROM THE 10 !

RELEASE DATE: May 13, 1997
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CHOOSE YOUR LAUNCHING PAD CAREFULLY

Often we see players thoughtfully consider which shot they want to select. They'll deliberate long and hard over making the right choice. And then they'll quickly shoot the disc from whatever spot in the shooting area they happen to find it sitting.

It is very important to select the best location from which to shoot. Choose your launching pad as carefully as you choose your target.

In describing the shooting area, it has become the custom to number four spots as if the four discs were positioned side-by-side across the shooter's half of the 10-off area. The spot by the triangle, near the center, is called the number one spot. The position near the outside of the board by the gutter is called the number four spot. Then the number three and two spots fit in between one and four. (see diagram)

Remember first that the entire half of the 10-off area is yours and that there are advantages to be gained by exploiting its full width. When hiding, get way over to the outside, the number four spot. When knicking out partially hidden scores, shoot from the extreme of the side that shows you the target. When clearing St Petes, I generally shoot from the one and one-half spot or the two spot. This is comfortable for me. I have an unbothered standing area and a good alley down the court.

When there are no pilots or other discs to shoot around, you have a free choice of launching point. You may be shooting for a score or at an opponent's open score. What delivery point do you use? The best and natural area is somewhere around the number one or number two spots. I doubt that it matters where in that area you choose. I like the number one spot.

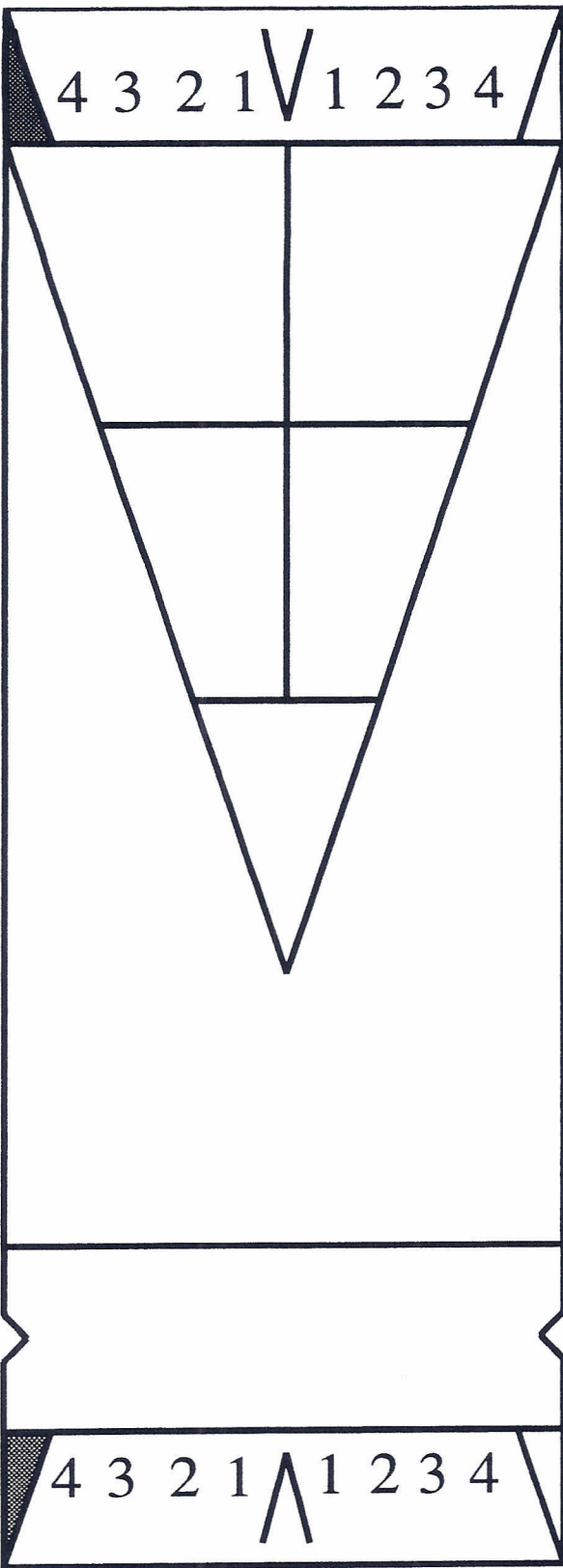
But the key is to always use exactly the same spot. Exactly. Don't shoot one hammer from the number one spot and the next from the number two spot. The drift will be different, the court speed will be different, and the delivery will likely feel different. Not a big difference, just subtle differences. But it doesn't take much difference to put a hammer on a line instead of in the 8. Choose your best spot and stay with it.

I played a National Championship match once on a court that seemed to drift differently for every delivery spot. It was a court that drove good players batty and was known for its upsets. Folks swore at it. In some games, it was said, nobody won.

In the first two games I battled it and managed to win one, but I was ready to throw my cue into Lake Erie. Before the start of game three, I put a chalk mark at the number two spot (this may not be legal but it's easy to pick a court blemish to accomplish the same thing). I resolved to shoot all my soft shots from that exact spot, and I did. I got a consistent drift, I got a consistent feel, and I got a victory.

NASA was careful to choose a good spot to launch rockets. Shufflers should be careful to choose the right spot to launch their discs.

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2q97-06

LAUNCHING SPOT NAMES

RELEASE DATE: May 20, 1997
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WEB SMITH'S ADVICE

Back in the 1960s, Web Smith was generally thought to be the greatest shuffleboard player, ever. Well, there have been many more greats since then but nonetheless, Web has to be thought of as being at the very top. Mary Eldridge's fine summary of all-time Florida points shows Web is the leader with 1195. Web won the first Masters. Whether he would be on top today or just one of the top 10 is a question that will never be answered. But for sure, we can learn from him and follow his advice.

Web played in the 50s and 60s. I was lucky to get to watch him play, to talk to him, and to talk to players who had played him. And I got trounced by him in the Nationals in 1968. I'm very proud that, in shuffleboard genealogy, I'm a descendent of his. For many years he partnered with Farrell Bruner. Later, Bruner partnered with Jay Snoddy, and finally, in the early 80s, Snoddy took me as a partner. If I was a race horse being auctioned, that tie to Smith via Bruner via Snoddy would up the bidding. What blood lines, they would say.

Web, of course, knew the game inside out, from St Petes to sevens, from hides to hammers, and from curves to kitchens. He loved to talk about strategy and tactics.

A pet point of his, that I heard him talk about several times, focused on a simple and common board situation. The shooter has a 10-off and his opponent a 7. The two discs are split, well over a foot to the side of one another.

Web liked to point out that a shuffler often tries to remove both discs, hoping to even leave the opponent in the kitchen in place of his own. He said this is the wrong shot choice. He'd add that he'd seen this mistake at all levels-- beginners, intermediates, and even experts.

Smith said the correct shot was to hit the 7 directly, replace it, and try to put it in the kitchen. That is, the shooter should completely ignore his 10-off. Web was absolutely right. If the combination shot is tried, it will gain 27 points, if Web's shot is made, it will gain 24. There's not much difference in the two outcomes if each shot is made perfectly.

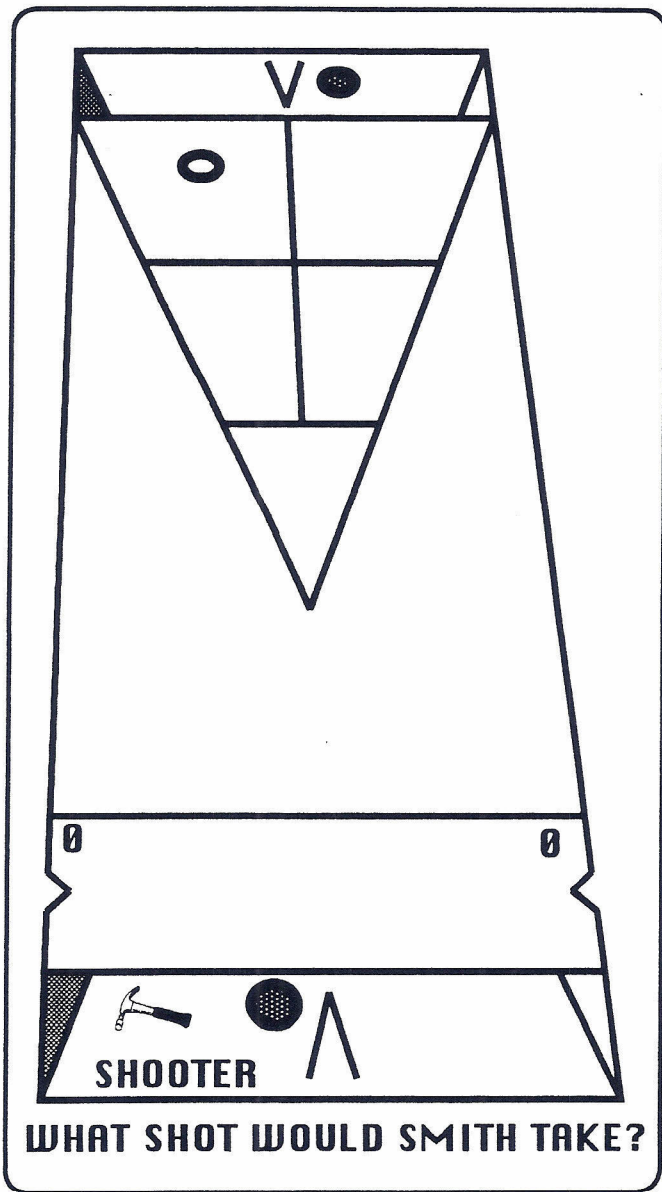
But the perfect shot is not the likely shot. The most likely outcomes will be that on the combination shot only the 7 will be removed with shooter rolling off the court and the 10-off remaining. That's a gain of 7. But if Web's shot is tried, it's almost a sure thing that there will be a gain of 14 with the 7 removed and also replaced with the shooter's disc.

The key in Web's thinking is to focus on the most likely outcome rather than the potential outcome from a perfect, but unlikely, shot. The choice to him was simply between gaining a sure 14 versus gaining a sure 7. He rejected the temptation to focus on big pay-out from a perfect shot, one that, even with his great skill, wasn't likely to happen.

Of course, reversing 10-offs is more fun then replacing simple 7s. Besides, it's really sensational when the perfect shot is actually made. So next time you may try it despite what I've written here. I may too. But we can be sure that if we played Web Smith, he wouldn't, and that the most likely outcome of a game against him would be a loss for us.

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2q97-07



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(Please do not publish before this date)

SHOOTING UPHILL

Reader's question: I have trouble hiding behind St Petes when the drift of the court brings the disc back towards me. It seems I can't get in behind the St Pete. What should I do?

Coach's answer: This is a very difficult shot, but it's one that pays off if you can master it. Many players call this shooting uphill or having the drift against you. Yet, despite the disadvantages, many experts would just as soon play "the wrong side of the court." They have learned how to make this challenging shot properly.

Start by getting as far to the outside of the shooting area as you can. Put your disc in the number 4 spot as close to the outside line as you can. Get your body and feet over there too. You may have to stand in the lane between the courts. If someone from the other court is there, wait until they move or move them.

Aim to a spot far to the outside of where you want your disc to stop in the 7. This will be a spot that will route your disc very close to the St Pete. It may even appear to be a route that will cause your shooter to nick the St Pete (but it will drift before it does). See diagram.

Then shoot at the aiming spot. The key is to stick with your aiming spot even though it looks wrong. Don't change your aim during the shot---stay with the aiming spot. Let the drift do the correcting for you.

Try this alone on a drifty court. Work with it until you get it right. Remember, the drift will correct the path, you don't have to.

On an uphill court, it is best to place the St Pete as high as possible. By high I mean close to the lag line. This will give you a lot more room to get in behind it with your hiding shot. You will likely have to shoot for the 7 rather than the 8. That is, the shot must be hard enough to get behind the St Pete before it starts to pull out. If you shoot for an 8, the pull will occur long before the shooter is behind the St Pete and the hiding attempt will result in a wide open disc.

When the drift is really bad, so bad you just can't get behind a St Pete, often you can shoot to the outside line of the 8 with your pilot with the idea of bumping it on in with the next shot. That does work and can result in a nice hidden score, but it's a difficult shot to make on a drifty court. Further, if your opponent tries to clear your pilot and sticks, you can't bump it in, it's his disc, not yours.

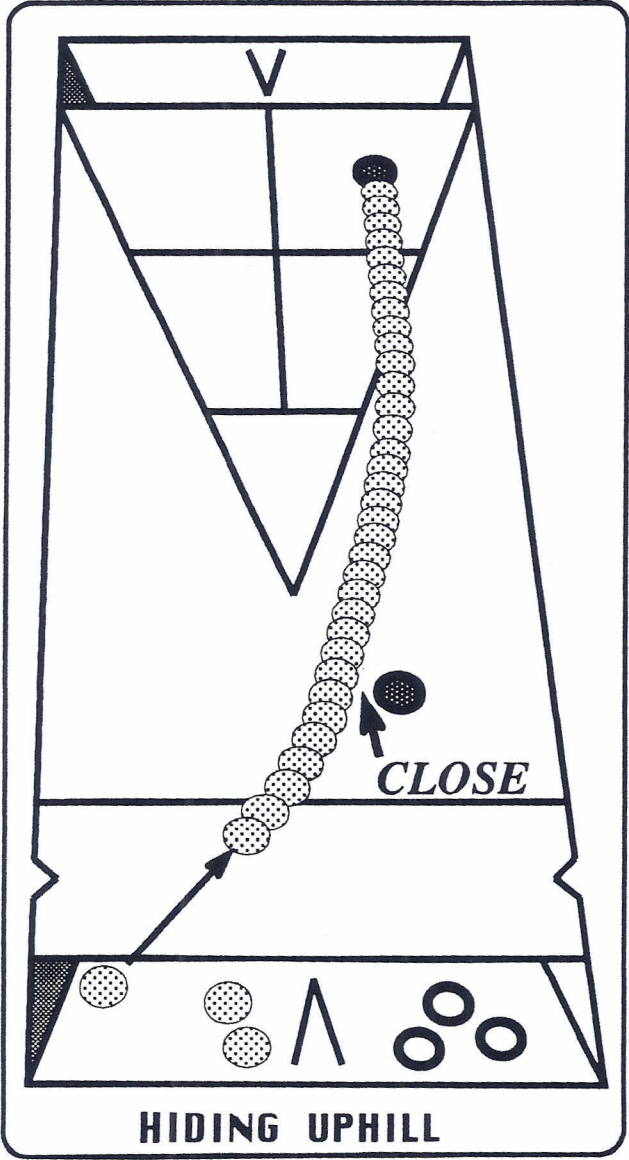
Of course, if the Tampa side has way less drift, a Tampa may be used instead of the St Pete pilot.

Finally, if the drift is really severe and the bump shot doesn't work, just shoot a score, opponent may miss it.

Of course, if you have other secrets and techniques for playing uphill, use them and let me know. I'll mention them in a future column.

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2q97-08



RELEASE DATE: June 3, 1997
(Please do not publish before this date)

EIGHT WATCHERS

Everyone knows that making 8s is the key to winning at shuffleboard. While there may be great excitement in doubling, reversing, and kitchening, the player who shoots 8s is the player who goes to the winner's stand.

It looks simple enough. The 8 is a seemingly large area. A good player ought to be able to practice shooting there and be able to succeed almost every time—at least one would think that. There are even two 8 areas to shoot at.

Yet, if you spend a couple of days being an 8 watcher, you'll see that many attempts to score 8s don't work. A surprising number of the shots end up on lines. Even the experts miss two or three out of ten. It turns out, when you get right down to it, that the 8 isn't as big as it looks.

Each 8 is a polygon. It is three feet high with its top one foot wide and its bottom, two feet wide. But the lines have width. The rules say lines are to be one inch maximum or three-quarters inch minimum. Using one inch (many seem to be wider), the area in the 8 drops from 4.5 square feet to 4.2 square feet.

But the disc has a six inch diameter and that has the effect of adding three more inches to each line's width. So the effective size drops to 2.18 square feet or only 48% of the 4.5 square feet we thought it was. (I wish I could lose pounds as fast as the scoring areas lost just lost size.) The disc itself is 0.2 square feet, 8% of the area.

The problem in scoring an 8 is usually in distance, that is, shots go too long or too short. Calculations show that the available stopping distance is 29 inches not the apparent 36. The 7/8 line is seven inches wide, not one inch.

A real pessimist might try to argue that the lines are 13 inches wide, but that's not so. It's not that bad.

So if you're an 8 watcher, these numbers may help in understanding why it's more difficult than it looks.

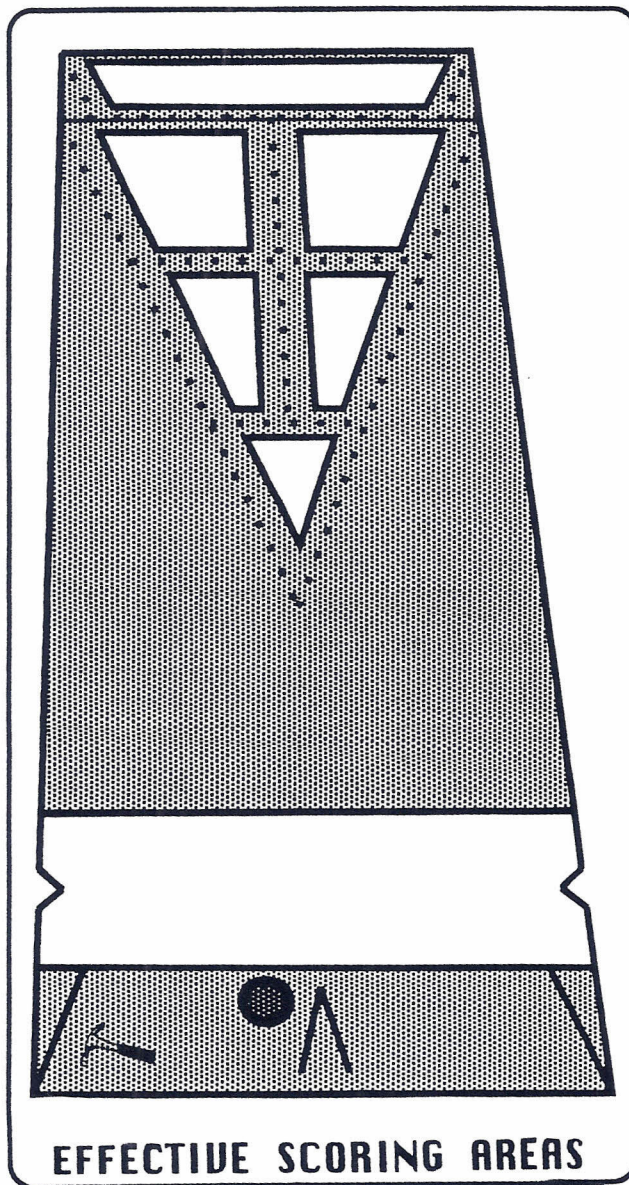
Now a related question. How many discs could be scored in the 10? Could each player get all four, forty points each?

Well, if you walk on a court and carefully place discs in the 10, you should be able to fit seven in. So that's one answer. But discs are allowed to be on top of each other. Thus, it's possible, but very unlikely, that all eight discs could be in the 10 and each player would have 40 points. In fact, I guess, if you had an unlimited number of discs, you could stack them as high as the moon.

But the realistic answer is seven. However if you're shooting and you need a 10, the answer may seem more like zero.

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2q97-10b



RELEASE DATE: June 10, 1997
(Please do not publish before this date)

MOTHER MAY I?

We've all had friends ask us how to play shuffleboard. Sooner or later we invite these curious folks to the courts. We meet there one morning, hand over a cue, and approach the discs together.

Now, what in the name of lag lines do we do first? When introducing new players to shuffleboard, what is step one? Have you ever faced that question? What do you do?

My rule of thumb is to keep it simple. Don't start with the latest strategy, one that you just learned. Don't start with a description of your latest exciting game. Don't start with something I had in a diagram for the experts in a recent column. And by all means, don't start with the fine points of the rules.

Rather, start by simply letting them shoot a disc down the court. That's what they need to do before anything else. Just shoot a disc. Let them feel the simple act of shooting a disc with a cue. I can vouch for this from my own experience.

Back in 1937 when I was 3 years old, as we passed some shuffleboard courts in Lakeside's Central Park, my mother suggested that I might try the game. Of course, I quickly gave her my young boy's automatic, "No." The thought scared me. I was intimidated. I'd be embarrassed because people might watch me. I'd seen others play and it looked too complicated. My answer was a firm, "No."

It likely looks that way to all newcomers, regardless of age. It was from my mother that I got my determination and at this point she was as determined as I was scared. So she next, using her tact, suggested, "Would you like to just push one of those wooden things and see what happens? Just push one?" I brightened a little. "Maybe." I was curious. Everyone is.

Then came the clincher. "I'll give you five points if you get it to the first line and ten points for reaching the second line," she offered. That didn't look hard and I bit with, "Mother may I try it just once?" I had that hedge in my answer, but I was committed. I shot more than one disc. In fact I haven't stopped shooting yet.

What had she done? She started me out at a level that was simple. One I intuitively felt I could handle. She recognized my curiosity, and she'd thrown in a little pay out the was so easy that I thought I could achieve it.

She did not start out by saying, "This is a great game. It will challenge your mind and your body all your life. It will offer intriguing puzzles and exciting cliff-hanging matches. Some day you'll be National Champ and you'll go to Japan and Africa to play. Some day you'll write a newspaper column about it."

