

68 FIRST STEPS TO BILLIARDS

playing each with due regard to position, of course. Then, when you feel confidence in your individual stroke play, you should put the balls in any given position and see what sized break you can make from it. Note the position of the balls when you begin, return to it when you break down, and keep a record of your average day by day—there is no better test of your improvement.

The " drop-cannon " is a shot of enormous positional value. Broadly speaking, it is a cannon played to " drop " the balls into favourable position at the spot-end of the table. *Diagram 13*, shows a typical " drop-cannon." The red ball is on the billiard-spot, the cue-ball is in hand, and the white lies sixteen inches from the left side cushion and seven inches above the centre-spot. Place your ball seven and a half inches to the left of the centre-spot of the baulk-line and play three-quarter ball on the white, the first object-ball, simply because it is the only way in which you can steer it into the desired position. This thickish contact with the first object-ball is the great underlying principle of

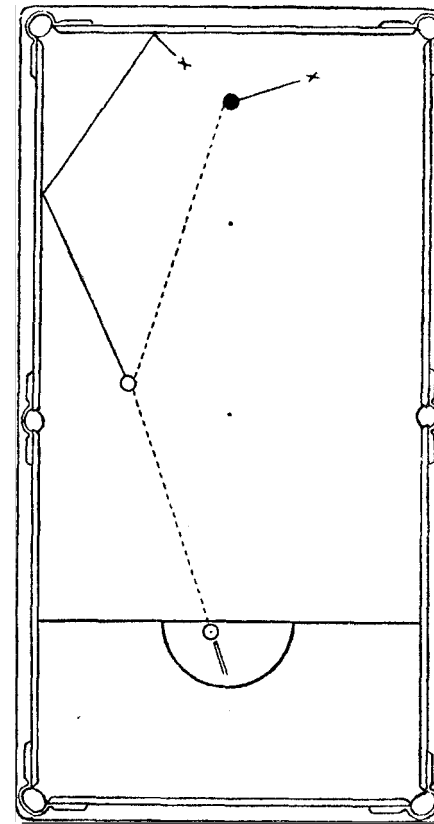


Diagram 13

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the " drop-cannon," and the main reason why amateurs so often play this shot badly is because they *will* make a half-ball of it. Correct pace has to be studied of course, but the thickish contact always helps in this respect. The right strength for a " drop-cannon " ought to leave a feasible shot at the red ball when, as is usually the case, the cannon is completed on that ball. It will generally leave a red winning hazard, with the white somewhere near the spot for top-of-the-table play after the red is pocketed. But I do not advise you to specialise in the direction of spot-end billiards. Get away from it as soon as you have an opportunity to pot the red and leave the half-ball loser shown in *Diagram 3* (page 18). This will pay you much better than endeavouring to control the balls at the head of the table, an alluring department of the game which has no connection with " First Steps."

Alternately, the " drop-cannon " may leave you a red loser. It may offer you a loser off the red or the white. This is likely to happen if you play a shade too hard, but it is no leave to be despised. Speaking for myself, I am perfectly happy when I have the choice of going in-off either ball—I ask for nothing better. Sometimes, your " drop-cannon " will " bunch " all three balls close together for the easiest of

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short cannons, in which case I advise you to cannon with the idea of leaving a hazard for your next stroke, a shot at the red for preference, and if it is a winner you can play to leave No. 3 (page 18), so much the better. It may seem harsh to thus advise the smashing up of a close-cannon position from which Tom Newman or Claude Falkiner could tap away on a beautiful run of nursery cannons. But what is the use of this to you ? If you have the exquisite touch and judgment requisite for close-cannon play, you have one of the rarest gifts in the world of billiards, and I assure you that this book is not written for the one gifted mortal among many thousands of cuemen. For the remainder, the vast majority whose touch is not of close-cannon delicacy, and never will be, it is worse than a waste of time to attempt these lovely little sequences of nurseries. It is far better to play a bold shot, to open the game in the manner I have described.

The positional variations which result from the " drop-cannon " depend mainly on the exact position of the first and second-object-balls when the cannon is played, but so many other considerations enter into the matter that it is impossible for any man to be *quite* certain of the precise spot where the balls will stop after a " drop-cannon " is played. As a rule, one or

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the other of the positional alternatives will leave something of break-building value. But it occasionally happens that even the best professional exponents will " drop " the balls together so awkwardly that a terrific masse is the only road out of trouble. This is due to playing with such nicety that a fraction of an inch makes all the difference between a good leave and one of the very worst, and I do not advise you to " step " in the direction of such precise control of all three balls.

You will do very well indeed if you play thickly enough on the first-object-ball to carry it up the table in accordance with the " drop-cannon " principle, and leave it in a good scoring zone. No side is required for the example shown in *Diagram 13* (page 69), and I advise you to avoid the use of side as much as you can when playing your " drop-cannons." Every now and then you will be confronted by a leave which calls for the use of check side to help you to get your ball through, but do not make a habit of doing this unless it is absolutely called for. If the angle for the cannon demands the use of anything like strong side to score direct from ball-to-ball, you had better take a second look at the balls to make sure that a losing hazard off the first-object-ball is not a more likely and lucrative shot.

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It is much more probable that you will want side on your ball when the direct cannon is not possible, and you are thus compelled to play to make your cannon off the top cushion. Even then, however, I do not advise you to use side if you can get the angle you want without it.—always remembering, when computing the angle, that you must strike the first-object-ball to steer it where you want it near the head of the table. When utilising the top cushion in playing " drop-cannons," it is very necessary to guard against bringing your ball off that cushion at such an angle that the second-object-ball is struck fully " from behind," and moved more or less straight towards baulk. This is a sure path to trouble, and you should avoid it by striving to cannon so that the second-object-ball, whenever it is the red, is sent in the direction of a top pocket. If you cannon on the white off the top cushion, you should concentrate on taking the red up to offer you a succeeding shot.

You want to play on the red as much as you can. Always remember that the white ball is only the mortar which binds the bricks together when you are making a break—the red ball gives you the bulk of your material. Obviously, you score three points instead of two every time you make a red hazard instead of a white one,