

Part 1 - THE BASICS / GETTING STARTED

The material that follows in this section is on video, developed in 1997 through the I.S.A. (Appendix A-1 Page 33). The narrative that follows is broken into 8 sections for the reader.

Section 1 - THE SHUFFLEBOARD COURT

A court is generally made of a patio green slab that is 52' in length and 6' in width (Fig.1 Page 44). The approach area is 6 ½' in length at each end of the court for a total of 13'. The total playing surface, baseline to baseline, is 39'. The starting area for the game is 18" in length followed by three 12' segments with another 18" 10-off area at the opposite end.

As we look at our scoring triangle, which is sometimes called 'the House', the points are designated as follows: the 10 area at the tip, followed by two 8 areas and two 7 areas ending with the 10 off area. These scoring areas are defined by white lines, which are generally ¾" to 1" in width. Finally, each court has a 2' wide alley/gutter on each side of the court that is recessed to collect discs which leave the court.

Section II - EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Lets talk briefly about the equipment needed to play the game (Fig. 2 Page 45). To play, very simply, a disc is propelled down the court using a cue. A shuffleboard cue is a metal device no longer than 6'3" / 75". The disc is made up of composition about 1" thick weighing no more than 15 ounces. A set of playing discs consists of 4 yellow and 4 black discs. Next there is the court dressing, which is used to give the discs the needed glide down the court. The court finish and type of dressing used will be discussed at length later in the book. Finally, there is the scoreboard which is used to track the score as the game progresses.

Section III - GAME ETIQUETTE

It's important to focus briefly on some do's and don'ts in this game. No attempt will be made here to cover all of the playing rules; rather, I'd like to just focus on some main thoughts that add to the enjoyment of the game and if followed, will put you well on the way to following many of its rules. If one looks at the opposite end of the court from where players are shooting, you should see two things- the players at that end should be seated quietly, concentrating on the shots coming toward them; holding their cues in an upright position. This is done so as not to

distract the players who are shooting. As play completes, these players then stand and begin to retrieve the discs. This is done with the handle end of the cue, to protect *the tips of the shooting end*. Now these players are ready for play. Their discs are within their shooting space, not touching any of the adjoining lines (Fig. 3 Page 45). In a singles game, yellow would go out or shoot first. The player shooting black should be standing back quietly with the cue in an upright position until the shot is delivered. Now the order changes, yellow stands back quietly with the cue in an upright position to allow black to shoot. You are now well on your way to playing and enjoying this great game.

Section IV - SHOOTING TECHNIQUES

This is one of the key sections for *all* shufflers, because in order to get the discs where you want them on the court, certain fundamentals need to be followed. A personal note here; in watching golf instruction, it seems 75% or more of these shows focus on aspects of the swing. Yet, in shuffleboard, once a player gets his/her first instruction- that's it. *Very seldom* is time spent on the stroke.

At this time, I'd like to focus on 2 approaches to shooting a disc. Lets talk about Footwork first. Many players use the one-step approach. If you are right-handed, generally you take one step out with your left foot and push the cue directly toward the target. Lefties obviously reverse this. The advantages of this style are two-fold: One, there's a minimum of motion needed, and two, once a player squares up for the shot, he/she simply steps forward with the opposite foot and extends the cue.

The second way to shoot a disc is to use the two-step approach. I'm left-handed, so my first step out is with my left foot, then my right. Note that the cue and arm stay still/motionless on that first step. There are two advantages to this style: One is that a player can get much closer to the target at the release point (because of that second step) and two- a player develops more of a rhythm in the shot. Try both approaches to develop the style that works best for you.

That is half of the equation. Now we will look at the two methods of Holding the Cue. The first method is used by over 95% of all players. In this method, the middle finger and ring-finger cup the cue and the swinging of ones locked arm, (pendulum motion) actually pushes the cue forward.