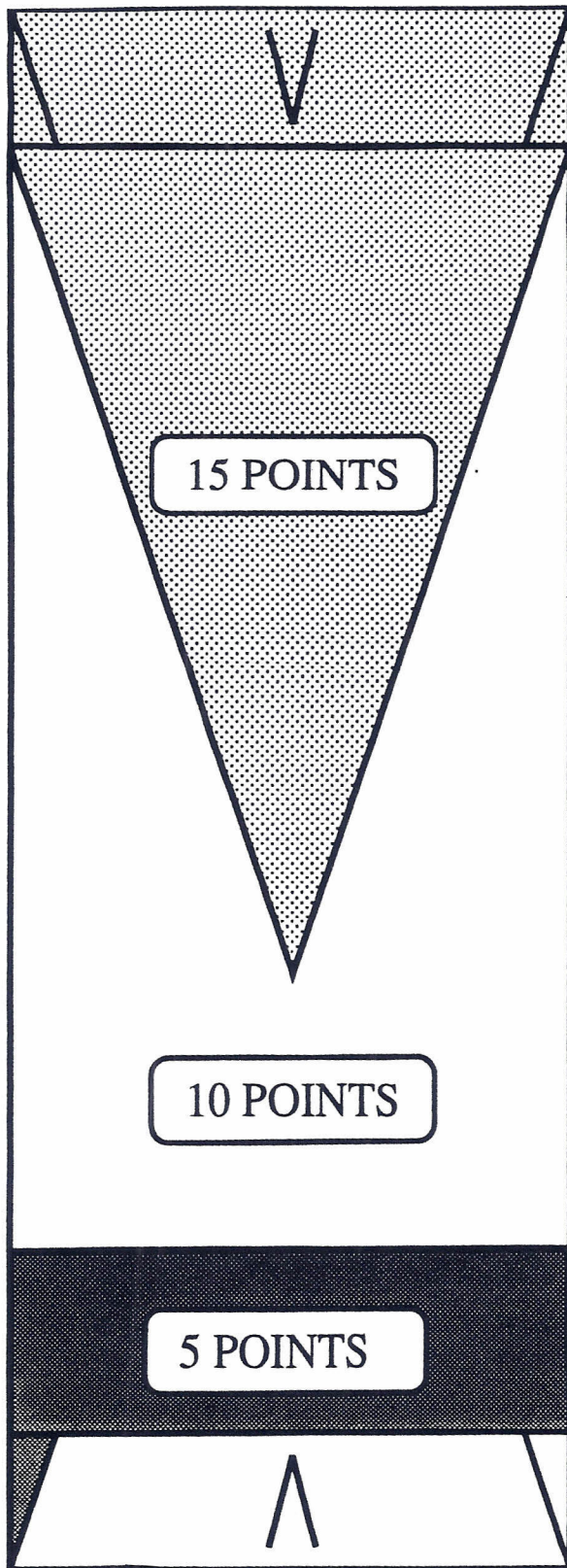
If she had said those things, I'd have gone swimming. She'd have scared me away. I wouldn't be writing this for you 60 years later.

Follow my mother's approach. Introduce shuffleboard to new players with the simple, not the complicated stuff. Let me know how it goes.

A few pointers. Let them shoot however they like for the first few shots. They'll be better listeners after a few misses. Have them hold the very end of the cue with only the finger tips. If they are right handed, be sure they shoot off the left foot and vice-versa. Help them understand that they should push the disc not hit it. Give them lots of positive feedback-- "Good shot," "Way to go," and "You're sure catching on fast." Give them a chance to shoot on their own, by themselves, and then answer their specific questions. And by all means, be sure they have fun. My mother did that with me and it's still fun.

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2Q97-10



BEGINNER'S POINTS

RELEASE DATE: June 17, 1997
(Please do not publish before this date)

KEEP A LEVEL HEAD

If you want to shuffle accurately, keep a level head. Yes, that usually means to keep your wits about you. but it also means "keep your head level," and that's the point I want to make today.

When making a shot, avoid moving your body or your neck in a way that causes your head to bob up and down or move side to side. Keep your head at a constant height and position as your body moves forward during your shot.

Shooting involves eye-hand coordination. You focus your eye on a target and your hand tries to deliver the disc to it. With enough practice, the muscles and nerves of your body seem to fix patterns that work for you. The eye-hand coordination in shuffleboard is similar to pitching, bowling, putting, serving, and key activities in almost all sports. We can add throwing darts, hitting croquet balls, pitching horse shoes, rolling lawn bowls, and shooting three pointers.

My own experience in shuffleboard is that keeping my head level, and thus my eyes, really helps my shooting. It seem logical that the hand can coordinate more accurately with a steady head. Bouncing the eyes up and down can only confuse the hand.

How is this done? How does the shuffler keep a level head? I can offer a few guides that may help. First, if you shoot from a bent position, bend over before you aim and stay in that position. Second, stay in your shooting posture as you follow through. That is, avoid raising up at the end of your shot.

Third, try to be conscious of keeping your head level. Observe what works for you. Fourth, have someone look at you while you're playing. Ask them to watch and make note of what your head is doing as you shoot. Their observations may be enlightening. Finally, when you have your delivery worked out, practice it. Practice it until it's automatic and natural.

I notice that some very good players tilt their heads toward the shoulder of their shooting arm. That likely helps line up the eyes and the hand. If you do this, be sure to keep the tilt the same throughout the shot. Have I got scientific proof to support this column. Nope, just experience in what works. I'll leave the science for others. Once in a while I see batters lunging at pitches, but they usually miss.

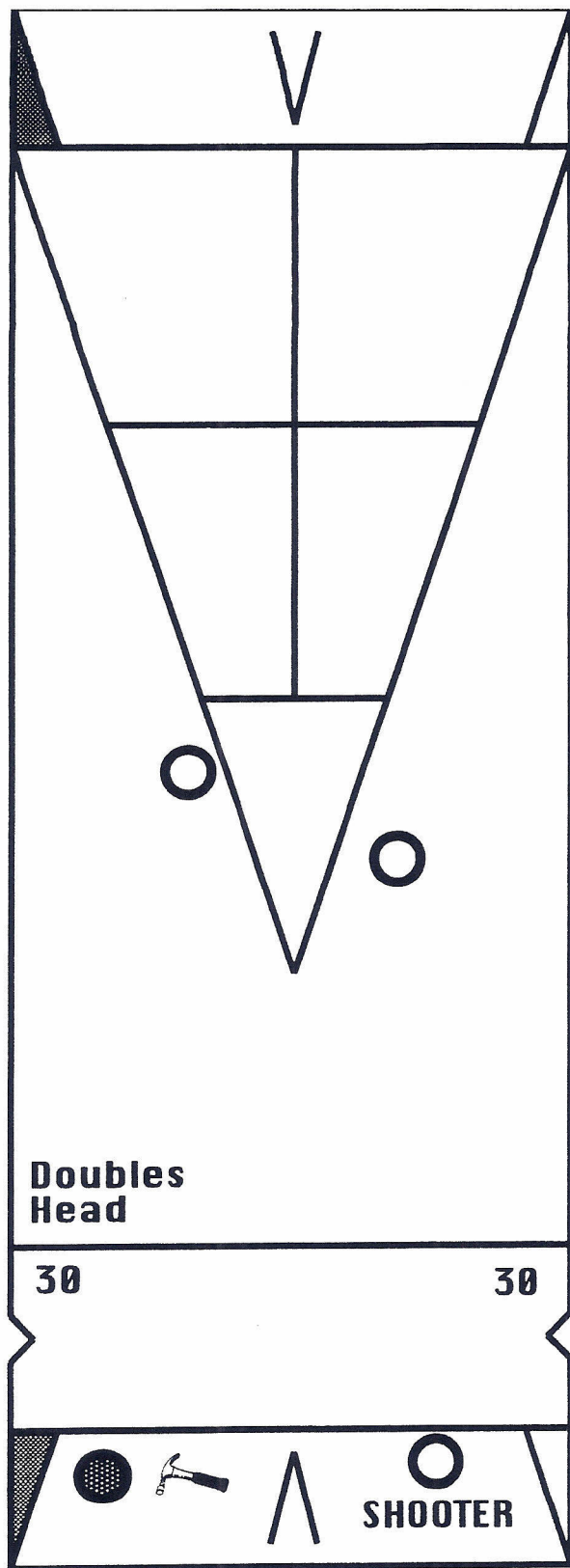
Seems to me that the guns of a battleship are going to be more accurate in quiet water than rough seas. It seem to me a loose sight in a gun will lead to misses. So it seems to me that a loose head will lead to poor shuffling.

I like to block the board on the other guy's hammer. Today's diagram shows a perfect chance to do just that. There is a yellow disc on each side of the point, off about ten inches each. All yellow has to do is stick another disc on the point and yellow must shoot down the side to make his hammer, a tough shot that may not be a score and could even go into the kitchen. But wait....

This situation came from a game being played by the great Rosie Biron. What did he do with it? He shot to the 8/8 line. Now why is that better? Black still has to shoot down the side. Well yes black should, but maybe Rosie has tricked a black player or two to try to go down the center for an 8, and maybe Rosie has gotten a gift 8 form this tactic. (Yes, I know many of you would try to hide, but I likely wouldn't and Rosie didn't.)

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2q97-11



WHAT IS YELLOW'S SHOT ?

RELEASE DATE: June 24, 1997
(Please do not publish before this date)

KEEP YOUR SHOULDERS DOWN

I was making bad shots. The harder I tried the worse I got. In fact, when I had a simple, relaxed shot, like setting a St Pete, I shot very well, but when I had a difficult shot, I'd really bear down, and it would seem to jerk at the end of my delivery and go a couple inches to the side of the target. I kept trying but I got nowhere. I couldn't improve my shooting no matter how hard I tried. I was frustrated.

So as I have before I went to a court by myself for some practice. I shot and I thought. I seemed to be throwing my shot off right at the end of my delivery. What could that be, I wondered. Then it can to me, an old problem was at it again.

I was raising my shoulders as I followed through with my arm. That's a real no-no in precise shooting. As the arm comes up at the end of the shot, the shoulders must stay in position, they cannot come up also. The arm follows though but not the shoulders.

It begins way back at the first step. As I bend, before I shoot, my body assumes a position that must be kept. That is as the body moves forward to shoot, the legs move and the arm swings, but the rest of the body must stay in the same position.

The legs cannot move the body up or down, only forward. The body itself should stay in the same bend, not opening or stooping more. And the arm just swings from the shoulder, without any movement for the shoulder or back.

I watched Eddie Jessup, an excellent shooter from Ohio. Eddie has been on crutches all his life and, of course plays shuffleboard on them. He is a very precise and accurate shooter. I looked at him as he shot. His shoulder never moved an inch. It was held in place by his crutch, fixed in position. His shots went to their target. We need to try to match the stillness of his shoulder. There is a lot more we could learn from Eddie too, he's a great shuffler and a wonderful person. I'm lucky to know him.

Sometimes knowing something and actually doing it are two different things. On the day I discovered I was raising my shoulders, I wasn't done by just finding out my problem. To prevent it, I had to have in my mind the thought that I was lowering my shoulder as my arm came up in follow through. I had to think I was dipping my shoulder in order to keep it level.

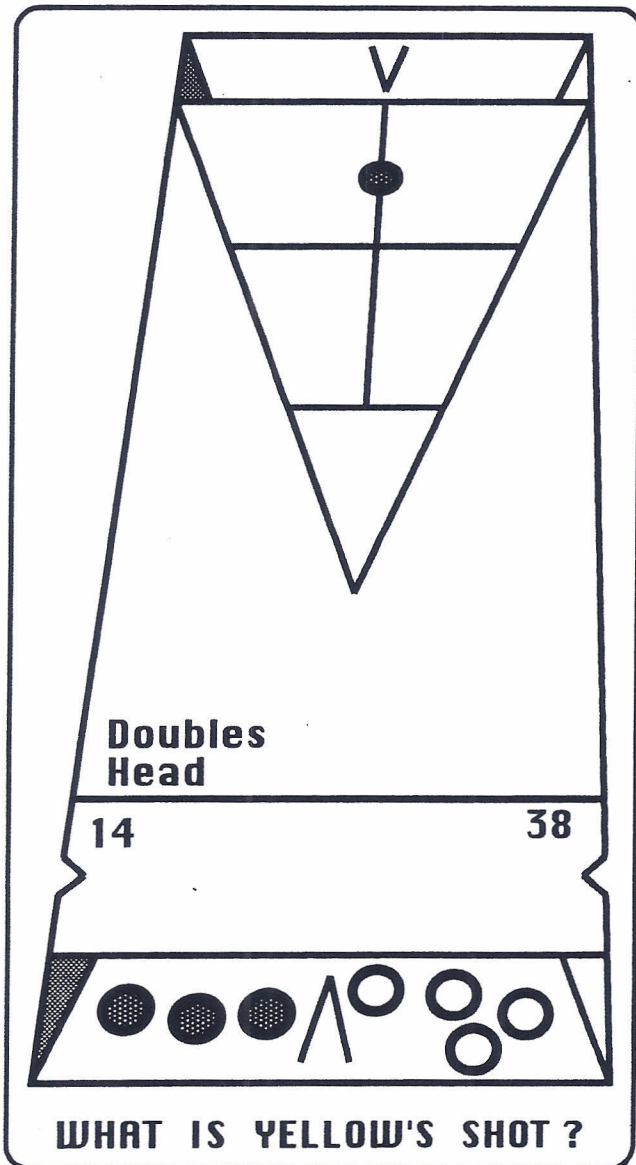
Then, the third step was to shoot this way enough, so that it came natural. Mary Eldridge has told us that we can't shoot well if we're thinking of our feet and our arms and whatever. We must focus on our target. That means that we must have our shot grooved and natural before we can be a good shooter. So I had to practice the shooting technique, again and again, until, that was the way I shot, without even thinking about it.

Today's diagram shows a common situation in tournament play. Yellow has a nice lead at 38 to 14 and has the next two hammers. Black leads with kitchen bait that lands on the 7/7 line. What is yellow's shot? Well, I'd blow the black disc off (that is I'd clear it) and so would many other expert shufflers. But wait....

The situation came in a game being played by the great Rosaire Biron. What did he do with it? He snuggled the 7/7 liner. That sure surprised me. But then when black scored a 7 on the next shot, Rosie hit his own snuggle block, pushing it into the black 7/7 liner and running that black disc right to the kitchen, meanwhile his shooter rolled a little to the right, into the 7. The two yellow discs were effectively locked and no reverse was possible. Rosie, of course won the game and match and tournament.

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2q97-12



RELEASE DATE: July 1, 1997
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COURT COURTESY

Rules are meant to define how our game of shuffleboard is played. But they don't and shouldn't cover items of personal conduct. "Court courtesy" picks up where the rules leave off. There are many points of courtesy that are important. In today's column, I'll cover one of them.

When your opponent is shooting, she shouldn't be distracted. We should raise our cue. We should stand back and aside. We should be quiet and still. We should let our opponent shoot without distraction.

Why should we do this? Simply because it's the right thing to do. It's basic ethics. We shouldn't bother a person shooting because that's the way we want our game played. It's a simple matter of right and wrong.

Back in 1988 I went to Japan to play in the international at Yokohama and one of the highlights of the trip centered on this courtesy. Yoshio Kosai, The "Overall Captain" of the Japanese team spotted me during a game. I was standing aside and back, away from my Japanese opponent while he shot. I had my cue raised and I was perfectly still as he delivered his disc.

Kosai told me that such courtesy to an opponent was, in the Japanese culture, one of the most honorable of acts. He called his team together the next morning and asked me to demonstrate my position and posture for them. It was a very proud moment for me.

The top Florida players all follow this courtesy. Watch Skip McCoy, Glenn Peltier, Ann Hersom, and the other great players. They all stand back and stand still. They win because they are smart and shoot well, not because they try to mess with their opponent's shots.

Unfortunately, shooters are not always given this courtesy. When I was nine years old, I beat a young girl in a tournament because I yelled and startled her during one of her key shots and caused her to miss my good seven. I've never felt good about that and I'm sure she didn't either.

Back in the days before we raised our cues, players often tried to distract opponents. One of my best friends, a National Hall of Famer, who's now deceased, used to flip his cue in his half of the shooting area during key shots by his opponent. He even did it to me. One of the famous Mirror Lake players kept his handkerchief out and blew his nose during his opponents shots. Of course there was also the smoker who surrounded you head with a choking cloud of smoke just as you took aim.

Shufflers, we just don't do anything to bother our opponent's shooting.

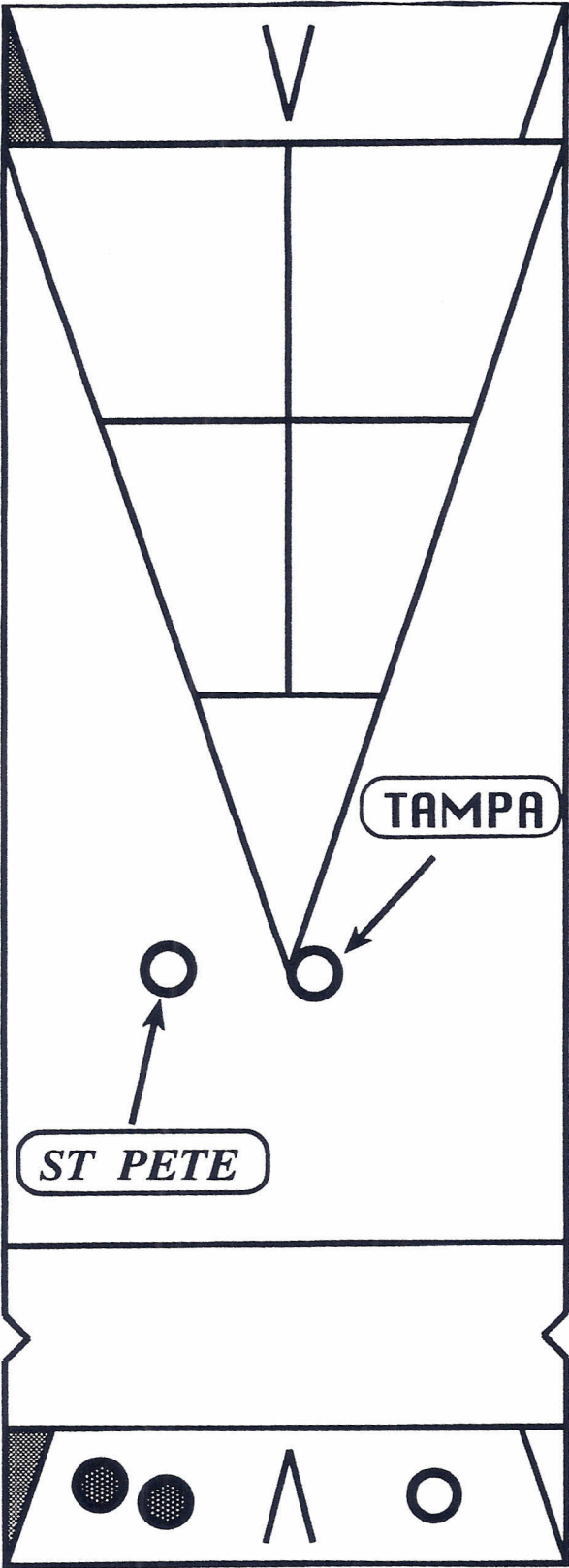
It's very simple to raise the cue, to step back, to step aside, and to remain still and quiet while the other person shoots. Please, let your opponent shoot.

As I've written many times I assume my readers have a working knowledge of shuffleboard terms, just as the folks who write bridge columns assume their readers know how to play bridge. That means I use terms that are specific to shuffleboard. For instance a "kitchen" is a 10-off. I can't define each term each week or I'd take up the entire newspaper.

At the same time, I recognize that there are many non-shufflers who look over this column out of curiosity to see what it's about. I know they are often lost. I know this because I get letters from them. The most common question is, "What is a St Pete and a Tampa." So today's diagram shows a St Pete and a Tampa for yellow. They are positions that make a part of the scoring area accessible to yellow, but not accessible to black. I've defined these before, but let's do it again today for the new readers.

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2q97-13



DEFINITIONS

RELEASE DATE: 7/1/97
(Please do not publish before this date)

NATIONAL SUNDAY

National Sunday. Now what on earth could that mean? Well, in this case I'm referring to the day before the annual Summer National Shuffleboard Tournament at Lakeside, Ohio. It's an exciting day. The pressure mounts as the players arrive and practice. One can see a certain tension develop. Tomorrow, Monday, will be the big singles, an event that will establish the year's Summer National Shuffleboard Champ.

A big piece of the excitement for me is seeing who arrives. Through the years we've had the greatest shufflers in the world compete in this event. Names like Jane O'Laughlin, Betty Stone, Mable Suttan, Elsie Hawkins along with Web Smith, Jay Snoddy, Rosaire Biron, and Skip McCoy--these and many others come to mind as I think back over the years since the first National at Lakeside in 1968. On the average, half of the Florida Masters players arrive at Lakeside each year.

Each year, on National Sunday, I'm in the park, sometimes playing, sometimes watching, but always being alert to who will be the next exciting arrival. I'm trying to be a good host, but I'm a competitor, too, and I want to play the very best. We're never sure who will come. Many of the great players have said, "I'll try to be there," or, "It's doubtful," or, just a simple, "Maybe." So there is hope and uncertainty and doubt in the atmosphere. This year, 1997, we expect Masters players Jacques Bergeron, Mike Vassalotti, Richard Buchanan, Richard Minnich, and Dale Williams, or 5 of the 8 men. Beyond the top eight we'll have the next four, Paul Prescott (we hope), Dave Stott, Bob Douthit, and myself. In the men, that's 9 of the top 12, great competition.

Everyone wants the very best players to be there. Yet deep down in, many of the competitors would be happy if certain very good players stayed home. Emotions are mixed as one great after another arrives. It adds prestige to have the greatest players alive in the tournament but at the same time each one of them brings the threat of defeat.

Back when David Karaska was a super player, I used to hope he would be here and then on Sunday, when I went to the park and heard his high pitched voice verifying his arrival, I'd shudder, knowing I might have to play him and face his uncanny accuracy. Some years I'd spot Charley Bone, one of the greats I never had much luck against. I'd shiver. At times, fine players have come from out west and it's always interesting to watch them practice, watching to see if they can handle our slower courts--and they never can.

Then rumors go around about the local young players, which of them will be back this year and which have given up the game for girls. Lakeside has had an endless supply of young players who can keep up with the pros from Florida and in fact take great pleasure in beating them. Lakeside's Shirley Schneider won Nationals before she was 20. In the men's we've had the Brown boys, the Oglesbees, Bobby Sudomir, and a number of others. The question is always, which one is extra hungry this year and ready to mop-up.

