

# 100 Misses

by Tom Simpson © June 2001

One thing all pool players do is miss shots. We all miss. Pros miss easy shots, just like the rest of us – just not nearly as often or as badly. In fact, some of the early billiard games eventually became so easy for some players that they had to be abandoned. Missing is what makes the game compelling.

There are many types of misses. Failing to pocket the intended ball in the intended pocket is obviously a miss, but there are also position misses and strategic errors to contend with.

Missing not only costs us games – it's often embarrassing. We miss shots we "should" be able to make 100 times out of 100. Better players don't miss as frequently or by as much, but they still suffer the same humiliation because they have greater expectations of themselves.

One old-time road player told me that when he was a teenager learning the game, whenever he missed a makeable shot, he would shoot it in his next practice session until he made it 100 times in a row! This might be a little over the top, but this guy eventually became one of the top road players in the 60's.

So, we all miss and we all want to miss less. I developed a simple method that helps identify why and how we are missing, on the premise that if I know what my problem is, I have a better chance of being able to fix it.

Here's the drill: Get a notepad. Put it by your table at home, or use a pocket size pad you can take to the bar or poolroom. **Record your next 100 misses.** Every time you miss, write down as best you can the type of miss and the deepest truth you can about why you missed. By "type" of miss, I mean **physically** how and why did you miss? Overcut, undercut, shot too hard, misjudged throw, used too much english, shot was too difficult, etc. By "why" you missed, I mean **psychologically** why did you miss? This is harder to get at. Perhaps you missed because you weren't paying attention, or were intimidated, in a hurry, nervous, thinking about the great shot you just made, knew you were off but didn't stop, changed aim after you went down, didn't focus because it was an easy shot, lack of confidence, off balance, distracted, undecided on position plan, etc. – any of a hundred possibilities. This is difficult because it calls for you to admit these errors and shortcomings and write them down.

Please do this practice. You don't know what you'll find, but I guarantee you'll find something useful. In my case, for example, I quickly found that physically I was missing 80% of my shots by undercutting, and most of those were when I was cutting the ball to the left. This can be corrected, but I would not have believed I was off this consistently without this drill to convince me. My position misses tended to be misses on the long side – rolling too far. Also fixable, now that I know that's my tendency. Psychologically, I found no obvious pattern. I lost concentration here and there, and skipped my pre-shot routine a couple of times. Nothing chronic, but still, helpful to have it pointed out so clearly.

It's hard to face the truth about our shortcomings. This drill puts it right in your face. If you make the effort to learn about your misses, and then you find ways to improve the things that are holding you back, you have to get better. **A big part of excellence at pool is how well you recover from error.** Not just the big, missed-the-shot-and-gave-away-the-game errors, but also the ongoing position adjustments, the runs of "bad luck", your opponent's good rolls, the equipment faults ("I was robbed by that pocket"), and so on. You're going to miss. Accept it, study it, learn from it, get a little better. Start today.