

THE DO'S AND THE DON'TS OF SHUFFLEBOARD – by Earl Ball

Earl began shuffling in 1995. He achieved his Florida Shuffleboard Association (FSA) Pro status in 1999, and in just five seasons qualified for the FSA Hall of Fame. He currently (in 2023) holds the second-place position for Lifetime FSA Points, over 300 points past his 1000 Point Achievement in 2017. His accomplishments as a player are astounding, including many championship wins, undefeated in an International Shuffleboard Association tournament, and qualifying for the Florida State Masters tournament 22 times, taking first place five times. Earl has also contributed greatly to the sport of shuffleboard, holding offices at the Club, District, State and International levels. He has dedicated much of his time to promoting shuffleboard and to teaching other players. He wrote this series of shuffleboard tips in the summer of 2006, sharing his intimate knowledge of the strategy and techniques of the game for the betterment of all players.

I REALLY DON'T KNOW IT ALL AND I REALLY DON'T WANT TO PROVE IT TO YOU!!

I've been encouraged to write about some of the shuffleboard tips I teach. You all know I'm unorthodox (different), poco loco (a little crazy) and even weird (really different) and all of that's OK with me. Just don't call me normal! You won't find any of these tips in Glen Peltier's book and I expect Wilber Estes [author of *Modular Shuffleboard*] to go bananas as he reads these tips.

Lots of these things aren't really mine. I've picked them up from various players along the way, either by listening or watching. Some have been used against me and some have been used by me.

Some things I'm saying and going to say aren't what I always do. My main partner, Stan Williamson, rarely does the right things by the book. That's one of the things that make him so dangerous. If you have a partner like that, you know you have to swallow hard and take the good with the bad or find another partner.

Do as I say, not as I do!



HAVE THE COURAGE TO WIN

We've all faced situations where we knew what shot we had to take but were afraid to look bad. One of my partners was always afraid to look bad. I used to tell him to take the shot anyway, because if we lost they weren't going to let him stay because he didn't look bad. He was going home too. If you have to run the alley to get another scoring disc, do it. If you have to shoot a ten, do it. Sounds simple, doesn't it!

Last year in the semifinals of a tournament we needed one disc to win. Our opponents had the hammer and needed three discs to win. I had a thin hide from the head for my final shot but played it by the book. I blocked part of the board instead of by my own rule, which is win when you can, take that hide, rush the game! My opponent scored his hammer and then his partner, Mike Vassalotti, the best player in the game, got two on my partner. I never got a chance to win the game.

In the finals, Mike snuck a half-hidden 7 for the winning score against David Earle. David needed to score a 10 with his hammer for the win and had to do it because the opponents were going to get the next two hammers. Now Mike's talent has intimidated many players and it's not unusual to take the wrong shot against him. I'm sure that's what happened to David. He tried to take out the seven and stick the score but missed and lost. He knows better, just as I do, because we've talked about it many times.

Know what you have to do to win, be aggressive and do it!!



KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

Know what's going on at the other end, don't "think" you know. Sounds obvious don't it!

In a tournament earlier this year, Joan Cook and I had 68 and our opponents, a fine team of newer Pros, had 67 and the hammer from the foot. I put up a guard and he cleared and stuck. I tried to hide and stopped in the eight

(yes, I know I should have been in the seven). To top it off I was open near the 7/8 line. For the second time in the match he thought I was on the line and covered my good disc and in this case the winning disc.

Now you just can't let that happen and your partner can't let it happen either. It's hard enough to win; you can't throw your chances away. But what's worse is he was so upset with himself he stopped thinking and let emotion take over. Had he thought about it he would have realized that I had 76 and a 10 would give him 77 and victory! He crashed into the cover guard trying to get the good disc and stuck. He probably should have shot a score out onto the open board and kept the 10 open for his hammer. If I cleared it and stayed scoring on the board he still would have had a kitchen shot for a chance to score and win. As it was I covered the 10 and won with 76.

Keep your head about you.



THINK

In the same match, Joan and I had 66 and they had 67 and the hammer from the head. Somehow Joan had a 7 about eight inches below the 7/8 line and one shot left. She knew she had to put another 7 on so we would have 80 and the opponent would have to take her off. She put a 7 on the other side.

I remembered that in Lake Worth during my first year Jay Goldman had the same situation against me and snuggled his own block so I had to take him off and couldn't score. In the "Masters" that same year I had Mike Vassalotti beat. He needed two scoring discs and I needed one with the hammer. He snuggled his own eight and I didn't have room to score, he kept one and scored the next hammer and won.

I wish Joan had had those experiences because I know she would have remembered. As it was though, the opponent took her off and scored. His partner scored his hammer and they won!

Learn from your experiences.



CAN YOU GET OUT OF THE KITCHEN?

It's really not too hard to do on beaded courts, just rear back and let it fly!! But on rough courts you might just still be there; happens all the time because the discs don't move forward as easily. Many a person has stood and shook their head as they tried several times only to find themselves still in there!

When you aim at the edge of a disc, your eye for some reason often takes you back right on the center of the disc. I, like everyone else, had problems with this until Dale Williams gave me a tip. Aim at an intersection on the other end or someone's foot or some other item that if you hit your target you'll clip the disc on the way past. That keeps you from aiming at the disc itself. It's also about the only time you'll hear me say it's OK to shoot from some place other than the inside or outside position. Move the shooting disc where you can get an angle on an intersection.

