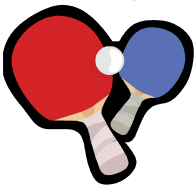


Psychology of Gamesmanship

How to Manage Mind Games & Tricks



**By Allan P. Sand,
PBIA/ACS Instructor**

Psychology of Gamesmanship - How to Manage Mind Games & Tricks

Allan P. Sand,
PBIA & ACS Instructor

Billiard Gods Productions

Santa Clara, CA

ISBN 978-0-9793454-4-9

Copyright © 2010 Allan P. Sand

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions.

Published by Billiard Gods Productions.

2627 Pilot Knob Drive, Santa Clara, CA 95051

U.S.A.

Published in the United States in America

This book is designed to provide information on the psychology and the interaction of sports competitors on the field of play. The author and publisher have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly by the information in this book.

Feedback can be forwarded to: **billiardgods@hotmail.com**

More information is available at: **www.BilliardGods.com**

By the same author

Table Map Library

Drills & Exercises for Pool & Pocket Billiards

Advanced Cue Ball Control Self-Testing Program

Cue Ball Control Cheat Sheets

Safety Toolbox

The Art of War versus The Art of Pool

The FAQs of Pool & Pocket Billiards

The Art of Team Coaching

The Art of Personal Competition

The Art of Marketing & Promotion

Fundamentals of a Master Gamesman

The Art of Politics & Campaigning

Acknowledgements

A special mention must go to my wife, Jianhua, who patiently encouraged me to write and produce this book and the others in the *Handbook of the Billiard Gods* series.

People who helped along the way, in no particular order:

- Bob Jewett
- Eric Harada
- Jerry Hardage
- Mickey Suen
- Ted Mauro
- Carter Adams
- Rich Koolkin
- Frank Barnes
- Flo Hendrickson
- Those who tried psychological tricks on the author.
- Those who were sharked by the author.
- The many others too numerous to mention who contributed feedback and moral support.
- Especially those who tried to denigrate or otherwise shark the author into quitting or giving up on the concept of teaching people how to stop others from sharking them. These small-minded individuals provided the incentive to prove them wrong.

Preface

The world of sharking does not apply only to table billiards and pool. Sharking exists in every aspect of your life. You are sharked and you shark others every day. If you look closely at nature, all species use sharking efforts to survive. Everything from camouflage to shock & awe can be observed.

It is important to be aware of situations where psychological tricks and traps can be applied. Being alert helps you minimize and counter their affects. Don't obsess about it, just accept the facts that these attempts are being used by everyone, whether on purpose, or unintentionally.

Head to Head Sports

In these sports, the mind games must be applied before the execution of varying plays and scoring attempts. Once the action starts, opponents are very busy interacting. Some efforts can be done in the heat of the competition, but those are usually situations of one-upmanship, not planning.

- Badminton
- Basketball
- Boxing
- Fencing
- Football
- Handball
- Hockey
- Lacrosse
- Martial arts
- Racing of all types
- Rugby
- Soccer
- Table tennis
- Tennis
- Volleyball

In Turn Sports

In these sports, the playing and scoring actions are much more spaced out. Each action is taken turn by turn. Attempts to distract can be done before and during each turn. For example, in baseball, during the pitch, someone can be yelling, "Swing!" hoping for an involuntary response. There is more time for interaction between the opponents. If a team sport, unengaged players can contribute their efforts to distract.

- Archery
- Baseball
- Bocce ball
- Cricket
- Curling
- Darts
- Exhibition hot dogging
- Golf
- Horseshoes
- Lawn games
- Pool
- Shooting
- Downhill competitions
- Track and field events

Work & Personal life

- Bosses & their admin assistants
- Children (yours and neighbors)
- Co-workers and customers
- Friends and neighbors
- Relatives on both sides of the family
- Repairmen
- Salesmen
- Significant others

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Preface	v
Head to Head Sports	v
In Turn Sports.....	vi
Work & Personal life	vi
WELCOME.....	1
PRIMARY SHARKING TRICKS & TRAPS	4
Accusations	4
Alzheimer's	6
Attention Deficit Disorder	8
Back & Forth	10
Bad Shooting.....	12
Bellyacher	14
Bigmouth	16
Boring	18
Call Every Shot.....	20
Celebration	22
Cell Phone.....	24
Clothes & Accessories	26
Compliments	28
Consoling.....	30
Cripple Yourself	32
Drinks in Turn	34
Emotional Opposites	36
Equipment Envy.....	38
Fundamental Errors	40
Gayness	42

