

possibly tap it into the 10 by accident, or more likely push harder to get by it - *sometimes resulting in a kitchen, especially early in a match.*

SITUATION 2 - No Hammer - Playable Court

Finding the Line - Remember those practice shots; what if they don't go anywhere close to what we wanted? On these occasions, I am very happy not to have the first hammer. This leads us to exploring to find the line (Figure 14 Page 53). There is some controversy to this in that many shufflers tend to play one line only - no matter what court they are on. I question this. If my 4 practice shots (2 from #1 and 2 from #4) did not give me the desired results, I need to move. I will try the #2 position over the T (number 1 spot) and see what happens. Remember, if you are not getting the results you want, keep exploring in non-hammer frames - you must zero in when it becomes hammer time. I feel this facet of the game is even *more crucial* on those non-playable courts!

SITUATION 3 - No Hammer - Playable Court

This situation comes up quite often early in a match. You have a good score on the board and it's your shot. What to do? Let's say it's your last disc. My take is very simple - *block your counter* (Figure 15 Page 54). Let me tell you why - it's to get into your opponent's head early. If your block is a good one the better player will leave it and score or try to. So that frame may end 8-8, 8-7, or even 8-0 if they miss the hammer. Even an 8-8 score will unnerve many shufflers - now they don't feel too good! Let's look at the other choice. With a counter, I put in a score on the other side of the board. You've seen it many times - the player takes them both and many times they will stick in the process. *Now* they feel good - you see what I mean. Now, let's look at this same scenario on the very difficult court - I can't predict even where my disc is going - rather than try to block, I'm going for a score - realizing even the take outs will be tough. Think about it.

SITUATION 4 - Hammer, Playable Court

This situation occurs quite frequently in a match, especially early. It is yellow's hammer and black has a disc on the centerline - separating the 8's (Figure 16 Page 55). What to do here? I see 3 options. One is to try and score a 10, but if the speed is not right black could score on a bump in. A

second option is to try and pass the black disc and score an 8 or 7 on either side. Many times that extra push ends one up in the kitchen. *Remember* - we are early in a match - the wax is fast and maybe we are still a bit nervous. The safest shot is option #3. Shoot at the black disc with take out speed and try to roll into either 8. Shooting that speed we take kitchen out of the mix even if I miss the black. On impossible courts this is definitely the shot to take - with even a little more take out speed.

SITUATION 5 - Hammer, Playable Court

In this scenario, yellow has the hammer and black has a counter that is over $\frac{1}{4}$ blocked (Figure 17 Page 55). What to do? Take it from me, there is only 1 safe course of action to take - shoot to make your hammer. My rule of thumb is this - if there is *any* chance to miss it, *don't* go after it. Ego is the big word here for all of us. We all say to ourselves, I think/know that I can hit that disc. But, many times we either clip the front black or miss everything. It's amazing just how many times that missed scoring opportunity of a 10,8, or 7 early in a game will come back to haunt us later in a close game. Conversely, without a doubt, the take out shot is *the shot* on a very difficult court. Why, you might ask? Very simply, on that real tough court I don't know where the disc is going anyway. For that reason alone do the take out.

SITUATION 6 - Hammer Frame, Playable Court

Many shufflers don't like the conservative game. Here is a scenario for them that you see quite often in a match. Black sticks on a take out to the right of the point - a good Tampa for yellow. On shot #3 for yellow a hide is in the offing. This is a *gamble* - I don't recommend it. On yellow's attempt at the hide they catch a 10-8 liner (Figure 18 Page 56). Now 2 discs are on the board. Black can now attempt a bump in 10, a sneak in to the 10, a score along the center line or set a block left of the point (my favorite). Now look at yellow's hammer - 3 discs are on the board. Why? Because yellow gambled, lost, and now faces a tough hammer shot. If this situation occurs on a very difficult court, the clear on disc #6 is imperative!

