

Pool Billiards - The Rules of Play

(Effective 1/1/08)

1. General Rules

The following General Rules apply to all the games covered by these rules except when contradicted by specific game rules. In addition, the Regulations of Pool Billiards cover aspects of the game not directly related to the game rules, such as equipment specifications and organization of events.

The games of Pool Billiards are played on a flat table covered with cloth and bounded by rubber cushions. The player uses a stick (pool cue) to strike a cue ball which in turn strikes object balls. The goal is to drive object balls into six pockets located at the cushion boundary. The games vary according to which balls are legal targets and the requirements to win a match.

[Editorial comments on the U.S. English version: The masculine gender has been used for simplicity of wording and is not intended to specify the gender of the players or officials. The word “game” is used to refer to a discipline such as nine ball rather than a rack or a match.]

1.1 Player’s Responsibility

It is the player's responsibility to be aware of all rules, regulations and schedules applying to competition. While tournament officials will make every reasonable effort to have such information readily available to all players as appropriate, the ultimate responsibility rests with the player.

1.2 Lagging to Determine Order of Play

The lag is the first shot of the match and determines order of play. The player who wins the lag chooses who will shoot first.

The referee will place a ball on each side of the table behind the head string and near the head string. The players will shoot at about the same time to make each ball contact the foot cushion with the goal of returning the ball closer to the head cushion than the opponent.

A lag shot is bad and cannot win if the shooter’s ball:

- (a) crosses the long string;
- (b) contacts the foot cushion other than once;
- (c) is pocketed or driven off the table;
- (d) touches the side cushion; or
- (e) the ball rests within the corner pocket and past the nose of the head cushion.

In addition, a lag will be bad if any non-object-ball foul occurs other than 6.9 Balls Still Moving.

The players will lag again if:

- (a) a player’s ball is struck after the other ball has touched the foot cushion;
- (b) the referee cannot determine which ball has stopped closer to the head cushion; or
- (c) both lags are bad.

1.3 Player’s Use of Equipment

The equipment must meet existing WPA equipment specifications. In general, players are not permitted to introduce novel equipment into the game. The following uses, among others, are

considered normal. If the player is uncertain about a particular use of equipment, he should discuss it with the tournament management prior to the start of play. The equipment must be used only for the purpose or in the manner that the equipment was intended. (See 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct.)

(a) Cue Stick – The player is permitted to switch between cue sticks during the match, such as break, jump and normal cues. He may use either a built-in extender or an add-on extender to increase the length of the stick.

(b) Chalk – The player may apply chalk to his tip to prevent miscues, and may use his own chalk, provided its color is compatible with the cloth.

(c) Mechanical Bridges – The player may use up to two mechanical bridges to support the cue stick during the shot. The configuration of the bridges is up to the player. He may use his own bridge if it is similar to standard bridges.

(d) Gloves – The player may use gloves to improve the grip and/or bridge hand function.

(e) Powder – A player is allowed to use powder in a reasonable amount as determined by the referee.

1.4 Spotting Balls

Balls are spotted (returned to play on the table) by placing them on the long string (long axis of the table) as close as possible to the foot spot and between the foot spot and the foot rail, without moving any interfering ball. If the spotted ball cannot be placed on the foot spot, it should be placed in contact (if possible) with the corresponding interfering ball. However, when the cue ball is next to the spotted ball, the spotted ball should not be placed in contact with the cue ball; a small separation must be maintained. If all of the long string below the foot spot is blocked by other balls, the ball is spotted above the foot spot, and as close as possible to the foot spot.

1.5 Cue Ball in Hand

When the cue ball is in hand, the shooter may place the cue ball anywhere on the playing surface (see 8.1 Parts of the Table) and may continue to move the cue ball until he executes a shot. (See definition 8.2 Shot.) Players may use any part of the cue stick to move the cue ball, including the tip, but not with a forward stroke motion. In some games and for most break shots, placement of the cue ball may be restricted to the area behind the head string depending on the rules of the game, and then 6.10 Bad Cue Ball Placement and 6.11 Bad Play from Behind the Head String may apply.