Generation Gap	44
Health Queries.....	46
Helpfulness	48
How & Why	50
Ignoring	52
Injuries	54
Insults.....	56
Invisible Friend	58
Jokes	60
Jump Starting.....	62
Late to Begin	64
Lingering	66
Listening.....	68
Lucky Me	70
Mental Intimidation	72
Missing Ball.....	74
Musical Talents	76
Nit Picking.....	78
Noises	80
Odd Habits.....	82
Old Geezer.....	84
Partner Divorce.....	86
Politics.....	88
Powder & Chalk	90
Practical Joker	92
Propositions	94
Put-downs.....	96
Random Sharking.....	98
Rules Expert.....	100
Self-delusional.....	102
Self-doubt.....	104

Sex Appeal.....	106
Shark Yourself	108
Shockers	110
Slow Racker	112
Slow Shooter.....	114
Smoking	116
Stand By Me.....	118
Stick Whisperer	120
Stories	122
Sympathy	124
Table Critic.....	126
Team Tricks	128
Cheerleader	128
Annoying Voice.....	129
Temper Tantrum	130
Thinker.....	132
Time-outs	134
Tragedy	136
Waiting to play	138
Waive the Penalty	140
Walking Stick	142
Warming Up	144
MINOR SHARKING TRICKS & TRAPS	146
Advance Notice.....	146
Am I in your way?.....	147
Annoyances.....	148
Concession.....	151
Leading Questions.....	152
Mixed Doubles	153
My stick is better	154

Nagger	155
Overused Words	156
Self Talker	157
Start and Stop	158
The Gang is All Here	159
Waffler	160
Some Final Words	161
ADDITIONAL NOTES	162
Definitions	162
About Hustlers & Gamesmanship	163
Expert Researching	165

Welcome

Random House Dictionary definitions:

competition - rivalry between two or more persons or groups for an object desired in common, usually resulting in a victor and a loser.

gamesmanship - 1. the use of methods, esp. in a sports contest, that are dubious or seemingly improper but not strictly illegal. 2. the technique or practice of manipulating people or events so as to gain an advantage or outwit one's opponents or competitors.

shark - 1. (v) to obtain by trickery. 2. (n) a person regarded as ruthless.

+++++

In 1947, Stephen Potter published a treatise named, *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship*. This was a humorous sports book that identified some of the more light-hearted ways to win (while helping others lose) through the use of psychological tricks, traps, and sharks. The techniques that he pleasantly documented were only the mildest varieties of the many tactics of winning by changing the way an opponent thinks.

How does this apply to you in your sporting adventures? Basically, anytime your attention span is split between two things - your game and anything else - you are being sharked. It doesn't matter that the diversion is initiated by someone else or generated from within yourself. Whether you like it or not, this kind of gamesmanship is as much a part of competition as the rules and tools of sports.

Some psychological tactics are effective in team sports and others in individual competitions. This book is written for sports in general, but when an example is needed, table billiards is the sport used.

This book provides educational opportunities. You learn what mind games are and how to recognize them. You also learn what you can do to respond or counter the effort. The book could never be

complete enough to cover every possible ploy, but will help you recognize when someone is playing with your head as a player or when you see it on the playing field.

Using this book to provide basic orientation, other writers and educators can now identify and publish information about sports-specific sharks. That knowledge can be disseminated in the various magazines, newsletters, and web sites used by the general public and sporting officials. New game rulings can be made to penalize the more damaging tricks as unsportsmanlike behavior.

The concept of bending an opponent's mind ("sharking") has been around a long time. These have been used in nature since the beginnings of the food chain. It is so pervasive in the world that Sun Tzu incorporated it in his "The Art of War", and that was 2,500 years ago. Do you think that there were no psychological sharking tricks and traps going on at the first Olympics? These were the guys who came up with the Trojan Horse - an ultimate shark if ever there was one.

Sharking can be so subtle that you can question whether someone is affecting your way of thinking. If you spend too much time debating about it, you can assume that someone saying "hello" is a shark attempt (and it might be). Paranoia is one of the health risks of seriously studying competitive psychology.

