

C. THE END GAME - the moment of truth in Frames 11-16, i.e., how to preserve the win or, if behind, how to try and win

Now, before we can talk about the above, the remainder of Part 4 (Sections 2-8) will deal with preparations I attend to *before* I step onto a court for tournament or league play. I strongly urge the reader to study/look at the following closely; incorporating many of the items into their shuffle repertoire!

Section II - YOUR PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Unfortunately, every shuffle book ever written (Appendix B-1 Page 39) focuses on *how to play the game* from the shotmaking aspect. Don't get me wrong, these are great books. I've read them all and have every one in my shuffle library. The book that you are reading will do much the same; *but*, I promise you this - *my second book will be devoted entirely to the mental/emotional aspects in a game of shuffleboard.* (Please look forward to it around 2008).

Now, getting back to my physical preparation, I keep it very simple - I practice, then practice some more. Be advised, practice means practice - not jackpot or potluck play. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy the above; *but*, I enjoy practice more! Many times at Las Palmas, in Mesa, I'm the odd man out. It's okay by me, I just go to a vacant court and practice; whether it be taking out and sticking, making doubles, or shooting straight hammers. Many times I'll shoot with another shuffler who is at the other end of the court. This makes the above much easier. What better way to build your confidence - I can't think of any! In fact, I've developed 2 games to simulate a game condition. One is called ADD IT UP - very simply I'll shoot 1 color the other way and count all scoring discs on the scoreboard for 8 frames. My partner shoots back and does the same. Another fun one is called CALL YOUR SHOT. Shooting 4 discs of a color I must call where the disc will end up for a score or it doesn't count. What better way to shoot hammer after hammer.

Section III - YOUR MENTAL/EMOTIONAL PREPARATION

As was mentioned in the last section, there are currently no books devoted to this aspect of shuffleboard. I did the next best thing and read a number of golf books devoted to this (Appendix B-2 Page 40). I highly recommend any of them. A number of themes echoed through almost every book including building self-confidence, staying in the present, and letting the feel or touch dominate the stroke - rather than sheer mechanics. Personally, I feel that the mental/emotional aspect of the game is just as important, if not more so, in producing more wins in your game. Besides reading some of these books, I also suggest watching other accomplished players to

see how they handle/react to certain crucial situations. Don't be afraid to talk to them about what you see after their match. Remember one thing, what some shufflers refer to as luck could actually be a player showing good patience and sound thinking.

#### Section IV - TRACKING YOUR MATCH

I must admit that the following section is still in the early stages of experimentation. I mention it here for two main reasons - to educate and to get you thinking a bit more about your game (Appendix A-4 Page 34). The idea came to me a couple of years ago. I'll bet many of you reading this know how to keep a scorebook/track a game of baseball. I thought about this possibility in a game of shuffleboard. I realize that there are difficulties in doing this. Initially, in some of my practice games, I tried to do the tallies (at bottom ½ of page) after I played a frame. It was a bad idea for 2 reasons: Believe it or not, I had trouble remembering the 4 shots I had taken and more importantly, I found it interfered with my concentration in playing the frame.

The other way to use the form is to have somebody watching the game keep track. I have yet to try this for a couple of reasons: namely, it's hard to get someone to do it; and, more importantly, how does the tally person know what I am trying to do on a particular shot. One more point here. In the 2004 I.S.A. Tourney in Mesa, I had 2 of my games videotaped, this was a kick! I watched each game (about 30 minutes each) and charted it - very interesting. I thank Dave Obert of Venture Out for doing this - actually it was done for the I.S.A., but I got a few copies for my use. I'm not saying you need to do this. I will say for 2 years now, I have used this form after my game. I was able to fill the top part completely and track my 8 hammers (more detail on this in the next section).

There is another reason I mention all of this at this time. If you will look closely again: the bottom ½ of Appendix A-4 Page 34, you will notice that there are only really 6 shots in the game. You are either successful or unsuccessful with each shot. / *never realized this* - and chances are you didn't either. The 6 shots are:

- |             |                        |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. Block    | 4. Take-out with stick |
| 2. Hide     | 5. Score               |
| 3. Take-out | 6. Shoot through       |

Give this form some consideration as it relates to your game.

