

Should I use ENGLISH

OR

Should I NOT use ENGLISH

That is the Question

English is one of the most misunderstood and misused parts of a pool stroke. Many players believe that it is essential to use English as you improve as a player. Thinking that, they start using it before they actually have perfected their stroke. When they realize that English is getting them in more trouble than not using they have to spend countless hours relearning how to stroke straight. Pool, just like many other sports, should follow the KISS principle. KISS=Keep It Simple Stupid. It's hard enough to make that cue ball go straight without adding other variables to it. So let's exam English and how it works to see why it's so difficult.

Take a cue ball and put a ¼" dot on it. That is as much of the cue tip that ever comes into contact with cue ball. When you here the phrase, "Put a tip of English on the cue", you are aiming ¼" off of dead center. The max English you can put on a ball is 3 ½ tips, or about .85 inches. The cue ball has a diameter of only 2 ¼ ". So .85" is only a ¼" from the edge. Now take a minute and think about this. Most good amateur players, aiming at center ball, can only reliably hit within a ¼" of center ball. Pros are within an 1/8" of center ball. That means that on every shot you are hitting has some kind of unintended English. Left spin, right spin, forward spin, or draw. But it doesn't end there. There is still another variable. Center ball. Where IS center ball? If you lay a piece of chalk in front of the cue ball and place your stick on top of the chalk, where it hits the cue ball is center ball. Center ball is that spot on the cue ball when stroked correctly will produce no spin. Because we are looking down at the table and the rail is slightly higher than center ball, most amateur players see center ball about 1 tip higher than it actually is, or ¼". This in itself isn't a huge problem but it enhances another variable. A lot of players play with an elevated cue. By elevated I am talking about more than 1" above the rail when the tip of your stick contacts the cue ball. If you hit center ball while elevated you will actually put draw on the ball. If you hit above center ball while elevated you will actually cause the cue ball to jump. This is why many players put the cue ball off the table when they break, hitting down on the ball causes it to skip down the table and hit the rack in the air, and if it doesn't contact the head ball square it deflects off the table. That is why it's so important to play with a level cue. If we hit that cue ball at its center with a level cue we should be able to repeat ably make the cue ball to the same thing every time we stroke. The PBIA has an acronym. A.S.S. That should make it easy to remember. There are only 3 variables you have when you shoot a cue ball. That is Angle we shoot at, the Speed we shoot it, and the Spin we put on it. Like anything else, the less variables we have the better our consistency. We shoot with a level cue. That removes one variable. We shoot center ball. That's another. We practice our speed control. There are no variables. Keep It Simple.

So back to English. One of our stroke drills is to put a ball on the spot, shoot at the center diamond on the other end of the table, leave your stick in its finish position and wait for the ball to hit the tip of your stick. If you have never done this you'll find it very hard to do this. You need a perfect stroke to repeatedly hit the tip of your cue. This drill will demonstrate how off center you are hitting the cue ball. If the ball comes back and misses by an inch or two you might only be a half a tip off. THAT'S ONLY 1/8 OF AN INCH!!! If you are a tip off center you'll probably be 5 or 6 inches further out. Two tips may put the ball in the corner pocket. That's with a level cue. If we elevate the cue and don't hit center we'll start what's called a masse. The cue ball will actually start to curve before it hits the rail. Now we are approaching the rail at an angle and have spin so the ball will actually go more off line. An added danger when we masse is that the curve changes depending on how hard we hit it. As you can see, there are a lot of things that can go wrong with English, but wait, I'm not done yet. There is a little thing called squirt that happens when don't hit the center of the ball. If you hit the cue ball to the right or left the cue stick actually pushes the ball off in the opposite direction. Only a little, but you still might have to aim slightly different to compensate. If the shot is long enough and the cloth is tacky enough it will actually correct itself, and to be honest, with low deflection and zero deflection shafts this problem is far less than it used to be. So with all of these variables we probably shouldn't use English at all. Well, not exactly. Think of English like a power tool. When you need it, it's good to have that right tool available. You just don't need it for every shot.

How do we minimize our variables? Drills, of course. We talked about a drill to hit the ball to the other end of the table and back to the end of the stick. Let's expand that. Place the cue ball on the spot and stroke the cue ball into the center diamond on the other side. Make it lag speed. Stay down until you see the cue ball approaching the end of your and stand up. We want the ball to end up within one diamond of the rail. We call that a 1 speed. Do this 5 times. Set the ball up again and repeat. Go down and back and see if you can land the ball between the 1 and 3rd diamond. This is a 2 speed. 5 times. Repeat again but try to finish between the 3rd and 5th diamond. That's a 3 speed. 5th to 7th diamond is a 4 speed and all the way to the far rail again is a 5 speed. This teaches you center ball and ball speed.

Ok. So once we have that perfected a straight stroke then we can use English. First, very important, if you add English to a shot, depending on how long that shot is and what kind of shaft you have you might have to adjust your aim because the cue ball may squirt or actually swerve a little. Another thing is that some of the spin applied to the cue ball will actually transfer into the object, reverse of what you applied. They refer to this as throwing the object ball. This is what makes English so hard. Lots of variables. Low deflection shaft, cloth, dirty balls, speed. There are a lot of things that affect English and the only way to learn it is practice. Every stick is different, every table is different, and every set of balls is different. It's a tremendous tool in your arsenal. BUT!!!! If you don't have a consistent stroke English will create more problems than it solves.