There are opponents who use subterfuges that are crass, low-class, and obvious to the extreme. Many players think that what distracts them must also distract you. If they've been hit with a sledge hammer attack and it distracted them from their game, they in turn blindly believe that to be the "gold standard" of psychological attacks.

On the other hand, some players see the mastery of these efforts merely as a standard competitive skill. They select and apply each maneuver as part of their overall strategic program, carefully tailored to their competition. Each attempt to confuse an opponent is chosen after careful analysis and then applied with precision.

To them, this is not cheating, but the use of a tool applied with the same finesse and style as any defensive or offensive move. They

have a very large library of choices and options that can be adapted to their competitor's personality and playing style. Compared to the gross approach, they prefer the gentle tap of a carefully placed psychological chisel.

Everyone has a set of these tricks they have adopted and adapted over their lifetime. Some are intentional, many are unintentional. Pointing them out is usually answered with shock at being accused and vehement denial. After much explanation, they are appalled to realize that they were bending the concept of sportsmanship.

However fiercely you may cling to the high ideals of upstanding sportsmanship, the reality of the world is that gamesmanship and sharking is everywhere. It exists in nature, relationships, work, and business - in every aspect of life.

Consider these examples. In the past, a girlfriend, with a simple request asked with a smile and wistful, appealing little-girl look got you to watch the Wagnerian opera, *Das Rheingold*. You were sharked. Your sister's kid throws a temper tantrum when you say "No" - you pretty much always give in. Sharked by a kid - tsk, tsk. Your Mom says, "People are starving in Africa." You reluctantly consume everything on your plate (even the boiled cabbage). Sharked! The common element in all of these examples is that your intention was to do one thing, and you did something else, even against your intention and desire.

You can best respond to sharking situations with intelligent actions instead of emotional reactions. With careful study, imaginative thinking, and a little practice, you can recognize and handle almost any psychological tactical attempt for the rest of your life.

Skillful and knowledgeable play or a lucky roll is NOT sharking. It is bad sportsmanship and poor manners to accuse anyone of sharking when they are simply better players.

Note: No scientific study has ever been done to determine just how common sharking is, along with the average variety of sharks played across the population of players, teams, and coaching staffs in each of the various sports. It might be worth a Ph.D. to some enterprising college kid.

Primary Sharking Tricks & Traps

These are the efforts commonly used by players of all levels and applied throughout the competition on a regular or occasional basis.

Accusations

In this action, your opponent aggressively accuses you of cheating, sharking, playing unfairly, and general dishonesty. It is the vehemence of the accusation that causes the initial distraction. At first, you might think he is joking or directing his ire at someone else. On realizing you are the target; at first you are mentally stunned. Once past the initial shock, your thoughts revolve around thoughts like, "How dare he say that? Who the hell does he think he is? What is he talking about?"

Here is how he begins. After you have racked the balls, he makes his break shot. When the balls don't spread well, he becomes upset and accuses you of not racking properly. He attacks you with his allegations and complaints. What you don't know is that he took some speed off his break shot. This helps keep the balls clustered together so that the table layout validates his accusations.

With this first recrimination, you suffer the reaction of the falsely accused. His first attack is just the beginning. For the rest of the match, whenever you give him a bad playing position, intentionally or by accident, you are the target of his complaints about your sportsmanship. At every opportunity, he is in your face. When you are shooting, he comes right up to the table and stares down at your shots, looking for an opportunity to dump on you. If you ask him to back off and give you room, he refuses, saying, "I'm making sure you don't cheat."

If you accept this tactic without responding, you are continuously bothered, if not by his actions and words, certainly by his aggressive suspicious attitude. If you appear to be taking his efforts in stride, he comes out with a new attack. He is making sure that you never recover your concentration. This limits and severely diminishes your ability to focus and play well.

Response

How you handle this depends on your personality. If you are an aggressive competitor, use the direct counter-attack. With greater emphasis, accuse him of being the swindler and scammer. If he doesn't quickly back down, push this into a shouting match. When others come to settle the two of you down, reluctantly let them do so. If you can get this guy to back down even a little, he will not be anxious to re-start this type of attack. At this point, he should be so subdued that you won't have any trouble winning. To make sure your counter doesn't fade into memory, do the occasional glare to remind him you still consider him an ass.