When the shooter has the cue ball in hand behind the head string and all the legal object balls are behind the head string, he may request the legal object ball nearest the head string to be spotted. If two or more balls are equal distance from the head string, the shooter may designate which of the equidistant balls is to be spotted. An object ball that rests exactly on the head string is playable.

1.6 Standard Call Shot

In games in which the shooter is required to call shots, the intended ball and pocket must be indicated for each shot if they are not obvious. Details of the shot, such as cushions struck or other balls contacted or pocketed are irrelevant. Only one ball may be called on each shot. For a called shot to count, the referee must be satisfied that the intended shot was made, so if there is any chance of confusion, e.g. with bank, combination and similar shots, the shooter should indicate the ball and pocket. If the referee or opponent is unsure of the shot to be played, he may ask for a call.

In call shot games, the shooter may choose to call “safety” instead of a ball and pocket, and then play passes to the opponent at the end of the shot. Whether balls are being spotted after safeties depends on the rules of the particular game.

1.7 Balls Settling

A ball may settle slightly after it appears to have stopped, possibly due to slight imperfections in the ball or the table. Unless this causes a ball to fall into a pocket, it is considered a normal hazard of play, and the ball will not be moved back. If a ball falls into a pocket as the result of such settling, it is restored as closely as possible to its original position. If a settling ball falls into a pocket during or just prior to a shot, and this has an effect on the shot, the referee will restore the position and the shot will be replayed. The shooter is not penalized for shooting while a ball is settling. See also 8.3 Ball Pocketed.

1.8 Restoring a Position

When necessary for balls to be restored or cleaned, the referee will restore disturbed balls to their original positions to the best of his ability. The players must accept the referee’s judgment as to placement.

1.9 Outside Interference

When outside interference occurs during a shot that has an effect on the outcome of that shot, the referee will restore the balls to the positions they had before the shot, and the shot will be replayed. If the interference had no effect on the shot, the referee will restore the disturbed balls and play will continue. If the balls cannot be restored to their original positions, the situation is handled like a stalemate.

1.10 Prompting Calls and Protesting Rulings

If a player feels that the referee has made an error in judgment, he may ask the referee to reconsider his call or lack of call, but the referee’s decision on judgment calls is final. However, if the player feels that the referee is not applying the rules correctly, he may ask for ruling by the designated appeals authority. The referee will suspend play while this appeal is in process. (See also part (d) of 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct.) Fouls must be called promptly. (See 6. Fouls.)

1.11 Concession

If a player concedes, he loses the match. For example, if a player unscrews his jointed playing cue stick while the opponent is at the table and during the opponent’s decisive rack of a match, it will be considered a concession of the match.

1.12 Stalemate

If the referee observes that no progress is being made towards a conclusion, he will announce his decision, and each player will have three more turns at the table. Then, if the referee determines that there is still no progress, he will declare a stalemate. If both players agree, they may accept the stalemate without taking their three additional turns. The procedure for a stalemate is specified under the rules for each game.

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5. Black Ball

Black ball is played with 15 colored object balls and the cue ball. The object balls are two groups of seven and the black ball. The player or team pocketing their group of object balls and legally pocketing the black ball wins the game. Shots are not called.

5.1 Definitions

In addition to definitions defined in 8. Definitions Used in the Rules, the following definitions apply to black ball:

Free shot

After a foul has been committed the incoming player is awarded a free shot. On a free shot Rule 6.2 Wrong Ball First is suspended and the player may take the cue ball in position or in hand in baulk.

Baulk

Baulk is the rectangular area of the table that is bordered by the baulk line and the three cushions at the head of the table. The baulk line is parallel to the head rail and one fifth of the length of the playing surface away from the head cushion. For the applicable general rules, “behind the head string” should be read as “in baulk.”

Snookered

A player is said to be snookered when the cue ball has no straight, direct path to hit at least part of a legal target ball. The snooker must be declared by the referee for it to be in effect.

