

Follow Through with Abandon

by Tom Simpson © December 2003

This one is hard to teach, but it's really important. I'm sure you've heard about it your whole life, in every sport you've tried. Gotta follow through, gotta follow through.

If you're skeptical, you're thinking "Yeah, right. That cueball is long gone before I ever have a chance to follow through. What's the difference?" Well, it's certainly true that the cueball is gone. Let's slow this thing way down and look at what happens during a hit stroke.

If you are *stroking* (as opposed to poking), your stick is accelerating toward the impact. If you are *poking*, your stick is *decelerating* toward the impact (this is bad). The tip spends only one or two *thousandths* of a second in contact with the cueball and the ball springs off and heads down table. Meanwhile, because your stick ran into the ball, the stick has slowed down. But then, because of your stroke inertia, the stick regains some of its speed and continues forward.

If you stroke the shot, you have a feeling of accelerating through the hit. The actual physics, as we saw above, is a little different, but **this is the right feeling**. You aren't doing anything to slow the stick down. The cueball slows the stick.

So, if the player doesn't slow the stick, what makes it stop? Two things: your range of motion and your stroke speed. My belief is that, to interfere as little as possible with your stroke, you *allow* your follow-through to flow forward until it either runs out of speed or until you run out of range of motion for your stroke arm. What I'm getting at here is the idea that **there is a "natural" amount of follow-through that is appropriate on each shot, and the less you interfere with that, the better your results**. In other words, if you're not getting that natural amount of follow-through, you are interfering with the stroke. You might want to fix that.

Imagine a very soft shot – maybe just hard enough to send the cueball one table length. Natural follow-through for a shot of that speed might be just one inch past where the cueball was. If the stick came to a stop by running out of speed, as opposed to you stopping it with muscle, I'd call that natural follow-through. The forward energy of the stick was overcome by the cueball and then by the "friction" in your arm movement. Different players have differing amounts of fluidity in their stroke arm, resulting in some differences in natural follow-through length. If your stroke arm is very stiff, try pausing slightly at the back of your stroke, so your bicep doesn't have to fight your tricep as it swings the stick forward. Imagine your upper arm is soft.

Now consider a very hard shot – say three table lengths. Natural follow-through for this shot might be four to six inches past the cueball, or more. Most likely, the factor limiting your follow-through this time will be your range of motion. If you're an elbow-dropper, you may have a longer follow-through because your range of motion is long. If you're not an elbow-dropper, your stroke hand will bang into your chest, and that's as far as your stroke is going.

To get back to the real point here, "So what? The cueball doesn't care whether I follow through or not, so why does it matter?" The answer is that **follow-through is a symptom of a good stroke**. A good stroke gives you consistent ball action, and consistency raises your game. Here's the beauty part: Sometimes you can take a symptom, and use it to improve the cause. For example, we all know that when you feel good you smile. We also know that you can smile (on purpose), and you will feel better. Using this same reasoning, if good follow-through is a symptom of an excellent stroke, **why not work on following through as a way to improve your stroke?**

To check out your follow-through, place a chalk next to the cueball, take your shot, freeze at the end of the hit stroke, and then look at the chalk to see how far you followed through.

Don't pull back on your stick. Follow through with abandon! Forward only!

Don't push your stick after the hit. Just let it fly to its natural end point. Stay down. Check out the beauty. Show off your follow-through.