This is also how I teach clearing (yes, I can clear even if you've never seen me do it and don't believe it).

Aim at something else.



THE WRONG SHOT CAN BE THE WINNING SHOT

You've probably heard me say that you never always do something and you never never do something. Sometimes you have to do what you never do. It depends on who you're playing, who your partner is playing, and how well you are both playing, not to mention the score and lots of other factors.

Last week Joan Cook and I were playing a match. The other team had 67 and the hammer from the head; we had 65. Joan had a Tampa, a little too much to the center of the point. With one shot left, she did the right thing by shooting a high 7 on the open side of the board so they couldn't win with a clear. You can count on Joan to shoot the right shot, but for once I wish she had shot the wrong shot and tried to bump up the 10 for the winning score. They made their last hammer and won.

Sometimes the wrong shot is the winning shot.



SCORE YOUR DARN HAMMER FOR CRYING OUT LOUD

How many times have you said that under your breath when your partner has chased a scoring disc. How many times have you said it to yourself!

If you want to see the proper use of the hammer, go watch Glen Peltier and his partner play. Unless game point is on the board, he'll score his hammer every time instead of trying to clear a partially hidden scoring disc. And so will his partner. I know that's a fact because if he doesn't he's playing his last match with Glen. I've seen it many times. If you ask Glen about it, he'll tell you he's been playing so long and seen so many games turn around that you just can't throw away the chance to score, and I agree with him.

I also agree with Jack Grant. You can't score your hammer if you are in the kitchen. How many times have you seen a player, early in the game or in a game that is about even or a game that they have the lead late in the game, try to reverse a kitchen? Great players try it all the time and sometimes they pay the price. The right play is to blast it out of the kitchen so you can score your hammer.



YOU'RE ABOUT TO LOSE! WHAT DO YOU DO?

Your opponent is about to win, but you have one shot left and a clear board. What do you do?

Almost everyone will say shoot a high 10; a few will say a high 8. Wrong, get the disc on the board. The other guy is nervous, he's trying hard, often he will roll off the scoring surface. If you've been the player doing the shooting you know that's true!

Now if a 10 will give you the game point, then by all means shoot a 10. But forget high, just get it on there. He can't leave you there and will be really nervous.



WHAT ABOUT THE HIGH 10?

You'll hear me say it's the wrong shot almost every time. High 10's have a way of being low 10's and that translates into a scoring disc and a half for the other team.

Remember, when you are trying to steal the opponent's hammer there are a lot of lines to get next to and they don't all run across the court. In fact, if I were telling you how to steal your opponent's hammer I'd probably tell you to try to get to the outside edge of the 8 or the 7, giving your opponent the chance to hit the angle line also.



DON'T HIT THE GUARD

When I started playing a great player gave me a great tip. Ralph Day told me that when I get a guard early in the game to give myself plenty of room when I shoot to get behind it because I wouldn't know the drift. The other player would probably just clear if I wasn't well hidden. If I didn't hit the guard, I would be much more successful the second time I try to get behind it. I try to ingrain this into new players. I do wish I would listen to myself more often!

Don't hit the guard the first time you try it.



DEADWOOD

Ever see deadwood, stray discs come into play? Happens all the time! Did you know that some players put deadwood out on purpose! How many times have you seen George Darwin put out a deep poor guard when he doesn't have the hammer? He then clears and if the deadwood is still there when it comes to his last shot he takes that hide or bumps it up and all of a sudden you're chasing him. He isn't the only one like that.

Watch out for the traps.



HIT ONE OR THE OTHER

What do you do if you try to clear and stick and your opponent gets one partially hidden? Well you try to get it out of course but you **MUST** hit one or the other, the hide or the one you are chasing.

Missing both is the worst thing you can do. If you hit the hide your opponent will probably try to re-cover his disc and we all know that isn't the easiest thing to do!

Don't miss them both for goodness sake!



GETTING TWO DISCS OFF

How many times have you seen games go down the drain because someone tried to get both off and missed them both?

A few years ago, in the National Singles at Bradenton, I was watching Hall of Famer Buck Buchanan who was at that time a great player. He was playing Glen Peltier and I learned a big lesson at Buck's expense.

Buck was a couple of discs from going out; Glen had the hammer and was at 45. Glen put one on the 7 and Buck missed, we all do from time to time. Glen put one on the other 7. Buck went for both of them and missed again. Glen put one on the 8 on the same side as the first 7. Buck tried the same shot as last time and missed again. Of course, Glen put an 8 on the other side and now Buck had to get two off or he would lose the next time around. He missed them all and Glen won from 45.

I learned a big lesson because if Buck could miss so could I. I made up my mind that I was going to "get one for sure" and that's what I teach.

Be sure you get one!



WHEN GETTING TWO WILL DO YOU IN

How many times has your opponent been behind and gone on the 7; you miss so he goes on the other 7. You go for two and get them and there you sit in the center of the board, right where he wanted you to begin with. Bonk, in the kitchen you go, darn!

And by the way, I do mean darn! I've had other players say to me you can speak plainer than that, meaning go ahead and use profanity. I explain to them that you just can't allow yourself to do that because it'll come out at just the wrong time if you allow it of yourself. A few years ago, an outstanding player wanted to play on the National team in the International Tournament and just before selection time he let out with a profanity laced tirade, in a tournament, with the National President's wife on the next court. He wasn't selected after being a virtual lock.