Ball On

An object ball is said to be “on” when it is a legal target for the shooter.

5.2 Equipment

The fifteen object balls include two groups of seven balls distinguished by two solid colors or by the usual pattern of numbered solids and stripes. (One through seven and nine through fifteen are the two groups.) In addition, there is a black ball or a black eight ball.

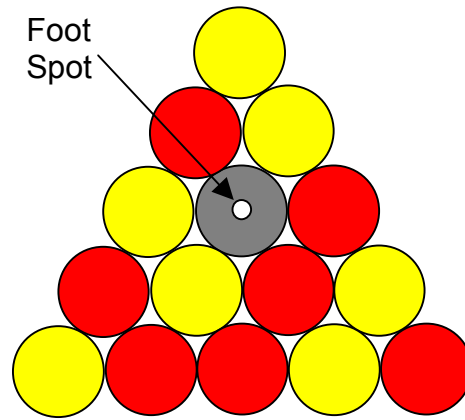
The foot spot and the baulk line should be marked.

5.3 Determining First Break

The player winning the lag has the option to determine who has to execute the first break shot. (See 1.2 Lagging to Determine Order of Play) The standard format is alternate break (See Regulations).

5.4 Black Ball Rack

The balls are racked as illustrated with the black ball on the foot spot.



Black Ball Rack

5.5 Break Shot

The following rules apply to the break shot.

- (a) The cue ball begins in hand in baulk.
- (b) At least one ball must be pocketed or at least two object balls must cross the center string or the break shot is a foul.
- (c) If the black ball is pocketed on the break, all the balls are re-racked and the same player breaks again. Any violation of 6.1 Cue Ball Scratch or off the Table or 6.5 Ball Driven off the Table is ignored on a break that pockets the black ball.

5.6 Open Table / Choosing Groups

The table is said to be “open” when the players’ groups have not been decided. The table is open after the break shot and remains open until the shooter pockets balls from only one group on a legal normal shot, which means not a break shot and not a free shot. The shooter is then assigned that group of balls to pocket and the opponent is assigned the other group.

5.7 Continuing Play

The shooter remains at the table as long as he continues to legally pocket balls or the rack ends. If he fails to legally pocket a ball but commits no foul, the opponent shoots from the position left.

5.8 Cue Ball in Hand in Baulk

When the player has the cue ball in hand, he may place it by hand anywhere in baulk. The player may continue to adjust the position of the cue ball by hand until he takes a shot. The cue ball is not required to leave baulk before striking an object ball.

5.9 Touching Balls

If the cue ball is touching an object ball, the shooter must not play the cue ball in the direction of that ball. He is considered to have hit the touching ball when he shoots away from it if the ball is on for the shot.

5.10 Playing from a Snooker

When the shooter is snookered, Rule 6.3 No Rail after Contact is suspended for the shot.

5.11 Spotting Balls

Object balls driven off the table are spotted on the long string. If several balls are to be spotted, they are spotted in the following order: (1) the black ball, (2) balls from the group of the next shooter, or balls from the red, blue or solid group if the table is open, (3) other balls.

5.12 Stalemate

In case of a stalemate due to lack of progress towards a conclusion, the breaker of the rack will break again. A stalemate also occurs if the position does not allow any legal shot.

5.13 Standard Fouls

If the shooter commits a foul, play passes to his opponent. The incoming player has one free shot (see Free shot) as the first shot of his inning. The following are standard fouls at black ball:

- 6.1 Cue Ball Scratch or off the Table
- 6.2 Wrong Ball First (suspended for a free shot)
- 6.3 No Rail after Contact
- 6.4 No Foot on Floor
- 6.5 Ball Driven off the Table
- 6.6 Touched Ball
- 6.7 Double Hit / Frozen Balls
- 6.8 Push Shot
- 6.9 Balls Still Moving
- 6.10 Bad Cue Ball Placement (when playing from baulk)
- 6.12 Cue Stick on the Table
- 6.13 Playing out of Turn
- 6.15 Slow Play

The following additional situations are fouls at black ball.