Style #2, used by your's truly, is a bit different. If the cue were lying on the ground and a player went to pick it up, he/she would have their entire hand on the top of the cue- pointer finger on top of the cue with the pinkie pushing the cue- again with proper arm swing. In making the shot, the hand comes straight forward and up, eliminating any side-to-side movement of the hand or arm. Again, try both styles and see just which one works best for you. Also, refer to Appendix A-1 Page 33, to visually see what has just been explained. One final tip to keep in mind. Always remember that

once the cue tips have been placed on the disc, everything after that is a forward motion in the shot.

Section V - SHUFFLEBOARD TERMINOLOGY

At this time I'd like to briefly define 6 terms often used in shuffleboard circles:

- 1.) The Baseline - This is basically the foul line; in taking a shot, a player must not step on this line or a 10 point penalty can be assessed.
- 2.) The Lag Line - This is the far line from the shooter (about 24' away), a line that is just before the far triangle. A shot disc must make contact with this line or it is removed from the court as a dead disc. The lag line is also used to determine color prior to a game's beginning. This will be discussed a bit later.
- 3.) The Gutters - These are located on both sides of the court, are generally 2' wide, and are recessed 2-6 inches to collect discs which leave the court.
- 4.) The Kitchen - This is the 18" section (the 10-off) located in the back end of the far triangle. Shuffleboard is one of the few games, if not the only game in the world, in which you can actually *lose* points you already have! A final clarification - if a disc ends up on the upside-down V (in the Kitchen area), the V you see *does not exist*. For scoring purposes, then, it is counted as a -10 if all shots have been taken.
- 5.) The Starting Area - When a player is shooting discs from the -10 area, the upside-down V *does exist* - you must shoot from your $\frac{1}{2}$ of the court.
- 6.) The Hammer Shot - This is the last disc - eighth disc shot in a frame. After this shot, the scores are posted. You need to make this shot!

Section VI - PLAYING SINGLES/DOUBLES

Playing Singles simply means that the person standing next to you is your opponent. So, there are 2 matches per court, one at the head and one at the foot. After 16 frames (64 shots) the player with the most points wins the match.

Playing Doubles simply means that you play with a partner - the person directly across from you. Down and back is considered one frame and both scores are added together.

Section VII - SCOREKEEPING

This brief section is for only one reason, and that is that all players need to know how to keep score! It is important to help the game along by doing your part and to protect yourself in knowing your game score. Please refer to Appendix A-3 Page 33, for a further look on scorekeeping.

Part VIII - OBJECTIVE OF THE GAME

Now we will talk briefly about how to play this great game. There are 2 ends of the court -the Head and the Foot. A game always begins at the head, where the scoreboard is located. Looking at the discs, yellow is always on the right and black is always on the left. The scoreboard shows us that to begin a game, yellow goes out or shoots first (Fig. 4 Page 46). We know this because where we mark the first set of scores has a yellow marking on top of the scoreboard. Following the shooting rotating then, you can see that black has the last shot/hammer; hence, the advantage this frame. The game/scoreboard is designed to give both players 8 hammers in a traditional 16 frame game. If there are no board referees, black makes all calls at the opposite end of the court. The player then calls out the final score to be put on the scoreboard. Now the discs are at the foot. As the player looks at them, yellow is on the left and black is on the right. Don't let this confuse you! Just remember where the discs are at the head and be sure they are directly across from you if you are playing the foot. To begin a game, yellow also shoots first from the foot. After the frame at the foot, the score is put on the scoreboard in 2 places. The top row of the scoreboard is much easier for the players to see their scores (Fig.4 Page 46). In frame 2 now, black shoots first giving yellow the hammer. Under I.S.A., Arizona, and California rules, at the conclusion of 16 frames the game is over. Simply put, this means that after 64 shots have been taken by each player, whoever has the most points wins the match.

One final note here - please review Appendix A-3 Page 33 to see what happens after 8 frames (half of the game) is over. It's slightly different in California. One thing is the same , however, in all play - the player is now on the other side (same end) of the court. This is crucial, because the more you play, you'll begin to notice that most Western Courts drift or curve, which seems to give one side an advantage over the other. So, again in fairness, each player has to play both sides.