Don't lose something you really want!



HE'LL "GO BANANAS"!!!

Wilbur will "go bananas." He knows me pretty well and knows how radical my game is. After all, he's had to put up with me as a partner, as an opponent, and he's observed my play from time to time. I'm sure he doesn't understand what I'm trying to do in some cases. I never tell him. After all, how do you tell someone what you're doing when even you don't know!

I'll build up to the radical stuff, dragging the wizard out further on the limb. Maybe he'll hear it start to break off; maybe he'll be watching me to see if I'm going to saw it off! I'm sure he's pushing me out to the edge of the cliff. Maybe he's waiting his chance to shove me over the edge! In any case, I hope he doesn't try to outdo me with

physiology; I know I'm no match for him in that area. This could be good, stay tuned. Dum tee dum dum, oh the suspense of it all!



PRACTICING THE WRONG SHOT!

I see it all the time! You're on your home court, you run the alley against a wide St Pete and make it, you snuggle without the hammer and don't pay the price, you roll hides, you can do it all. Trouble is you're at home, many times on the same court against the same players. We've all done it and I've seen some great players fall into the trap. They go on the road and nothing works. Two matches and they're gone. You need a reality check from time to time, look for someone else to play against. I travel a little to try different court surfaces in summer tournaments, it keeps you from falling into the trap!

Look for different court surfaces to play. Experience is the only element that will help you become comfortable with varying conditions. I remember the first time I played on beads, I thought I was on ball bearings. I couldn't even keep my balance. I didn't think I ever wanted that experience again. I hear a lot of newer players, even pros, that say they're lost on a court surface different than they have on their home courts.

I still run into playing conditions that are tough to adjust to, but like Glen Peltier, I try to take the attitude that I never saw a court that wasn't my favorite court. No matter what the conditions, I'm still playing shuffleboard and that beats the next best thing. You'd be surprised how your upbeat attitude will push your opponent's attitude down as he's having trouble adjusting. Not that I'd ever use psychology to my advantage!



WHAT'S THE RIGHT SHOT?

We've all asked that question and we've all been asked that question too! Often that question comes along the lines of should I clear or do something else. I advise when in doubt "Clear", although I don't always do that. I look to give the opponent the most trouble that I can, put the pressure on and keep it on, give the other guy a chance to make a mistake!

The right shot is "the shot you can make" and that's true. You can explain the best right shot or some alternatives but there's no sense in your trying to do something you don't do well or can't do anyway. We've all sat on the other end and said, "oh no" as the block is coming down the court, convinced our partner has made the wrong shot, only to have it work perfectly. The words that come out of our mouth is, "great shot, what do I know anyway".

When I'm having trouble executing shots I try to keep it simple, shoot right at the discs, nothing fancy and it works. I get back on track and the game begins to come back. I get in trouble because I'm trying to cut too many shots. Maybe that happens to you too!



IS STEALING THE SCORING DISC WORTH THE RISK?

Some players try to steal a scoring disc every time they get a chance, even if it means the opponent gets two scoring discs. Now I believe in stealing scoring discs, but if it will only get you into the 50's and two scoring discs will get your opponent to 45, then I think that's too much risk. If your partner at the foot makes a mistake and gives up two, you're in trouble because now they are in the 60's and have a good chance to win.

Don't steal a meaningless scoring disc if it means letting the opponents back in the game.



ONE POINT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

I want to hold an opponent to 44 instead of 45. I'll go into the seven to keep him off of 45. I don't want the opponent at 61 from the head, or 68 if I can make him chase a seven and only get to 67.

If you think about it there are a lot of places where one point does make a difference and that one point may be gained at 29 instead of 30.

Many players start counting too late in the game.



ONE MISSED HAMMER

Think of how often one missed hammer makes a big difference. Pay attention to the order your opponent is shooting the discs. Also your partner.

A couple of years ago, I was playing a non-walking tournament at Winter Haven. I was playing Jerry Pointer, clearly the class of the field on his home courts. I discovered the #4 disc was slow. So after he beat me up the first game and we changed colors, I tested Jerry out by going on the open board with my last shot when he had the hammer. Sure enough, he would leave me on the board as he shot me for the kitchen. He never did catch on. I won the game and the lag for the third game, and he never caught on in the third game either.

The discs are marked for a reason. Don't let the other guy be the only one that knows what is going on!



HOME COURT ADVANTAGE

Home court players should always have a decided advantage.

Some clubs have discs they only use for tournaments, but if there's a bad disc they don't know it until it's too late and they lose their advantage. It's the same for rough court clubs. Some of them wash the courts just before a tournament and that changes the speed of the courts negating the home court advantage.

For the life of me I don't understand why a club would take the home court advantage away from their own players!



HOW TO USE YOUR PRACTICE SHOTS

I start practice off by sliding a disc with the non-shooting end of the cue back and forth across the shooting box, both my side and the opponent's side. Players are surprised to find out they can feel if a corner is turned up or down or there's a hump in the shooting area.

These little differences give you a hint as to what might happen when you shoot. Remember all the drift is not down the board, some of it's right where your cue starts out. If the corner is turned up it'll push your cue and the disc across the board and if it's turned down it'll pull your cue toward the edge of the board. That's part of the reason I don't shoot my hammer out of the corner because almost all boards have added drift, in or out, from the corner.