5.13.1 – Pocketing Opponent’s Ball – It is a foul to pocket an opponent’s ball without also pocketing a ball from your own group.

5.13.2 – Table Incorrect – It is a foul to play before all balls that require spotting have been spotted.

5.13.3 – Jump Shot. – Causing the cue ball to jump over any ball is a foul. (If the cue ball leaves the bed of the table and misses an object ball that would have been struck had the cue ball not left the table on an otherwise identical shot, the cue ball is deemed to have jumped over that object ball.)

5.14 Loss of Rack Fouls

The player loses the rack if he:

- (a) pockets the black ball on an illegal shot;
 - (b) pockets the black ball on a shot that leaves any of his group of balls on the table;
 - (c) intentionally violates 6.2 Wrong Ball First; or
 - (d) does not attempt to hit a ball on.
- 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct will be penalized by loss of rack or other penalty depending on the nature of the conduct.

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6. Fouls

The following actions are fouls at pool when included in the specific rules of the game being played. If several fouls occur on one shot, only the most serious one is enforced. If a foul is not called before the next shot begins, the foul is assumed not to have happened.

6.1 Cue Ball Scratch or off the Table

If the cue ball is pocketed or driven off the table, the shot is a foul. See 8.3 Ball Pocketed and 8.5 Driven off the Table.

6.2 Wrong Ball First

In those games which require the first object ball struck to be a particular ball or one of a group of balls, it is a foul for the cue ball to first contact any other ball.

6.3 No Rail after Contact

If no ball is pocketed on a shot, the cue ball must contact an object ball, and after that contact at least one ball (cue ball or any object ball) must be driven to a rail, or the shot is a foul. (See 8.4 Driven to a Rail.)

6.4 No Foot on Floor

If the shooter does not have at least one foot touching the floor at the instant the tip contacts the cue ball, the shot is a foul.

6.5 Ball Driven off the Table

It is a foul to drive an object ball off the table. Whether that ball is spotted depends on the rules of the game. (See 8.5 Driven off the Table.)

6.6 Touched Ball

It is a foul to touch, move or change the path of any object ball except by the normal ball-to-ball contacts during shots. It is a foul to touch, move or change the path of the cue ball except when it is in hand or by the normal tip-to-ball forward stroke contact of a shot. The shooter is responsible for the equipment he controls at the table, such as chalk, bridges, clothing, his hair, parts of his body, and the cue ball when it is in hand, that may be involved in such fouls. If such a foul is accidental, it is a standard foul, but if it is intentional, it is 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

6.7 Double Hit / Frozen Balls

If the cue stick contacts the cue ball more than once on a shot, the shot is a foul. If the cue ball is close to but not touching an object ball and the cue tip is still on the cue ball when the cue ball contacts that object ball, the shot is a foul. If the cue ball is very close to an object ball, and the shooter barely grazes that object ball on the shot, the shot is assumed not to violate the

first paragraph of this rule, even though the tip is arguably still on the cue ball when ball-ball contact is made.

However, if the cue ball is touching an object ball at the start of the shot, it is legal to shoot towards or partly into that ball (provided it is a legal target within the rules of the game) and if the object ball is moved by such a shot, it is considered to have been contacted by the cue ball. (Even though it may be legal to shoot towards such a touching or “frozen” ball, care must be taken not to violate the rules in the first paragraph if there are additional balls close by.) The cue ball is assumed not to be touching any ball unless it is declared touching by the referee or opponent. It is the shooter’s responsibility to get the declaration before the shot. Playing away from a frozen ball does not constitute having hit that ball unless specified in the rules of the game.

6.8 Push Shot

It is a foul to prolong tip-to-cue-ball contact beyond that seen in normal shots.

6.9 Balls Still Moving

It is a foul to begin a shot while any ball in play is moving or spinning.

