

MICRO BRIDGING

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If you've been reading my columns for awhile, you've probably noticed how I'm always yammering about the need for precision. After all this is probably the most precise game on the planet. We're upset when we miss a shot, even though we may have only missed our aiming point by a millimeter. Ya can't be too precise in this game.

Mostly, when we talk about missing by a little, we're talking about how we missed pocketing a ball when it hit the pocket point, or we missed because we were off by a little on where the cueball contacts the object ball. But the miss we're talking about here is the one we don't recognize so often—missing our intended point of contact on the cueball, or simply not having enough precision in mind regarding that contact point. Imprecise plans yield imprecise results. It doesn't take much of this type of error to make us miss shots, miss position, and miss the glory.

There are several ways to miss that contact point on the cueball:

1. **Side-to-side wobble error** at the back of the stroke. Since the bridge is a fulcrum, the stick pivots freely. The longer your bridge, the more wobble error gets transmitted to the tip/ball contact point. If your stroke is not beautifully straight, you'll benefit from a shorter bridge.
2. **Up-and-down pendulum error** from the back of the stroke. Some players drop their elbow during the stroke, unwittingly allowing the tip to hit higher on the cueball than intended. If you don't drop your elbow, you'll want to address the ball with your grip hand at the bottom of the pendulum arc so the stick is as flat as possible at impact. If you grip too far forward, the tip will be diving toward the cloth as you hit the ball, and you may not hit where you thought you would.
3. **Bridge problems.** If the bridge is airy, weak, or poorly constructed, you can miss your contact point due to the cue slopping around in the bridge or the bridge actually moving a little during the stroke.

Of course there are other ways to miss your contact point, but these are the main culprits. This column is about a precision bridging technique. This technique won't fix a fundamentally flawed bridge, but it will improve your accuracy and strengthen your focus.

Golfers have a move known as the "waggle." Once a player is in their stance and is addressing the ball, they may waggle the club head around a bit behind the ball. The purpose of the waggle is to increase feel in the hands as they grip the club, to get really precise about where the club head is going to contact the ball, and to increase focus by directing attention to the final micro-aiming details of the shot, for example, is the club face square to the aim line, is the head the right height off the ground, and so on.

I'm suggesting a similar move in pool. I call it "micro bridging." Once you've addressed the ball and are pretty well homed in on the aim and cueball contact point, come to a full stop with the tip at the cueball so you can easily and clearly see where your tip is intended to strike (you should do this anyway). Now what I'm suggesting is to go farther and get more precise and certain about it.

Once your bridge hand is in the right spot, anchor it to the table, using little pressure into the cloth. If you're using an open bridge, anchor your forefinger. If it's a closed bridge, use the middle finger. In both cases, your palm is down on the cloth. This will give you certainty that your bridge is not going to move.

Now, shake your bridge a little, keeping it anchored. Wiggle it around. See if your bridge can be a little more snug or a little more stable (without constricting the stroke) and then to home in on your exact cueball contact point. This is the "micro bridging" part. You'll find you feel better about the shot as you settle into the final position. Once you're there, lock it in. Your confidence will increase because you will see the shot better, you will know you're right on target, and you will be more focused. Really.