PART 2 - WESTERN COURTS/FAST BOARDS

Section I - MEASURING COURT SPEED

The following chapter is the essence of this entire book! Anywhere in the world, shuffleboard has the following constants: Court size, discs, and basic cues. *However*, Arizona and California Shuffleboard drastically departs from the rest of the world regarding the speed of the court. In both of these places, during the '70's and '80's, a concerted effort was made to increase court speed. I can't tell you why, I'm still researching that one.

To measure court speed you'll need a stop watch to time your discs - from a player's first movement of delivery until the disc stops in the kitchen at the opposite end. Here's where many players, and especially people who don't play, get confused. Very simply, a fast court is generally defined as a disc taking 11-17 seconds to get to this other end. Note, it is called a Fast Board, yet the disc is actually traveling very slowly. Conversely, Eastern courts (Florida) and most courts in the world are Slow Courts - from 6-10 seconds. Remember now, if the disc is getting to the other end in this time, it's moving rather fast. Hopefully this will explain some about the difference.

Now, how does this happen with the Western Courts! Polyglide.com (Appendix D Page 42-43) explains this. Suffice to say at this point, that the courts are very smooth, much more polished, and many times buffed. As Kathy Cullop of Polyglide says, "Slick, shiny, and smooth" is what her products deliver.

Section II - ARIZONA COURTS

In general, the speed of most courts in Arizona's 5 shuffle districts is 11-16 seconds. The courts are slick, smooth, shiny and they are all outdoors. Because of this heat, wind and dirt are major factors in keeping the speed consistent. Polyglide and Dura Dress (M & S in Mesa) provide regular and wind wax as well as other court products (Appendix D Page 42-43). Rules continue to be important in defining how the game is played. Every shuffler wishes for consistent speed as the game unfolds. In this author's opinion, waxing rules need more clarity and tournament play *may need* speed control, i.e. a 12-14 second condition. This obviously gets into the politics of play, which is not in the scope of this book.

Section III - CALIFORNIA COURTS

Keeping in mind that California has 13 districts, this section will mainly focus on District VII, Hemet. Hemet, which I call "Shuffleboard Heaven", is by far the most

active district in the state. Why "Shuffleboard Heaven?" A number of reasons come to mind beginning with court speed, which is generally 16-22 + seconds. All of the courts in this district are indoors (25 or so parks), so that heat, wind and (for the most part) dirt do not come into play. The gutters are carpeted and most houses have 4-8 courts. The biggest reason that Hemet courts are enjoyed by most shufflers, however, is that court speed never varies as the game unfolds. Once a shuffler captures the speed he/she is there. Also, in most houses, once the game begins there is no waxing allowed until half-time.

Section IV - EASTERN COURTS

Reference to the Eastern Courts encompasses the following: Florida, North Carolina, New Jersey, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, as well as the Canadian Provinces of; Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario. Also included are clubs in: Japan, Brazil and Australia. For the most part, courts are outdoors and point games are played to 75 points with the best 2 out of 3 games winning the match. I realize that this is a generality as Texas plays frames, Alberta plays on indoor courts, etc. The point is that the game is different on all of these courts.

Eastern Courts are standard size but they look different than the Western Courts (Figure 5 Page 47). For one thing the texture/finish of the court is rougher to the touch. Generally, products from Allen R. Shuffleboard are different from the standpoint of application (Appendix D Page 42-43). The court dressing is generally made up of glass beads, so the player can hear the disc going down the court. The biggest difference, however, is that court speed is very slow by Western standards, roughly between 6-10 seconds. I've played these conditions, and the big plus to the game is that court speed seldom varies or changes during the course of a match. In fact, the beads once applied, literally last all day! This has obvious implications as to the cost factor involved in tournament play.

Section V - DIFFERENT COURTS / DIFFERENT STRATEGY

I have gone to great lengths to compare the two court conditions for one obvious reason - the *Strategy of Play* is very different on Eastern Courts than it is on Western Courts. The difference being that Eastern Court conditions allow the player to read the court much easier, because the disc is traveling much faster down the court. (I liken it to a putt in golf - if the golfer strikes the ball firmly it stays on line.) For shuffleboard purposes, then, it allows the player to play a much more offensive game. As a player must reach 75 points to win the game, with 2 of 3 games winning the match, you can see my point.