If you don't like aggressive performances, take the opposite approach. Pretend to have a nervous breakdown. Pitifully ask why is he picking on you and blaming you for something you would never do. When possible, pull the railbirds into the act by asking them what you were doing wrong. Play this performance to the audience. Solicit their sympathy and support. (Extra point if he apologizes.)

Here is a low road "guilty and proud of it" approach. Respond with a sneer and a challenge, such as, "Yeah, I'm sharking you. What are you going to do about it?" Every time he misses a shot, you call out, "Sharked you - again." By the time the match is over, his sanity is questionable. Be a little careful with this, he could become violent.

Here is a high road counter. Demand, "Prove it. Explain to everyone here what I did to shark or cheat you." Drag in any railbirds to be your jury and request a judgment from them. Be loud so that everyone within 20-30 feet turns around to look.

You can apply the sarcastic approach. Every time he misses, mention that you are so sorry that he missed the shot and that you didn't mean to shark him. That alone can drive him to maddened frustration. Again, overusing this taunting procedure can have consequences.

Alzheimer's

This is usually pulled on any player younger than the old geezer (who has to be at least in his mid-fifties or more). If you see this scheme in action, stay and watch the match. It can be quite entertaining.

The old geezer, with all due seriousness, constantly asks his opponent which ball he should be shooting. Occasionally, he stands stock still for a long time while it is still his turn. He only moves when the youngster reminds him to shoot. He says in surprise, "It's my turn? Again?" This is interspersed with complaints about problems with old age.

For example, in an 8 ball game, on every other shot he turns to his competitor and asks, "Am I stripes or solids?" In 9 Ball, he queries, "Which one is next?" When it is his turn, he stays in his chair, intently watching the table. After about 15 seconds, he looks over to the youngster and says, "Why aren't you shooting? It's your turn, isn't it?"

The old fellow accomplishes several things all at the same time. He forces his opponent's attention from the game and the necessary thinking that has to go into proper tactics. He suffers deepened frustration over constantly giving the same answers to the same questions. Then, if he is kindly hearted, he has a minor obligation to feel some sympathy for the old guy. These all combine to make the youngster reach an assumption that serious intent and strong drive to win is not required.

The old guy will further cover up his skills with a blanket of confusion. He randomly stops at any point in the game to turn away from the table to say hello to a passing acquaintance. He gets down on a shot, does a couple practice strokes, then suddenly rises and asks if it is still his turn. He may even ask confusing questions, and then ignore any answer given. With this buffoon-like facade, his young competitor doesn't quite realize how carefully the old man is playing his game. Nothing fancy, but all resulting in situations to the oldster's advantage and the youngster's disadvantage.

Response

When you see it applied to younger players, don't interfere. This is just another life lesson that kids need in the long process of becoming seasoned players. Being exposed to an oldster who wins with cunning tricks is one of those necessary experiences. Watching this happen is always worth the time - and you might pick up a trick or two to be used later. If anyone is interested in side bets, put a few bucks on the old dude.

On the rare occasion someone applies this to you, play your game as carefully as when you face any excellent shooter. Wait for him to get the effort well established. Then when he begins his turn and before he can say anything, helpfully identify the next ball. Continue being of assistance for every shot. You can even go so far as to patiently and courteously point out what he should do next.

Eventually, he realizes this isn't working and will get down to proper playing. But do continue your counter by calling him "Old Dude" or "Gramps". And don't forget to periodically ask him where his wheel chair or walker is.

Attention Deficit Disorder

The example provided is about one of the rules in pool where a legal hit is required on every shot. If not legal, the penalty is the cue ball in hand anywhere on the table - a very costly penalty for the offending player.

This tactic depends on you not paying close attention to the table and what occurs when your opponent is shooting. It also helps him use this if you are easily surprised. When he notices that you are engaged in some activity other than observing the table, he can spring this on you. You could be engaged in a conversation with a friend, making a phone call or text message, ordering a drink, or watching another table.

When he spots your inattention, when he shoots and the balls stop rolling, he gets your attention and asks, "Did you notice that?" On your "Huh?" or "What?" he continues, "I think I made a legal shot, but I'm not sure." He pauses for a second to confirm the level of your confusion and continues, "Can you verify if it was legal or not?" Please note that he is careful not to declare a foul on himself.