I also feel that the speed changes from the corner. On beads you are going from fast on the outside to slower as you cross the center of the board and back to fast on the far side of the board. On rough courts you're going from slow on the outside to faster in the center back to slower as you get to the other side of the board. It's just too hard for me to get the speed.

Almost everyone feels they need to use their speed shots to get the 8 speed up the center of the board, but it doesn't seem to me that you are getting enough information by doing that. I feel you need to shoot all of your practice shots at kitchen speed so you can see the drift all the way down the playing surface.

You need to get certain information out of practice. What happens on your side of the board? It's important to gain control of your own side. Can you cross the centerline and hide if the opponent puts up a sloppy Tampa? What happens in the 10 area? An outstanding pro once told me that sometimes in a match a 10 is going to play a critical part, be it taking the opponent off and holding a 10, or getting the opponent's partially hidden 10 off the board, and I've found him to be right.

Very rarely should you shoot the same shot twice in a practice round. If something goes wrong, you know what it was and can correct for it when the time comes. Remember, your opponent is watching and whatever practice shot you don't take will be used against you. You're going to see that 8 you didn't try or that deep 7.

Some players continue to practice the first few rounds of the game, getting a feel for the board. If you clear, they will know the board and you won't when the time becomes critical.

You have to have a plan!



WHAT IF YOU LOSE YOUR CONFIDENCE?

I got trashed the other day. That day belonged to my opponent. He reversed shot after shot, drifted around guards and canned me like he owned the board, made every double, and drained my confidence right away. My partner was great, he made enough shots to carry us to victory. Therein lies the lesson.

When you're getting trashed maybe the best thing to do is stay out of the way and let your partner take care of things. Sometimes you can win that way. If you both play poorly or run into a hot team, you're gone. If one of you is playing well or having his way, you can still win. When you're both hot, no one can stop you.

Never give up but do recognize when it's not your day or it really is your opponent's day. Sometimes you walk away feeling like you played poorly and let your partner down, but sometimes that's not really the case. Give your opponent his due!



IS CRITICISM GOOD?

There is no such thing as good criticism after a match.

I always try to say encouraging words to my partner after the match, but I've heard many a player come down the court after a match and start telling his partner all the things he did wrong. End of relationship. You just can't do that because you probably took some shots your partner didn't agree with either.

One thing that does happen is you take the winning edge away from your partner because the next time he may not take what could be the winning shot for fear of criticism and you'll be going home again!



SNUGGLING CAN GET YOU WHIPPED

When you snuggle you often wind up giving scoring discs away on your hammer or maybe two. Sometimes you wind up in the kitchen just for good measure.

If you must snuggle, do it only when you have the hammer. Repeat, only when you have the hammer. And as Dale Williams advises, only on the 3rd disc so your opponent only has one chance to make a mess of you.

Books I've read say only to snuggle in the 8's. Glen Peltier would agree with that, because he teaches players how to hit a low snuggle firmly on the side, knocking one of your discs off the board and rolling the other disc into the kitchen. However, some of the game's all-time great players maintain the only place to snuggle is in the 7's, because the lines are further apart and therefore harder to edge your block off the scoring surface.

Snuggling can be a great play late in a game to keep from being put in the kitchen. You really have to decide what will work for you. But keep in mind how dangerous the play is. This is one of the areas where you probably don't want to do what I do. I snuggle on almost every disc late in a game where I have the lead or need two scores to win or can put my partner in position to win. Now and again I get burned.



THE DISC YOU DON'T NEED

If you're in the 70's and your opponents have very little score but do have the hammer, you have to be very careful because at some point they are going to try to shoot your guard into the kitchen. They have no choice. If the board is clear and you have your last shot before they shoot their hammer what do you do with it?

Some consider it bad sportsmanship to just push the disc off the board and are very vocal about it. For that reason, some players act as if they are putting up a St Pete but come up short so the disc will be taken off the board. Some just shoot it off the board anyway.

I have personally lost tournaments by being a good sport and allowing the opponent to be a bad sport by shooting my disc, which I've shot off to the side, into the kitchen.

Now I keep the other guy from being a bad sport by pushing the disc off the board and I suggest you do the same!



SCORING YOUR HAMMER

Sometimes you do everything right clearing the board, and then you miss your hammer because you can't get the speed right. That's why so many players play more on the board or clear more with a controlled speed. Don't lose your hammer speed.

If your opponent is good at shooting something high to take your hammer, try putting your next to last block on the board so they have to take you off. They probably won't want to stay there and give you a free kitchen shot.

Some courts have a very odd or bad spot in them and sometimes you can get the other player's hammer over and over by going to that spot. Sometimes you want to save that spot for just that critical moment when the game is on the line. You know they exist so use them to your advantage.

Some courts are pretty straight down the middle but break out if you are out away from the centerline a little. On those courts your need to go down into the 7 to score your hammer, giving yourself more scoring space.

Little things make a big difference!



WHEN TO SHOOT A 10

When your opponents are 68 and you are at the head with 55, 56, 57, 58, you have to try to position yourself to shoot a 10 if you can't get two blocks. At 55 or 56 you need 10 from both ends. At 57 or 58 you need to shoot the 10 from the head because the opponent will block the 10 from the foot.