SITUATION 7 - Hammer, Playable Court

I probably receive more criticism or raised eyebrows on the following than any other strategy I use. The court is completely clear and I'm ready to shoot disc #6 (my third shot) 80-90% of the time I'll shoot that disc

completely through the court (Figure 19 Page 56). Why, you might ask? Very simply, I want the court wide open for my hammer to come. Black cannot put any shot on its last disc that I cannot hit/get to. Remember, it's early in the match - here's the downside of trying to go on the board:

1. I could kitchen my disc - always a possibility
2. I could shoot short in the wrong place - now black could hide or maybe I block my own line for the hammer
3. I could score and black sticks on the take out

Now on that impossible board, the only sensible shot is a shoot through - remember the old adage - *keep the board clear!*

PART 7 - FRAMES 5-10 THE GAME UNFOLDS

Section 1 -

By this time in most matches a player should be settling in to the match and hopefully beginning to figure the court out. This brings us to some mid-game situations we may encounter. Remember, this takes us through frame #10 - which includes the turn around.

SITUATION 1 - Either Color, Playable Court

The first two situations we will look at are quite philosophical in nature - you will note this because we look at both colors. You hear this all the time from players, "It's a black court or it's a yellow court." I'll be honest with you, I'm still not sure what this means. I say this because many times a player will share their thoughts with me, and yet when I play the court I see a different result (Figure 20 Page 57). Let's say the court has a significant, but predictable, bend to the right 1'-2'. I'm playing yellow. TIP - I find that a court with a big bend many times will have a straight shot down my side. Many think it's a black court, because of the bend to the right. However, if the speed of the court is 14+ seconds, many times black cannot get their disc into the triangle. Yet, if I shoot from my #4 I can score on the left side of the triangle. My suggestion to all shufflers is this, *you* decide for yourself if the court is yellow or black. I say this for a very important reason. Let's say you are black and can do nothing and everything yellow does is working. You are *probably* on a yellow board. *Be patient,*

you'll switch to that color shortly. Don't start gambling and trying fancy shots to try and catch up. Realize that if you can stay close (15-21 points) you should make it up after switching colors. Conversely, if we are on the good color, say yellow on this court, we had better get the lead and then some by the half, because we'll be on the tough side shortly. Take it from me, one of the worst feelings in the game is making the color switch and realizing we were on the good side *and* we didn't know it! Now, if we are playing that impossible court have even more *patience*, because as many of you realize some courts have no good side!

SITUATION 2 - Either Color, Playable Court

On the fast Western Courts, taking out the opponent's scoring or near scoring discs *and sticking* is imperative to be considered a top shelf player. By this time in most games both players have settled in to the game, calmed their nerves, and generally figured out what the court will and will not allow them to do. To me, take out speed is somewhere between kitchen speed and full speed. I generally shoot from the 1½ position (Figure 21 Page 57). I generally recommend slightly harder take out shots at the outset of the game to learn the court nuances. Remember the last situation - this is a yellow court with basically a straight down shot. Because the court is bending to the right most of the black discs will line up for my take out speed - especially by the 5th frame - I need to stick these. Practice and more practice will help you to develop the confidence you need to do this. Now, if you are reading this carefully, some will say what do you do when you get to frame 9 and after. My response is simple - play short and don't go on the number. Also, on my turn around practice shots I definitely will try some lines *not shot* by my opponent in the first 8 frames. Now, what to do on those very difficult courts; my suggestion is to keep your speed up the whole game if need be. Remember that misses are the biggest danger on those tough courts.

SITUATION 3 - No Hammer, Playable Court

I see the following situation quite often as I'm sure you do too. We are shooting our last disc before your opponent's hammer and they have a disc up top near the 10 area. I see many shufflers knock this disc off them and try to stick or I see them go on the board for a score. I *do not* recommend these options for a number of reasons. Let's say the game is a close one - either tied or one or the other player is ahead by 1 or 2 discs. If you try the clear and cannot stick you now leave the court wide open for your opponent's hammer. If you choose to go on the board, you are now letting your opponent into the scoring area. You might say, then, well what should I do? My answer is to *think defense* (sound familiar) - block the court. Set your final disc to the right of theirs near the point (Figure 22 Page 58). Now here

comes a different take on those impossible courts. I choose to take that disc off and get off myself. Those of you who have played crazy courts like I'm describing don't want a wide-open court! Many times a wick or glancing off of a disc is the only way to score. Think carefully.