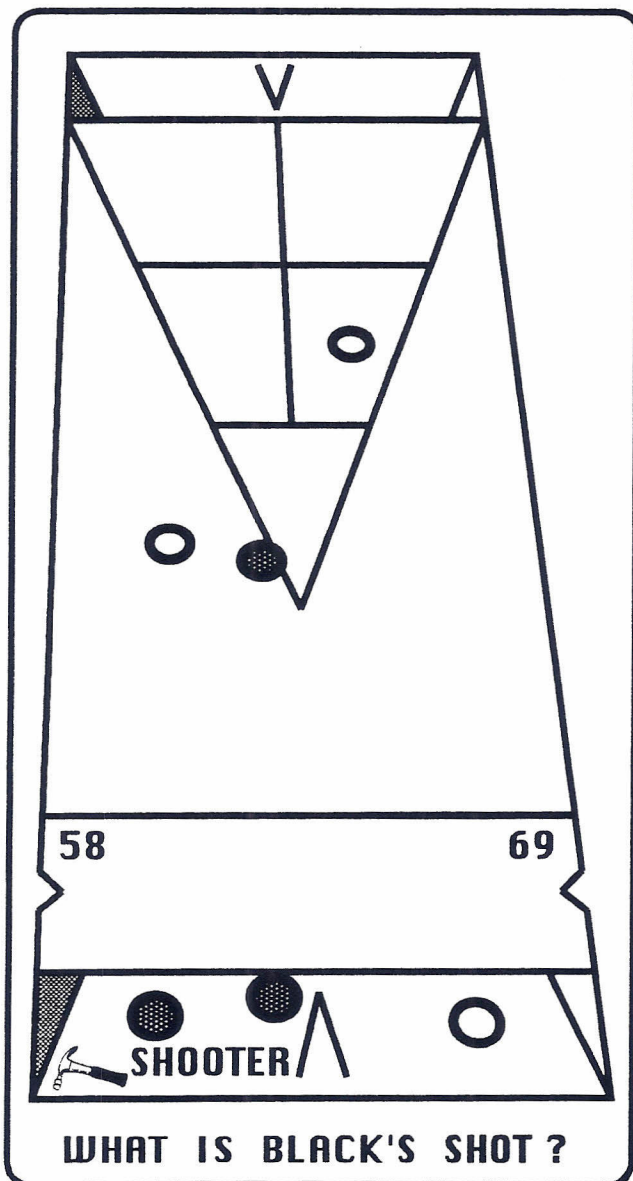
So Sunday is an exciting day. On Sunday, July 21, 1997, I'll go to church, leave before the sermon, and hurry over to the park to see who's at Lakeside this year. It's National Sunday at Lakeside!

Today's diagram shows a choice Bob Douthit had in a recent tournament. He's at the head in a doubles match, shooting black. On the board, on the side opposite him, yellow has an open 8. There are two discs covering the left side of the board as shown in the diagram. The score is 69 yellow, 58 black. Bob has the hammer and is about to shoot his third disc, the sixth of the frame. What is his shot?

Most players will try to kitchen the yellow disc. Yet with two discs covering the black side of the board, a roll to the 8 behind them isn't out of the question. After all, if it's made, the two up-coming black hammers will win the game. Bob tried the 10-off shot and after the game, I asked him if he had thought about rolling to the covered 8. He said he had and that he felt he had a better chance trying for the kitchen. That's the right answer. When the choices are about even, shoot the shot that feels the best to you on the given day.

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3q97-01



RELEASE DATE: 7/8/97
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BERGERON IS MY PARTNER

I was very lucky. I didn't have a partner for the big doubles at Clearwater last March. For different reasons two partnerships had fallen through and I was stranded, resigned to missing one of my favorite tournaments. I like to play at Clearwater because I can drive there, because the courts are kept in great condition by Junior Kenny, because they have 52 courts, because some of the courts are under cover, because they are good hosts with a good kitchen and clean rest room, and because the competition is always the best. (I'd say that's a lot of reasons.)

Then late Monday afternoon of the preceding week at the St Pete tournament, I mentioned to a friend I was sitting Clearwater out. He lit up and said, "I suppose I'll hurt my own chances telling you this, but Biron just told Jacques Bergeron he wasn't feeling good and couldn't play next week with Jacques as scheduled." "Wow!" I thought. Soon we found Jacques and he said, "Sure, I would like to play it with you." I was thrilled.

(This is what I wrote just before that tournament.) Now it's the day before and I'm thinking about my strategy. It's get serious time. Time to forget the high I was on. It is time to get down to business. After all. I don't want to waste this chance with a super partner. So I'm analyzing the season so far. Jacques is on top of the standings and has won four tournaments in the last month including a singles. He is hot. On the other hand my season has been just so-so. There are lots of reasons, but the bottom line says my soft shots are off a little, and that's enough to get me beat more times than I normally do.

So how do I play with Jacques. Well for sure I'll play the head and he'll play the foot. I'm the conservative board clearer and he's the great shooting board player. I take the safe shots and he adjusts based on whether I make my points or don't. He bails us out, if need be. I keep the steady pressure on. That's basic.

But now I'm thinking that I sure need to be careful to play my roll properly. Maybe one reason I've missed some shots this year is that I've tried some that I shouldn't have. Last year I shot so well that I maybe developed some bad habits. Maybe I got over-confident of my shooting ability. So I've decided to not only be conservative, but to be very conservative. I must take only safe shots.

What does that mean besides just board clearing? Well it means I shouldn't challenge my opponent's hammer with short 8s and short 10s that may backfire, so I'll just block one side of the board or the other. It means that if I have an opponent's score to remove, I shouldn't play it for the kitchen and thereby run the risk of giving away a 7. It means that when I have a chance to hide, I should shoot for an 8 rather than a 7 so that I'm sure I won't get a 10-off. On every shot, I must look at the worst thing that a poor shot can do and I must avoid that like the plague.

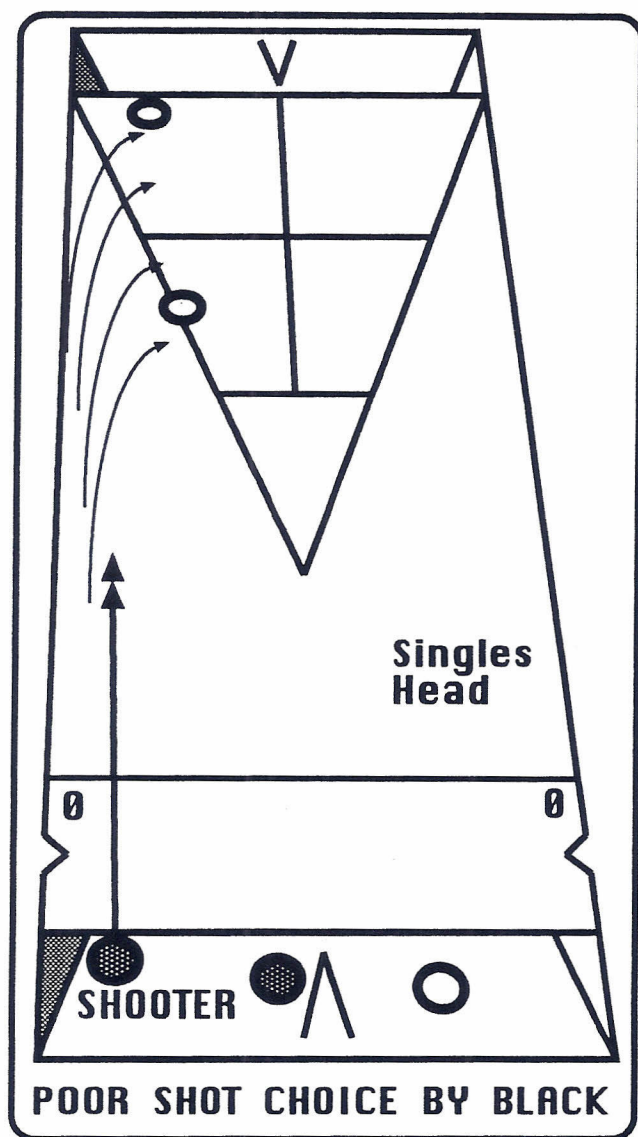
My feeling is that Jacques can beat anyone there. That means that if I don't lose the game for us, we will win. All I have to do is stay out of trouble and break even. I'm committed to that. I'll let you know how we do.

Alas, playing tight defense proved to be too challenging for my so-so shooting. My resolve to just keep the board clear fell by the wayside early as I missed and stuck about as often as I cleared. And that made a more difficult problem because the clearing game only works when the clearing shots succeed. When half of them fail, it's worse than playing on the board. So Jacques and I lost our first match in three games. Then, mostly due to Jacques's superb play, we won four consolation matches in two games each and got to the finals where I played poorly and we lost again in three.

When many shots go off to one side or another, it becomes impossible to read the drifts well. It becomes a guess as to whether a hit on the edge was a drift or an errant shot. When that happens, at least in my case, I lose confidence and began to fuss at myself and fret, none of which helps. Finally, I think so much about my lack of shooting accuracy, that I make poor tactical decisions. The diagram shows a bad shot selection that helped seal our fate in the consolation finals. Jacques, a great guy, forgave me. He's the best.

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3q97-02



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DON'T TRY FOR A TEN

Today's diagram shows a classic shuffleboard situation, one that comes up again and again. The score is 70 for yellow and 57 for the blacks in a doubles match, game three, with play at the head. Yellow used his fourth shot, the seventh of the frame, to clear a black disc. Now black is about to shoot his hammer and has an open board. Should he try for a 10?

Many players do just that. I've seen it done time and again. They seem drawn to that shot like a young actress is drawn to Hollywood, and, like the young actress, they may win once in a while, but more often the ending is tragic. They look at the scoreboard and see that if they make a 10 and partner makes an 8, they will pull the game out and win the match. Lyle Wood, a shuffleboard great loved to save games with 10s and did it well. He lived to 90 and I think he stayed alive some extra years hoping to have more chances to make that shot. Of course, he lost lots of games doing that, but he forgot those.

But watch them, most of the expert players simply shoot for an 8. What's going on here? Which is the better shot?

Shooting for a 10 will work about one third of the time. Those odds are better than the lottery but not so great in shuffle. Then, even if the 10 is made, partner at the foot will have to score an 8 to win. Now, be aware, the yellow player at the foot is not sitting there sound asleep. He darn well knows the score and even if he didn't know it at first, I guarantee that, when yellow at the head shoots a 10, he'll wake-up and turn to look at the scoreboard within a half second. Then he (yellow at the foot) will lead into the 7 and he'll keep play there the entire frame and yellow will never get to shot at the 8 for a win.

On the other hand, if the black player at the head scores an 8, the black score moves to 65. Now if black at the foot gets lucky and yellow makes a bad clearing shot, black may get two scores and can win that way. That way is more likely than getting the 10 and an 8. Even if the starting black score is 58 and a 10 from the head moves it to 68, the foot black player may not make his needed 7, or yellow may get one along with him.

Most important is that if both black players ignore the tempting 10 and go for simple 8s, they will move their score closer to 75 and they'll be able to play much tougher defense against yellow's coming two hammers. If they face the two yellow hammers with a score of 72 or 73 black versus the yellow score of 70, they have a decent chance of winning. If the yellow player misses a clearing shot, black can hide one for a win. If yellow sticks, black may give him a 10-off and save the game for the next black hammers.

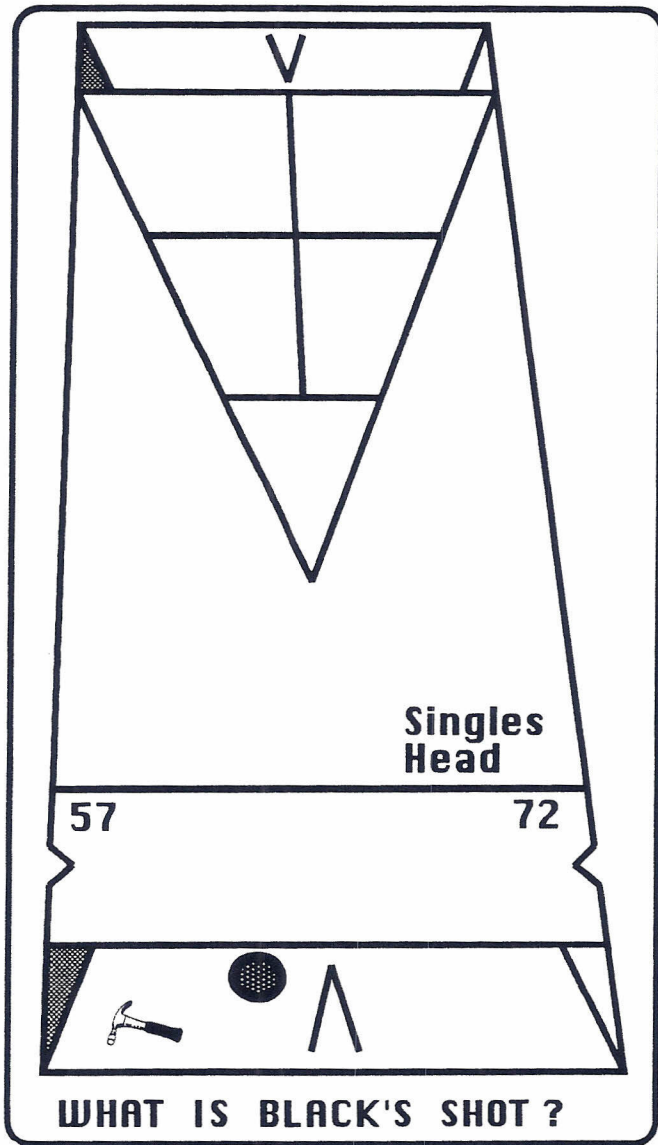
I'd guess that the odds are pretty simple. If black tries for the 10, his team will pull out a win less than one in ten. On the other hand, if black shoots for a score, he and partner may salvage the game one time out of four. I like those chances much better. Of course, neither will get a win for sure, after all the black players are in deep trouble in the first place. But it's not time to try a low percentage 10% shot, when a 25% chance is available with a simple scoring shot.

Now, as always, I'll add that a player should shoot the shot he is making on a given day on a given court. If he has been missing 8s by a foot all afternoon, he may as well shot for the 10, especially if he knows the 10 area well and has been there successfully several times. Then by all means he should shoot for it. George Higginson is a great 10 shooter. George would go for the 10 without a thought, but his odds of making it are twice mine and yours. He's extra good at it.

What do you think? Does this spark a debate? I hope so. My purpose here is not so much to give answers as it is to get shufflers thinking. Let me know. And good luck whichever shot you try.

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LINED-UP DISCS

I watched one of my friends playing a singles match. He was facing the situation I've shown in the diagram. I could see the discs on the 8/8 line were lined up almost perfect so that a hit on the yellow disc, almost anywhere, would cause the black disc to replace the yellow 10-off. What an opportunity, I thought.

I was behind the end of the court and walked over several courts to see if the discs were really lined up as they appeared to be. Sure enough, they were. My friend, though, didn't see the opportunity and simply scored his hammer. He missed out on the 10-off reversal and that was worth a big 20 points. Besides, he would likely have held his shooter in the 8 and it's 50/50 that the yellow on the 8/8 line would have stopped in the 8 also for a big 16 and 10-off.

It is important to keep your eyes open and watch for lined up shots. They don't come often but when they do, you should use them. My friend said he just didn't see it.

The key to the lined up shot is that the two discs be touching or almost touching, not more than an inch apart. If they are touching, the farther disc will go in an exact line with the centers on the two discs, no matter where the closer disc is hit by the shooter. That's the rules of geometry, or trigonometry, or mechanics, or physics, or what ever field claims it. For shufflers and pool shooters, it's just what happens. The key is that the shooter can be off a fair amount but the farther disc will still go in the lined up direction.

You may want to set some of these up and see how it goes for you. Remember, though, the two discs have to be almost touching, very close.

I talked to Masters winner Skip McCoy after one of his games. He had, as usual won it, and, as usual, had played on the board a lot instead of clearing discs. I said, "You went right down on the board and traded kitchens and 7s with him, didn't you?" He answered, "Sure, once he had shot his number 2 disc (on yellow), I knew I had him." Skip went on to say that the other three yellow discs were all grabby and hard to play kitchen with.

Do you watch what disc your opponent is shooting? Most of us don't. Skip does and he wins more than the rest of us. He's been leading Florida players for two years and we can't seem to catch him. He's won two straight Masters Championships. Watching the opponent's discs is one of his keys.

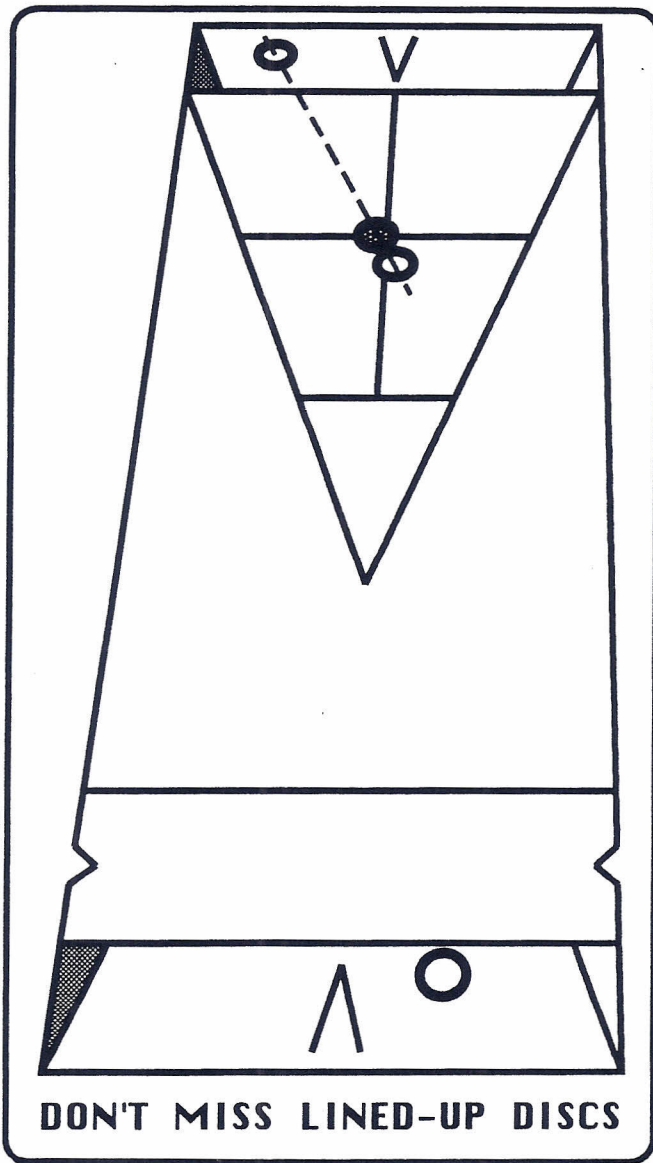
Today's discs are all different. Clubs wax them and treat them and polish them and grind them. As a result, no two are alike. They each feel different and they run different. Each has it's own characteristics. Some clubs even have mixed Arcos and Dimcos. Some use sets of the old superior Dimcos, but they are thin and have soft edges, and each is different by the time they have been used for two decades. Some use new Arcos, but they aren't broken in and each disc has a different sized hollow spot on the bottom during wear-in.

Players have to be alert to the disc's differences. In the 1995/6 Florida season we were allowed to take our own discs to tournaments. I had a great set of 1967 Dimcos that I hadn't used much. They all weighed the same and they all ran the same. I was in shuffler's heaven. Each shot felt the same and I could count on each disc traveling the same. But that rule got changed and we now use house discs, whatever the host club provides. They are all different.

Therefore, many of us get fooled and often frustrated. Not Skip McCoy, the champ. He studies the discs, watches which one he shoots, and even watches which ones his opponent shoots. Sounds like something we all should do, doesn't it?

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ON YOUR HAMMER KEEP THE BOARD OPEN

Every shuffler knows that the key to winning at shuffleboard is to score on your hammer. "Score on your last shot" is a phrase that has echoed around the shuffleboard world for as many years as people have shuffled. I'm sure that on the long P&O boat trips from England to Australia in the late 1800s, passengers, even ones who had never heard of the game before boarding, learned that tactic before they reached South Africa. I'd bet they were calling it to partners much before the sailors called, "Land Ho."

Yet while it's easy to convince shufflers that scoring the hammer is vital, it's difficult to get them to understand that keeping the board open so that they can score that hammer is just as important. Shufflers seem to wait to the last shot to think about scoring the hammer. Then often they look down the court and see several discs in-between them and the scoring area. After the game they'll say, "I tried to do the right thing and to score on my hammer but I couldn't, I was blocked out."

And if you had a video tape of the game, you could play that frame back for them and show them that they were blocked out by their very own discs. And that they put the discs there themselves. It wasn't the opponent who blocked them out, it was the hammer shooter himself. You'll need the video, because they won't believe it without seeing it.

How can this happen? Well it's easy. It comes from a conflict in shuffleboard tactics. One tactic, as we've said, is to score the last disc. But another very basic tactic, perhaps the second most important tactic in the game, is to cover a good score or, as the expression goes, to block it from the opponent. The conflict comes in the fact that blocking by the person with the hammer, means a disc has been left in the top of the board, the area between the 10 and the lag line. And, unless the blocking disc is way at the edge of the court, it will not only cover the good score, but it will surely block at least part of the routes available for the hammer to follow when it is shot.

Here's a situation I saw in a recent game. It was the very first frame in a doubles match. Black had the hammer, of course. On the sixth shot black looked at the board I've shown in today's diagram. Black has a 7 in this case a high one on her own side of the board. Yellow has a St Pete. A second yellow disc is in black's St Pete spot. What is black's shot?

In the game I watched, black covered her 7. I flinched as I saw her advantage disappear. She was on the way to blocking out her hammer. She had had a chance to get two scores but she'd only get one now.

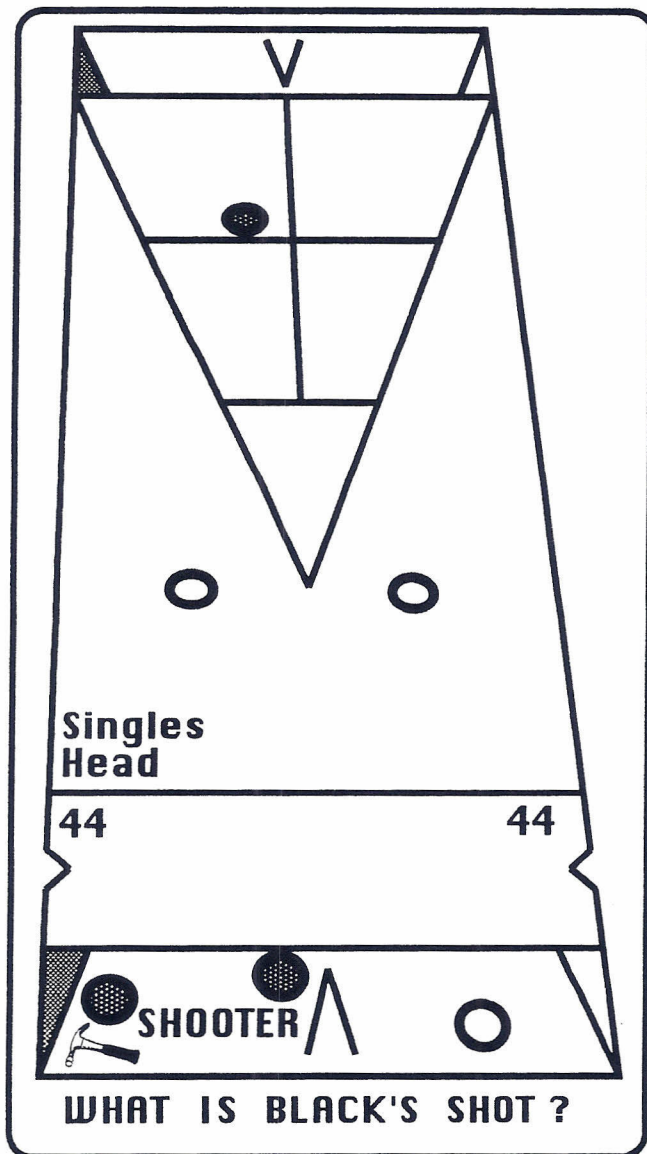
In this case it got worse, much worse. Yellow was able to see a corner of the black 7 and clipped it out. So black lost her good score and faced a blocked board on her hammer besides. She did have some room to get to the opposite 7 and she tried this, but her adrenaline got her and she shot too hard and saw her hammer go into the 10-off.

