

# Slumping Along

by Tom Simpson © October 2003

I don't care how good a player you are. From time to time, you're going to hit a slump. It may last a few minutes or a few weeks. The longer it goes, the harder it will be to pull out of it.

Slumps are not some voodoo curse you've been struck by. You don't have to just hang on and wait for the curse to lift. **Slumps happen because something you are doing has changed.** The change could be intentional or unintentional. Let's look at both types.

**Intentional change:** It could be that you are taking lessons and making fundamental changes in your form. Often, these changes take you out of your comfort zone – your habitual motion pattern – and naturally, you feel strange. You can no longer rely on some of the physical factors that used to tell you when you were ready to hit.

When a slump comes because you're intentionally making fundamental changes, you shouldn't be too concerned. After all, you're making these changes because you're stuck at your current level. You're changing on purpose. If you believe the changes will pay off, stick with them and give your body a chance to adjust and get comfortable in the new pattern. Depending on how dramatic the changes are, and how burned-in the old pattern is, it could take a while. In my case, when I became an instructor, it took a year to really get some of the form changes to stick. That didn't mean I was in a slump for a year. It just meant I had to be pretty vigilant, watching for my old habits as they would try to creep back into my game. Eventually, the new patterns take over and become your new comfort zone. The new stuff looks right and feels right.

**Unintentional change:** Last week, you were playing great. Today, it's embarrassing. You've lost the ability to see the shots, and you've lost your confidence. You wonder what it is about this frustrating game that keeps bringing you back, despite all the humiliation. And then, you make a great shot and you remember – "Oh yeah, look at that control, that perfect speed, that excellent strategy. Uh huh. I'm a player." Those beauties keep us coming back.

But let's get back to the issue at hand. You've lost that lovin' feeling, and you're missing shots and missing position. Things don't look right, or they look right but you're still getting surprise misses. First, try to identify what has changed. Are you imitating something you saw a better player do? Playing a different speed? Are you distracted? Nervous? Self-conscious? Angry? Tired? Intoxicated? If you figure out what's different, do what you have to do to correct it, right now. Get back to basics. Take a lap of the table. Check your alignment. Are you really hitting the cueball where you think you are? Are you changing your aim & english after you're down on the shot? Do you have doubts as you shoot? Is your stance totally solid?

Here's a really helpful tip. I call this **Doing the Double Down**. It can be done as an exercise, to improve your shooting. It can be used to pull you out of a slump. It's also a great way to shoot high-pressure shots or high-difficulty shots.

Double Down means you go through your normal pre-shot routine, all the way up to the moment when you are ready to pull the trigger on the shot, but then, instead of shooting, you stand up, re-focus, and go down again on the shot. *Shottus interruptus*. This time, as you go down (I call it the Drop), **try to drop straight down, seeing and staying on the shot line the whole time**. If you're not dropping straight down, try changing where your feet are placed. Most players have very narrow stances, requiring them to really contort their back & neck as they drop, while not having very good side-to-side balance. Try opening your stance, so your body is facing more directly toward the shot when you are standing. This allows you to drop straighter and more naturally, and with less contortion. Try widening your stance (feet further apart). This will make you more stable.

If you do move your feet, plan on going down a third time. The idea here is that, once you are comfortable and ready to shoot, believing you've got it, (you won't want to do this, but do it anyway) you're going to come up and settle back down *one more time*. That last drop will really ramp up your focus and confidence.

Your opponent may not appreciate how long you're spending on your shots. Too bad.