SITUATION 4 - No Hammer, Playable Court

This is similar to the last situation, except that the opponent has a disc on the 8 lines (or 7 lines) with each player having one shot left. For the most part, I see a knee-jerk response on this one from most players. They simply bang off the disc hoping for a stick. I say by now you should know if you can control the 10 area. Let's say we can. Again, thinking defense, put your disc in to the 10 or near the 10 blocking the hammer shooters double (Fig. 23 Page 58). Remember, we are trying to plug/clog the court and just not give a wide open hammer. However, you should know the response on that very hard court - get rid of that disc and leave the court open.

SITUATION 5 - No Hammer, Playable Court

I call this section the Lost Art in Shuffleboard, the Deep 7 (Fig.24 Page 59). I say Lost Art, because I do believe that, in the past or nowadays, there are players who value/play this shot. Let's say that this stage of the game we need something to happen, because we are behind or not playing particularly well this game. Wouldn't it be great if we could shoot Deep 7 hoping for a miss or roll into the kitchen after the take out. I do think that this should be a part of our game, but I see very few players using it. I can tell you this, it does unnerve an opponent if a player can consistently make this shot. Again, practice and more practice can make this shot work for you, especially if you are not a kitchen player. This is a particularly effective shot on those very difficult courts, because kitchening is almost impossible. *Fear* is the biggest obstacle we all face when having to execute this shot. The length of cue theory, mentioned earlier, may help here.

SITUATION 6 - Hammer, Playable Court

This situation will probably cause a stir, because it deals with a subject that there is always much talk about and that is *luck in shuffleboard*. I am probably in the minority, because I believe that there is not much of it that happens in a 16 frame match. Now, let me qualify that for a bit. Remember in this scenario we are black and have the hammer. If we keep the court clear as we should then at best only 1 disc of the opponent should be on the court at hammer time. Now with only 1 disc to contend with we are cutting down significantly on luck entering into the picture.

Now, let's look at Figure 25 Page 59 for another look at luck. Our opponent has 1 shot left before our hammer. Can you see the possibility for much to happen with the remaining 2 shots? In black's case, there is no need for this confusion if the board has been kept clean. On that very difficult court both players are courting disaster - depending on which color gets the luck!

SITUATION 7 - Hammer, Playable Court

In my estimation, this is the most important segment of the entire book. It's called *Make Those Hammers!* As I emphasize in all of my strategy sessions, if a player could consistently make 4 of 8 hammers during the course of a season, they would be virtually unbeatable. Now I know players from Slow Court play will snicker that 50% standard. You see top players on those courts virtually never miss a hammer or consistently make near 90% of them. Getting back to the Western Courts it would seem that 50% would be a reasonable expectation to an open board. Can you do it? First off, a player needs to track their hammers (Appendix A-8 Page 38). Please allow me to share one of my seasons of play to illustrate this. My goal every season is to play 100 competitive games; i.e., tournament and league play. In the 2002-2003 shuffleboard season I accomplished this goal. I played 104 competitive games and won 84 of them for an 81% winning percentage. The reason that I share this with the reader is that I tracked my hammers in those games (I've been tracking for 4 seasons now). If you studied Appendix A-8 Page 38, you will notice that I broke down the 2 types of hammers shot in a match. One is called the Draw Shot - a shot to an open board. The other is the Stick Shot (or a bump shot of my own disc); in other words, another disc was hit on the hammer attempt. Now, here is what I'm getting at. On my draws for the year, I made 41% of them. On my sticks/bumps I made 21% of them. When I combine these 2 figures, I come up with a 32% average! Folks, 3 of 8 hammers made is 38%. My point here is simple - I made 32% of hammers for the season, yet I won 81% of my games. I wonder what 50% of hammers would have done. One final statistic regarding my thought on *defensive play*. My scoring average for that season was 33 points a game. My opponent's scoring average for the year was 21 points a game. (I also keep every game score). One final tip - on those very difficult courts even 1 positive score can win a game. *Patience* is imperative on these courts.