## Section V - TRACKING YOUR HAMMERS

On Eastern Courts, there would be little need for this, because a top shuffler makes about 90% of his/hers hammers. On Western Courts, where scoring is at a premium, this *never* happens - period. Do you know how many hammers of the 8 you get in a game are successful? You should. Players who know me, and those who attend my strategy sessions, are familiar with my quote, "If any shuffler on our Western/Fast Courts could consistently make just 4 of 8 (50 %), that shuffler would be the Tiger Woods of Shuffleboard." Please read that last sentence again, because I believe it with all my heart. I've purchased a clicker used by baseball umpires at a sporting goods store for under \$5.00 and tracked my hammers for the past 3 shuffle seasons (Appendix A-5 Page35). I'll use the 2002-03 as my best example. My goal that year was to play 100 tourney and league games. Out of the 104 games played that season, I won 84 of them - for an 81% winning average. I am telling you this for a reason. Even though I had great success, my hammer % for the year was *only* 32%(3 of 8 is 38%). To go a bit further, I keep track of 2 types of hammers. The top 2 parts of the clicker shows draw hammer made on the left - attempted on the right - in this case 2 of 4. Then, I also kept track of take-out hammers with a successful stick - again the top counter on the bottom ½ of the clicker shows 1 made out of 4 attempts - the bottom clicker. I urge the reader to use some way of tracking hammers - it'll surprise you!

## Section VI - THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CUE

Have you ever thought of this one? Now I don't mean the type of cue you use, although that's something to think about; I mean the length of the cue being used (Appendix A-6 Page 36-37). Ron Crause of Crescent Run in Mesa and I have been working on this aspect of the game for almost 3 seasons now. The full narrative from both of us appears in the Appendix. I strongly urge you to look at this for your game. On these fast Western Courts, where speed control is *crucial*, wouldn't it be a godsend to be able to take the same stroke and have the disc travel longer or shorter simply by adjusting the length of cue. We are still working on this as we go to print.

## Section VII - THE MAGNETIC STRATEGY BOARD

Roy McClure, a fine shuffler and a good friend of mine, from Hemet, CA developed this board in 2002 (Appendix A-7 Page 38). I've used it in my strategy sessions for the past 3 seasons. It measures 16"x12" and has a variety of uses. Roy originally designed it for the visually impaired players in our sport. His idea, a good one, was to have a non-player show the visually impaired player where the discs are at the far triangle. This *is not* coaching, because no words are exchanged, and the opposing

player sees the board, too. (Roy has since used it with the hearing impaired). Besides these uses, the board is a great teaching tool for strategy - turned one way it's the far triangle - turned the other it's the going out area. I've talked to many shufflers, and I'll bet you have too, who want to tell you about their great shot to win a great game - the board can be used to visually show this, too. Currently, it's available from Roy, Yours Truly, and M & S Trophies and Engraving in Mesa, AZ. I urge the avid shuffler to give this board a look for your shuffle repertoire.

### Section VIII - BEING MECHANICAL TO USING FEEL/TOUCH

You've heard of players in all sports being "in the zone," where everything is working. I, like you, pray for these days and sometimes weeks! But, being human, perfection seems to be a fleeting thing. Obviously, the mechanics of the stroke including the footwork, can only be refined so much. In fact, I've made it a point to talk with as many accomplished players - many of them Hall of Famers - and to a person the players say after the mid to late 70's the skills seem to decline. Now the opposite end of the scale is the feel/touch of the shot. I liken this to the mental/emotional part of one's game - the shots simply flow without worrying so much about shot mechanics. As you can imagine, *balance* in your game is the key here; too much attention to mechanics can cause tension, whereas too much attention to just letting feel take over can cause sloppiness of execution. To put it in plain words, if you are not playing well look at the above 2 factors and bring balance back into your game.

## PART 5 - PRE-GAME THOUGHTS / GAME PREPARATION

We are now at the courts ready to play our league or tournament game. The following sections are designed to prepare the player for the push of that first disc.