So what was her shot with the sixth disc? A simple hide behind the St Pete for black would have been perfect. That would have given black a high 7, a hidden 7, and after yellow's next desperate shot, the hammer would have the board open.

Jane O'Laughlin showed up one day with a pedometer on. That's a thing that hangs on a person's belt and records the number of steps the wearer takes and from that gives the distance walked. After winning her match in walking singles (Jane won in two games, of course) Jane reported she had walked 1.6 miles. No wonder players get tired shuffling. No wonder Jane is the biggest winner active in the shuffleboard today, she's still studying the game.

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DAVE MINNICH

I enjoy having expert shufflers ask me about suggestions I have written in my column. I don't mind at all if they want to propose a better shot than one I have recommend. Of course it's easier for me to be receptive when they go about it tactfully, saying something like, "Lary, I liked your column last week. It was interesting and made me think of another solution." It's a little harder when they say something like, "Hey Lary, you've written some stupid things before but the one last week was the dumbest yet." It's easy for me to strike up a fun conversation with the tactful one and awfully hard for me to be pleasant with the second.

I write the column primarily to encourage shufflers to think. Shuffleboard is not as deep as chess but it is not a simple game either. Many think it is primarily a game of skill but, while skill is important, and while a certain level of skill is necessary to compete, it is strategy and tactics, and these involve thinking, that separate the pretty good from the very good shufflers. And it's primarily to make that point and to encourage thinking, that I write this weekly column.

So last winter when Dave Minnich approached me with a new thought on a column that had been published the week before, I was anxious to hear his thoughts. Dave's a fine shuffler. He's finished second in the National Singles and he gets Florida points regularly. But Dave, is one of the bright people who knows he doesn't know everything there is about the game. (In fact some shufflers are so smart they think they know more than all the others combined.) Dave and I are in the group who are still learning everyday.

Dave was very tactful as he asked about the column I had written. The situation is shown in the diagram. Play is at the foot in a singles game and black leads at 64 yellow to 68 black. It's yellow's hammer and black is about to shoot his last disc, the seventh of the frame. On the board is a black Tampa and a yellow disc on the 7/7/8/8 cross. What is black's shot?

In the column I said that if I had a good drift and a favorable feel of the Tampa hide route, I would likely try to hide the winning disc and get it in far enough so that black would have a hard time chasing it. I acknowledged that many might rather cover the liner at the cross with a shot to the yellow Tampa spot. That choice would for sure keep the game alive for partner's coming hammer. I said that I felt either shot had it's advantages.

Dave said, "How bout a short 8 on the yellow side," I replied that many would, but that I wasn't good at that and so I likely wouldn't do it, fearing I'd get too deep." Dave went on, "But I'd shoot it to be short rather than long, that is, short of the 8 rather than deep into it." Now that's thinking I like. Dave's covering himself for a shot that he can't totally control. After all, we're not playing chess where the knight always goes 2 and 1. Sometimes in shuffleboard a knight would go 1 and 1 or 3 and 1.

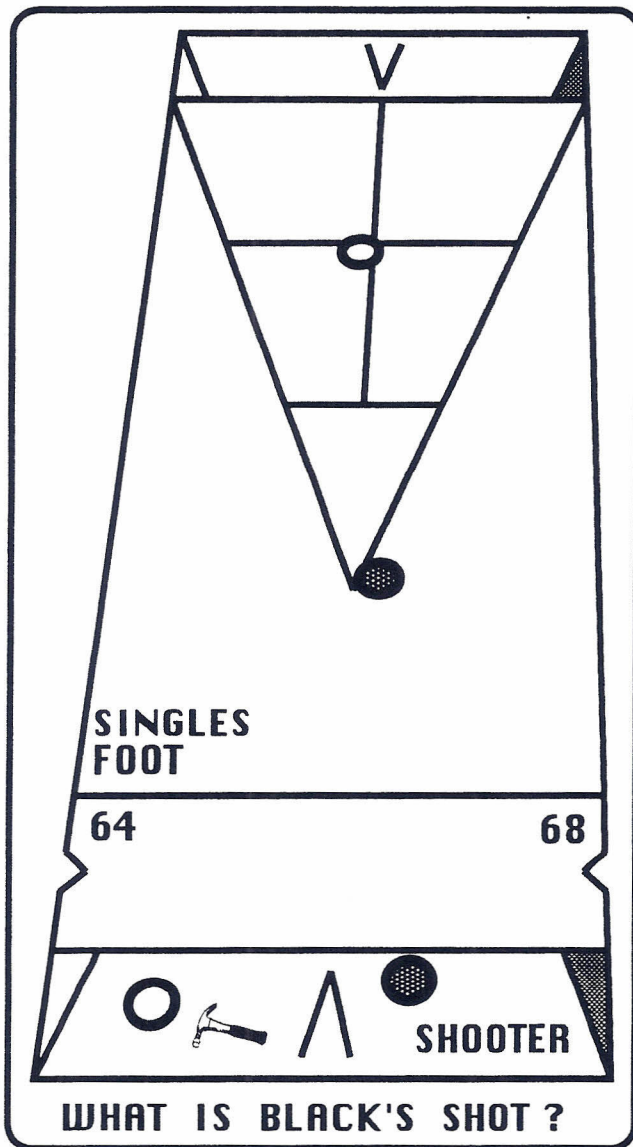
Actually, if I tried the shot, I'd try to shoot about a foot short of the eight. If I made my shot, I'd have the liner on the cross covered and the game would still be alive for sure. If I shot a little hard by mistake, I'd have a short 8, and even better spot. That's a can't-go-wrong shot selection. I love those, shots in which a less than perfect shot gets a better result than a perfect one. Hard to lose on that.

So I certainly agreed with Dave that he had a great shot choice in mind. Yet at the same time, I'll say that if I had a good feel of my Tampa hiding route, I'd go for the game. Well then, maybe I wouldn't.....or maybe.. Hope I don't face it!

Thanks for the contribution Dave, we appreciate it.

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GOD'S FAVORITE

What do Job and the Bible have to do with shuffleboard? Well, probably nothing; God has more important things to take care of than our shuffleboard games. On the other hand, I went to the local theater players last night and saw "God's Favorite", a Neil Simon play about a modern day Job. And it carried a message for shufflers, at least indirectly.

In "God's Favorite", the lead character gets his faith tested by God. He loses his job, his fortunes, and his health. Yet he never gives up his faith. In the end, because of this, God rewards his faith and gives him back his fortunes and health and son.

So how do I tie theater and the Bible to shuffleboard? Well, it's like this. In every game we will have bad luck. Things will go wrong no matter how hard we try to prevent that. A good shot will bounce around and cause a large loss; the opponent will make an awful shot that works out well for him; a disc from the next court comes over and causes a play-over when we have an opponent in a double kitchen; the wind blows our cue on a crucial shot; we'll have our opponent in a jam and he'll get out of it with some kind of miracle. We've all seen this. Sometimes it seems like the luck will never change.

Howard Hawkins, one of the greats of the game, used to say, "Shuffleboard is the most 'aggravatiniest' game man ever invented." He likely was right. Sometimes no matter how hard we try and no matter how well we play, the discs don't go our way and disasters happen. I think we've all been there.

Well, the lesson is: Don't lose faith. If we hang in there, sooner or later things will start to come our way. As they say, "The worm will turn." On the other hand, if we let the bad breaks upset us and we start making dumb shots in our frustration, the worm will keep going the same way, it will never turn.

Years ago I developed a special philosophy. I went into every game figuring that there would be at least one disaster, maybe two. I positioned myself mentally to expect to have a fame where I got 10-off and my opponent got 15, or even 22. Once I expected this, once I recognized it would likely happen even in a game in which I palyed well, I wasn't to disgruntled when it happened. I knew that such a disaster was just part of every game and that if I kept a cool head, I could keep on trying and that sooner or later, I might win. I believed I could keep scoring and stay in the game and that I might even see my opponent have a disaster for himself.

Last year in a major doubles tournament, I lost the first match. Of course I was immediately asked by my friend Bob Douthit, who saw the result, "What happened." I said, "I've never played so well and gotten such bad results. Seems like every break went to my opponent." "What are you going to do?" asked Bob. "I'm going to keep right on the same track. If I'm shooting this well, I'm not going to change a thing. Sooner or later I'll get the breaks." My answer came true as my partner and I won the consolation and then I won the next two tournaments besides.

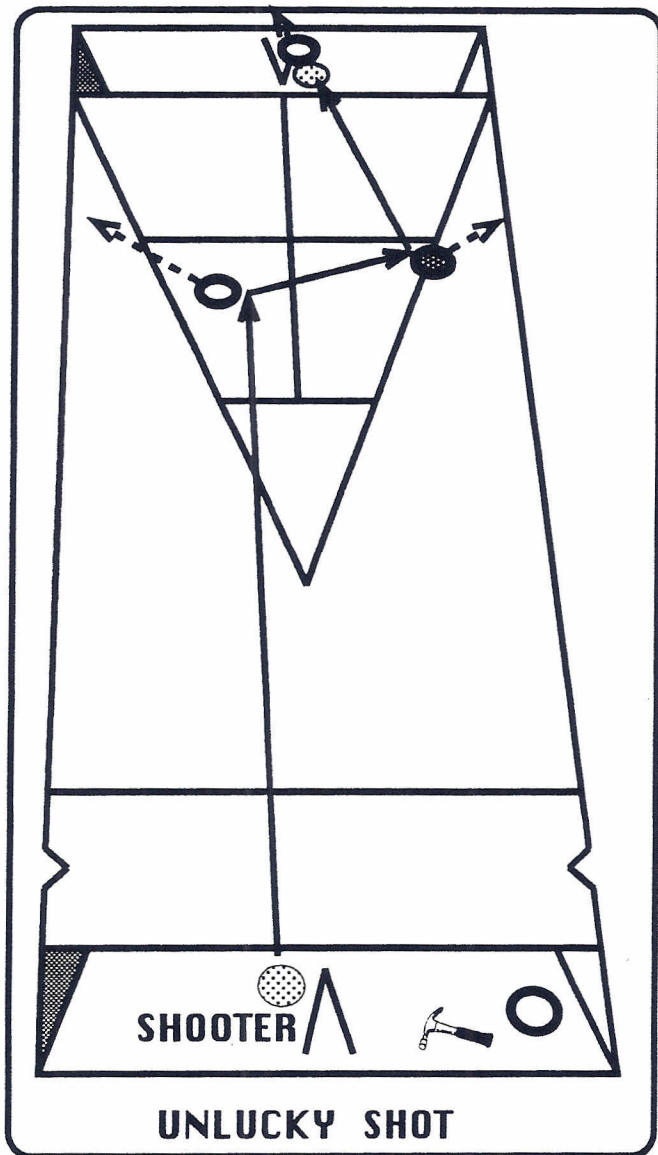
After losing that first round game because of bad breaks, I won my next 17 matches, an amazing streak against the best shufflers in the sport. It took a lot of breaks to do that. One great opponent missed a 7 and went into the kitchen on his hammer; another missed an open ten; one had a terrible day. I was shooting well and I was lucky. I made hammers and combinations, and my hides were great. On one shot, I went from 15 for the opponent to 15 and 10-off for me.

The message here is to hang in there, have faith. Don't give up because everything seems to be against you. Sooner or later, it will be better.

The diagram shows an unlucky shot that reverses 20 points. But remember, luck will even out.

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3q97-07



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BUBBLE

I'm writing this in early March of 1997. Early this evening the NCAA will announce the 64 teams that will be in the big March Madness Tournament. Some are in from conference championships. Some are shoe-ins because they had fine records. That covers about 50 of the spots. For the last 14 spots there are maybe 20 who think they deserve to play but, since there are more teams than spots, some won't make it. These teams that might make it or might not make it are said to be on the bubble.

Right now I'm on a bubble. One of my favorite things in all shuffleboard is the International Tournament. Canada, Japan, and the USA, and we hope more countries some day, send teams of women shufflers and men shufflers. It's competition, but it's more than that. It's ceremony, pageantry, patriotism, and world peace. It's a great experience to meet folks from other countries and to really get to know them personally.

I've been involved in the International from the start when my good friend Howard Hawkins created the event and staged the first one in Muskegon, Michigan. I wasn't there but I heard about the plans and encouraged Howard. Finally in 1988, when it was played in Japan, I got to be on the team. I loved it and loved Japan. I became friends with many of the players and because I won all my games, they very carefully studied me. I played again at Mesa in 1992 and in 1995 was non-playing co-host, as they all traveled to my home location at Lakeside, Ohio. It was a dream come true to have this tournament in our community and we did it up proper.

Now this year it's to be in Hendersonville, North Carolina, A wonderful summer shuffleboard Mecca. I've heard their plans and I know it will be a gala event with a downtown parade planned. Their goal seems to be to host it even better than Lakeside did. I hope they do just that. It will be great spirited fun. My friends from Canada and Japan will be there and I'm anxious to see them.

The problem is that I, of course have to make the team. And I'm on the bubble. That is, I may or I may not be chosen to play. All the 14 states of the National Association want to send players. Some of the players are chosen by play offs, some by recent record, some by willingness to travel, some maybe by politics. All the states need to be represented, but at the same time, the USA needs to field winning teams. My home state, Ohio, has chosen others who have never gone but are fine players. So I'm left out there and must rely on what amounts to an at large berth. So you can see I'm anxious.

Now you are reading this in mid-August and the team has been chosen long ago. So you know whether or not I made it. Either way, go to Hendersonville and watch this event. You'll see great play and you'll have a great time.

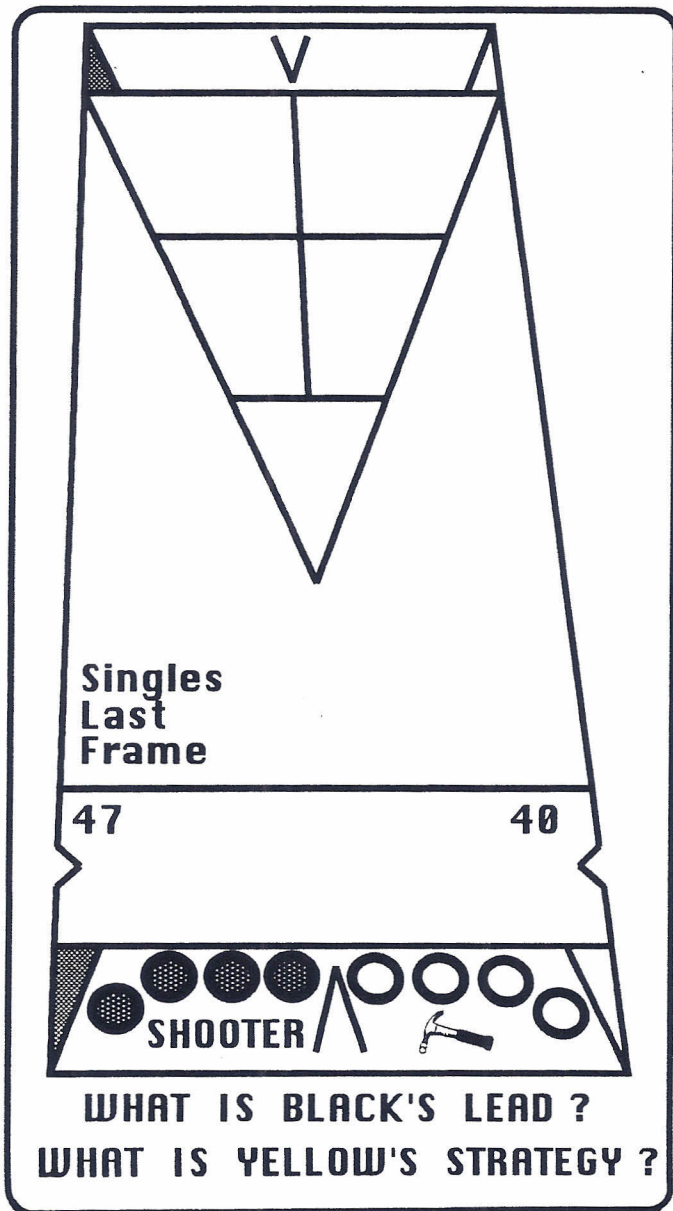
In the International each country sends eight to 12 men and eight to 12 women. There are 16 rounds with eight players from each team playing each round. That all adds up to 168 games for each team and the country with the most wins in each division is the winner. International rules call for games of 16 frames with players changing color in the middle of each game.

John Barnett, Jr. is the President of the International and under his strong leadership I'm sure it will be a great event. It's exciting to think of possible growth of shuffleboard around the world. Australia has a continuing interest as does Zimbabwe. Ireland has courts and now Brazil has been heard from and indicates they may want to have a tournament. Wouldn't it be fun to have eight or 10 countries send teams? Olympics next?

Post script. I did make the team as the alternate from Florida. As I add this PS I am training hard so I'll do a proper job as I represent the country I love.

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CUE TIPS

Like many shufflers, I'm interested in my cue. Is it the right one? Is it right for me? Should it be stiff or limber? What runners or cue tips are the best? All shufflers want to know about cues. So today I have for you--some cue tips.

Years ago I asked the great Web Smith what he looked for in a cue. His answer was, "Stiffness." I think he's right. Most shafts made of aluminum or fiberglass are pretty stiff and are fine to play with. I used to say to avoid shafts that flex or whip but now I have to qualify that. I use a very flexible cue, called the whip, when the wind is blowing across the court. It's shaft is so small in diameter that the wind won't catch it. Others, like masters player Mike Vassalotti, are using it successfully everyday, windy or not. Old bamboo shafts give a nice feel, but they often are limber and have been known to break at exactly the wrong time.

Swivel tips were developed by Sam Allen several years ago and most shufflers have found them superior to the old fixed runners. A few experts use rider cues and are successful with them, so they must be OK, but I have tried them several times and find them uncomfortable. Sam Allen also developed a wheel runner a few years ago. It was great in a wind, but it was too hard to steer during the shot and I know no one who uses one regularly, but I know several who have fun with them in non-tournament games..

Don't neglect the end of the cue that goes in your fingers, that is the end that has the rubber or plastic cane tip on it. Get one that fits your hand and fingers and that you are comfortable using. I like a larger flange on the end so I don't let go of it at the finish of my shot and I like a small one because I have small hands. I usually take a knife and shape it to suit my taste, that is, I customize mine a little. Then I work it over to give it a smooth surface that slides in my fingers easily.

It's very important to own your own cue. The cues provided by clubs are just what they are called, "clubs." They are OK for vacationers or motel guests, but all club players and above should get a personal cue. Sam Allen in Seminole, Florida, has the world's greatest collection of cues and his prices are modest. His shop has experienced craftsmen. All the experts use his cues. Buy your own and take care of it.

Like many shufflers, I have several cues. When we drive between Ohio and Florida, my wife always says, "Why do you have to take so many cues," I answer, "I'm only taking a few, I left most of them in the garage." I have old ones, new ones, spare ones, loaners for guests, lucky ones, unlucky ones, winners and losers. I have a collapsible for air travel, Sam's latest design for trial, and my current favorite for tournament play. And a spare or two or three.

Back in 1936, we didn't have aluminum or Fiberglas or Sam's inventiveness. Nonetheless, we wanted our own personal cues. Ross Mullin, a retired contractor, found some aluminum, melted it down, and poured it into a mold to make a "C" type cue head. He drilled and treaded the ends and used one inch sections of broom handles for tips. He searched fishing stores for bamboo poles that were straight. Then he cut them to size, and painted decorative bands at the bamboo ridges and finally varnished the whole thing. Each was distinctive. We had fun and shot well.

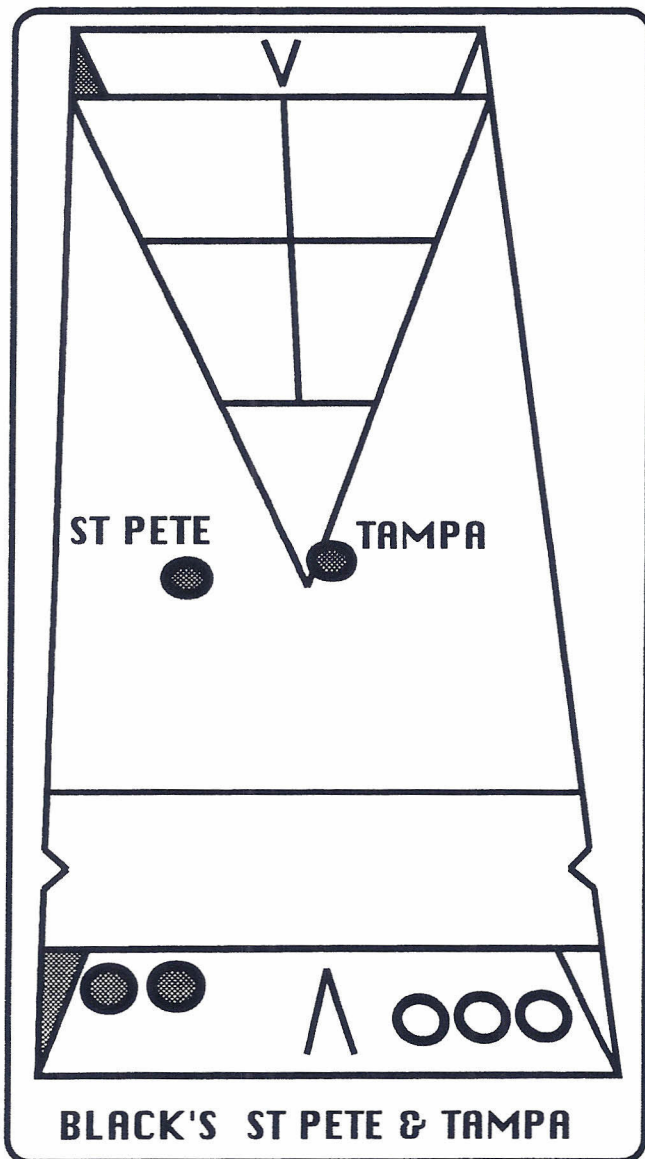
He sold them for \$2 and when I was about seven, I got one for my birthday. What a thrill. I slept with it and I still have it. I put lucky marks on it but I never rubbed it with a chicken bone or had it blessed. I guess maybe I did kiss it a couple times when it did well and more than once threw it into the nearby bushes, or at my sister.