PART 8 - FRAMES 11-16 / THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

This last set of situations are called The Moment of Truth for a reason. If a†

this point in a match we are ahead what do we need to do to preserve victory; whereas, if we are behind what can we do to possibly win.

SITUATION 1 - Ahead, Playable Court

We have just made the turn and we are ahead -we need to know the Magic Numbers! We are playing black now and Frame 9 has just been completed (Figure 26 Page 60). We are starting Frame 10 shooting black out. By a stroke of good play we are ahead, 31 to -3 that's 34 points. Our opponent only has 4 hammers left - note the 4 checkmarks at the base of the scoreboard. By my calculations, if our opponent makes all 4 hammers of 8's, and we make nothing, the opponent will get 32 points. Remember, we are ahead by 34. What to do on that first shot in Frame 10. I suggest that we shoot through and knock off all opponent's discs - let them have that wide open board. (In my heart the game is ours if we don't play any more). The error that I see many shufflers make is that they keep playing when the game is in their favor. We must realize *when* to stop playing! If they have 3 hammers left and we are ahead by 25 - if they have 2 hammers left and we are ahead by 17, and if they have 1 hammer left and we are ahead by 11 - the strategy should always be the same - shoot through on shot 1 and clear all discs. I liken the above to two well known sports - basketball and football. In basketball, if the team is ahead by even 4 points why come down the court and shoot quickly, the team ahead is playing to run out the clock. In football, if the team is ahead by 9, why throw passes which are intercepted or dropped to stop the clock? The game is theirs - the game just needs to end. Likewise, in shuffleboard, when we are ahead we are trying to get to Frame 16 and win by at least 1 point. The above strategy is Western/Fast Court Strategy - Defensive. We are not trying to get to 75 points; we are simply trying to play 16 frames and be ahead by at least 1 point. Now, if we are playing on those impossible courts and we are ahead 7 - 0, let's say, and we are on the good color - what to do? I suggest shooting almost everything through. Many of my games finish quickly on tough courts, because I may shoot through my first 3 shots just to get to my hammer - for many times my opponent cannot keep a disc on the court. Give this one some thought - believe me, it works!

SITUATION 2 - Ahead -Playable or Non-Playable Court

This will be an easy one for you if you agree with the last section (Figure 27 Page 60). Our opponent will try Deep 7's to try and get back into the game - either hoping for a miss, a stick they can kitchen, or our hit on their 7 ending us up in the kitchen on our take out. Now let's say they kitchen their attempt. We are ahead and the magic numbers are with us - what should our shot be? I suggest shooting our

disc through. Why block or score again - we don't need to. Why have your opponent get back into the game by reversing your good 8 - putting you into the kitchen and holding the 8. Now that's an 18 point swing. Why? *We kept playing!* Many shufflers will say, "Bob, what are you afraid of? The opponent's chance of making that shot might be 3 or 4 out of 100." As many of you shufflers know, even a 1 in a 100 chance means that a particular shot *could* succeed. You know what, I'm sorry, but I don't want to take that chance. As all of you shufflers can attest, *strange* things can and do happen in games. Think about those odds in your next game!

SITUATION 3 - Ahead - Playable or Non-Playable Court

Shuffleboard, like most games, is hard to figure. I'm sure all readers have either seen or experienced the following scenario late in a game. When we've tried to stick as the game developed we had little success. Now it's later in the game, we are black, and yellow goes on the board, hoping we'll stick. The opponent's aim is to try and kitchen us. Like I tell shufflers in our strategy sessions, I don't care if we shoot the take-out from a cannon invariably we *will* stick when we don't want to. Now yellow tries a kitchen on our stuck disc, but misses it entirely! The Magic Numbers are in our favor, so what should we do on our shot? I strongly suggest that we knock off our own disc (Figure 28 Page 61). Very simply put, if we do anything else the opponent will try the kitchen again. Don't give them that chance.