### Section I - COURT ASSIGNMENTS

Most of the tips that follow are designed for the *tournament player*; yet, they can be adapted to even help the novice shuffler. Generally, the charting of a tournament is posted early, and even court assignments are listed about half-way into the game before your's. Let's say you've drawn the second game of the day. I have 3 basic suggestions. One is to try and watch the court you will play for speed and drift of both yellow and black. There are players who refuse to do this and I still wonder

why. Try to get an edge if this is a possibility. Better yet, try to talk to players after their match to get their thoughts on a given court. I once lost a Finals Championship Match at Good Life, because I didn't do this. I won the lag and on this particular court, I needed to start yellow. I didn't do this and it cost me. A third suggestion is to chart/take brief notes on courts you play - you might play them in another tourney. True story here. The very next year at Good Life, I played a Top Flight player on this same court in the quarter finals - the game to get into the trophies. I remembered from the previous year, took yellow, and not only won that match, but went on to win the tourney.

## Section II - THE LAG

In tourney play, if you are on the upper line of the chart you lag yellow, meaning lower line lags black. Whether in Arizona or California, you generally want to win the lag. Here are a few tips. I never shoot first; i.e., I look at adjacent court speed. Each player gets one practice shot before the lag that counts. If I am lagging yellow, I always try to lag *short* of the line, because as you probably know, if black hits yellow, yellow automatically wins. If I am shooting black, my first concern is not to hit yellow - possibly trying another line. One other point for both colors; sometimes you'll play courts where the discs go in the gutter. *Important point* - remember, either color just needs to move the disc out of the starting area - many times that produces a winning lag! One final note - there are some shufflers who believe the lag is meaningless - they contend that reading the court is the important thing. They use their 2 lag shots as practice shots. Think about that one!

## Section III - MY FOUR PRACTICE SHOTS

The remaining sections of Part 5 are on the net at [polyglide.com](http://polyglide.com) - give it a look. Out west, in frame games, a player is allowed 4 practice shots before the start of the game. Game strategy begins here! Let's say I'm shooting yellow. I'm trying to determine two key things: Court Speed and Court Curve/Drift.

First we will look at disc placement (Figure 6 Page 48). Starting at the upside-down V the discs are called 1-2-3-4. Let's look at each shot:

SHOT 1 - (Figure 7 Page 49) Try to shoot all discs into the deep 7, or better yet, the kitchen - why shoot for 10's and 8's if I'm trying to see the entire court. Look at Figure 7. On my first shot, I shoot from the #1 position aiming at the middle 7 on my side of the court. Let's say that the disc drifts 3 discs left and ends up on the center line - what does this shot tell me? I feel that it tells me 2 things:

1. The court drifts 3 discs left from #1 position.
2. My court speed was 2' off - I didn't make the deep 7.

SHOT 2 - (Figure 8 Page 49) On my second shot, I shoot from the #1 position again aiming at the middle 7 on my opponent's side of the court. Let's say that the disc ends up going exactly where I shot, and it goes into the kitchen - what does this shot tell me?

1. Direction and speed were perfect.
2. This is my preferred hammer shot - with a slight cutback on my speed.

SHOT 3 - (Figure 9 Page 50) On my third shot, I shoot from the #4 position aiming at the middle 7 on my side of the court. Let's say that the disc ends up going 3 discs left of my aiming point, but it ends up this time on the upside-down V in the kitchen - what does this shot tell me?

1. The court drifts 3 discs left from the #4 position.
2. My court speed was perfect.

SHOT 4 - (Figure 10 Page 50) On my fourth shot, I shoot from the #4 position aiming at the middle 7 on my opponent's side of the court. Let's say the disc goes one disc left of my aiming point to the back line of the kitchen - what does this shot tell me?

1. The court drifts one disc left.
2. My speed is still very good.

The more I play, the more I contend that being able to *read* a court for *speed* and *drift* will bring about a victory as much as anything! The faster that you can establish *predictability* of your shots, the more success you will have.