In sunmmary, buy several cues of your own, pick your favorite, make it lucky, and give it TLC.

New readers ask what we mean by St Petes and Tampa. These are shown in today's diagram.

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(Please do not publish before this date)

PRE-GAME SHOTS

Some shufflers call them practice shots; but they're not. They are to learn about the court and the discs. I'm talking about the eight shots a player gets to take before a game. These can be the most important shots of the match. They aren't shooting practice, they are serious learning shots.

Most shufflers, when they shoot first, try a St Pete hide, using partner's cue tip as a surrogate St Pete. Then with partner placing discs to help, they shoot a Tampa hide, a double on an 8/8 liner, and finally, replace a deep 10. When they shoot second, they have partner line up four 7s in the four corners of the 7s and they shoot at those. On each of the eight shots they read the court drifts and try to detect slow or fast discs.

Some think that's all there is to it. Well, if they do, they will be short some valuable information. For the experts, the pre-game starts before the eight shots and extends into the game. Besides that, the eight standard shots must be shot in just certain ways. And even beyond that, there are variations on the basic eight.

The best head start on all this is to have prior knowledge of the court and even the discs. Having played the court previously helps, or even just talking to someone who has played it can be useful. Next look at the court. Are there cracks? Holes? Is the glass even? Turn over the discs and look for uneven wear and chips that will make the discs run different from each other.

Next, if you have new beads, before you do anything, you'll want to send the discs down the court in pairs. Don't do it casually though. Shoot the 1 and 2 discs together and then the 3 and 4. Watch to see if one is faster or slower. Watch your opponent's discs, looking for speed differences in them too. Then partner should make-up different pairings, depending on how your pairs had gone. Maybe he'll pair 1/4 and 2/3.

Also before the eight shots, there are two shots for court speed (new glass or old glass). Never pass these up unless you already know something your opponents don't. Now don't just shoot these any old way and any old place. Pick the two discs you are going to use on your last two shots each frame, usually the 3 and 4 discs. Discuss this with your partner ahead of time if you are at the head, because he'll have to shoot the same ones back to you. I did this in a recent tournament and found out my partner liked to shoot number 4 first so we decided we wanted to use 2 and 3 for our speed shots.

There are as many variations on the speed shots as there are players. Some even shoot one from each side. There is no rule against shooting a speed shot from the other color's shooting area. I've even seen a player use one of his opponent's discs but that was controversial. Most shoot one disc down the right hand side and the other down the left hand side, delivering from the #1 spot and shooting about kitchen or 7 speed. They do check the court speed to see if they want more glass, but they also read the drift down each side of the up and down line and get a feel for disc's differences if there are any. By all means, watch your opponent's discs.

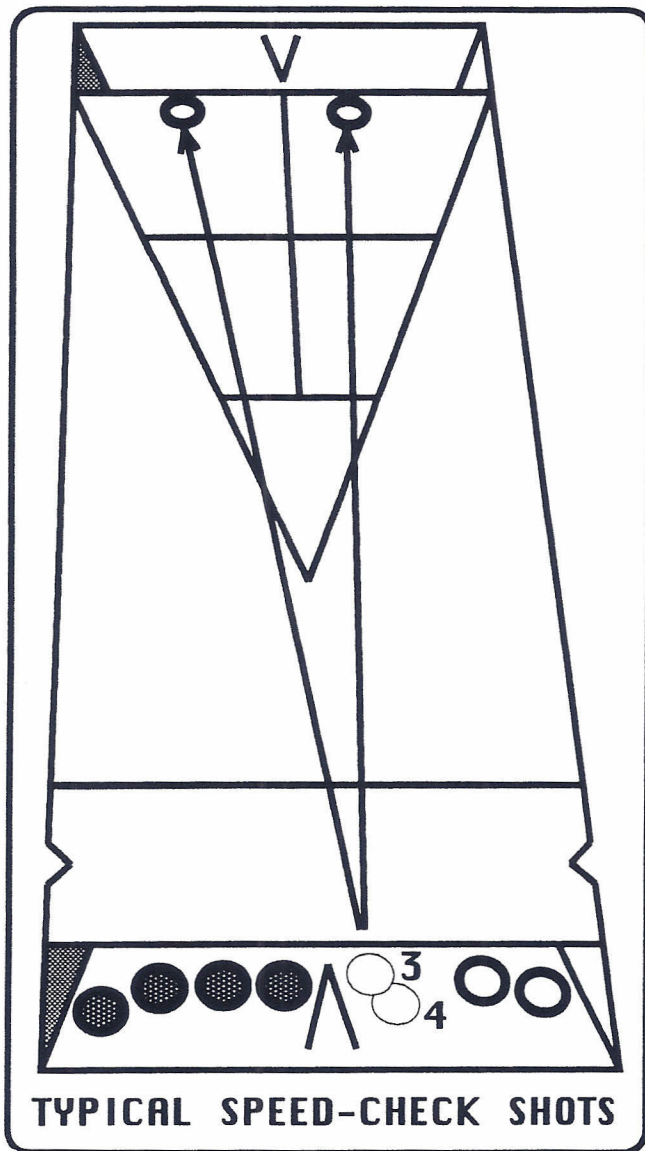
Some players use the speed shots to test the outside of the court. Jay Snoddy used to use one them to shoot from #4 across the up/down line to see if discs would slide over it or get stuck on it. Often I'll use the first to set a Tampa and the second to hide behind it. This gives me valuable information, but since I don't know the drift or speed sometimes the discs don't go where I wanted and I don't learn what I wanted to or anything else for that matter. Make you own choice, but have a reason, get information, and remember it.

Check out the discs. Most discs are marked with dots to ID them as 1, 2, 3, and 4 (or 0). Often they also have someone's chalk marks on them from a previous game. It's possible to learn from those chalk marks, but the information is suspect. Clean up the tops so you know what the marks are. If between games you talk to your partner about the number 3 disc and you mean the one with three dots and he means a different one, one that has three chalk lines, you'll be confused.

Wow, this is so complex.

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3q97-10



RELEASE DATE: 9/9/97
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SUNDAY SHUFFLEBOARD

Sunday shuffleboard is not Monday shuffleboard. At least for the top Florida players it isn't. Most big Florida pro tournaments start on Mondays. And once the tournament starts, it's dog eat dog, no holds barred shuffleboard. Players go at each other as if their lives depended on the outcome of the games. Only the best tactics and strategies are used. Wrong shot choices are rare.

So what is Sunday shuffleboard? Is it different? It sure is. On Sunday many of the experts arrive at the location of the coming tournament about noon. They want to get a feel of the courts and to keep their muscles tuned up. They gather in fours and play for a couple hours against each other, that is, against the same players they will bump into the next day in the tournament.

They play hard but they don't always use the same tactics they'll use the next day. While they play to win, it is more important for them to learn the courts, to get a feel of the discs, and to try shots they may need in tough situations once play for keeps begins. They talk a lot, and kid, and get up to date on gossip and news.

Spectators will see them maybe change courts frequently, maybe take an extra shot to test a disc, or perhaps talk to partner during play. None of this will happen on Monday.

But mostly what is different on Sunday is the making of shot choices, that is, the selection of shots in a given situation may be different on Sunday than it will be on Monday. While on Monday the criteria for shot selection will be simply to choose the shot that will most likely lead to a win, on Sunday, the criteria may be to choose the shot that will give them the best practice, the one that will help them win on Monday but that may lead to a loss in Sunday's game. They'll sacrifice Sunday for Monday.

Today's diagram shows a case where this is true. Black is ahead at 60 to 30. Play is at the foot and black has the hammer. Black stuck on his first clearing shot and stayed in the seven. Yellow quickly kitched that 7 and held a 7 yellow. The two good discs are split, the 7 on the yellow side and the 10-off on the center. Now what is black's shot? What is his Monday shot? And what shot might he select on Sunday?

On Monday, an expert will surely shoot directly to remove his 10-off. The black's are nearing game at 75 and do not want to suffer a 10-off. They can afford to let yellow have a score because yellow only has 30. It's a straight forward tactic, used by all experts. It saves 10 black points and sacrifices 7 yellow points, a good bargain.

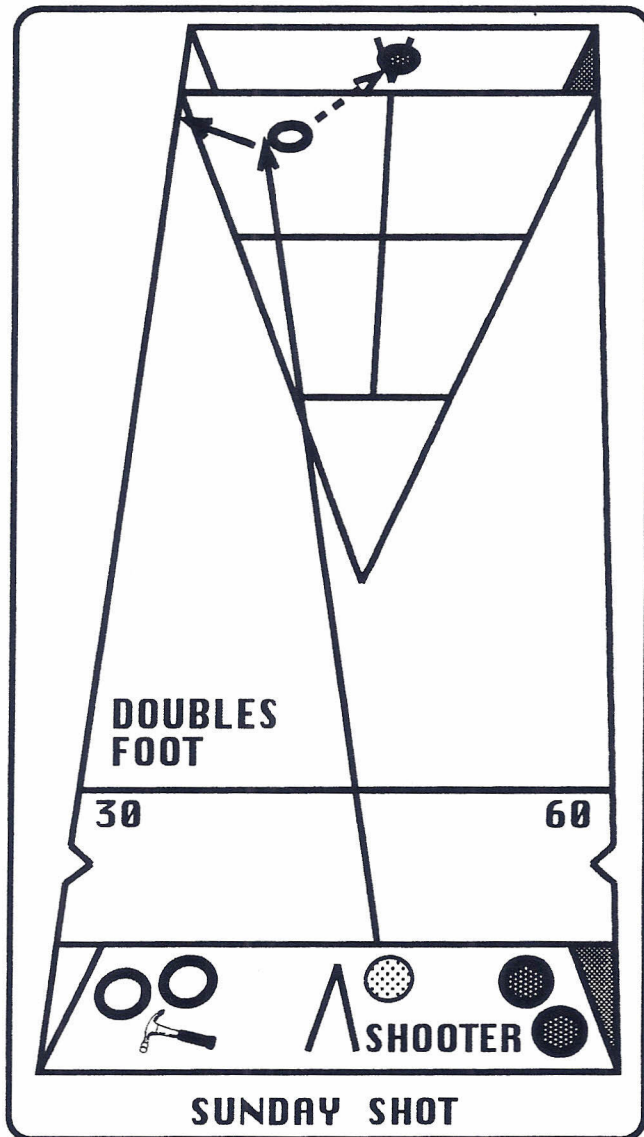
But on Sunday, a spectator might see black try to hit the 7 on the outside kicking it toward the 10-off, hoping to remove the black 10-off and replace it with a yellow 10-off. He just might do it and if he does, he'll have made a gain of 27 points. Hey, 27 is lots more points than the 10 points gained by the Monday shot!. Yes, it is, and that shot would be the correct one IF a shuffler could make it every time. But it's a low probability shot that even experts will seldom be able to achieve. Black is just tuning up his shooting and having fun.

So beginners, don't go watch the Sunday practice. You'll learn lots of wrong shots. You'll say to yourself, "That's the shot I saw a Hall of Famer take." Maybe you did but, if it was on a Sunday, forget it.

When to watch? Watch the quarter-finals. Those are the matches where it's all at stake. The players that reach the quarters are all playing well or they wouldn't have gotten that far. At the same time, they know that they get nothing for that tournament unless they win that quarter-final match and reach the final four. So they play their very best. Go to a tournament on Tuesday, usually in the afternoon, that's usually quarter final time. That's where you'll see shuffleboard at it's best, shuffleboard you can learn from. Happy watching.

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3q97-11



RELEASE DATE: 9/16/97
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DON'T KITCHEN A ST. PETE

Years ago, when I was trying to improve my bridge game, I read a book called, Why You Lose at Bridge. It identified 10 or 12 tactical mistakes that beginners and intermediates repeatedly made. They made mistakes that guaranteed defeat in game after game, the same mistakes over and over.

Shufflers have their own versions of such doomsday mistakes. I've played 60 years and there are several blunders that I've seen endlessly repeated. They led to defeat in 1940 and they lead to defeat in 1997. Suicidal errors seem to have eternal life.

One error I'll write about is playing an opponent's St Pete for the 10-off. It's one of the worst shot choices in shuffleboard, yet I see players try it again and again and again.

Let's look at this closely. Your opponent has set a St Pete. It sits between the point and the side of the court on your side. The rest of the board is open. You're behind and you feel desperate. "I can put that St Pete in the kitchen," you say to yourself. You make the shot perfectly. Your opponent's disc is smack in the kitchen. That's fine. But look, your disc has replaced his disc. He now has another St Pete. He will remove the kitchen and when he does, you're right back where you started. You made the shot perfectly as you had planned but nothing was gained.

If you're lucky enough for your opponent to miss his kitchen on his removal shot, you now have to either score your own disc or cover the kitchen. If you do the first, your opponent can still remove his 10-off, or reverse using your good score, or slam both out, or he can even hide. If you do the second, your opponent can hide a score and cancel out most of the loss from the kitchen.

None of the above get you much--and that's the upside, the most you can achieve.

The downside is that the St Pete usually doesn't go into the 10-off and that you leave your opponent the hiding opportunity he wanted in the first place. Or worse, you give him a 7 he can promptly cover and keep. These are not attractive outcomes.

Now jumping to bottom line results, there's about a 10% probability you'll gain 3 points, a 40% probability you'll accomplish nothing, and a 50% probability you'll lose 7 or 8 points. If a bank advertised an investment with that potential, we'd all laugh and buy our CD's elsewhere. Yet I see shufflers buying into this shot at almost every tournament.

So what should you do? Assuming you're behind, go directly to the board and try to get a good score. You want to play kitchen and that's the best way to get started, the best way to catch-up. Just shoot for a score, anywhere on the board will do.

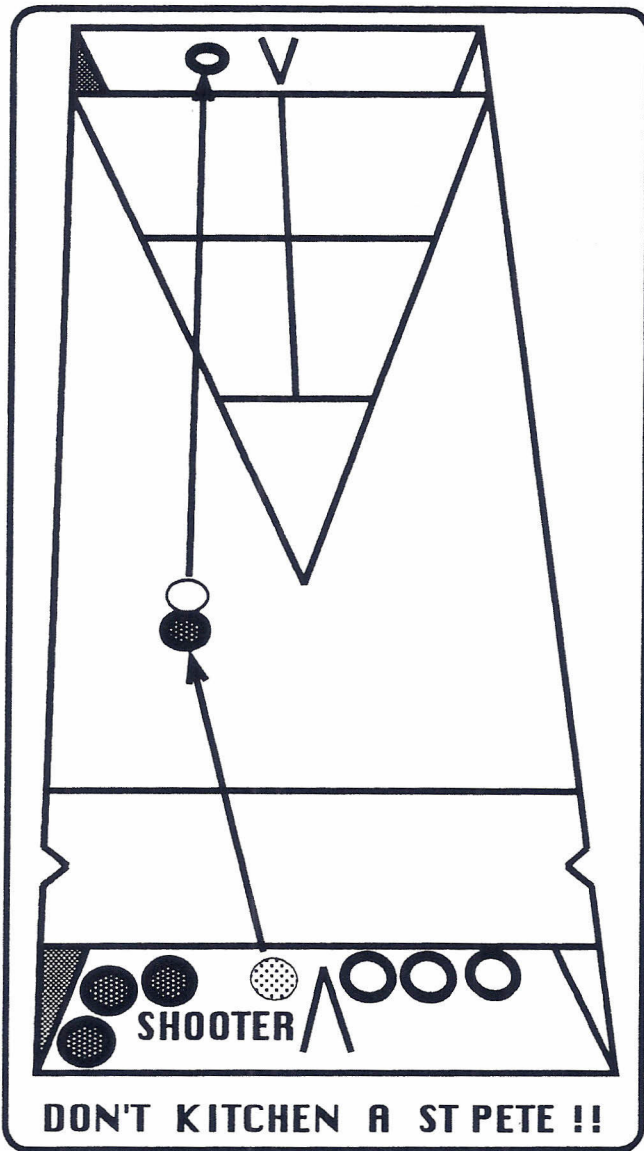
Please note, I'm writing about not trying to kitchen a St Pete. If you're facing a Tampa, go ahead and try to kitchen it. Do you know why?

The next time you're at your club watching matches, be alert for games where someone is trying to kitchen St Petes. Note the results. They won't be good.

Today's diagram shows this foolish shot.

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3q97-12



RELEASE DATE: 9/23/97
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DON'T COVER A POSSIBLE DOUBLE

I used to be stubborn. Then I got lazy. And I got beat. How did this happen? It happened from covering a possible double instead of clearing it. Beware.

Today's diagram shows a situation from a recent game. Black is ahead at 56 yellow to 66 black. The black team, however, must survive the two coming yellow hammers before it can use its own hammers to secure the win. Play is at the head of the court and is down to the seventh shot, black's last.

On the board, black sees a yellow St Pete and a yellow liner near the cross of the 8/8 and 7/7 lines. What is black's shot?

Black would appear to have two choices. He can cover the liner to prevent a double or he can clear it to prevent the possible double. Is that it? Can black have this choice?

Years ago, when I was more stubborn, I'd never leave an opponent's disc on the board in this situation. After all, discs in the gutter never come back on the court to haunt you by scoring. A dead disc is dead forever. That was my philosophy. But then I got smarter. I watched some of the better Florida players who don't often clear (I won't mention names), and I saw that they would simply cover the liner. Wow, I thought, that saves lots of hard shooting energy. Just shoot a lazy cover shot in the upper court.

As a matter of fact, I wasn't getting smarter, I was getting lazier. I was being too lazy to make one more hard shot, rather substituting a simple, soft covering shot that had only to go a couple feet past the lag line. I was just too lazy to make another fast shot. After all, it takes energy to bend and aim and shoot hard.

So I'd cover the potential double, rationalizing my choice by thinking to myself that I might have missed the clearing shot anyway and that the cover was surer. Further, I'd tell myself that many of the experts did this too. I even got to the point that I felt it was the right shot.

Well, covering is not the right shot and it can be a losing shot. Ask Charlie Griffin, he's dead set against it as one of the worst shot choices in shuffleboard. He says, and he's right, that it's impossible to fully cover a potential double. He says the yellow disc must come off of the board.

The fact is that to double a disc, the shooter is aiming at an edge of the disc, not the center. And a cover can't cover both edges. So no matter how good the cover, the shooter will have one edge or the other to shoot at. And that's all he needed in the first place to try for a double. He doesn't need the whole disc, just an edge. Go out on a court and try this.

So the correct shot in the situation on the diagram is to clear the yellow disc and eliminate the possibility of a yellow double with the hammer. With the score where it is in the diagram, that would be a disaster.

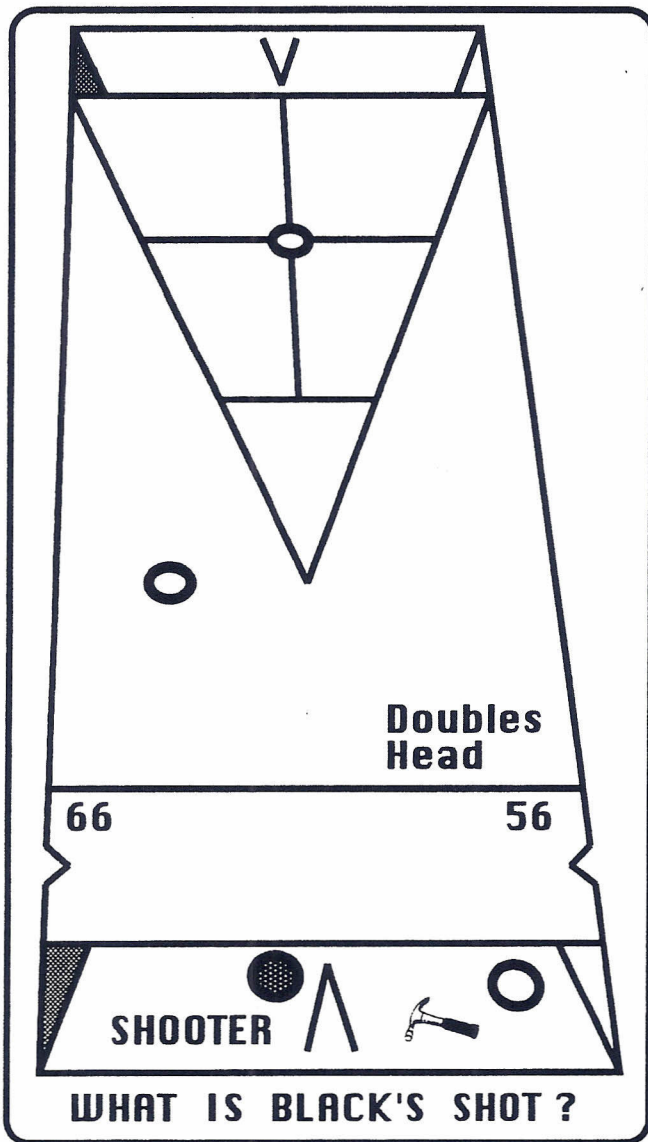
In the game I was watching (actually I was the yellow player's partner at the foot) black covered and left the side of the yellow disc wide open. I'd like to report that the yellow shooter, my partner, then made 14 and that I made my hammer for a win, but I cannot tell a lie.

In the game, yellow tried his double and hit it too solid and left both on the line. We then lost. Many said my partner should have simply scored so I could try for two scores, but I disagree. My partner had a nice chance to make the two scores we needed and he was right to try. Even if he missed he was likely to make one or the other. He just had bad luck.

But the black shooter who covered didn't learn a lesson. He'll keep on covering and sooner or later he'll get burned and lose a game he had won. Lesson--clear that possible double just as if it were a score.

