

Rotation: A Game and a Drill

Insights into One of the Least Favored Pool Games

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I view Rotation as two things, a game to play or a drill.

The game sucks. It is one of the worst and most stupid games of all time. You can make two-thirds of the balls and lose. The hardest ones to make are the first third, and they reward you with the lowest score. Your opponent watches you make and run the first two-thirds of the balls and miss, he runs the final third and wins. This is nuts. The only game more stupid than this is 9 ball, which is nothing but short rack rotation with six balls removed. It is even crazier; in this game, you can make 90% of the balls, 1 through 8 and miss, the opponent makes one ball, a simple straight-in shot, the 9 ball, and wins. In 9 ball, 90% of the balls do not count, they have no score, only one ball counts, which is nuts, people. That would be like going out at golf and playing 17 holes which mean nothing, but the winner is the one with the lowest score on the last hole. Golfers would never go for that, taking a game of skill and turning it into a game of luck.

At the turn of the 20th century, several world championships were lost by the best player making two-thirds of the balls and losing playing rotation. They knew then this game had to be killed off, as it was not a test of championship skill.

During the 1910s, 20s, and 30s, up to WWII in 1942, the world moved at a slower pace than today. Men would go to a pool hall and hang out for long periods. It was a social club, a home away from home. When the Great Depression hit in the early 30s, men spent years in pool halls with nothing else to do with their jobs gone. All they had to hope for was making a score and buying lunch off of the winnings. During this time, the championship game and the tournament game became Straight pool, but the game of the people was Rotation.

Rotation pool, a game beloved by many, especially in its heyday, offered players a chance to maximize their playing time for minimal expense. This document explores the history, popularity, and eventual decline of this once-dominant game.

In the early 1950s, pool enthusiasts would gather around tables to play games that cost them just a dime. The process was straightforward: you called out "rack 'em," and a boy would come over to set up the balls from the gully tray. A simple dime was all it took to get started. Given the limited funds at their disposal, players sought to extend their playing time by intentionally missing shots or trying challenging cuts and banks. This strategy allowed them to enjoy the game longer without breaking the bank.

Rotation pool emerged as the go-to game for these thrifty players. With its unique rules and gameplay, it provided the best value for money. The primary objective was to prolong the game, making every shot count and every minute spent at the table worthwhile. Running 15 balls and out quickly would have been counterproductive to the goal of stretching one's playing time.

During this period, Rotation was the main game for club players. It was a staple in pool halls and clubs, enjoyed by both amateurs and seasoned players alike. The game required skill, strategy, and patience, making it a favorite among those looking to test their abilities and outlast their opponents.

The dynamics of pool rooms began to change in the early 1960s. Instead of charging per game, many establishments switched to an hourly rate. This shift had a profound impact on the popularity of Rotation. Players quickly realized that they could have more fun and get more value by playing faster-paced games like 9-ball. The allure of Rotation began to wane as players sought more exciting and time-efficient alternatives.

With the decline of Rotation, players turned to other games for gambling and competitive play. 9-ball and straight pool tournaments became the norm for those looking to prove their skills and determine who was the best. The quick and dynamic nature of these games made them more appealing in a world where time was becoming an increasingly valuable commodity.

The history of Rotation pool is characterized by a trajectory of rise and decline, influenced by economic changes and evolving player preferences. Once popular for its economic appeal, it eventually gave way to faster and more exhilarating games. Despite its decline, the legacy of Rotation pool persists in the memories of enthusiasts and within the broader history of billiards.

In conclusion, while Rotation pool may be perceived as flawed and frustrating compared to other billiard games, its historical importance and its role in the social fabric of the early 20th century are undeniable. The transition from Rotation to Straight pool as the championship game signifies an important milestone in the history of billiards.