

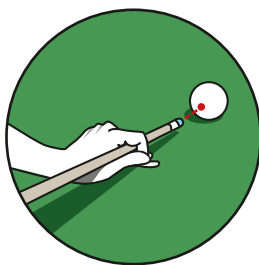
BREAK  
**Rack and roll**

From pubs to pay-per-view TV, pool is now a world-class sport. Here's how the sharks pot the big-money prizes



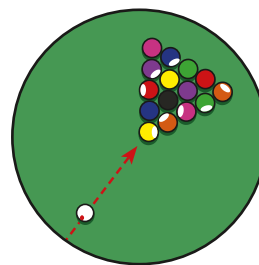
**1. Pick a cue**

If you don't own a cue, take all the available ones and roll them on the table to see which is straightest. It's a bonus if the tip is half-decent and there's chalk to brush it with.



**2. Make a bridge**

Using your non-dominant hand, make an 'OK' sign with your thumb and index finger. Put the cue through the gap, resting it on your middle finger, and create a tripod with your spare fingers.



**3. Rack 'em up**

In an eight-ball break, hit the middle of the rack straight on to minimise the chances of the cue ball ricocheting into a pocket. Aim the tip for the centre of the cue ball.

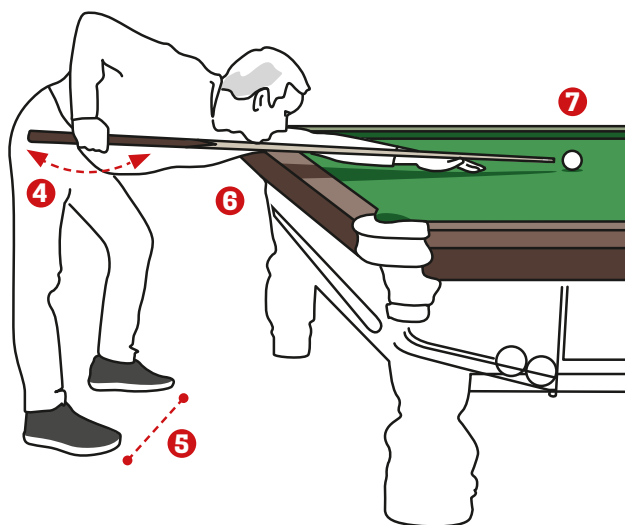
**J**ayson Shaw's childhood wasn't like most.

The son of a English professional eight-ball pool player, he picked up his first cue at the age of five. At weekends he'd follow his dad to events around the UK, while he'd use any free time practising at the table in his family's pub in Glasgow.

"When I didn't have school, I'd go there at nine in the morning and stay until 12 at night," Shaw says. If he wasn't playing at the pub, you'd find him at the snooker halls or cutting his teeth in local leagues and competitions.

Now 34, Shaw has been a professional for more than a decade. His favoured game is nine-ball pool, a more difficult spin on traditional eight-ball – players must consecutively pot numbered balls in order from one through nine, with the winner sinking the nine. "You're only playing for one ball at a time, so if you don't land the cue ball in a certain spot, it's game over," he says.

Fortunately for Shaw, this doesn't happen too often. His titles include the 2017 US Open and five Mosconi Cups



**4. Find your balance**

With your dominant hand, find the point where the cue balances in an open palm. Grip the cue 2cm behind this point.

**5. Strike the stance**

Stand square to the cue ball with your dominant foot 60cm behind the other. The cue should be directly below your chin.

**6. Perfect your swing**

Stay still. The only part that moves is your dominant arm, which should swing loosely like a pendulum.

**7. Make the break**

Hit the cue ball firmly, but keep the connection smooth and soft. Follow through with the cue after hitting the ball.



**"Pool came from bars, but it's not like that any more"**

Jayson Shaw, pro pool player

– pool's version of golf's Ryder Cup, where teams of the best US and European players battle it out for North Atlantic bragging rights each winter.

Now based in West Haven, Connecticut, where he owns his own pool room, Shaw might not undertake the same mammoth practise sessions as when he was a kid ("It's probably about six-to-eight hours a day"), but he's prepared for any eventuality. "It's about working on aspects of the game. I'll practise my break for an hour, and then my safety game, before putting it all together, so that when these situations come up in big events I know what to do."

Those 'big events' now sell out arenas from London to Las Vegas, and pool has followed darts' trajectory in breaking out from pubs. "Pool came from bars, but it's not like that any more. You're travelling the world, playing in front of thousands of people, live on TV. The prize money and TV coverage are getting bigger. It's no longer something where you walk into a pub, have a beer and hit balls."

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