

Let's Get Jumping

by Tom Simpson © January 2000

The jump shot is becoming an important skill these days, especially for 9-Ball players. While good kicking skills and basic masse ability will get you out of many tough situations, sometimes going to “the third dimension” is really the best solution. This article will give you an overview of the subject.

Balls jump all the time. Most players don't realize it, but the cueball actually leaves the table on almost every shot. Because pool tables have rails, the butt of the cue is always at least a little bit elevated. When the cue is elevated, you are hitting *down* into the ball. That downward force has to go somewhere, and the slate under the cloth is not going to move. Since the cueball is resilient (as is the cloth), it compresses a little and then springs upward and away, leaving the table at an angle equal to the angle at which it was struck.

The closer your stick is to flat, the lower the jump. The more elevated the stick angle, the higher the jump. The harder you shoot, the longer the jump. The resulting jump action comes from the combination of the stick angle, how hard the ball is hit, the quality of the stroke, and the “jumpability” of the stick. So, to jump high and short, elevate steeply. To jump even higher, shoot harder. For a lower trajectory, elevate less. For a longer low flight, shoot harder.

The easy way to understand how the ball jumps is to imagine you are throwing the cueball onto the table. The angle and speed at which the ball hits the table determines the angle and distance of the bounce.

Jump cues are short, to make them light in weight and to avoid hitting overhead lighting. Typically, they weigh about half of what a regular cue weighs. They usually have very hard tips and thick shafts. Jump/break cues are full-size cues with an extra joint just in front of the wrap so you can remove the rear portion of the butt. This makes the cue lighter and shorter. Since jump/breaks serve two purposes, they have to make compromises. While they may jump better than a full cue, they won't jump as well as a cue made specifically for jumping. Decent jump cues today start at around \$80. Many players jump with their shaft only. This works pretty well, but is illegal in BCA rules, and in many leagues and tournaments. You can jump with your regular shooting cue, but just not as easily. If you are using a low-squirt shaft (such as a Predator), a soft tip, a heavy cueball, or thin cloth (such as Simonis), you may have difficulty getting much jumping action.

There are two very different stroke techniques in jumping – the “pendulum” and the “dart”. The pendulum stroke is the normal pool stroke with the cue swinging in a pendulum arc below your elbow. The dart stroke is used when you have to elevate the cue so steeply that you can't use the pendulum. It's called dart stroke because it looks a lot like throwing darts – your stick swings directly above the elbow. The dart stroke is more difficult to control, but it's necessary when you have to clear an obstructing ball that's within a short distance of the cueball (say, less than about 5”).

Here's the trick for pendulum stroke: Bend your front elbow to allow you to stand closer to the ball and elevate the butt of the cue. Keep your forearm vertical. Try a light grip, but if that doesn't work for you, try gripping *more* firmly than usual, and think of powering through the cueball.

Here's a trick for the dart stroke: Try to align your body and head so that your body is out of the way of your stroke and you can see down the shaft without tilting your head. Grip with thumb and forefinger, as lightly as possible, with the palm of your hand open and facing the shot. Cock your grip hand back so that your wrist is bent all the way backward. Leave your wrist in the cocked position and stroke with your *forearm*, keeping the forearm vertical. Imagine you are throwing the stick at the ball like you would throw a dart, and allow the stick to “bounce off” of the cueball. This is a *feeling* – don't actually let go of the stick. Alternatively, for tips on how to shoot dart method with the wrist, visit the website mentioned at the end of this article..

On all jump shots, take great care to strike into the center of the cueball, or slightly below. If you hit too high on the ball, you will trap it between the tip and the table, and it will not jump. Hitting too high on the ball is the most common error, followed by timidity. Do not use any sidespin at all, unless you want to execute a jump/masse (usually a bad idea). Once you are confident in your aim and contact point on the cueball, focus your gaze on the cueball until you hit the shot. Strike the ball with confidence, and don't worry about hitting the cloth.

If you are not getting the ball to jump, try lightening up on your grip if you are using the dart stroke, or firming up your grip if you are using the pendulum stroke. Try less elevation. Try more elevation. Focus on hitting toward or just below the true center of the cueball. Don't hit so hard – your stroke accuracy may fall off. Be patient with yourself, especially if this is a new skill for you. It will happen. Don't start with dramatic full-ball jumps 2” from the object ball. Start with little jumps – clear a coin, a pencil, or the edge of a ball, and work your way up. It does take some practice.

For more information on learning to jump, and photos of the dart stroke, visit www.JumpBreak.com.

You'll find jumping videos and additional instructional materials there, as well as information about the Stinger™ JumpBreak Cue. Let's get jumping.