Western Courts in Arizona and California are a different story! The main

reason being that, because of the court speed, the disc travels very slowly down the court; hence, it picks up much more of the court's nuances - bends and curves. Again, likening it to golf; if the golfer strikes the ball lightly/slowly, the nuances of the green come into play regarding the break and curve of the putt. Suffice to say, at this point, the Western game needs to be played very *defensively* as far as strategy goes, in this author's opinion. As 16 frames dictates the game, not game score, there are very strong implications for defense - a player only needs to beat the opponent by 1 point, no matter what the score. One final note to the reader. I am not judging one style of play over another; rather, I am merely trying to point out that court conditions vary/differ. It stands to reason then that since conditions differ, then strategies should differ.

Part 3 - OVERALL GAME STRATEGY / HAVING A PLAN

Section I - GOALS IN A SHUFFLEBOARD MATCH

I always begin my Shuffleboard Strategy session with the same question, "What are the goals in your game?" Generally responses range from "I want to win" to "Play a more solid game" to "Having better shot selection." I try to get the group to see that although these are good goals to aim for, they are much too general. Specifically, I feel that there are 7 specific items to strive for - realizing we are all human and to attain them all would be perfection! None the less, I feel that it is worth striving toward these.

- GOAL #1 - Thinking on shots 1-64

We all do it! Upon the loss of a game, most, if not all shufflers, talk about wrong or poor shot selections bringing about their demise. On our Western Courts points are at a premium and even 1 mistake can cause a loss. I cannot stress *conservative play* strongly enough. Are we thinking of the safest shot to take? Are we thinking *Defense*? I, like you, have lost games on shot #1 and shot #64 alike. The point to remember here is to stay calm, be patient and focus on the shot at hand.

- GOAL #2 - Leave Gambling for the People in Vegas!

I contend, and will continue to contend, that more games are *lost* on our Western Courts because of this factor than any other. My wife, Mary, was a Blackjack Dealer in Reno and Vegas for 30 years. To this day, she continues to

tell those who ask for advice on "How to Win" the following, "In the long run when you gamble you'll eventually lose - the casinos don't have those chandeliers up there from the winners!" Yet, I, like you only ever have people tell me about their winnings - *never their losses!* The same holds true in the game of Shuffleboard. The problem most shufflers have with their gamble is - *they don't know or will admit that they are doing it!* I have 2 suggestions, at this point, to cue you in to the gamble (most of the rest of this book will talk about it). The easiest one for all of us to recognize is the feeling in the pit of our stomach, *after* a certain shot is taken. I contend that 90%, or so, of the time that a gamble has been taken. Remember - this is a tough one, because sometimes a gamble does work. The problem I see here is that if the *wrong shot* is taken in a given situation, chances are that the player will continue to take this wrong shot. The second suggestion is to look at shot selection. My rule of thumb is think *defense*, instead of offense when faced with a choice. Remember, please, that we are talking about Western Court play - where defense wins games!

- GOAL #3 - No Giving Points to My Opponent

At first this tip seems like a no-brainer, but I can't count the number of games I've watched where this happens. Again, like I've already pointed out in games in Arizona and California points are precious - you can't afford to give your opponent even one score. Why, then, you may say does this happen? I contend that there are 2 main reasons. One is that many times a player doesn't think *before* the shot. The other is that the player gambles - instead of taking the safest shot, he or she tries a risky shot. You'll see many examples in the pages that follow.

- GOAL #4 - No Misses on Take - Outs

I've won many games, and lost some too, on this item. I suggest 4 things to look at if this is a problem for you. Being human, we all miss - and as we know *when* the miss occurs is big. Number One reason for many misses is mental. Confidence in the game is *very fragile!* I've seen, and played against, some very fine shufflers who have this affliction. You can't be ready to take a shot thinking "Gee, I hope I don't miss this one!" My best suggestion is practice and more practice. Number Two reason for misses is bad mechanics. Many players have a nice shot with good tempo on an open court, yet they tense up and either bring their arm across their body or lift the cue off the court, etc. Number Three reason for misses is proper speed. I suggest early in the game to shoot a bit harder to hold the line. As the match progresses and the player

begins to settle in he/she should move to take out speed (a medium speed shot) if the player needs to stick. Reason Number Four, I feel, is responsible for many more misses than players think - that is the inability to pick up the bend/drift in the court along with *where* the shot should come from (more on this later). Many times I, like you, have a court that I do not feel comfortable on - it's a struggle just to hit my opponent's disc. If this is the case I simply keep the speed up for the entire game, if necessary. Remember, first and foremost, the aim of the take out is just that!

