

PERFECT IS THE ENEMY OF GOOD

As a general rule, once every ball has a clear path to a pocket, you can start to select a key ball. Steve Mizerak used to advocate this principle, Ray Martin also was quick to use up balls that might make break shots or key balls if the balls were still sitting off a bit.

They would save balls that are, by their positional nature, useful in any end pattern, and getting rid of those that do not meet those criteria.

Get the balls in the clear, like Mizerak and Martin advocate, save the balls that will be valuable in your end pattern and you are on your way to success.

I often tell my students not to "die with the perfect (insert: "break ball", "key ball", "end pattern"). You shouldn't ever feel "forced" to shoot a ball you don't feel comfortable with. The point is to solve problems with insurance balls so there's something to shoot next regardless of what happens, as well as opt for whatever gives the most options, so there is no fear of the outcome. It's easy really: as long as you feel there is only one correct thing to do, and that it's do or die ("if I make this, I can only hope I get another shot, and if I don't make it, I'll probably lose"), it can't be the right shot. It should feel like you have a whole lot of choice, and that the perfect pattern incidentally starts/continues with the simplest shot currently on the table, it's not about becoming immune to risk or fear. Great shooting is about seeing solutions, not problems!

I have already pointed out when to choose one's key and break balls: as early as possible, which is different in each rack. As well as, perhaps, as late as possible: Steve Mizerak used to say that he won't think about an end pattern until there are only 5-6 balls left on the table, by which he didn't mean to say that he wouldn't think about *which* 5-6 balls to leave, but that until there, he would proceed with a certain flexibility of mind. Although ideally, the K2K (key-to-key) and the key ball should form a stop-shot triangle with the break ball. Watching videos of pros playing Straight Pool you don't see that stop, stop, end pattern all that often. Even if a stop shot pattern would be the ultimate in repeatability.