#### Section IV - MY OPPONENT'S FOUR PRACTICE SHOTS

All good shufflers know the following - don't go to sleep when your opponent is shooting! Quite the opposite - pay very close attention to even their practice shots. There are 4 basic reasons you should do this:

1. Does the court react the same for them; i.e., they may watch your line on practice shots and may try to copy it - does the court allow them to do this?
2. Watch for the line/path that works for them into a score.

3. Watch for the lines/disc position(s) they *do not* shoot from. Remember - if they are *not/cannot* score from where they are shooting, you need to know this.
4. Finally, as you all know, in the second half of the game, you will need to shoot from that side. Being watchful will serve you well when you get to the other shooting area.

## Section V - THE TWO TYPES OF COURTS OUT WEST

I am going to spend quite a bit of time on this section, because of my whole-hearted belief, which is, a player/the player who wins most games is the one who can figure out/adapt to the court quicker and more efficiently than their opponent. Let me use bowling as an example. The bowler with a 200+ average sometimes only needs a shot or two to figure the line and speed. You know what - I think the same is true of a really expert shuffler! The following narrative, I hope, will be as beneficial to you as any material you read in this book. Most of it will be devoted to the first type of court we will look at. So here goes:

1. The Easy/Playable Court - By definition, this is a court that a player is on that he/she can figure out. You reach a comfort zone on at least 1 side/color. In plain terms, you can capture both the *speed* and *drift* of the court.

I am a great believer in *spot shooting*. I've talked with many players more accomplished than I, and they believe in it, too. Like so many theories in sports, however, there are two schools of thought on *where* to look for the spot. One theory is to look down at the far triangle for a spot or entry point. The other theory focuses on looking at spots on one's own triangle. I, personally follow the second theory. I liken it to the bowling we first talked about earlier. When I first started to bowl, I looked down at the pins, hoping to hit a few of them. As I became a bit more accomplished, I looked at the *spots* on the lane, 12' - 15' away from the foul line. I feel that the same can be applied to shuffleboard. For example, shooting from the #1 position - that nearest the upside-down V, let's say I'm shooting yellow from the head. I look at the T of my triangle where the base of the 10 joins both 8 areas (Figure 11 Page 51). From the left part of the T, I number in my head 1,2,3,4,5 with 3 being where the T intersects. I also assign numbers 6 and 7 to the outside of the 8-7 line where it intersects with the outside of the triangle. Let's say on this court that I shoot from my #1 position over the 3 spot (T intersection) and the disc goes right

through the far 10, into the 8, and stops in the deep 7. With proper speed, then, I can hit any of my 3 scoring areas - so the number I need to remember is 13 (#1 meaning my #1 shooting position and 3 meaning my spot). One final point here - the expert player just knows/remembers to shoot this spot; but, don't be afraid to think of the number to reinforce your choice of spot.

Now, one more piece of information I'll pass along about the scoring triangle I think you'll find most interesting. As in most games, the object of the game of Shuffleboard is to score more points than your opponent. So, just how many discs will fit into each scoring area (Figure 12-A Page 51)? The number that you see in each scoring

area is the total number of discs that can fit into that area; the 10 area will accommodate 8 discs, each 8 area will hold 13 each, each 7 area will hold 25, and the dreaded -10/kitchen area will hold 30. The game is indeed challenging in that there are times in which a player cannot get even 1 six inch disc into the positive scoring area when needed.

2. The Difficult/Unplayable Court - You will only understand this is you have played out west on lightning fast, drifty courts. There are times when 1 score will win the game! In fact, I, like some of you have even won games with no score - being that my opponent scored in the negative.

What do I do, you might ask. Well, for one thing you've got to play that court, they won't move you from it. But, you know what, your opponent must play it, too. Patience, and more patience, is the key to stay in and win matches on a court that is impossible. Secondly, speed is even more crucial, because these types of courts force you to give a harder stroke to hold the line. There are many more kitchens because of this. Thirdly, I believe that the strategy is different on very difficult courts (I'll refer to this in the chapters that follow). I suggest you consider two other thoughts. One is that I *never* leave discs lying around when it is time for my opponent's hammer. Many times the player will purposely or accidentally glance off a disc for a score. Because of this, I tend to shoot through much more often on these types of courts. Conversely, on my hammer I try to have one of my discs anywhere near the triangle so that I can hit it and try to roll in. The key here is to really never give up on impossible courts - strange things can and do happen!