Go out on the board with your 3rd shot and your opponent will take you off leaving the 10 open (at 57 you need to be on the 8). If the opponent stays on the board, take your free kitchen shot; if you don't make it then your partner will have to find a way to win. Otherwise you must shoot a 10. Don't worry that you might miss it because if you don't take it, you will lose.

If you're at the foot and have 65 or 66 and the opponent has 68 you have to find a way to get two blocks or shoot a 10. If you get a shot at the 10 you must take it, just do it!



WHEN NOT TO SHOOT A 10!

I'm sure all of you know this but just in case!

If the opponent has 49, 50 or 51 and the hammer and you shot a 10 and it goes deep, the opponent has a chance to get the equivalent of two blocks. If he holds the 10 he'll only be two blocks from winning instead of three. It's especially bad if you do it from the foot.

It's not a good idea to do if the opponent has 45 or 46 because that gives them the potential to be two blocks from winning, albeit two big blocks.



PLAYING 7'S

You'd be shocked how many players don't know when they should shoot a 7. They try for a high 10 or 8 and go too deep or don't get on the board and the opponent gets the extra point they need.

If the opponent is 53, 60 or 67 you really need to play 7's with them to keep them from getting into position to win. Think about it!



DO YOU KNOW WHEN TO TAKE YOUR DOUBLE?

It's always a hard decision. But you are best off taking it right away if you haven't played that part of the court before so if you miss it you'll have another chance. If it's located where you know you know the drift, then wait for your hammer and make two blocks.

Of course, you know you shouldn't take doubles with your hammer unless you really, really need the extra score because you may get nothing!



TAKE OFF THE GOOD DISC

If you have a choice to take off a known good scoring disc, out in the open, or a potential double, you must take off the known good disc.

Remember a double isn't a double until it's made. Make him make the shot; sometimes both wind up on lines!



SLOW DISCS AND FAST DISCS

If you get a slow disc, try putting it on the board with your last shot when the other guy has the hammer. You'd be surprised how often he'll cut you a 7.

A very fast disc can be used in a similar way. Try to shoot something high with it and your opponent will try to kitchen it and push it right on through. You may steal a few hammers along the way.

Keep track of the numbers on your discs so you know what's fast or slow. And watch your opponent: if he is shooting out of order there may be a reason.



WHEN TO RUN THE ALLEY

Ever notice how when someone runs the alley and is successful it seems to turn the momentum of the game around! Dale Williams was so good at it in his prime that players blocked the alley on him in respect. It can be the difference between winning a Championship and not winning.

A few years ago, I won the Summer National Singles by using it in a critical situation in the deciding game. Don Clovis had played a great tournament and we were playing under the lights before a big crowd. He cleared my hide and rolled a St Pete hide for himself, I needed an extra scoring disc to have a chance to win so I saved his St Pete for later use by going out on the board and forcing him to clear. On my last shot I ran the alley and made it. It was the key shot leading to the Championship.

I wish I could say that it always works but let me tell you the other side. Another time I was playing Mel Erb for the Florida State Singles Championship and I had the same situation, only when I went on the board to save the St Pete for later use, wouldn't you know it, he shot me in the kitchen and I couldn't get out. Mel's not known as a kitchen player but he was that time and won the Championship. I never got to run the alley!

You do need to learn to run the alley because you will need it and it may give you your only chance when you most need it.



NEVER GIVE UP!

Games and matches have a way of turning around. When you win it's important to remember you may not be as good as you looked and your opponent may not be as bad as he looked. Sometimes only a shot here or a shot there makes a game look lopsided. If you get a big head and get careless, that big lead may disappear, and you'll be the one going home.

A few seasons back a team had my partner, Stan Williamson and myself, down 52 to 93 in the hole. They drew a big crowd because they were in the process of punishing one of the game's most successful teams and everyone wanted to see it.

Well they saw it all right. They wouldn't stop playing kitchen, even when they had 68 and the hammer. Wouldn't you know it, we got two of theirs in the kitchen and the crowd saw it all right. We came back and won the game. You could have heard a pin drop. It can happen!!



KEEP YOUR STRONG POINT

Have you ever seen a great player who changed his game and all of a sudden they become just average?

We had an outstanding amateur in our district when I started to play the game. I used to think if only I could be as good as him, I'd win some tournaments. He was a great board clearer. Then one season a great board player moved to our district and began playing with our amateur.

Now the board player was one of the all-time great shot makers, spent a good deal of his life as a pool hustler and carried it over to shuffleboard. Our amateur played with him a lot and really wanted to play the same type of game. He still tries but never reached that great potential. I see the same thing with some of our new players; I wonder what will happen.

If you are good at some part of the game. "stick with it" and add the other parts.



IF YOU NEED TO PLAY KITCHEN~~GET ON THE BOARD!!

For crying out loud I don't understand why it's so hard to grasp that principle!

So many players insist on shooting at guards to kitchen them and all they do is leave their disc as a replacement guard. And even if they get the opponent in the kitchen, the opponent blasts it out and still has the guard. Get on the board. If the opponent sticks and you shoot him in the kitchen, he now has two problems to deal with and you have a chance to make hay while the sun shines! If they ignore your disc on the board and hide, then you can shoot the guard for the kitchen. If you make it, you may expose their other disc too.

