

## Tendencies

How well do you know yourself? No, this is not about laying down on “the couch” and expressing “how you feel”. This is about awareness. Awareness of yourself and your opponent. How you act and react during a match says a lot about your composure, confidence, triggers and tendencies. Playing competitive pool can expose inclinations and tendencies in your game, maybe without you even realizing it. Everyone has “their game”. The way they carry themselves, the way they approach the game and the way they shoot. Some of these things are just quirks, like taking 25 practice strokes or shooting super hard or never playing safe. Those are strange, but they are just shooting styles. Your personal tendencies show up unannounced before you even know it. You find yourself in another world, where everything seems to have changed. It could be triggered by a particular type of shot or some external circumstance that throws you off. Suddenly you are seeing, thinking and playing differently. It’s like everything is out of sync. You may ask yourself what the heck is going on? Nothing seems to be working. You may even go so far as to ask your opponent “what am I doing wrong”? Remember the 1<sup>st</sup> rule of competition “never listen to your opponent”. Don’t get me wrong, some tendencies can actually be good. Watch and learn from a “clutch” player. The kind that seems to always make the comeback. This type of player self-generates focus. They bear down and re-energize purpose. The purpose being “to play to win”.

Now clutch players are special, but they are few and far between. However, the rest of the world (including me) are prone to generating those negative tendencies like jumping up on a shot or staring off into space during mid stroke. If you find yourself pondering some stupid shot like a 19 rail bank or 7 ball combination, stop and realize that you have just entered “LaLa land”. “The imagination is a wonderful thing”, but it can both solve problems or lead us into trying to accomplish the impossible. The game of pool is a combination of skill and imagination. Skill being the summation of physical dynamics and imagination being the understanding of those dynamics to both make shots and get position for the next shot. Sensible – processed thinking will separate fantasy from reality.

Awareness of your own tendencies will help alleviate them. Make a list of the ones that you are aware of. During a match, take note of what triggers it. If it’s shot related, work on overcoming that type of shot during practice. If you can’t solve it, plan your escape scenario like maybe playing safe or avoid leaving yourself in that position during your run. If it’s situational, like a “pressure” shot, talk yourself through it. Generate your confidence, knowing you have already made this shot many times before, and this time is no different. Think only positively and not about any risk. If it’s the correct shot, you’re doing the right thing, go for it. Always remember to setup your shot based on your “ready” routine.

Try to compete as often as you can. Play in local tournaments against a variety of players. Getting comfortable in tournament play will relax you the more often you do it. The more tendencies that you overcome the better. Consider them challenges solved. Try to pick up on the tendencies of opponents. This can be useful information on how to beat them. Watch for key signals like shooting very softly all of a sudden or start shooting very quickly between shots. A sure sign of instability is when they start missing straight in shots or over cutting shots. Usually the more they miss, the more they miss. Understand that during a long match, there will come a period of time where not much is happening. This is usually a time when few balls are made. I call this the “doldrums”. This is normal and will pass and the game will pick up again. All in all, know and play within your abilities. Use your practice time to expand them.

I hope this was helpful,

Mike Ezyk