He expects you to momentarily freeze while you try to figure out what he is talking about. You don't want to look like an idiot by saying something like, "Huh? What shot? Where?" If you don't answer within a few seconds, he repeats with emphasis, "Did you notice if that was a legal shot or not?"

The strength of your reaction can vary from blind panic to mild bewilderment. He wants you to have that experience of confusion while your mind races to come up with something intelligent. You might even glance around to see whether any railbirds can confirm or deny his question. The net result is that he has replaced your intention to win with confusion.

He can also use the same trick while you are actually looking at the table. When a ball is slow rolled into a rail, he can turn and ask, "Did that look like a legal shot to you?" He knows very well it was legal, but you are still forced to replay the sequence in your mind to

reconfirm what you actually saw. This can take a bit of time as you sort the answer out.

Response

Even if you weren't paying attention, you can turn this around provided that you are quick witted. On hearing the question, answer with certainty, "Nope, that was not a legal hit. Thanks for the ball in hand." This should cause your opponent's jaw to drop in surprise, and generate quite a stir among the railbirds. During that moment of surprise, take possession of the table. Act as if you are the one in the right.

He can stutter the whole night long about how it was not really an illegal shot, but he can't stop you from fiercely claiming that it was a foul. Vigorously declare the righteousness of your claim.

You might actually be awarded ball in hand based on the very vehemence and certainty of your claim. In this case, your opponent ends up complaining the whole night long about the injustice of it all. He will be constantly fuming and fretting over your villainous rip-off. You can't get a better turnaround than this as a reward. It could even continue distracting him into future matches.

Even if you are not awarded ball in hand, you still have effectively destroyed his focus and concentration for the majority of the match. Any time he appears to be recovering, simply say, "I still know you fouled and I should have gotten ball in hand." That keeps his irritation level jacked up and helps keep him from regaining internal control.

If you miss the first chance to counter this, just wait. Set up another apparent disinterest in the table. Patiently wait for him to attempt to try again. But, on this time around, you are ready to spring the trap.

Back & Forth

On this sharking effort, your opponent is going to use what appears to be a personal preference to distract and delay your playing rhythm. This will continue for the entire match. It can create a lot of damage to your will to win.

If there is a coin toss to determine who gets the first shot at scoring, he interrupts, saying, "I've got something that's cool." He goes back to his equipment, digs around a bit, and then pulls out a huge coin. He brings it back and says, "Let's use this. It's more fun." After the toss, he picks it up, returns to store the coin, and then comes back to the field of competition.

At every turn, he will come up, ready to play, and then forget something and have to go back to his equipment. He can do this once or twice times at every turn or every shot. The amount of time spent there can vary from a couple of seconds to pick something up to a need to perform some minor maintenance. Play can only resume upon his return.

For example, in pool, that would mean that when he does a couple of practice strokes before actually shooting, he suddenly jumps up to get his special chalk for his stick. Of course, it is located near his equipment. Then he stands there while devoting full attention to chalking up. Finally, he puts it down and returns to the table. As if the interruption made him forget his original plan, he restarts his analysis all over again. Sometimes the chalk routine will include a shaft wipe-down or a bit of tip fixing.

These constant interruptions to the flow of the game are cumulative. When suffered one at a time, their affect is small. But when piled on top of each other, these circumstances will generate increasing levels of irritation.

Response

If you are a patient person, let him run through all of the extra effort. Amuse yourself by watching him believe he is distracting you. Performing these activities requires a certain amount of physical and mental effort. That can make him less alert during the end-game.

In the meantime, during his turn, completely ignore his activities. You can use those waiting periods as a chance to relax. Or, if you need to improve your thinking skills, study the layouts. Consider the various options and choices available if you were the one taking the turn. This mental exercise and practice is an opportunity to develop better tactical shot selections.

If you are somewhat less patient and want to take a more active role, here are a couple of options:

- Wait for him to "forget" something. Step over and grab his item, return to your chair or waiting location and make him come to you. When he does come over, freely give it back. Ignore any strange looks you get.
- Set yourself up as a barrier, forcing him to walk around you - both to and from his chair. Shrug off any complaints.