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3q97-13



RELEASE DATE: 9-30-97
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DIDN'T PAY THE PRICE

In the 1995-96 Florida winter shuffleboard season, I made 51 points and finished 3rd in the standings, playing only about two thirds of the tournaments. In the 1996-97 season, I played almost as many tournaments and made just 19 points. What happened?

Did my skills, after playing 60 years, finally decline? I don't think so. Was I in poor health? No I was fine. Did I have lousy partners? Ha, that would be a super reason, but, alas, it just wasn't so. They were the same partners as the previous year and five of the six finished ahead of me in the standings. I sure can't blame them. So what the devil happened? Well, I know that answer. It's simple and it may be the reason others don't win as much as they would like.

The answer is that I simply didn't pay the price. I didn't focus my life on tournament shuffling. I didn't do the many extra things necessary. I didn't make the sacrifices one must make to win in the big tournaments.

Florida winter shuffleboard is tough. The players are superb and there are many, many great ones. I don't know whether today's players are better than yesterday's, but they are absolutely just as good and there are far more of them. This is true in the men's divisions where I play and in the women's division, for sure. (I've watched the women often and I always come away saying, "I'm glad I don't play against those tigresses.") To win and win big, today's tournament shuffler must truly dedicate himself or herself to shuffling with excellence.

Now when I say I didn't pay the price, I don't mean to say I tried to do that but failed. As I approached the season, I didn't intend to pay the price in the first place. There are many other things in my life that I like to do and want to do. Though I love playing shuffleboard and enjoy my shuffle friendships, I don't want to focus on the sport and the competitive tournament game year after year. So after focusing on shuffling in 1995-96 and in 1996-97 I planed to play but to do many other things too. I wanted to win and hoped I would get away with not paying the price, and I did for a while, but as the season wore on, I just fell behind the others in my sharpness and lost games, even with good partners.

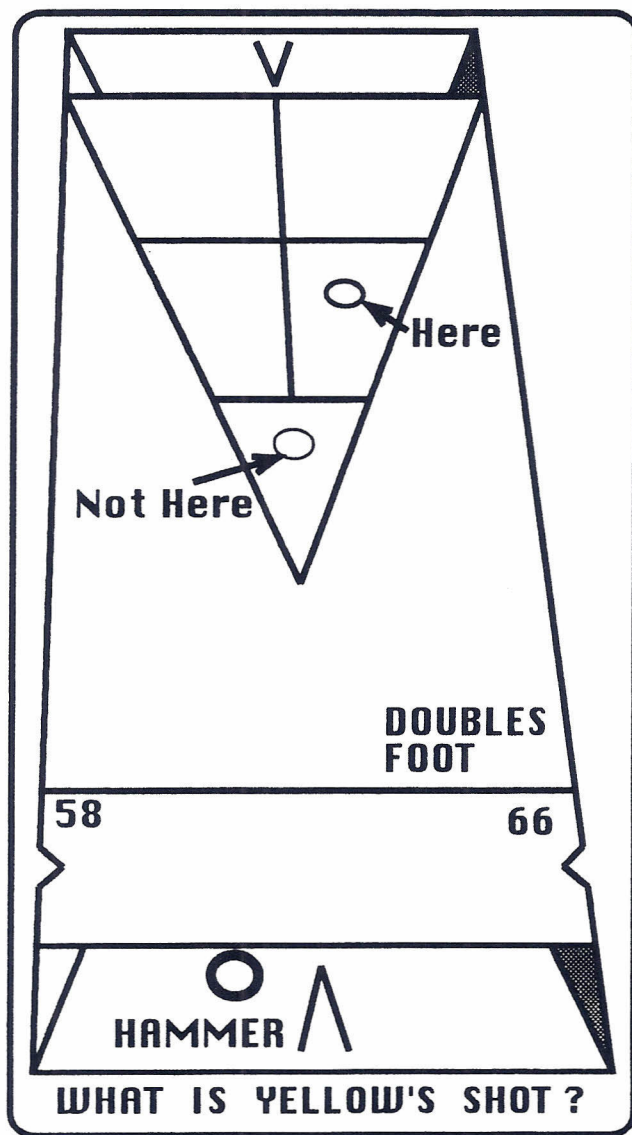
During the winter we took a great 12 day trip to Costa Rica and through the Panama Canal. Before that, we went home for 8 days to Cincinnati to have Christmas with our kids and grandkids. Twice I flew to Cleveland to attend Trustee meetings at Lakeside, and once I flew to Cincinnati for two days of business. Now that's five interruptions in five months. Early in the year my knee hurt so I babied it by practicing less (besides being lazy.) During the summer before the season, I had not biked as much as usual so I wasn't as fit and my weight had gone up a few pounds. Besides, I had played so much the previous year, I was somewhat burned out. All that adds up to not paying the price, the price to win in shuffleboard tournaments.

Now I'm thinking maybe there are good shufflers out there who aren't winning and wonder why. They think, "I'm just as good as the best, but I sure don't win as much. Why?" Well perhaps they aren't focused enough. Perhaps they haven't concentrated their lives on shuffle for a few months. Perhaps they just have too many other interests. If you are one of those and really want to be a shuffleboard winner, think about this. Do you want to win bad enough to pay the price? If you do, pay it. If you don't, have fun but don't expect to beat those who do.

Today's diagram shows a no-no, one I've talked about almost once a year but I still see it and I see it done by good players. The score is 58 yellow to 66 black. Yellow is at the foot shooting the hammer. He goes for a 10. More times than not he misses. And more times than not it comes back to haunt and before the game is over he wishes he'd made a simple 8, because that would have won the game. Don't try the grandstanding 10 shot, even when it will take the score to 68. Simply get what you can, an 8. Even against two hammers by the opponents, if yellow has 66, it can play very tough defense and has a good chance to win. Forget the 10.

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4q97-01



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EMBARRASSING MISTAKES

Last week I used my hammer to block the board. Can you imagine that? I thought my opponent had another shot and I did a great job of covering the open part of the scoring area so that he would have trouble finding a route to score his hammer. I was startled when, instead of shooting, as I had expected, he just sat down on the bench. I knew immediately what I had done and hid my face. It was very embarrassing.

We've all made absent minded mistakes on the courts. When they happen they are awful, terribly embarrassing. Later they are funny. A great part of the game like the baseball player who didn't go to second on a grounder that was the final out in a would-have-been pennant clinching game. I'm not the first guy who wasted his hammer mistakenly thinking it was the seventh shot of the frame. In fact it wasn't the first time I did it. Once I did it at St Pete against Dale Williams. That time it was singles and when I blocked the board with my hammer, I was stunned as Dale headed down the gutter to the other end of the board. "What's he doing" thoughts went through my mind.

Well, I'm not going to embarrass others by pointing out in the newspaper some of the crazy things they have done but I'll tell you a few and also include a few more of my own booboos in today's column.

One superb player, a fellow who was known to be hard on his partners pulled a dandy. It was his hammer and he was facing an opponent's liner on the 7/8 line. What did he do? He used his hammer to clear that line. Whopped it off as hard as he could shoot. I was watching and saw him sit down, give a funny look at his opponent who was also sitting, and then he turned as red as the inside of a watermelon.

Another great player, a many times Masters player once went to his opponent's side of the shooting area to see how open a disc was. Apparently he liked what he saw because he promptly bent and shot the closest disc to his cue. The problem was that the disc was one of his opponent's. Oh my. In another game that I was watching, both team's scores were in the 70's and when it came to the hammer there were several good discs on the board with both teams having plenty of points to go out. All the hammer guy needed to do was to take out one of his opponent's scores, and there was an open 7 ripe for this removal. But, after thinking a long time, the poor guy figured it wrong and, thinking he had it won on the board, stepped up and simply pushed his hammer about 6 feet down the court, not for his expected win, but rather for a loss.

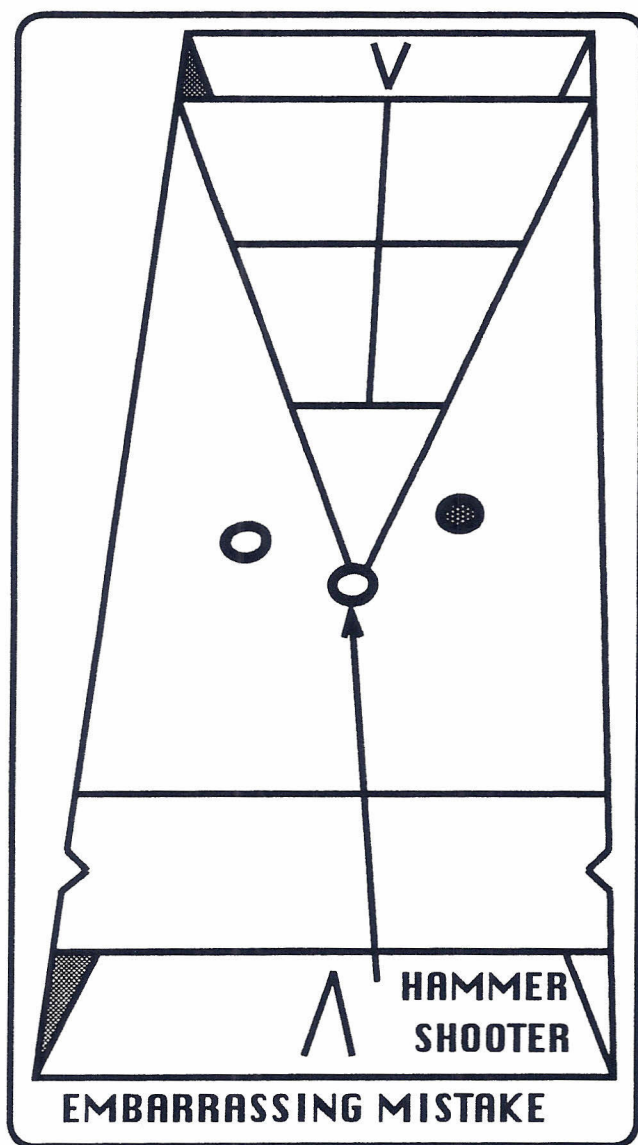
Betty Downing, a fine tournament director I see often at Bradenton, has caught me making every possible mistake in turning in my score card after a win. I sometimes forget to turn it in and go to lunch. Then I sometimes forget to sign it. Once I forgot to enter the score, and once I circled the winning scores so that they looked like losing negative scores. At one tournament, I even took the card from the court next to me and wrote my score on that card and signed it and turned it in, accusing the tournament director of having given us a card with a consolation bracket stamp on it and someone else's names.

Finally, last week in the same tournament that I blocked the board with my hammer, in a game finished late in the afternoon, I took the card home with me. I had to be very nice to the tournament director the next morning when I sheepishly gave him the card. With thinking like that, you may think it's a wonder that I had a winner's card in the first place. Betty doesn't know I did that. Please don't tell her.

Now I feel better. I've admitted all these dumb mistakes. I dare you to do the same.

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4q97-02



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by Lary Faris

RELEASE DATE: 10-14-97
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WELCOME BACK TO FLORIDA

I got here Monday and today, Wednesday, I went over to the Bradenton Club to join up for the 1996-1997 season. What I found was a bunch of fine people to go along with the shuffling. Shuffleboarders are great friends to have. For those of you who are new in Florida, I'd suggest you take up shuffling, you'll find new friends. For those of you who already are shuffling, I'd suggest you take good care of your friendships.

(Now all you readers will wonder why I seem to be arriving at Florida in mid-winter rather than in the fall. Well don't worry, I'm not late. It's just that I write these columns way ahead of time. I'm writing this on Oct 24, 1996 and I know you'll be reading it in 1997, but I just want to advertise how wonderful shuffling friends are. So I'll just put it in my stack and let it be published later.)

I parked by the courts and could see eight or ten being used, the finish of a club draw tournament that started the day before. I quickly saw President Walter Cochran and 1st Vice President Shirley Jones. They greeted me warmly and made me feel at home. I said I wanted to join for the year, buy some glass beads, and also buy a hat so I would be able to let everyone know my club, the BSC. We went in the office, chatted about the summer and the coming winter.

Walter said Bradenton had 23 Club tournaments on the schedule, plus eight Southwest District tournaments, five Statewide and one National tournament. Now that's a bunch and the Bradenton club is growing because of it. The club tournaments are all draw-your-partners-doubles. Club players like this. They don't have to set up partner schedules; tough teams don't dominate, weaker players get a thrill from drawing great pros, and if you don't feel good in the morning, you can roll over and stay home in bed. Club draw doubles are a great way to make new friends. (State-wide draw doubles, tournaments where shufflers drive a long way and stay over night, are another thing entirely.)

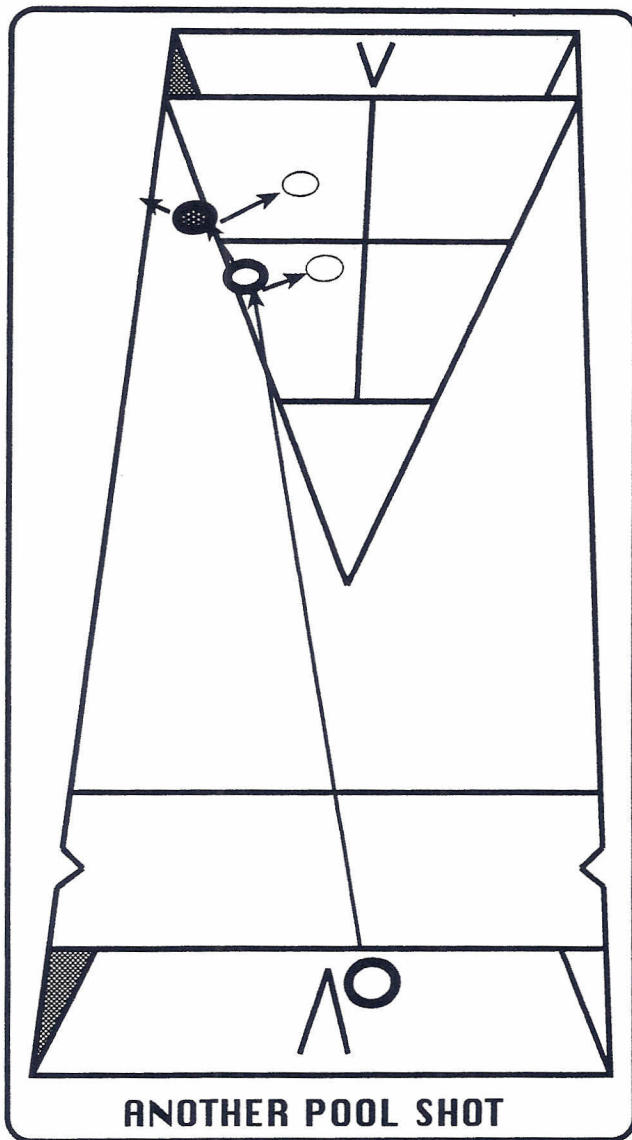
I said "Hi" to many friends-- Virgil Pfisterer and Charles McGee who I've known for years, Betty Hodeshell who I bumped into at Arlington, Ohio, when Clinton's train was there (I didn't vote for him, but I would have voted for Betty). Ray Davis asked me if I wanted to walk a couple of games and I was delighted to do that. Ray is a great promoter of shuffleboard facilities and it's always fun to learn how he's doing. He wants to build a 16 court, covered complex in the north and another in the south. I bet he'll gets it done some day too.

Boy was I rusty. Right away in the second frame we shot 7 discs before we realized we had the colors backwards. My legs got tired, my back got sore, and I was hot-- but I loved it. Florida, friends, and fun.

During our match I had a chance to make an unusual double. I've shown it in today's diagram. It may look difficult, but its really quite easy. The difficulty is in spotting it when it's there. With the situation I've shown on the board, all the shooter has to do is hit the front disc a little on the right. The shooter will go into the 8 while the front disc will hit the back disc and roll into the 7. Watch for this one and make use of it in a close game.

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4q97-03



RELEASE DATE: 10-21-97
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JACQUES BERGERON

I took French for two and a half long years when I was in college at Columbia (a long time ago). It was very hard for me. There was something about French that made it difficult for me to learn, while courses like calculus and physics were easy for me.

Now here I am, many years later, having trouble with French again. This time it's French-Canadians, French-Canadian shuffleboard players. Rosie Biron has always been at the top. Now that he's stepping down and playing less, Jacques Bergeron has stepped up. They are wonderful people, just like French is a wonderful language. My problem is that they are hard to beat just like the language was hard to learn.

And so it's like I'm back at Columbia, finding it easy to beat some players, but very difficult to win against my old nemesis, French, or in this case, French-Canadian shufflers. Like the language, they seem to have a special touch. In shuffleboard, they are more focused on scoring than they are on keeping the opponent from scoring.

The great Rosie Biron was the best at this. His games were always over long before other's games were over because he got many scores and reached 75 quickly. He is a super friend and almost unbeatable. Now his back bothers him and he doesn't play as much. Taking over for him, though, is Jacques Bergeron, who was often his partner and who uses a similar, but still different style.

Jacques is one of the nicest, friendliest shufflers around. He always seems happy and energetic. He dresses with matching outfits, sometimes Bermudas, sometimes long pants, but always looking like a style show. He smiles and chats to all. Like Biron, a really nice guy.

Jacques lives in Hollywood, north of Miami. Most of the state tournaments are 200 miles from there. Jacques loves the game and the competition so much that he heads out each week for a motel at a distant location. Sometimes he leaves home on Sunday afternoon, sometimes he gets up at 3am Monday and drives five hours to play. He knows the closest and best motels at each location and makes his reservations in October for the full season. Meanwhile his friendly and pretty wife is running tournaments back at Hollywood. In the summer, he drives over 700 miles from Montreal to play in the National at Lakeside in Ohio.

Jacques will be in the Florida Hall of Fame, for sure. The main qualifications are to get 200 points from winning and to play 10 years. Most have trouble getting 200 points. Not so for Jacques. At the start of the 1996/7 season he had 214 (we know that thanks to Mary Eldridge's fine summary) and as I write this, I know he has over 50 more to add. But he hasn't yet played his 10 years! He'll have to wait. I'm not sure if anyone could check it for sure, but I believe it when it's said that Jacques reached 200 the fastest of any shuffler ever.

Jacques plays with a different strategy than many, just like the French language is different from English. At least it's different to me. And like the language, his play has a beauty to it. Let's look at what he did to me in a recent game. The game was close and my partner and I had a slight lead at yellow 46 and black 42. Jacques and I were at the foot, he was shooting black. I figured he could have his hammer and then if we, the yellows, could score ours, we'd be in pretty good shape. Then I saw a chance to steal his hammer, but forgot about the French approach.

When I shot the fifth shot of the frame I was looking at a St Pete for black(me) and a Tampa for yellow. I figured if I just filled the hole between the two pilots, I'd have a start on a barrier that would block Jacques out on his hammer. So I shot to the spot on the diagram, #5.

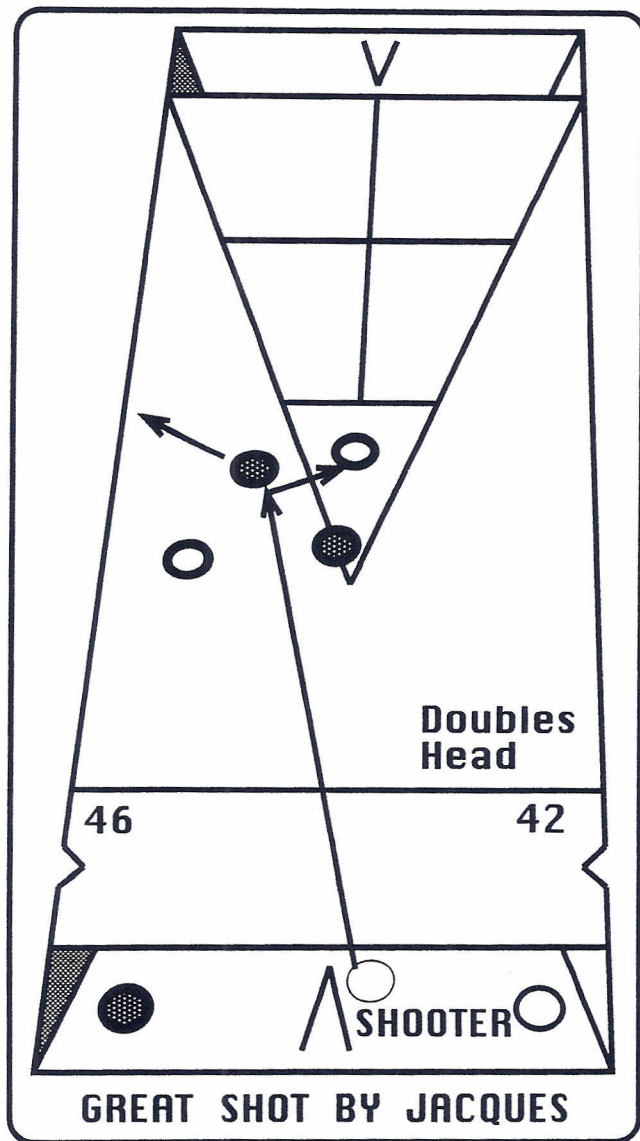
Jacques hardly hesitated. He promptly shot at my disc and rolled into the 10 for a hidden score. I was lucky I wasn't in the 10-off also. He had seen a chance to score that many wouldn't have seen. It was pretty much a no-loss shot too. If he missed it, so what, no loss. But he had, as always, looked for a way to score and he made it. I tried to blast the 10 off the board with a drive shot but missed and he promptly scored an 8 and the whole complexion of the game changed.

French-Canadians are great shufflers. I hope no shufflers come directly from France. They'll be unbeatable.

NOTE: In the 1997 National Championships at Lakeside, Ohio, Jacques was first in the singles and second in the doubles.

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4Q97-04



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KEEP THINKING ALL THE TIME

Radical, innovative finishes are fun, but if you try them, you have to keep thinking all the way. Today I'll show you a good example.

You may have noticed that in this column I never make a fool out of another player (except, sometimes, myself). I wouldn't pick on someone in print for all the world. Shuffleboard is a difficult game and it's so easy to make a mistake. Why point out who may have made one? It would serve no purpose and it would embarrass someone. So I don't.

So if I have a play in which someone is a goat, I either don't name the player or I admit it was me, that I was the knuckle head. And that's the case today. I forgot an option.

Here's the situation. Play is at the foot and yellow is behind at 56 yellow and 66 black (I'm shooting the yellow). Yellow has the hammer. My strategy, a radical and innovative one, was to try to make three yellow scores while letting my opponent, black, have one. It's a questionable strategy, but the situation was special and it was our best bet.