Now there are times when you have no choice. If you are playing the foot and the other team is in the 70's with the next two hammers, go ahead and fire away with your hammer. Or if they have two dead discs on the court and you are shooting your 3rd shot and they are in the 70's, go ahead and use your last two shots trying to save the day.

There are some top-shelf pros that shoot the guard for the kitchen. They aren't concerned with leaving a guard or leaving you in the 7. As far as they are concerned, they are putting a disc in play. If they shoot you long, they like nothing better than to have you try to hide, or as they would say, put one in play for them work with. Be wary of these guys, but otherwise be grateful that some players never learn to stop shooting guards for the kitchen.



WATCH OUT FOR THE SUCKER HIDE

If it looks too good to be true, maybe it is. Maybe you can't get hidden and they know it or maybe they need you on the board somehow.

I remember being at 68 with the hammer from the foot against Larry Faris in my early years. He put up a poor Tampa for himself, but I cleared it. The next one was even poorer, kind of on the point, but I cleared it. The next

one was a perfect one for me. I thought how can this guy be so far off. I hid leaving just a fraction open. Well you know what happened, in I went!

Watch out, not everything is as it appears!!



PLAY THE BOARD

That thar is my real game, with or without the hammer, with or without the lead! I wish more players would play that way. Some players just play the board.

Did you ever think about it? It's the same as clearing the board in many cases because the other guy may just be going to clear you off. He's getting tired and you're not.

Think about it. If he sticks, you put him in the kitchen, what fun. If he plays kitchen and makes it, you've got a backstop. If he doesn't make it, you "can" him, what fun. It's even easier when you have the lead because now he's going to play out on the board with you. As long as you've got a shot left what difference does it make who has the hammer! Now if you get down to your last shot and he has the hammer left, you just don't put him in as deep, or put him in at an angle, or put him in and get off the board. What's the problem?

Some players should only play the board. The opponent must be just thrilled when he sees Stan Williamson clear. One of the most fearsome kitchen players in the game and he's clearing you off, can you imagine! It's like being a pitcher in the Mickey Mantle era, the most fearsome home run hitter in the game, but also an excellent bunter. It must have been real relief when the "Mick" would bunt - let him have his single.

Remember, if you think you can't, you're right. But if you think you can, you may just be right and have a lot more fun! It's the same with re-covering a good disc. Why bother? Just put another one on. Maybe he'll go for both and miss them all. Or if he gets both, maybe he'll be sitting in the middle of the board and "donk", you've got him.

Have fun. After all, life is like a shuffleboard game and it's late in the match, they have 70 points, might as well take a shot at them.

Have you ever stopped to think how many "tips" are in an article like this?

1. Playing the board keeps the pressure on.
2. If you have a disc left, all's not lost.
3. Playing the board can be the same as clearing the board.
4. If you are a great kitchen player, intimidate the opponent.
5. If you're having trouble covering, put a second one on.
6. If you think you can't, you're right.
7. Have fun; it's later than you think!



COVERING A SCORING DISC

It's not easy to do. The best cover is about three feet directly in front of the disc, but that's close enough for the opponent to do some damage. You should only go that close if the opponent only has his hammer left. Let him be foolish and chase your disc.

Sooner than the hammer, he can shoot straight through and get you. Or take your cover off and roll onto the board. More players should do this, giving you the option of re-covering your block, or taking his off in which case he can put you in the kitchen.

If the scoring disc is on your side of the board, you should cover to the inside half of the disc so the opponent can only get it on the outside, if he can get it at all. That way he won't be hid and you may get a shot at him and maybe roll behind the guard again.

If it's on his side of the board, you should cover to the outside of the disc so he can't go down the outside to get you and be hidden by your guard. If he goes down the inside, he'll be in the middle of the board where you can see him.



DON'T FORCE A GREAT PLAYER TO MAKE A GREAT SHOT!

There are two sayings you should heed. They are "Don't force a great player to shoot a great shot, because he will!"; and "Don't allow a great player the chance to make a great shot, because he will!" A couple of examples:

If you have a good 7 and it's double covered with one of your discs covering one of his, and you have a good lead, don't block the open side of the board, leaving the great player an easy option. Remember, he is a great player because he earned the reputation. If you block the open side he may just decide to combination his dead disc up on your 7, holding his disc scoring and putting you in the kitchen. The great players make those shots on all too regular a basis.

If a great player lands on a line and you decide to cover that disc instead of clearing it, you are looking for disaster. Somehow Glen Peltier will hit that disc and get one if it's your hammer and two if it's his. Mike Vasalotti was great at rolling off the cover onto the board, forcing you to take him off so he could get a shot at you or make his double. Stan Williamson and Chuck Stansburg will just shoot the cover into the kitchen and then where are you!

Great players make great shots and great plays, that's how they got the reputation!



DO YOU KNOW HOW TO GET TWO SCORING DISCS?

If you're at the head and the other team is in the 60's, or you're at the foot in the low 60's and the other team will get the next two hammers to most certainly win, you need to get two scoring discs. Most players just try to play kitchen, don't make it and just lose. Here's how you play for two scoring discs.

If the opponent puts up a St Pete, you put up a St Pete. If he puts up a Tampa, you put up a Tampa. Let him hide one, then you must have the discipline not to chase him but take your own hide. About that time, he'll wake up and realize what is happening and chase you. Just re-cover your scoring disc and then score the hammer, trading two for one. If he doesn't chase you and tries to hide another one, he probably won't be successful because it's really hard to fully hide two. Take him off and score the hammer.