The only response that you should avoid is flinging his tools across the room. That definitely gets you some looks of surprise from others.

Bad Shooting

All players have situations where a shot or scoring attempt was missed, or the layout of the playing field is less than ideal for the next attempt. This is part of the ups and downs of competitive play.

This becomes a sharking trick when your opponent makes one or more comments on those failures. These will be freely offered on any poor consequence or where the playing situation is less than ideal for advancement.

The reason for the failure of intent might be a badly misjudged shot selection, a poor tactical choice, or a desperate starting position. Upon the lack of success, your opponent then provides his sharking comments. This is usually presented in a joking manner and without any apologies for his occasional glee over your bad luck.

Here are some reality-based comments he can make on a poor result:

- "That's a bit of bad luck."
- "Could you have done any worse?"
- "That was terrible."
- "What an unlucky roll."
- "That almost came out perfect."
- "You needed just a little more (or less) speed on that shot."
- "You should have been more accurate."
- "So close, so far."
- "You must have really pissed off the sporting gods."
- "I bet you wish you could shoot that over."
- "That could have had a better result."
- "Are you really that bad?"
- "I can show you how to shoot that correctly."

Here are a few comments he offers if you begin your turn in a less than ideal situation:

- "That's a tough position to start in."
- "I don't see anything that you can do with this."
- "That's not quite the worst spot to start from."

- "Tsk, tsk, tsk." with sad, slow shaking of the head.

All of these are not welcome comments. But it is his attitude that takes the most joy out of playing against him. He enjoys your lack of success with unabashed pleasure.

Response

When he starts using this distractive effort on you at the beginning of the match, your first attempt to handle this can be done with a straight-forward request. Make an offer something like, "Let's make an agreement. If you don't say anything about my game, I won't say anything about yours. Deal or no deal?" If he agrees, you've stopped this specific attempt. (He could still try others, but those attempts require other responses.) If he jokes it off, he has given you permission to provide similar "assistance".

You can also try this counter. When you are waiting for your turn, and he indicates you need to start, do not approach the playing area. Just wait. When he finally asks again, refuse to play while being sharked. Ask him if he even knows what good sportsmanship and manners are. Try this only when there is a good audience available. You are attempting to shame him into proper behavior, and the more people that observe his agreement, the harder it will be for him to use this and other tricks in the future. With his agreement in hand, proceed with the game.

Bellyacher

Life can be a bowl of cherries or it can be the pits. Any opponent who uses this is that bowl of pits. His efforts also put him at the top of your "DO NOT make friends with" list. The primary result is to fill the air with so many negatives that you have a hard time seeing the playing environment. Not only is he acting generally irritated and upset, apparently he intends to drag you down with him. If you started the match with expectations of enjoying yourself, by mid-match you are not.

This is an opponent who is primed from the moment he walks in. If he isn't complaining about one thing, he's whining about another. Just saying hello is enough to get him going. From that moment, his every statement offers only a negative viewpoint. He has personal problems and intends to make you aware of them. No matter how hard you try to fade into the background, you are his audience of choice.

The guy is a bitching machine. It is debatable if he will leave you alone when you are up. During his turn, he gathers whatever tatters of his attention span that he can find and then shoots with little consideration of the consequences.

His continuous negativity burns away any enthusiasm you had at the beginning of the game. His careless shooting affects your careful concentration. To sum it up, there is no one in your experience who more deserves bad luck, limited opportunities, a disapproving mother-in-law, and a nagging wife. The milk of human kindness dries up around this fellow.

Response

There is a problem with dealing with this type of opponent. Unless he is a very accomplished method actor, he is not using his bellyaching as a disguise to hide his skills. He is not attempting to trick you into not playing your best game. He is actually feeling and demonstrating his normal personality. You just happen to be the nearest captive target.

Anyone carrying this amount of negative emotions rarely offers a competitive challenge. Even though he isn't making a serious attempt at winning, you are still being distracted. You can hunker down and do your best to ignore his efforts. At the same time, strive to maintain enough focus and concentration to win quickly. Turn your feelings of irritation into a powerful drive to win. Use the internal thought of "How dare this bastard try to ruin my fun?" as an incentive. Apply your strongest intentions to find ways to prevent him from having opportunities. The quicker you can beat him, the quicker you can get away from his presence.