My opponent led with a black St Pete, and since he left me plenty of room to go down suicide alley, I gave it a try and got to the 7/8 line on the outside. Black then hid behind the St Pete. Yellow (me) then went down suicide alley again and bumped in the first yellow disc. Black tried to hide again and hit the 7/8 line. Yellow(me) scored an 8 above the black 7/8 liner, a loose snuggle. Black then made a nice shot, the seventh of the frame and his last. The situation in today's diagram resulted.

I was faced with three black scores and only one for my yellow discs. I studied this and decided, not surprisingly, that I was in trouble and that the only way out was to blast away and hope that two of the three black scores flew off of the court. How many yellow scores were left was of little concern at this point, as my need was to keep the game alive.

What I failed to see was that I didn't have to get two of the three yellow scores off the board. How's that? If I left two of them, I'd have had to make five yellow scores and I couldn't do that unless I stole a disc from the next court. (I tried that once and got caught.)

What I forgot in my panic was the possibility of a black 10-off. With one of the blacks in the kitchen, I could leave the two blacks as good scores and the game would still be alive, or over, in fact, if I happened to get my three yellows. The way the discs are lined up, a black kitchen is a possibility.

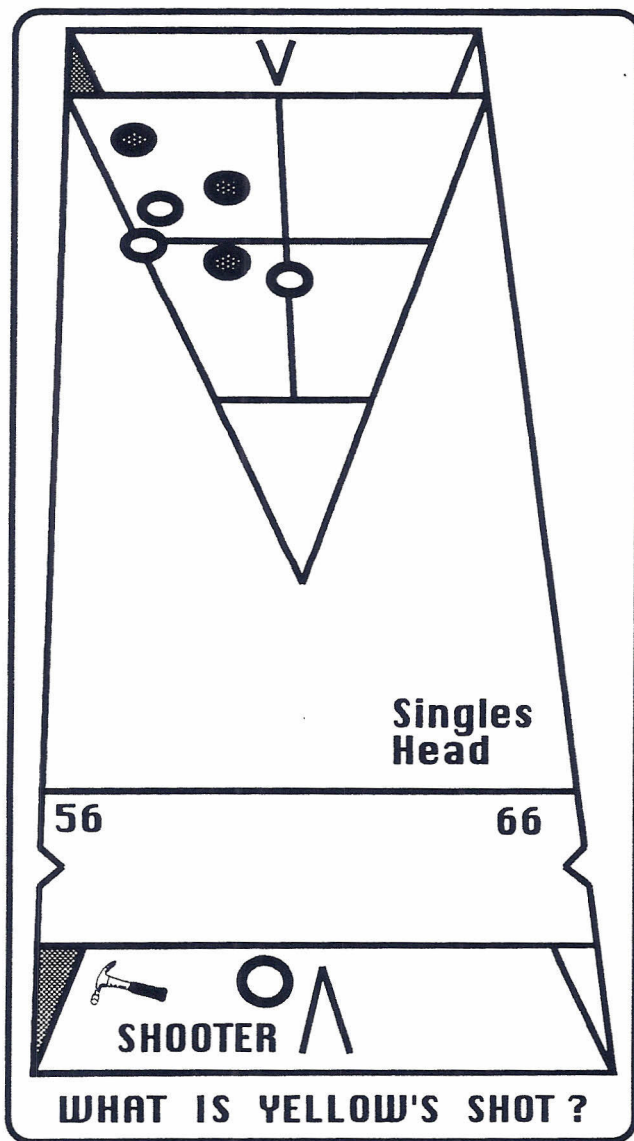
Now you'll say, that's a low odds shot, not worth it. And that's correct, usually. But in this case, I had started the game with a gamble. I had already decided to try to win or lose the game right there. I knew in the first place I was going to try to create a mess so that I might get lucky and make three to his one. So why stop that tactic on the eighth shot? I had created a chance, even though it was a small one, so, it follows, I should go ahead and try it.

But I forgot about the kitchen possibility. Dancing in my head was the direction, "Make three and let him have one. 3 to 1. 3 to 1." Somehow I didn't remember that 2 minus 1 is also 1.

Shuffleboard is a thinker's game. Learn it and then keep thinking all the way to the last shot and a win.

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NEW VIDEO ON SHUFFLEBOARD

John Barnett, Jr., the fine President of the International Shuffleboard Association, now has a video introducing shuffleboard. Commissioned by the ISA, Bob Zaletel and his friends in Las Vegas wrote the script and did the acting. They did a remarkable job and deserve thanks from all shufflers and perhaps Academy Award nomination. Watch for them at that Hollywood ceremony.

The purpose of the video is to give those who are promoting shuffleboard a tool to help in their efforts. The focus is on the basics: the court, scoring areas, equipment, shooting form, and score keeping. Bob promises a sequel that will cover strategy. Bob has several friends who demonstrate his points on the courts as he talks. The quality of the production is excellent.

Now Las Vegas is in the West, so the game is demonstrated as it's played in the West. The courts are much faster than Florida courts. Scoring is by frames with a color change at the halfway point in the 16 frame game. The scoreboards are the horizontal style versus the vertical Florida style. Being fast courts, the discs travel ever so slowly and have humongous four foot drifts. All this is to say, Florida players will see shuffleboard, but not the same as they play it. It's fun to watch.

John and the International are aimed at promoting shuffleboard around the world. The video is available to those who can help in this effort. John says promoters may have a copy to use in their efforts. Folks who want to sell it will be charged only for the costs. John deliberately had the tapes made so that they can be copied and he recommends that holders make as many copies as they want. Borrow one and copy it.

As I write this, I am aware that a number of copies have been sent to Sam Allen at Allen R Shuffleboard. Sam's place is the center of shuffleboard equipment and items. He has books, audios, and videos about our game, along with his vast array of equipment. Go and see Sam at 6595 Seminole Blvd., Seminole, FL 34642. The phone is 813 398 4851.

In the ISA's continuing efforts to promote shuffleboard world-wide, Brazil is the latest country to show strong interest. In 1999 the ISA tournament is planned to be in Japan. Wonderful. I have a dream that someday the International Tournament will feature Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, Ireland, Japan, USA, and Zimbabwe. Wouldn't it be something to be in the Olympics? Go for it, John. If you see John and his lovely wife Marylin, thank them and wish them good luck. You'll often find them at the Bradenton Club.

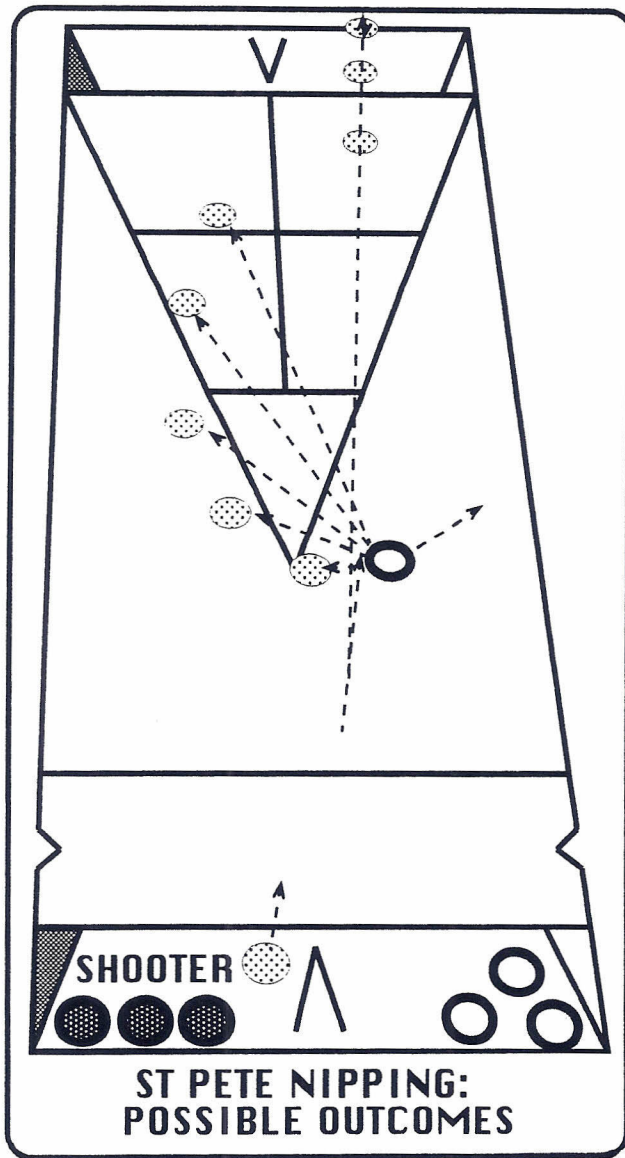
Now for some tactics. I've been studying board players more and more. I started out a board player and stayed that way until I was in my 30s when I blew a 62 to 14 lead to Dave Karaska in the North American in about 1966 or so. In that game, I didn't protect my lead with board clearing, so I resolved to learn to clear well and to make it my strength, rather than my weakness. That I did. Now I'm likely one of the all-time best board clearers. Yet board clearing gets boring and as I get older it gets to be more work. I see others winning who don't clear board as much as I do. So I've begun to study their games, their tactics, ploys, strategies, and executions. I'm learning, and that gives me information to pass on to you readers that may be helpful to you.

So here's a tip from Ernie Nolder and Jimmy Herold, both fine board players from Colony Cove. Like most board players, they try to nip a St Pete pilot on the center-of-the-court side, trying to remove the St Pete and hoping their shooter disc stops as a Tampa or St Pete for the shooter. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't. And they have tactics to deal with all the possible ending positions their shooter disc may end in. But what about the times they completely miss the St Pete? I have to learn how to handle that.

Here's the tip. When trying to nip the St Pete, be sure to use a speed that won't have the shooter disc end up in the kitchen, in case of a miss. Use a speed that is either too hard for a kitchen or too soft (7 speed.) This may sound simple, but I've seen lots of misses go right into the 10-off. Thanks Jim and Ernie.

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4q97-06



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NO CLONES YET

The issue of cloning keeps showing up in the news. Should it be done? Will it be done? Lot's of questions. But one answer is for sure. It hasn't been done yet, and thus all shufflers are different. They all have different muscles, different bodies, and different nerves. No two are alike.

So it shouldn't be a surprise that every shuffler seems to have a unique shooting style. Peltier shoots one way, McCoy another. Biron took a unique short quick first step, almost a hop. Jacques Bergeron swings his arm from out to in. Jay Snoddy was tall, but bent almost to the ground. They say Hans Strieb had a late release, that is, he completed his steps before he moved his arm forward. Jane O'Loughlin shoots pretty much standing up. They are all different.

What they do have in common is that they all have won the Florida Masters. All are proven experts. Yet because they have different bodies, different eyes, different arms, different nerves, and maybe different instructors, they all end up shooting differently. And until clones are here, and I hope that never happens, this will continue. Great shufflers will shoot with different styles.

When we were smart-aleck kids at Lakeside, we used to experiment with different styles. Sometimes we'd imitate certain adults, exaggerating what was unique and odd-ball about some poor oldster's shooting style. Then we'd try different ways to see what worked best for us. We'd bend, we'd stand straight, we'd stand sideways, we'd take no steps, one step, two steps, and a whole bunch of steps. But when the games came, we'd go shoot in whatever way came natural to us. We shot the way it felt best, not even thinking about it.

So it's hard for me to give much shooting advice. Mary Eldridge, another Masters winner, once told me, "You must be instinctive. You can't be thinking about your hands and feet when you shoot or you'll lose your target and distance." She's absolutely right. A while back my knee was sore and I was experimenting with different deliveries to avoid the pain and the flinching that went with it. But then that got me all messed up because in tournaments I was concentrating on my delivery and not on my target and strategy. We shufflers are human, we can only think of one or two things at a time. I have a notion that when baseball players are in a slump they are thinking about their hands and swing and forget to simply, "See the ball, hit the ball."

So shoot however you feel comfortable. And shoot the same way every time. And hold the cue loosely. All the experts do that.

Now, is it easier to shoot a 7 than an 8 on an open board? There are many who say it is, but I don't see the logic. Why would it be? The distance between the first line and the second line is the same, three feet, center to center. I just don't see that a 7 would be easier.

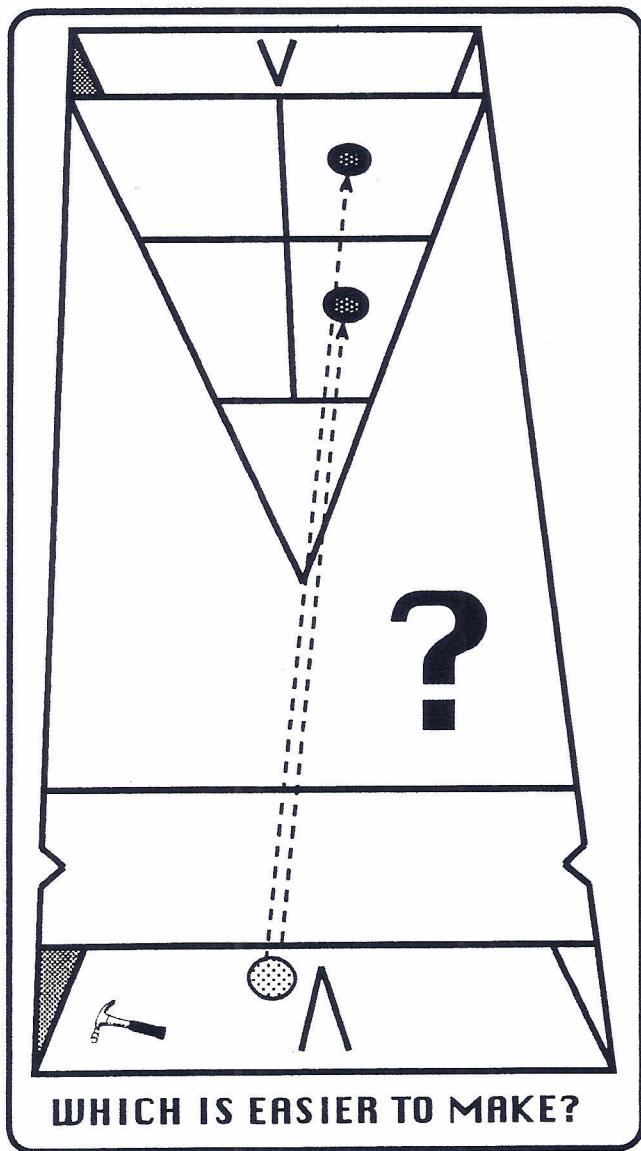
Now it is true that the 7 is wider, lots wider. Yet if a player can't stay within the outside lines of the 8, he's in for trouble anyway. On the other hand, the 8 is closer to the shooter than the 7. That should make it easier.

For me the big difference is in the penalty of error. If an 8-try goes too long, it lands in the 7 and only loses one point. But if a 7-try goes too far, it's in the 10-off. And that's often a disaster. Of course a 7-try that's shot too easy may be an 8, while an 8-try that's shot too easy is seldom a score (once in a great while a lucky 10), but the occasional 8 doesn't make up for the disaster in the 10-off.

Maybe I'll stir up some controversy here. I do remember that when we were kids and playing for instinct and street learning, we'd shoot 7s rather than 8s when we wanted to be sure. But it doesn't hold up in science, does it? Let me know what you've figured out.

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A THINKER'S GAME

Shuffleboard challenges the mind. It's a thinker's game. It calls for clear, logical thinking. One has to be analytical, creative, and decisive, all at the same time and all in a few seconds. It challenges even those with highest intellect (I know two shufflers with PhDs, several who are M.D.s and Dentists, and a number who are bridge masters. Plus there are many others who don't have the formal education but are sharp and smart as they can be). It takes years of experience to learn the fine points of tactics and shot choices and even then, new situations keep popping up that need instant analysis.

Many non-shufflers don't believe that shuffling is mentally demanding. They say bowling and lawn bowling take strategy too. Of course they do, but not at the same level as competitive shuffling. Of course chess is much deeper, but even there, I wonder how the chess greats would handle it, if they weren't sure their knight would go 2 and 1, knowing that sometimes it might go 3 and 1, or 2 and 2. Many of my non-shuffling friends thought, when I started this column, that I'd run out of material. Here I am ten years later with a bigger backlog of material than I had when I started. Yes, shuffleboard is a thinker's game.

Here's a situation from a game I saw a while ago. It offered a solid challenge to a Florida masters player. He went with a choice that didn't work out when his shot went a little awry. He lost a game that was winnable. After the game he had more time to think and came up with a better, fool-proof, shot choice. We had all been pondering the situation and it did offer a mental challenge that illustrates the point that shuffling calls for thinkers.

Yellow is ahead at 71 to 67. Play is at the foot, with black having the hammer. Now right away, before looking at the diagram, think about yellow's goal for the frame and about black's. Got it? Yellow's main goal is to keep black from going out so that the yellow team can use its next two hammers to go out themselves. Black will try to get an 8 with his hammer or to make two scores, for a win. Yellow will try to be in the 7 after his seventh shot, so that black won't be able to go for an 8, because he'll have to remove the yellow 7. Black certainly knows that yellow will likely be in the 7, so, since black knows he may be chasing a 7, he'd better also think about giving yellow a 10-off.

Yellow leads to the 7 and black kitchens him, holding a 7. Yellow reverses. Black then tries his reverse and holds a high black 7 but misses his 10-off. Yellow then, shooting well, kitchens the second black disc on the other side of the board and leaves his shooter on the 7/8 line. Black is getting desperate now and tries another reverse, keeping an 8, but driving the yellow disc through, between the black 10-offs. This is where the diagram picks up the game.

Yellow is in fantastic position now. He has 71 points and the next two hammers. On the board he has black in the 10-off twice, and even though black has an 8, black has almost no chance at all of going out. The yellow players will almost surely win with their coming hammers.

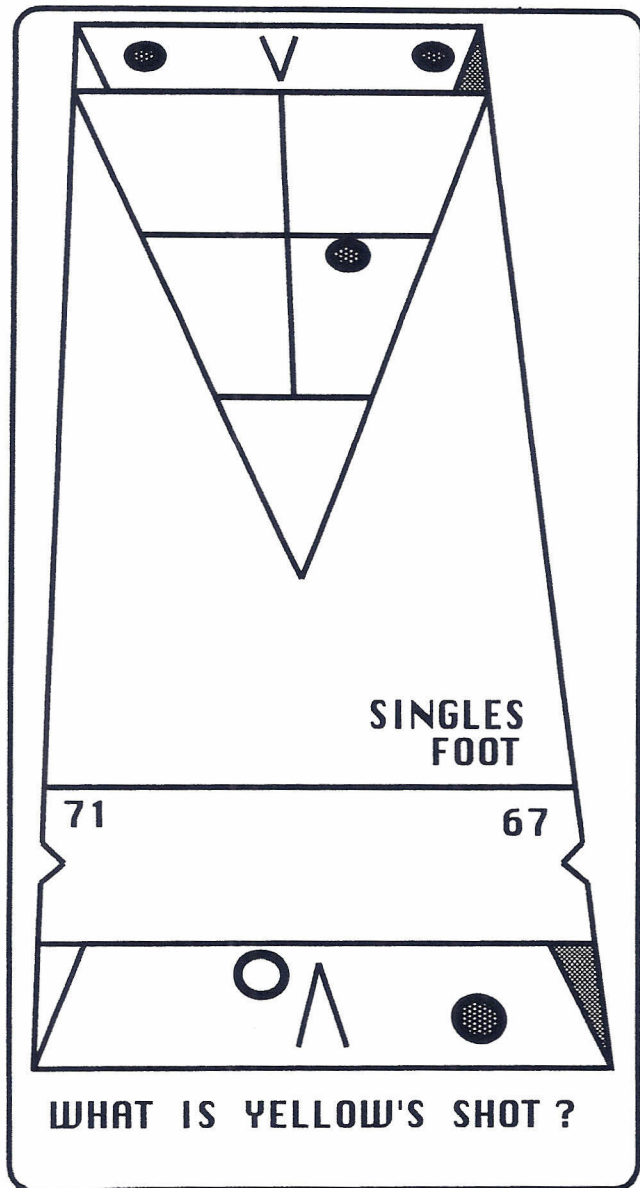
What is yellow's shot? Before you answer, think back to yellow's goals as the frame started. First and foremost, he wants to keep the game alive for the next two hammers. He should also know that black's objective, if he can't get an 8 or two scores for a win, is to kitchen yellow. Now, again, what is yellow's shot?

On the board he already has all he wants! He doesn't need to do anything except stay out of trouble. But he tried to snuggle the black 8. He hit it a little too hard and while holding his own 8, he had moved the black disc to the center line where it didn't protect the back door for this 8. Black saw his chance and went for the reverse and since he had just had two learning shots on that, he made it. Suddenly yellow was back to 61. And when yellow's partner missed his hammer, black soon won the game. (If this seems complex, that's my point! Shuffleboard is a thinker's game.)

After the game, the disappointed yellow player had time to think and announced he had thought of a new fool proof shot, one that surely would have won or at least set up a good try at a win. What was it? Ready? All he had to do with his fourth shot, the one I've shown in the diagram, was to shoot it into the gutter. And that's a shot that will not go awry, that is, if a player shoots for the gutter it's hard to miss, he succeeds almost 100% of the time. Then the black shooter must face the situation in the diagram and he has no good choices. He's about to get beat, and yellow is about to win. Shuffleboard is a thinker's game.

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POOL SHARKS

Shuffleboarders come from all sorts of backgrounds. Many are farmers, others have been insurance salesmen, teachers, writers, engineers, housewives, doctors, lawyers, and all sorts of other things. A lady shuffler is a dentist, a man I know, an engineer. The game has attracted managers and waitresses, nurses and carpenters. And then there are the ones I want to write about today--the pool shooters, the billiard players, the sharks who spent their youth and early adulthood in the pool halls of the country.

I'll name just two--Charlie Griffin and Skip McCoy. Both are top Florida shuffleboard pros. McCoy won the Masters in 1996 and 1997, Griffin has finished well in it several times. Both have over 200 Florida points. They are Hall of Famers. Both are pool sharks.

I've been Charlie's partner in doubles matches and I've watched him light up when an exciting billiard opportunity shows up in a game. He'll stand and study the angles for sometime before he shoots. Then he'll aim his disc down the court and sure enough the discs will fly and bang, and when they settle some miracle will have occurred that nets a bunch of points that few others saw available.