- GOAL #5 - No Opponent Double Scores

On the fast Western Courts where points are very hard to come by, a player cannot afford to give up a double score, yet it happens quite often. I see three reasons - you will note that all 3 go back to earlier goals. Number one is many times a player will not think before the shot or the player will say there's no way my opponent will even try that shot. You know what, I say, if there is only a 1: 100 chance it can happen I don't want to give the player that chance. I've seen very deep 7's split on the last shot of a game! The second reason goes back to gambling by a player - instead of taking the safest shot, the player tries to get cute and ends up paying. Reason number three goes back to the missed take out, enabling the opponent to make the double.

- GOAL #6 - No Kitchening Myself

I think one of the biggest sins/errors in shuffleboard is kitchening the hammer shot. Psychologically, it really works on even the best shuffler, and I look upon it as an 18 point swing in the game - I kitchen instead of scoring that 8. There are 3 other reasons a kitchen happens. Number One is that a shuffler fails to recognize and adapt to court speed - especially early in the match. Add to this is the fact that disc position is an important factor in court speed. Number Two goes back to gambling again - thinking *offense* and trying to make a tough shot instead of playing a safe *defensive* shot. Another gamble we all try at times is trying to kitchen the opponent, instead of scoring our hammer, missing the shot and going in ourselves. Reason Number 3 happens in many matches I play and many I watch and that is the take out of your opponent's deep 7's. The rule of thumb I use revolves around a number of things. Do I need to clear that deep 7? Can I score in front of it? I suggest you trying the following when clearing deep 7's. First, shoot very hard to hit the side of the disc - sometimes a miss is better than a kitchen. Also, try to hit the deep 7 disc on the side closest to the gutter to get your disc off the court as soon as possible. I've been tracking my kitchens by the opponent and myself for 4 seasons, and

those to myself average about 1 in every 9 games.

- GOAL #7 - Having Patience in Singles and Doubles

This is a goal I've recently added to the list - perhaps it should be #1. I say this because the rank and file shuffler, I feel, generally begins to panic as the game unfolds if he/she falls behind or if the game stays close and they can't pull away. The players having the most success in shuffleboard keep emotions under control and mentally stay focused. I still contend that in singles play the shuffler who has the most success stays in the game! Now; here we go again - very simply *don't gamble*. Doubles play is a little trickier. Let me cite an example. I know very little about tennis - to me tennis doubles is simply putting another player on my side of the net. Wrong - in talking with various tennis pros, I find that game strategy, ball placement, is dramatically different in doubles play. The same is true for shuffleboard. I still have a lot to learn on this one. In talking with successful doubles teams, they don't have answers either. Suggestions at this time, are two-fold. One is to play your end and take care of beating or staying close to your opponent. The other thought will sound very familiar to the reader - don't gamble too early; remember, in doubles, scores can change very dramatically - try your best to stay within your capabilities and keep your chancy shots to a minimum.

PART 4 - "SITUATIONAL STRATEGY OVERVIEW" - DEFINING A PLAN

Section I - THE THREE STAGES OF A GAME

In reality, a game of shuffleboard can be thought of very similarly to a game of chess. In this part of the narrative I want to define for the reader the three stages of a game (this will be talked about in Part 5 - 8 of this book) and *how* to ready yourself for this (the aim of Part 4).

I break the game into 3 distinct stages:

- A. THE BEGINNING OF GAME - including the Pre-game, Practice shots, and Frames 1-4
- B. THE MID-GAME - which are Frames 5-10, including the practice shots on the turn around