You could emphatically demand that he be quiet while it is your turn at the table. This might work for a short time, but probably with no lasting result. Look around for anyone who could help quiet him down. See if he has any friends, team mates, or a match captain that could counsel him.

There is one diversion you can try. Agree with whatever he says. Use the supporting "I think you are completely right." Keep these communications away from the match. The more he is buried in his world of woe, the quicker you can get to the win.

If this is too much bother, at least use the traditional process perfected by husbands when they don't want to pay too much attention. The agreeable "Uh huh.", "OK.", and "Mmmm." should work enough to allow you to ignore his commentaries. Then you can pay attention to what's important. It's not like you are going to be tested on the content. To the extent possible, leave him to his troubles.

Bigmouth

To be effective with this distraction, your opponent has to be part entertainer, part narrator, part master of ceremonies, and full-time hogger of conversations. He must have a personality style that loves to be the center of attention.

Probably the most memorable person who made this a centerpiece of his entire lifestyle is Rudolf Wanderone, also known as Minnesota Fats. He was recognized as one of the most well-known hustlers of pool in the USA in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. He was so entertaining that he became a television star on his sheer talent to talk. Without apologies, he was an almost unstoppable force, keeping a shrewd mind hidden behind a constant stream of fascinating and humorous comments, stories, and observations. The flow of his words overwhelmed the majority of his competitors.

Whether playing or not, your opponent can't stop rolling over your conversational contributions. He knows what he is doing and the affect it has on people. His rapid fire verbiage almost forces a requirement to pay close attention to his word flow. While doing this, you have significantly less attention span to properly perform your game analysis with any kind of thoughtful consideration.

When he does ask questions, he is all friendly-like and polite. But respond quickly, because he won't leave you much time to answer. It goes something like, "So when did you first start playing?" If you don't say something quickly, he answers his own question. "You were probably about 13, right?" That initiates a recounting of some adventure he had at that age.

If you happen to come into the presence of a true master, sit in the background and watch the show. It is theater that you can not buy a ticket to get into. Stay out of his way. Do not play for money although a side bet on him will probably pay off. Watch and enjoy as he takes apart any opponent. It should be one of the best entertainment experiences of your life.

Response

If you get into a direct competition with such an individual, don't attempt to go word for word with him. He has years of experience in separating his game playing skills from his mouth. Instead, remove yourself as his primary audience. Snoozing while he is talking, or having a conversation with a nearby railbird helps slow him down. If he asks you any direct questions that do not pertain to the competition, wave them off as you ignore his conversations. If you do not appear receptive to his word stream, he transfers his talking to available railbirds. Not being his verbal target might give you a chance to limit the damage.

If you want to try a personal request to stop, make it during the first few minutes of the match. Whether he honors that request is debatable. Unless vigilantly guarded, he will nibble around the edges of your turn until he is talking right up to the moment of your shot. On his first couple of words into the beginning of your turn, fully face him and bring your index finger up to your pursed lips for the traditional "be quiet" signal.

Boring

Are you an individual who is courteous and attentive to others when they talk? Do you try your best to "get along"? If you fit this profile, you might find yourself the victim of this trap.

To make this work, your opponent has to dull down your keen competitive edge. This requires a two step-down process. First, he must convince you that he has little regard of who wins the match. He uses phrases like, "It's not important who wins. It's only important to have fun." If you are not on guard, statements like this cause you to relax your focus on the game. If successful, he has downgraded the quality of your desire to win. If you resist his call to be lazy and kick back to enjoy a relaxing round with a friend, he continues to persuade you of the relative unimportance of this competition.

Once your intense desire to battle for ascendancy is squashed, he applies the second level of this trap. Its intention is to ensure that once you step down your intensity that you stay down. He now becomes the talker, but not for the purpose of entertainment. He only introduces subjects that have little or no importance and certainly nothing that will peak your interest, especially about playing competitively.

He starts with a leading question that requires some kind of answer from you. For example, something like:

- So what do you think of last week's <sports event>?
- Did you know that <writer's name> came out with a new book on <some subject>?
- Did you hear on the news about <some event>?