After one of Charlie's great shots, he'll simply sit with an "Aw shucks, it was nothing look." I've seen him play enough to know he's very pleased with his shot. In fact, it makes his day and, as his partner, I have to bear down because Charlie may be so happy with his great shot he may forget he still has to win the game (or we won't get to play the next day.)

Skip McCoy made 18 with a simple combination shot in the 1996 Summer Nationals at Lakeside. To Skip the opportunity was obvious and the shot was easy. To many of the watchers, it was a surprise and a miracle. Skip seems to pull off several such shots in each match.

Today's diagram shows Skip's shot. Skip was yellow and had the hammer. On the board were two discs. There was one of Skip's yellow discs on the 8/outside line just past the 8/10 line. Above it, just short of the 10/8 line and sitting on the 10/outside line was a black disc.

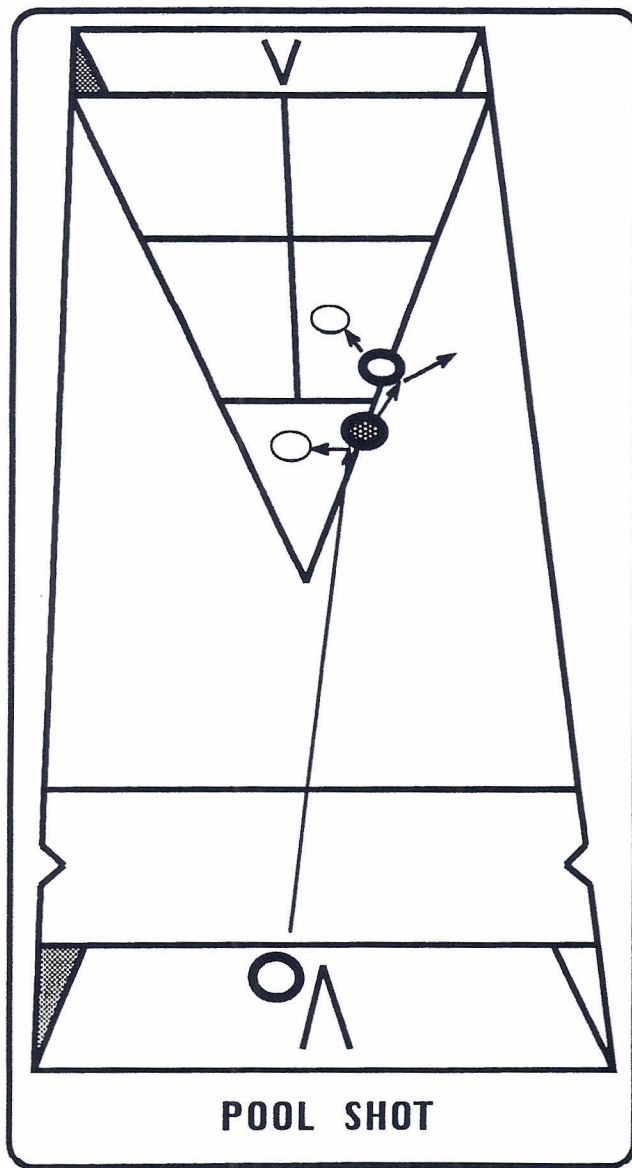
McCoy saw the opportunity immediately. In fact he had been nursing it along for several shots, hoping he'd have it waiting for him on the hammer. He hit the black disc just a little on the left and swung his shooter into the 10. Meanwhile, the black disc moved forward and out a little and hit the yellow line on the right and bumped it gently into the 8. A sudden 18 points for yellow.

So what is our lesson today? Well, first keep alert for opportunities to bump discs around. They will usually be discs that are within 12 inches of each other. Then study the angles to see where you can make them go. Determine where you need to hit the first disc to make the others go where you want them to. Then, when you shoot, concentrate on your target only. That's all you control; you can't guide the discs. Finally, be sure that, while you're figuring out the angles, you don't forget the drift and what speed is needed.

Of course, you can always head for a pool hall, but watch out for the hustlers you'll find there.

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4q97-09



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ROSIE BIRON, AGAIN

If you've been reading these "Shuffleboard Coach" columns for many years, you will surely know that Rosaire Biron is in them more than anyone. He's certainly a favorite of mine, and he should be of yours. In January of 1997, I was thrilled when Rosie pulled me aside and asked me to give the induction talk for him as he went into the National Hall of Fame. I was delighted and flattered.

Biron came from a small town south of Quebec City called Saint Agapit. He was raised on a dairy farm and, after getting his degree in agriculture, he had his own dairy at 18. He had many siblings and later, many children. In the winter it's awfully cold up there in the north and Rosie started to come to Daytona in the 70s.

His father had a shuffleboard court on his farm and the Birones played there often. Rosaire says his older brother was his competition and mentor. It was there that Rosie developed his style of offensive shuffleboard, the style that has won FIVE Florida Masters Championships. It's a style that some would say "rushes the game," a phrase usually used to point out that a player has been hasty and has lost out by doing so. Well, it's sure not a losing strategy in Rosie's hands.

I asked him if he had always played that way. I asked if he learned it in Canada or in Florida. His story went this way. He had played often in Canada and when he first came to Florida he decided to enter some tournaments. He says they told him he'd have to clear board to win in the tournaments. So he did. That is, he cleared board--but he didn't win. He says, "I kept getting beat." In a cute quote, Rosie says, "I am not strong, that is my weakness." He's just not made for board clearing.

So after losing with his newly acquired board game, he decided, as he told me, "To play my own game." He did that in the late 70s and he's been winning everything ever since. He scores and scores and scores. He doesn't chase discs. He does rush the game, but he does it from the start and he does it with great smarts and excellence. His matches are over quickly and he's in the shade resting while we board clearers are shooting our arms off and getting worn out and reducing ourselves to beatable rubble in the next match.

It's said that Rosie always takes the right shot. That he does. I said to him recently, "Rosie, you don't seem to have to look at the score during a frame, you seem to already know it and know what your options are." He smiled and said, "Several frames ahead, I know." He's always a gentleman and when I watch games with him and ask him if such and such was a dumb shot, he'll just smile and not criticize. Compare that to some players who seem to spend their whole day picking on shots others have chosen.

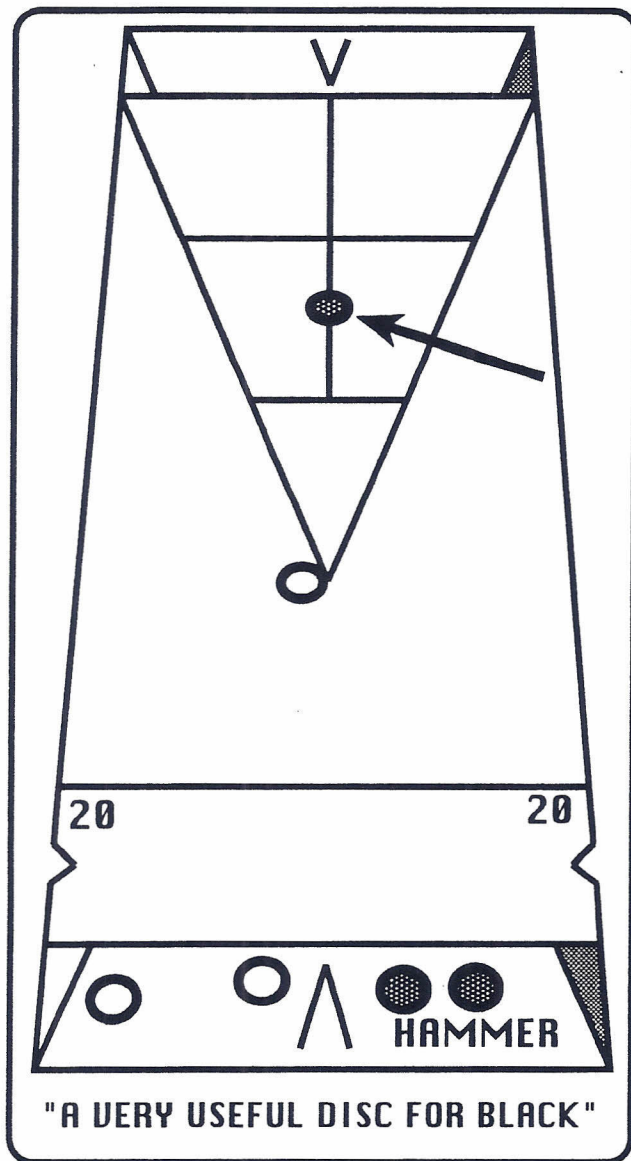
I wish I had a video of Biron's games. I'd love to study them and figure out his patterns. I could write books about his tactics. I'll just leave you with one today.

We sat at Clearwater watching a game a couple years ago. I was out, having lost my second match. Rosie was still in, of course, but his third match was over before anyone else's, as usual, and so he had time to sit with me. The situation I have shown on today's diagram developed in the game in front of us. Yellow had a Tampa and a black disc was on the 8/8 line. I looked at it and said to Rosie, "That's not a score, but it's not a bad disc to have on there." He smiled and lit up and said with a twinkle in his French-Canadian accent, "That is a very useful disc." Just think of all the things the black player can do with it. Darn right it's useful.

When I introduced Biron for his induction into the National Hall of Fame I said that I had seen almost all the shuffleboard greats of the last 50 years. I couldn't say who was the best, I never would pick one out, but I said with out hesitancy, "There has never been a BETTER shuffleboard player than Rosaire Biron." I've never made a truer statement. Rosie is proud to be in the National Hall, but The National Association is equally proud to have Rosaire Biron in its Hall of Fame. I'm flattered to have him with us there.

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TO A TOURNAMENT

My wife and I are heading down I-75 to another tournament. I've done this many times before but my mind is nevertheless swimming. There are so many things that a shuffler must think of as he starts out for a shuffleboard competition, especially one where he will stay all night. Here're the thoughts that went through my mind on this Sunday morning.

I'm about 4 miles away from home and I'm thinking of the things I should have been sure to do in order to leave the house for two or three days. Lock the door, change the air conditioning setting, let the neighbor know, turn off the lights and Mr. Coffee, and, of course, load everything in the car that we had planned to bring. My mind was spinning with these thoughts, as we headed south.

After about 10 miles, I gave up on thinking about the house because we were so far away by then that I wouldn't go back except for a disaster. Now I was thinking more on how long would it take to get there. I tried to remember how long it was last year. Two hours? Two and a half? We couldn't remember, so we just went. Couldn't change it now anyway. Then, I remembered, the speed limit is five miles an hour faster this year. That will save a little time, but I don't drive that fast anyway.

"Did you bring the Ft. Myers map?" asked my wife. I peeked between the seats. "Yep, there it is." Two key things to remember were always the maps--the city map and also the maps of the courts that I saved from past years. Can't forget either, but somehow, they are tougher to remember than my cue.

Last year on this trip I forgot my shirts. I had a shuffle shirt, but Monday night when we changed for dinner at a nice restaurant, I had no clean shirt, Underwear, yes; sox, yes; clean Bermudas, yes; a nice shirt, nope. Someday, I'll make a checklist, I promised myself; but I knew I wouldn't.

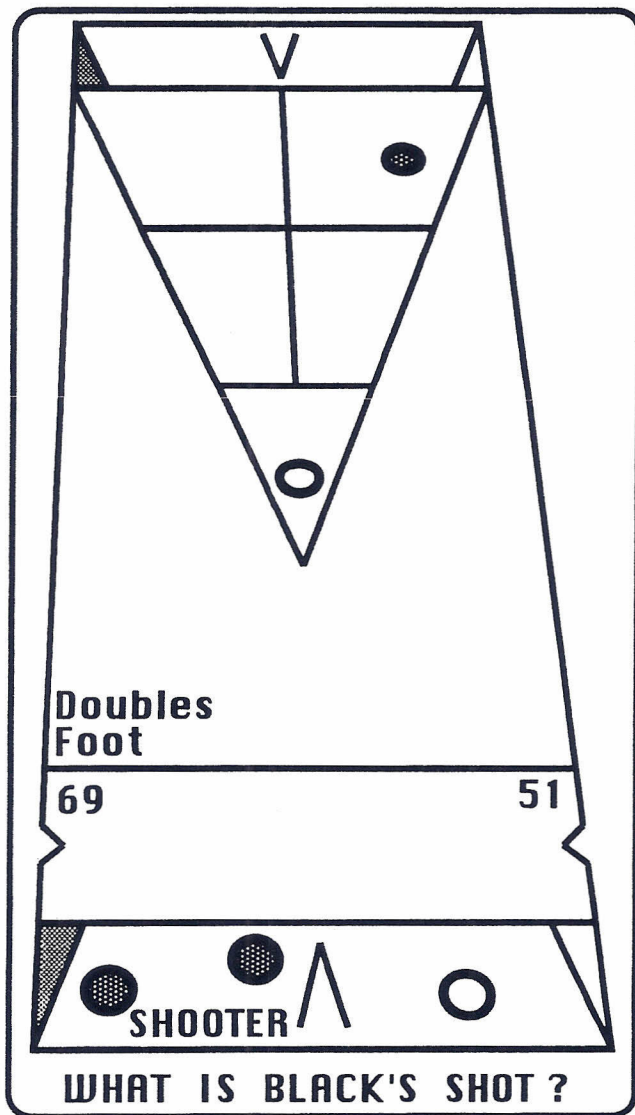
Gradually my mind turned to shuffling. This was one of the four Mondays on which there were two state pro tournaments--one in the south, one in the north. I wondered who would be with me at Fort Myers and who would be at the other, shufflers I wouldn't have to play. It's nice to think that only half of the best players won't be at my tournament---or is it?

We made it to our motel and got an early check-in, ate a sandwich, and got ready to head for the courts for Sunday afternoon practice. But suddenly I noticed that I had on the wrong shirt. I had had a special yellow t-shirt set aside to wear at the courts. It was one that felt good when I played in it. But when I dressed I had put on another yellow shirt, one that looked the same but that restricted my arm when I shot. Oh my. My special shirt was back at the house.

Today's diagram shows a situation shufflers will argue about. Play is at the head in doubles. Black is ahead at 51 to 69 and has the hammer. Black is about to shoot the sixth shot of the frame. On the board he sees a yellow high 10 and his own black seven. What is his shot? Should he remove the yellow 10? Cover his black 7? Or should he score a 7 on the other side of the board? In this game, black covered his seven. But he didn't cover it well enough and yellow clipped it out. Then it was black's hammer and he faced the yellow 10. What would you with the hammer? Shoot a score for a win, or remove the high 10. Yellow tried to score and hit a line. Then when his partner hit a line too, black got the hammers and won. Most agree that yellow should have removed the 10 because it took the opponents to within two scores of 75. I agree. That's a solid principle to remember.

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FATAL ATTRACTIONS

Are shuffleboard games won or are they lost? Some are won by fine shots and solid strategy. Some are lost by goofs. At a recent tournament I watched as the final games were played. They were lost, not won. And in each case it was a fatal attraction that spelled the doom.

In one case the shooter needed just one score to go out. It was his hammer and on his last shot he had an open board to shoot at. In the stands we all figured it was over. The two-time masters player would surely shoot his 8 and make it into the finals.

Whops. Somehow that center line attracted his eye. It was a fatal attraction. His hammer disc went right down the middle of the court. The shooter was the first to see this error and began to bend in pain before we in the stands could detect from the path that the disc was heading for the dreaded line. There it went right onto the 8/8 line, the line properly nicknamed, the Idiot Line. The poor shooter had the distance perfect, but alas, his eye was distracted. On the next hammer his opponent made his score and the game was over, the other guy winning.

In the next game I watched, play was down to the end-game at 62 for yellow and 65 black. It was yellow's hammer and he needed two scores to win. On the seventh shot, black looked at a board that had a yellow 7 sitting in the open. Black shot his disc at the open 7. In the stands we could tell it was coming down the court a little slow. It hit the open 7 but the hit was a little on the side and the speed wasn't enough to remove the 7. It remained a good score. All yellow had to do was to score his hammer to win and he promptly did.

The player shooting black said, "I told myself I couldn't leave a 7." But he did. He was attracted by the prospect of giving yellow a 10-off. It was a game that was lost by black rather than won by yellow. The lose came from a fatal attraction.

And the third fatal attraction I'll point out today is one I've seen many times. I've fallen victim to it myself and, in fact, I've set-up opponents to fall victim. It's simple and innocent looking. It's attractive. It's fatal.

It happens when a player is ahead. Let's say the score is yellow 40, black 54, with yellow's hammer coming up. Yellow sets a St Pete and black goes to the board on the opposite side. He hits the 7/8 line. Then yellow covers the liner with a Tampa. Black scores his next disc, his second, in the 7 on his own side, more to the outside than the center. Yellow, using his third shot, quickly clears it. Black then scores again in the same 7 but makes it closer to the center line than the previous 7.

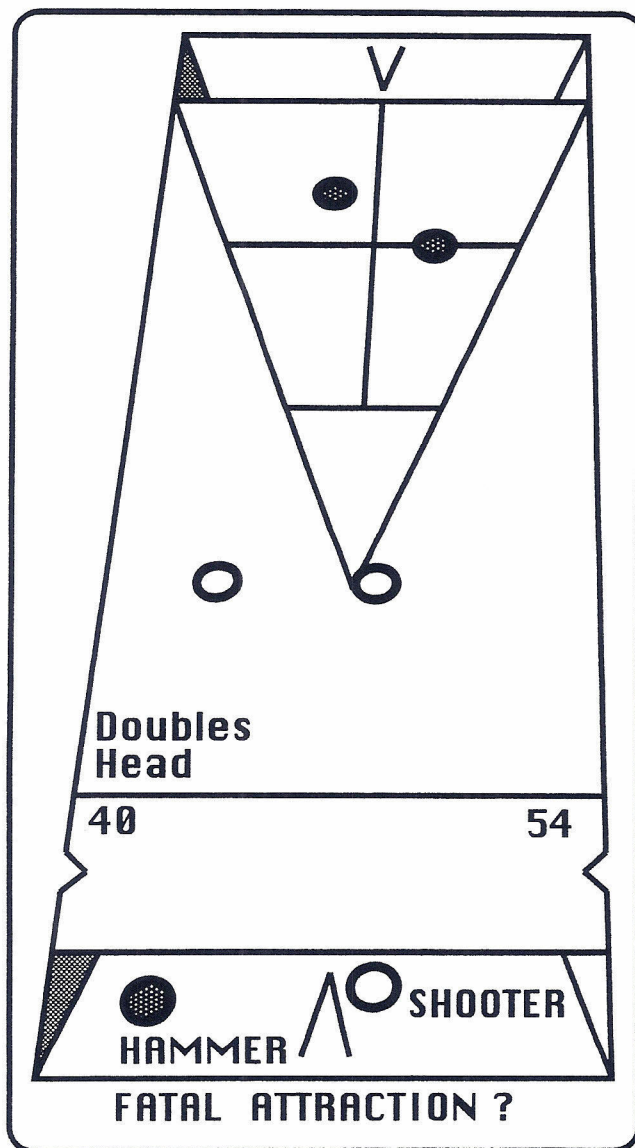
Now it's yellow's last shot, the seventh of the frame. He sees his own Tampa and his own St Pete on the board. Black has a 7/8 liner on the yellow side, covered from black by the St Pete. And there is the black 7 on the black side a little toward the 7/7 line from the center of the 7. All yellow has to do is clear the 7 and let black have his hammer.

Yellow steps up and quickly shoots at the 7. Of course he notices the Tampa and knows the black 7 is a little tighter than the previous one. In avoiding the Tampa, he keeps his eye on it and, of course with that attraction, hits it. What a disaster. Yellow has not only left the 7 on the board but he has opened up the 7/8 liner so that black can double. And when black does double for a fast 22 points, he has the lead at 54 to 62. Shortly thereafter, yellow lost the game that he had all but wrapped up for a win.

Shuffleboard, like any sport has it's exciting games. Some are won, but often others are simply lost. Keep that in mind as you play. And above all, don't be tempted by fatal attractions.

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WHAT'S THE HURRY?

When we were kids playing shuffleboard, we used to sit down before tough shot choice decisions and think about what the various options were and to add up the scores from possible outcomes. We took our time and we made great tactical decisions. Of course, being kids, we also used to shoot basic shots too quickly and would see them go awry as a result of our haste. The lesson there is simple and I learned it well. Haste makes waste is a saying that applies to shuffleboard.

Now here we are as senior citizens with nothing but time on our hands. Many of us are in Florida waiting for it to warm up in the North so we can go back home with family and old friends. We have few responsibilities and we've found shuffleboard gets us out in the sun, gives us exercise, and places us among good people and friends. It's a wonderful atmosphere.

So what do we do? We get antsy and we hurry. We hurry every thing we can. We get upset when the tournament takes 5 minutes extra to get to the draw. We see an open court and wonder why a game hasn't been assigned there yet. We see a player thinking more than a second about a shot choice, and we get on his case. On the second day of a tournament we often ask players to get up extra early so play can start at 8:30am rather than the official 9:00am, even though they may have a 75 minute drive to get to the site. Are we really thinking when we rush things so much?

Actually it's exciting to sit and watch others play while we wait for our own call. It's nice to be able to chat with good friends at the courts. My experience is that players play much better when they take their time and think about their shots. They play better when they position themselves carefully before they shoot. And what's the difference if play for the day ends at 4:30pm rather than 5:00pm? I'll take that anytime over an early morning 60 mile foggy ride.

I know I'm known for being a slow player and some shufflers kid me and others dig me. I like to think about my shot choice, I need to mark my drift card, and I need to get positioned before I shoot. Besides that, I've learned to use the rest room between games because sometimes the next game can be two hours long. And my doctor has advised that frequent water drinks are important to my good health. So I leave the court, always, between games. I am a slow player. I agree.

However, wanting to be well liked, I have tried to speed up my play. I shoot more quickly than I used to. I make my shot choices faster. And as a result, I make more mistakes, and that's not good in a game where one mistake can mean a lose and elimination. I walk faster to the rest room and a drink as fast as I can. People stop me to ask a question and I put them off in my rush to return to the court.

Well, I've learned I have no more friends than I did before. What I do have more of are bad shots and losses. So as of this writing I'm going to take the advice of a great player. He's a several times Masters winner, but I'll not mention his name.

He's a fast player and I was sharing my worries about bothering shufflers by playing slower than most. He looked me square in the eye and gave me an honest suggestion. He advised, "Lary, play at your own pace." That's a piece of advice I'm going to follow. I hope it doesn't bother others but it's my pace and they can play at their pace or whatever pace they want to. My pace is my pace and that's how I'm going to play.

After all. what's the hurry?

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