SITUATION 4 - Behind - Playable Court

None of us like this situation. As the game gets near the end we are behind by *more* than one disc. Is kitchen playing ever in order? I say a resounding yes! That -10 is not on the board for decoration purposes or for us to put ourselves in. Now it is our play to go on the board, the deeper the better. I've had my best luck from the mid to deep 8. Find your best line for feel and predictability and keep putting your shots there (Figure 29 Page 61). We all know kitchen speed. Generally, it's that little extra we put on a shot. Shoot that same way on kitchen tries. On your release just give the shot that little extra. Now on those very difficult courts kitchening is next to impossible. Deep 7's need to be the play.

SITUATION 5 - Behind - Playable Court

We are behind by more than 2 discs as the game is winding down. The Deep 7 needs to be employed now. We put one in real deep on the opponent's side in the 7. They either miss it or choose to shoot through. What should be our response (Figure 30 Page 62)? I say, without a doubt, a deep 7 on the other side. The mistake I see many players make is to score a 10 or an 8. That puts no pressure

on the opponent, in fact, your good shooters will simply take that top disc down to the 7 - many times clearing them both. Remember, we put the first 7 there to hope for a roll into the -10 on the opponent's take out or a stick allowing us to try for the kitchen. Force the opponent to shoot at one of your 7's. Our only hope on that very difficult court is to hope we are behind by no more than two discs and get 1 in to the deep 7 - hopefully, we have at least 1 more hammer coming. Remember again that we are on real tough court - even for the take outs. In fact, don't be afraid to shoot through yourself to force them to shoot at that lone 7.

SITUATION 6 Behind, Playable or Non-Playable Court

This situation is as much psychological as it is physical/shotmaking. I say this to all of us who are behind near games end. Our play is to go deep 7, but on this shot we kitchen our attempt (Figure 31 Page 62). Granted we have pressure on us to come from behind and try to win the match. But wait! Think of your opponent's pressure - they are ahead so they should win. I say all of this for a particular reason - don't be afraid of kitchen on your deep attempts. A good player should shoot through allowing you to simply clear your kitchen. We are hoping and praying they don't do this! If they try to get cute with a score or block on our kitchen, they are giving us a chance to put them in the kitchen on a reverse. Remember, this is a slim chance but , it is a chance. On that hard court this play is even tougher, the reversal, but we must still try it at this point in the game.

SITUATION 7 - Behind - Playable or Non-Playable Court

This last situation, I'll admit, is a bit preachy. We are behind by 3 or more discs with no chance to win. Very simply, please - please play till the end of the game. What do we learn if we simply push through the last 2 or 3 frames? We are not going to win, but what better time is there to practice our deep 7's or kitchen attempts than in a real match. In later matches in the season we might benefit late in a game by one of these shots. Simply pushing through teaches us nothing - it just shows that we have given up. Play till the end.

PART 9 - FINAL COMMENTS AND SHUFFLEBOARD'S FUTURE

Section I - Other Game Situations

As every shuffler realizes, there are literally hundreds of situations one can

face , and just when you think you've seen it all you'll see something never seen before! I believe the choices we make in given situation depends on 3 main factors:

- A. When in the Game - simply put, my response to a given situation will vary - is it the 2nd frame or the 15th?
- B. Type of Court - will the court allow me to do what I want/am trying to do?
- C. My Play for the Day - this factor needs to be determined ASAP in a game - cautious play should always begin a match.

One final note - Always remember that the Meat and Potatoes wins Shuffleboard Games. We all make great shots from time to time; but, if we rely on these frame after frame we will not be successful in the long run.

Section II - The "Art" of Winning

Now, the age old question - why do some players, male or female, win so much more than others? I contend that 4 factors come into play :

- A. Confidence - All top players have this trait. It is not a boastfulness but an inner feeling. Practice and more practice and play and more play are the key ingredients.
- B. Reading the Court - I still contend that being able to read the court quickly in a match pays big dividends (many tips were given earlier in this book.)
- C. Minimize the Mistakes - Let your opponent make the mistakes. Do this by smart/conservative choices. Granted, we will all make poor shots and poor choices, but these should be few and far between.
- D. Patience - Calmness and concentration seem to mark the top players. Remember, especially on the fast Western Courts, we cannot/should not rush the game.