## PART 6 - FRAMES 1-4 / SETTLING IN

### Section 1-A - Playing Without The Hammer

In a 16 frame game a player does this for 8 frames. Basically, there are 4 strategies a player can use to keep the opponent from scoring. Let's look at each one:

- A. Going On A Number - I feel 90% of all shufflers use this strategy, which is simply trying to score on every shot. (I personally don't use this strategy, except on very difficult courts). There are 2 benefits of using this approach: one is that it grooves the stroke into the numbers, and secondly it immediately puts pressure on your opponent to hit and stick.
- B. Going On A High 8 or 7 - this method is very similar to A, except that the disc barely gets into the 8 or 7. This is an effective strategy just before your opponent's hammer, because on the take out the take-out disc will usually stay on the line.
- C. Blocking The Opponent's Preferred Line - Generally, on most courts a player tries to find 2 ways in to the scoring area - usually 1 on each side of the triangle. Many times, however, there is only 1 line available. If you can block this line with your 4<sup>th</sup> shot, many times your opponent will have great difficulty scoring. This is a *great strategy* on very difficult courts.
- D. Putting Up Blocks - I feel that this is a very effective strategy to use on playable courts. Although the main strategy employed on slower courts, most Western Fast Court players don't consider it. They should (Figure 12-B Page 52). Basically, there are 2 main blocks used in shuffleboard. One is the St. Pete, which is set on your opponent's side of the court. The other is the Tampa, which is set on your side. The aim of both is the same - either a stick on the take out or a miss allows you to sneak/hide behind the block.

### Section 1-B - Playing With The Hammer

In that same 16 frame game, a player gets 8 of these. If you ask even the novice shuffler what to do if you have the hammer, to a person they'll all say *keep the court clear*, i.e., leave no opponent's discs on the board. Yet very few of us, if any, do this with regularity. I can cite 3 reasons for the above:

1. The Hammer Shooter misses a take-out (very possible - especially on

difficult courts early in a game) now a 2<sup>nd</sup> disc from an opponent will be on the court.

2. The Hammer Shooter tries to score on an open court, before the hammer - if unsuccessful, many times the opponent will counter with a score or block of their own.
3. The Hammer Shooter Gambles (Big Mistake) and tries to score behind a disc or on a tap in. If the shot is not made now there are at least 2 discs on the board with more to come.

Now you may say, well, what's the problem with 1-2-3. The basic problem is that the court is *not* open for your last shot. Think about this very carefully.

## Section II - Situational Strategy of Selected Shots

The remainder of Parts 6,7,8 will look at 21 common situations you see in a game of shuffleboard. Be advised, it's important to consider 3 main elements as we look at how to react to each:

1. WHEN does it occur - Beginning, Middle, End of the game?
2. WHAT is the game score at that time?
3. COURT CONDITION - that is, am I playing on a playable or non-playable court?

### SITUATION 1- No Hammer - Playable Court

Controlling the 10 area - I play the game quite differently than most players. My thinking is much like a Chess player. Those of you who know the game, know that controlling the center on the chess board is crucial to controlling the match. I feel that the same is true in shuffleboard. Also, I take a page from Florida/Slow Court play and that is to *block* the board. To me, going on a number allows my opponent into the numbers. I, personally don't want this to happen (Figure 13 Page 53). The idea is to shoot short of the 10 area or very near it. A champion black shooter will generally play take out - clearing the court. Now I suggest 10's for 3 main reasons. The first, especially early in the game, is to take going into the kitchen/-10 out of the equation - the -10 area is a good 8-9' away! Second, by shooting for a 10 or the 10 area, you are blocking/clogging the court - if a take out sticks or misses then you can try a sneak or clog some more. Third, if you can throw a 10 on your 4<sup>th</sup> disc, the 10 area allows *very little* margin for error on a stick. Consider another factor - if that 4<sup>th</sup> disc is short of the 10, many times the opposing player will either clip the disc,