GETTING THE DISTANCE RIGHT

Sometimes when I see players having distance problems, I notice they are lifting their hand as they follow through. Go get your cue and try this. As you lift your hand the head of the cue slows down. The higher you lift it the slower it goes, until it stops and then actually comes back toward you. This whole movement is called deceleration and that's one of the factors that cause speed problems.

Keep your hand down and your speed will be much more consistent.



DON'T SHOOT INTO THE GAUNTLET!

If you put up a St Pete and your opponent puts up a Tampa, the hole between them is called a gauntlet. Now if you can shoot for your normal hide from the outside position go ahead and do it. But if you have to move toward the center and are shooting into the hole, you are dead meat. All the opponent has to do is hit you and roll a little either way and he's hidden. Often he'll also put you in the kitchen just for good measure.

Don't shoot into the gauntlet. I don't know how many times I've told people that, but they still try it and they still get burned!



THE BEST COACHES

Did you ever play organized sports? If you did you probably had a coach somewhere along the line that was very harsh. You learn a lot from those guys. They don't want to hear what you think or why you tried to do something.

I had the good fortune to have one of my early shuffleboard coaches be like that, Dick Jenkins. He'd tell me he didn't want to hear what I thought or what I was trying to do. "This is what you do, now do it!" I learned a lot and really got off to a good start!

Dave Stott was a lot the same way. He'd watch you and he'd tell you what you should have done and he'd didn't always do it in a nice way. But if you could stand the chewing out, you learned a lot. I did.

I've been tempted to take the same approach with some of my students. Some of them will probably tell you I did, but I'm not doing it now. Probably because I'm not as passionate about seeing anyone succeed as much right now or maybe my reputation has preceded me and not many players argue with me.



BE AGREEABLE

Ever sit down next to an opponent and all he did was carp about his partner? It happens all too often.

Sometime when that happens, try this: The next time his partner misses a shot say, "your partner really is having a bad day isn't he?" And the next time say, "it just isn't his day." By this time your opponent will be so mad at his partner he won't be able to hit the broad side of a barn, but he'll be convinced it's his partners fault.

Just remember, at the end of the match get out of there fast, before the fireworks!



PLAYING BOTH ENDS!

If you go to a draw tournament and draw a known weaker player, you better play both ends or you're going home. Play aggressively, do everything you should and any other thing you might get away with. It doesn't matter if you feel foolish or look bad, it's your only chance.

If you're going to a State Tournament or a tournament where you get to bring your own partner and you want to win, then bring the best partner you can get. Don't be shy, ask the very best, you don't know when they will say yes! You've heard the saying "Don't bring a knife to a gun fight", it's true!



THE CHASE GUARD

If you are going to chase a cover guard forward and try to remove your opponent's scored disc and you have a choice to use your disc or his do you know which one to use?

If you're just trying to get it out, use yours so if you do hit it and it sticks, it'll be your disc that is now the scored disc. If you need to get it out and into the kitchen use his disc so if you miss but still get the kitchen because you are shooting kitchen speed, he'll be the one in the kitchen.



PRACTICE SHOOTING BEHIND YOUR GUARDS

At a tournament in Lakeland I saw an unfortunate thing happen. It was the last frame and Walt Stoddard had the lead 28-20. The other team had the last hammer. Walt had a good 7 hidden by two guards. Chuck Moulton also had a 7, on the same side of the board, but Walt could see half of it. If Walt can get it off, he wins, but he hit the cover guard on the way by, opening up his hidden 7. I'm sure Walt wished at the time that he'd done anything but that. He probably should have covered half of the 10 to Chuck's side of the board, so Chuck couldn't beat him and the 8 for a tie would have been no walk in the park.

Instead Walt's 7 is wide open. But Chuck has to shoot from the outside corner as if hiding behind a St. Pete. He hadn't had that shot the whole game. You guessed it, he missed the 7. Walt of course was thrilled and Chuck was sick.

You have to get an idea during practice of what will happen if you shoot behind the guards, even if you only get six practice shots [two for speed and four practice discs]. Or you have to practice these shots during the first couple frames of the game so you are ready in case of a critical situation.



WHEN TO COVER THE KITCHEN

I hear players say never cover a kitchen. Baloney! If you are way behind and you need a kitchen so bad to keep the game alive that you're out there on the board at every opportunity, when you get the opponent in the kitchen you'd better cover it or you will lose, and I think you will deserve to lose!



DIRECT THE PLAY

I lost in a tournament because from the head on my hammer I allowed the opponent to decide where I was going to shoot my hammer. It was a 12-frame game and we lead by four points. My opponent put in a high 7 for his last disc. I couldn't score and didn't get him in the kitchen. I was the dominant player and I should have taken my third disc out on the board where I had control!

"Why?", you say, in as much as my partner had the next hammer and the lead for the final frame. You have to keep in mind who your partner is playing. Well my partner, an amateur in a Pro/Am tournament, was playing one of those players that takes advantage of everyone else. Some of you call them sandbaggers, which, by the way, is one of the nicer terms they are called. Sure enough, that player out-scored my partner to win.

You hear players say, "play your own end." Those players spend a lot of their time going home after the second match of a tournament.