6.10 Bad Cue Ball Placement

When the cue ball is in hand and restricted to the area behind the head string, it is a foul to play the cue ball from on or below the head string. If the shooter is uncertain whether the cue ball has been placed behind the head string, he may ask the referee for a determination.

6.11 Bad Play from Behind the Head String

When the cue ball is in hand behind the head string, and the first ball the cue ball contacts is also behind the head string, the shot is a foul unless the cue ball crosses the head string before that contact. If such a shot is intentional, it is unsportsmanlike conduct.

The cue ball must either cross the head string or contact a ball in front of or on the head string or the shot is a foul, and the cue ball is in hand for the following player according to the rules of the specific game.

6.12 Cue Stick on the Table

If the shooter uses his cue stick in order to align a shot by placing it on the table without having a hand on the stick, it is a foul.

6.13 Playing out of Turn

It is a standard foul to unintentionally play out of turn. Normally, the balls will be played from the position left by the mistaken play. If a player intentionally plays out of turn, it should be treated like 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

6.14 Three Consecutive Fouls

If a player fouls three times without making an intervening legal shot, it is a serious foul. In games scored by the rack, such as nine ball, the fouls must be in a single rack. Some games such as eight ball do not include this rule.

The referee must warn a shooter who is on two fouls when he comes to the table that he is on two fouls. Otherwise a possible third foul will be considered to be only the second.

6.15 Slow Play

If the referee feels that a player is playing too slowly, he may advise that player to speed up his play. If the player does not speed up, the referee may impose a shot clock on that match that applies to both players. If the shooter exceeds the time limit specified for the tournament, a standard foul will be called and the incoming player is rewarded according to the rules applicable to the game being played. (Rule 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct may also apply.)

6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct

The normal penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct is the same as for a serious foul, but the referee may impose a penalty depending on his judgment of the conduct. Among other penalties possible are a warning; a standard-foul penalty, which will count as part of a three-foul sequence if applicable; a serious-foul penalty; loss of a rack, set or match; ejection from the competition possibly with forfeiture of all prizes, trophies and standings points.

Unsportsmanlike conduct is any intentional behavior that brings disrepute to the sport or which disrupts or changes the game to the extent that it cannot be played fairly. It includes

- (a) distracting the opponent;
- (b) changing the position of the balls in play other than by a shot;
- (c) playing a shot by intentionally miscuing;
- (d) continuing to play after a foul has been called or play has been suspended;
- (e) practicing during a match;
- (f) marking the table;
- (g) delay of the game; and
- (h) using equipment inappropriately.

