

Shooting with Elevation

Tom Ross

The first big challenge for most players, once they decide that they want to play well, is shooting with a level cue. Despite the hundreds of times that I have encountered it, I have no explanation for the natural impulse to raise the butt of the cue for every shot. Perhaps that back hand goes up to ensure that the stick does not touch the rail. Of course a 1/8-inch clearance handles the job as effectively as a five-inch one, but maybe such fine-tuning is difficult to manage in the early stages. Most accomplished players can remember learning the importance of shooting with a level cue and maybe some effort to manage the task naturally and comfortably.

Soon after we achieve a natural, level stroke and begin to enjoy the benefits—more accurate shot-making and more precise cue-ball control—we learn to appreciate the difficulty of shooting jacked-up. It does not take long to realize that once we have that shooting hand down where it belongs, we want to keep it there for every shot. It's impossible to imagine someone, no matter how good, approaching a shot that requires elevation without some concern. Each added degree of elevation adds more difficulty to every aspect of a controlled pool shot. But, as much as we may dislike it, some shots call for an elevated cue and we want to greet those shots with some confidence.

When we face a shot that requires elevation, because the cue ball is either near the rail or behind an object ball, we must first examine the shot. Typically we have to accept some limitations since, when we are forced to elevate, our options diminish. The top priority on any offensive pool shot is to keep the table and it helps to remember that fact when shooting with elevation. Sometimes the most

desirable position for the next ball is too difficult to achieve with elevation. A good way to examine that question is to ask how easy good position would be with a level cue. Unless the answer is “very” it will be a good idea to shift all priority to pocketing the ball and dealing with more difficult position for the next shot with the cue ball in the clear. Even if the next shot will be a safety, something that usually requires precise control, that shot will be easier to accomplish with a level cue.

A great rule of thumb on all shots, and a must for shooting with elevation, is that difficult shots become much easier with a short stroke. The most common pitfall among intermediate players when shooting with elevation is attempting to shoot with a long stroke. Set up some easy, straight-in shots with the cue ball about two inches from the rail and the object ball about two feet away to practice a few stop shots. The lower hit required for the stop shot will require you to elevate the back of your cue. You should see immediately how much easier the shot is with a short bridge and a two-inch stroke with a short follow-through. A long stroke is more difficult to manage and keep straight with any shot; it becomes nearly impossible with elevation. Another thing that works to make the shot easier is to elevate a few more degrees for a lower hit on the cue ball.

The extra elevation may add some difficulty with aiming but that is offset by the benefit of shooting with less speed and thus more control. Keep working on the shot until you are hitting perfect, soft stop shots with a short punch stroke. For greater accuracy, practice using your standard, closed bridge, propped up on the fingertips if necessary. Using a closed bridge instead of an open one helps to keep the tip moving straight at the cue ball instead of tracing an arc that moves it upward as the back hand starts to drop on the forward stroke.

Tom Ross has taught over 4,500 students, beginners to national champions. Tom lives in Denver, where he has private lessons, classes, workshops and his famous, weekly free clinic. Go to tomrosspool.com