You do what you have to to win.



DON'T TAKE A HIDE YOU DON'T NEED

We've all seen it or had it happen to us. You need one score to win, you have a big lead and the other team has the hammer. Yet you decide to take a hide and wind up in the open. The opponent shoots you in the kitchen and the game turns around.

Resist the temptation, wait for your hammer to score to win.



WINNING FRAME GAMES

The general rule to win a frame game is keep it simple, don't complicate things!

Clear the board and make your hammer. If they have a high scoring disc and it's your hammer, take their scoring disc off. It counts the same as if you had scored and you won't hit a line.

Leave no doubles; you don't have time to catch up if they get too far ahead.

Don't take hides you don't need. You see it all the time. Someone will take a hide and be left open for a kitchen shot. A game won will be lost. Run the frames out.



TO WIN YOU JUST HAVE TO BE AHEAD!

In a frame game you just have to have the lead when the frames run out! Let's look at a situation from a recent game.

You have the hammer from the foot, you lead 25-19 and it's the last frame. You stick and the opponent shoots you for the kitchen, rolling himself a corner 8 and leaving you in the middle of the other 7. You have two shots left and your opponent has one. What do you do? Take his corner 8 off and try to stay on the board. If you don't, it's not the end of the world. He will shoot you into the kitchen, but you just have to take his 7 off the center of the 7 area and hold for the win. Yes, you will lose 3 points, but you had the lead by 6 and will still win.



2 FOR SPEED AND 4 FOR PRACTICE

In some frame games you only get 2 speed shots and 4 practice shots. The best way to use those shots, for the most information, is to shoot your speed shots as if you are hiding behind a St Pete and a Tampa. Use the 4 practice shots to shoot the four-across 7's along the bottom. The 7 on your side in the corner should be shot from the outside position to see how the alley runs.

Sometimes you only get four shots and you change colors in the middle of the game. In that case the most information can be gained by shooting behind a St Pete and a Tampa with the first two shots and then shooting at two 7's located behind the intersection of the 8/10 line and the side angle line. When you change colors it is important to realize if you are significantly ahead or behind. If you are significantly ahead, you use the same practice as you did to open the game because you will be clearing to maintain the lead. You may also take advantage of a good hide if the opponent is not on the board. If you are about even or behind then you need to shoot the four-across 7's along the bottom because you will probably be playing kitchen to catch up or to build a lead.

In all cases it is important to watch your opponent practice because you do not get enough shots to learn the board by yourself.



HIGH 8'S

Do you know which high 8 to shoot? The high 8 on your opponent's side is the most difficult to roll on.

Do you know how to score on a high 8? If your opponent puts one on his side, you move over to the 3 position and shoot right at it. You will roll right over to your 8. Try it. If it is on your side of the board, you have to shoot firm to hard just off center to make it roll, it will. Try it.

I used to practice scoring on high 8s with another player. You should do that and I should practice it myself.



NO TAMPA

If you just need one scoring disc to win, you have no business being in the middle of the board on the opponent's hammer. Use a St Pete, a little wide and high enough that you can see the whole side behind the guard. If the opponent shoots it for the kitchen and it goes long, shoot the next one through. You know what he is going to try to do, don't let him.



PLACE THE DISC PROPERLY

How many times have you tried to play kitchen by going out on the board only to hit the 7/8 line and have the opponent cover the disc with a guard of their own? Be careful to go on the board close to the centerline on your side or away from the centerline on the opposite side of the board. That way if they cover your disc, you will have a guard, not them.



IN THE KITCHEN-HIDE

How often have you seen it! A player is in the kitchen and the kitchen is covered by a guard, but instead of hiding the player tries to hit the guard into the disc in the kitchen.

Look at the score. In many cases the right move is to hide. The other player then has to remove the guard and now you can get out of the kitchen. If they stick you can hide another scoring disc and make a positive score.



DON'T KNOCK OFF THE COVER!

We've all done it and it has cost us the game or even the match. Only try to get the extra scoring disc if you really need to. If you do, then do it. But be really careful because a win can easily turn into a loss.



DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO?

We've all experienced it more than once. There we are, facing the situation on the board and are unsure about what to do. So what next?

Even though I've only been playing for six years now, I think I have experienced the situation often enough to answer this question. There is no general answer as it depends on the score, your skills and your confidence in those.

First of all, you have to evaluate the situation. Stay calm and unaffected. (I know it's hard.) Analyze the board and consider your possibilities. In 90% of all cases, your first instinct is the best option. However, you have to be careful not to overestimate yourself.

Only do shots you know will work and never just do "something," because that will not work. Think out what you want to do. Don't be afraid to take your time, even if it might take a couple minutes. No need to panic!

To summarize:

- Analyze the board and the score.
- Accept the situation and don't think about previous shots.
- Take your time.
- Listen to your first instinct.
- If you think this option is too hard, take the easier shot.
- Go with your decision.
- Be focused while making your shot.

Good luck!



DO YOU THINK OF ALL THESE THINGS?

I know you're sitting there thinking "I wonder if he really thinks about these tips while he's playing?" The answer is yes, plus about two or three other things per tip that deal with the scoreboard, the situation, who I'm playing and who my partner is playing. You'd better be thinking about them, because your opponent is. And if you aren't, you're probably a dead ducky poo!