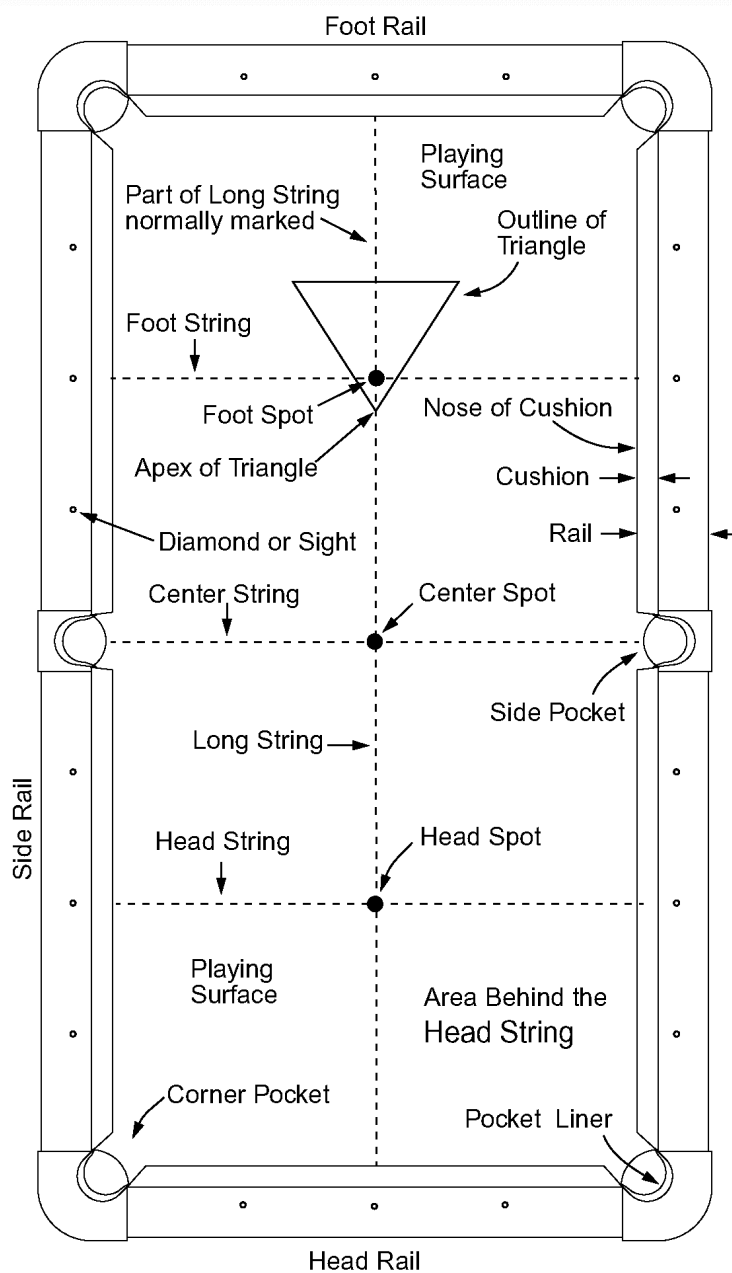
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8. Definitions Used in the Rules

The following definitions apply throughout these rules.

8.1 Parts of the Table



The following definitions of parts of the table refer to the accompanying diagram. Some details of exact size and placement are in the WPA Equipment Specifications. See the WPA website at www.wpa-pool.com for current information.

The table is comprised of rails, cushions, a playing surface and pockets. The foot end of the table is where the object balls usually begin, while the head end is where the cue ball usually begins.

Behind the head string is the area between the head rail and the head string, not including the head string.

The cushions, tops of the rails, pockets and pocket liners are parts of the rails.

There are four “strings” on the playing surface as shown in the diagram:

- the long string down the center of the table;
- the head string bounding the quarter of the table closest to the head rail;
- the foot string bounding the quarter of the table closest to the foot rail; and
- the center string between the two side pockets.

These lines are only marked as mentioned below.

The rails may have inlays referred to as diamonds or sights which mark 1/4th of the width and 1/8th of the length of the table measured from nose to nose on the cushions.

On the playing surface, which is the flat, cloth-covered part of the table, the following will be marked if they are used in the game being played:

- the foot spot, where the foot string and the long string meet;
- the head spot, where the head string and the long string meet;
- the center spot, where the center string and the long string meet;
- the head string;
- the long string between the foot spot and the foot rail; and
- the triangle, either in outline or by alignment marks depending on the game.

8.2 Shot

A shot begins when the tip contacts the cue ball due to a forward stroke motion of the cue stick. A shot ends when all balls in play have stopped moving and spinning. A shot is said to be legal if the shooter did not foul during the shot.

8.3 Ball Pocketed

A ball is pocketed if it comes to rest in a pocket below the playing surface or enters the ball return system. A ball near the brink of a pocket partly supported by another ball is considered pocketed if removal of the supporting ball would cause the ball to fall into the pocket.

If a ball stops near the edge of a pocket, and remains apparently motionless for five seconds, it is not considered pocketed if it later falls into the pocket by itself. See 1.7 Balls Settling for other details. During that five second period, the referee should ensure that no other shot is taken. An object ball that rebounds from a pocket back onto the playing surface is not a pocketed ball. If the cue ball contacts an already pocketed ball, the cue ball will be considered pocketed whether it rebounds from the pocket or not. The referee will remove pocketed object balls from full or nearly full pockets, but it is the shooter’s responsibility to see that this duty is performed.

