

CHAPTER XV

SUGGESTIONS ON PRACTICE

Since experience is the complement of knowledge, this work would not be complete without a few suggestions on practice. No play that is described in the foregoing chapters will begin to work out as planned without it. Practice is essential, since in no other way can a player select his weakest points and work on them systematically until he overcomes his problem. Whenever one finds himself losing scores in a game because of a particular weakness in his shooting, he should go to the court for half an hour or so of intensive practice by himself; that is, solo practice.

Solo practice is especially useful for developing a skill to game proficiency. This is a time for the player to analyze his problems and to make the same shot over and over until he sees some improvement. However, every player experiences a certain kind of growth in real game situations, too. For instance, the skills that develop in a tense game between two league or tournament players, each of whom is intent on achieving victory, cannot be duplicated anywhere else or in any other way.

The beginning player's first concern is correct delivery, and practice is essential, perhaps the only way, to develop this skill. There are two considerations in most shots, aim and distance. It is better to take them one at a time. Shooting for a simple score of 8 or 7 does not require an inordinate amount of aiming skill, but the new player has trouble controlling the distance of this shot. Shooting for a simple score is a good shot to start with. The player should practice by himself until he can score in the 8-area or the 7-area on either side of the board with comparative ease, while using a good delivery technique.

After the beginning player has developed a reasonable control of distance, he is ready to practice shots which require more precision in aiming. The basic shots will furnish this practice, and sometimes, for the sake of efficiency,

it may be better to practice these shots in a related sequence. The following sequence of shots is natural:

1. Shoot a cross guard with either color.
2. Hide a disc of the same color.
3. Clear off the cross guard with a disc of the opponent's color.
4. Replace the cross guard with a disc of the player's color.
5. Test the quality of the replaced guard by trying to spoil the hidden score with a disc of the opponent's color.
6. Repeat steps 1 through 5, using opposite colors.

These shots are in the order in which they might appear in a game, if one assumes that the opponent has failed in his attempt to clear the board immediately after shot No. 1.

This routine uses five discs, but since something is almost certain to go wrong with some of the planned shots, there will be an opportunity to use the remaining discs for practicing shots like doubling, bunting, shooting for a simple score, hit and run, kitchen shots, etc., which will be worked into the sequence naturally. Each one of the eight discs should be shot with a definite purpose in mind. Each one should be shot carefully, with correct delivery.

Whereas, in solo practice, it is sometimes desirable to practice several shots in a sequence, there are a few instances in which it is better that two players work together on single shots. Scoring across the centerline past a misplaced Tampa (Figures 25 and 76) is an example. This shot requires a precise set up, and for awhile the Tampa will have to be set up repeatedly after each shot. The cue disc, too, may have to be removed sometimes to make room for the next try. The player at the foot of the court can do this while the other player shoots seven discs in succession. Then the helper at the foot will make the same shots from his end of the court. One should start with the Tampa misplaced about

eight inches, then it should be moved gradually toward the apex as the player's skill increases.

With a little imagination a good practice technique can be worked out for other special shots. Many of these are fine-touch shots, which are good to work on to develop control. Two people can work on them more easily than one when it is desired to repeat the same shot over and over until a degree of improvement is achieved.

Husband and wife work especially well together at practice drills because each one is interested in the other's improvement as well as his own. Working together, they can enliven their practice by making a private game of it. In the following game one player is at the head of the court; the other, at the foot.

Turkey Shoot. This game, with different rules, is often played by an entire shuffleboard club. It is also a good practice exercise for two players. They should stand at the opposite ends of the court. The object of the game is to score as many of the eight discs as possible. The kitchen is counted as a positive 10 score instead of the usual 10 off. The two players will vie with each other for high score.

There is a simple strategy in this game: 1. One should shoot the first few discs into the 7-area where they will not block the discs which will be shot later. 2. One should not try to score directly in the kitchen, because a disc which overshoots is completely lost, while a disc which overshoots the 7-area may score a 10. 3. One should not try to bump good 7's into the kitchen; the extra three points are not worth the risk of spoiling a good score; but it may pay to try to salvage the easy doubles if they can be made without disturbing other nearby discs; otherwise, leave them. 4. Leave the 8-areas for the last three or four discs.

Forty-Five. Another practice game—one which gives special attention to the problems of the endgame—can be played by two players in the normal way, the only difference being that the game begins with both players' scores at 45 and continues to the game point of 75. This is a short game of thirty points, about four hammers apiece, but it is not the same game at all as starting at zero and playing to a game point of

30. Starting the game at 45-45 has advantages. The magic circle level comes where it ought to be, at the score of 60, and all the strategies of the endgame come about naturally at the scoring level where one would expect to encounter them. The basic advantage of the short game, of course, is that more endgames can be placed in a given length of time.

More on the Endgame. A very productive form of practice on endgame problems is the setting up of single-frame situations. The practice takes the form of a walking singles game with the two players shooting alternately from each end of the court. Before either player shoots, they assume a score within the magic circle, such as Yellow 68, Black 70. Then they play until one player wins. It is surprising to what extent this form of practice will sharpen a player's endgame analysis.

Variable Court Conditions. A problem in shuffling that, curiously, is seldom mentioned is adaptability to varying court conditions. It is a real problem since court speed can change, not only from court to court, but from hour to hour on the same court. Often the player who exhibits the most skill in adjusting to these changes will win the game.

This skill seems to be a natural one with some players, but, as with other skills, one should be able to improve it with intelligent practice. However, the kind of practice that is needed to develop adaptability seems to be contrary to that which is needed to develop other skills. For example, one usually chooses a court that is in excellent condition for ordinary practice, and he makes the shots over and over under unvarying conditions. But practicing for adaptability necessitates a change of courts during the practice, with the purpose in mind of overcoming the changing conditions. So what should a player do?

Everyone will admit that the ability to adjust quickly to varying conditions of the court is important and will help a player win games, but how can the skill be developed? On this note we will leave the reader at his solo practice with this investigative problem to which he can apply a little original thinking.

(The end.)