8.4 Driven to a Rail

A ball is said to be driven to a rail if it is not touching that rail and then touches that rail. A ball touching a rail at the start of a shot (said to be “frozen” to the rail) is not considered driven to that rail unless it leaves the rail and returns. A ball that is pocketed or driven off the

table is also considered to have been driven to a rail. A ball is assumed not to be frozen to any rail unless it is declared frozen by the referee, the shooter, or the opponent. See also Regulation 26, Calling Frozen Balls.

8.5 Driven off the Table

A ball is considered driven off the table if it comes to rest other than on the playing surface but is not pocketed. A ball is also considered driven off the table if it would have been driven off the table except for striking an object such as a light fixture, piece of chalk or a player which causes it to return to the table.

A ball that contacts the top of the rail is not considered to have been driven off the table if it returns to the playing surface or enters a pocket.

8.6 Scratch

A shot on which the cue ball is pocketed is called a scratch.

8.7 Cue Ball

The cue ball is the ball that is struck by the shooter at the beginning of a shot. It is traditionally white, but may be marked by a logo or spots. In pocket billiard games, a single cue ball is used by both players.

8.8 Object Balls

The object balls are struck by the cue ball with the usual intent of driving them into pockets. They are typically numbered from one to the number of balls used in the game. Colors and markings of the object balls are covered under the WPA Equipment Specifications.

8.9 Set

In some matches, the match is divided into parts called sets, with a certain number of sets won required to win the match. In turn, a certain number of points or racks won is required to win each set.

8.10 Rack

The rack is the framing device, typically triangular, used to arrange the object balls for the break shot at the start of the game. It also refers to the group of balls so arranged. To rack the object balls is to group them with the rack. A rack is also a portion of a match played with a single rack of object balls. Some games, such as nine ball, are scored at one point per rack.

8.11 Break

A break shot is the opening shot of a match or rack, depending on the game. It happens when the object balls have been racked and the cue ball is played from behind the head string usually with the intent of breaking the rack apart.

8.12 Inning

An inning is a player's turn at the table. It begins when it is legal for him to take a shot, and ends at the end of a shot when it is no longer legal for him to take a shot. In some games a player may choose not to come to the table in certain situations when play would normally pass to him, and then the player remaining at the table continues the inning (e.g. a push-out at nine ball). The player whose turn it is to play is called the "shooter."

8.13 Position of Balls

The position of a ball is determined by the projection of its center vertically downward onto the playing surface. A ball is said to be placed on a line or spot when its center is placed directly over that line or spot.

8.14 Re-spotting Balls

In some games, object balls are required to be placed on the playing surface other than when forming a new rack. They are said to be re-spotted when they are so placed. See 1.4 Spotting Balls.

8.15 Restoring a Position

If the balls are disturbed, the rules of the game may require them to be replaced where they were. The referee will replace the balls to their original position as accurately as possible.

8.16 Jump Shot

A jump shot is one in which the cue ball is made to go over an intervening obstacle such as an object ball or part of the cushion. Whether such a shot is legal depends on how it is accomplished and the intention of the shooter. Usually a legal jump shot is played by elevating the cue stick and driving the cue ball down into the playing surface from which it rebounds.

8.17 Safety Shot

A shot is said to be a safety shot if the game in play is a call shot game and the shooter declared the shot to the referee or his opponent to be a “safety” before the shot. Play passes to the other player at the end of a safety shot.

8.18 Miscue

A miscue occurs when the cue tip slides off the cue ball possibly due to a contact that is too eccentric or to insufficient chalk on the tip. It is usually accompanied by a sharp sound and evidenced by a discoloration of the tip. Although some miscues involve contact of the side of the cue stick with the cue ball, unless such contact is clearly visible, it is assumed not to have occurred. A scoop shot, in which the cue tip contacts the playing surface and the cue ball at the same time and this causes the cue ball to rise off the cloth, is treated like a miscue. Note that intentional miscues are covered by 6.16 Unsportsmanlike Conduct (c).