Even if you respond with the "I don't know about that." statement, he is off and running on about that subject. It doesn't matter whether you pay attention or not. The monotone sound of his voice develops a slightly numbing affect on the enjoyment of the competition. To ensure you don't totally tune him out, he changes the subject with another leading question that requires an answer.

If you advance, he removes any joy and pride of success. If he advances, he downplays it as unimportant. This continues all the way through until suddenly you realize he has won.

He may not be using this with hidden cunning. He can be using this approach because he doesn't like the intensity of competition along with the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. This could simply be a way for him to ensure that the emotions experienced are muted - for both of you.

Response

Assume that he is using this as a clever facade. It doesn't matter whether this is a subterfuge or he really is as dull as he appears. The effects are just as deadly. Your best protection is the strength of your focus and attention. To offset anything your opponent says or does during the match, keep and maintain your intention to win. Limit your participation in any attempts to communicate. That's the high road.

Here is the effective response. Encourage his topic matter discussion during his turn. Ask questions that keep him talking. By keeping his mouth going, he can't concentrate on his game plan and ends up distracting himself. This can be very beneficial to you.

Call Every Shot

To apply this attempt to distract, your opponent specializes in calling out every single shot he attempts - in excruciating detail. This is not the regular information normally required in a call shot game. This is the full and complete paths on every ball that he believes will be moved by his shot. He describes how and where every ball rolls until the playing area is once again a study in still life. The entire presentation is explained to you in the style of a professorial lecture.

This wouldn't be too bad if he was only calling out short positioning shots. This is the complete and fully detailed explanation of every intended ball movement. With this amount of detail, he is also spending a considerable amount of time at the table, while you are restricted to your waiting area.

The process works something like this. First, he does his analysis, taking his time as he considers what he intends to do and how he expects the balls to move. Once he selects his shot, he begins his lecture. Sometimes, when he is halfway through, he decides that a few modifications are necessary, so does an ad-libbed addition. He also uses his cue stick as a pointer to make sure you understand.

When he finally does get down to actually shoot, you hope that he doesn't rethink anything. You might send up a prayer to the sports gods that he won't change his mind. As you hold this fervent optimism, you hold your breath and wish that he misses. If the ball goes in, you have to resign yourself to another verbal planning session.

Here is an example: "I'm going to shoot the 5 ball and make it hug the rail to the corner pocket (tracing the path with his stick). Since I want the cue ball to go over there (again using his stick), I'm going to hit the cue ball with 6:30 to come off the long rail in this direction, and then drift it over here (again tracing the path). I hope to miss these two balls (again pointing), and try to end up right there (putting the cue tip on the table to mark the spot)."

Assuming no change in plans, when he executes the shot, it rarely actually follows the patterns he has laid out. This doesn't matter. He is glib in his explanations; he is also glib in his excuses.

Response

The effect on you is minimal in the beginning of the competition, but becomes more and more irritating as the match progresses. Immediate action is required. Contribute to his statements. For example, as he describes the cue ball control and speed, chip in with, "Have you considered using 7:30 instead of 6:30? You might get a better action off the rail."

As he tries to ignore you, continue being helpful. Offer additional suggestions and recommendations. You can even come to the table to trace out your ideas and contributions. When you are overlaying your guidance onto his ideas, he finds himself becoming the recipient instead of the aggressor. It shouldn't be too long before he gets tired of defending his plans and simply shuts up.

As an added jab in the bloomers, become the doubter of his shooting decisions. For example, when he predicts a shot, call out, "I don't think it goes that way. I think that it goes <some where else>. You really want to reconsider your plan. It won't work."

Celebration

In most team sports, excessive celebration for any scoring advance or an excellent play is common. These are expected behaviors both from the players and the spectators. It is a normal experience of that type of competitive participation.

In the majority of one-on-one competitions, the idea of "dancing in the end-zone" jubilations over a score or good play is uncommon. Even a loud and rousing cheer often pushes the edges of tolerance. A joyous up-thrust of the arm or a self-contained "whoop, whoop" would be considered barely acceptable after a successful play.

Greater expressions of happiness and joy are often seen as unsportsmanlike behavior. There are social standards that have to be considered, regardless of the internal joy you experience. Your public face has to be subdued and controlled in these circumstances for the sake of good sportsmanship.

Therefore, when you face an opponent who is not so considerate of social conventions, it can be distracting. He now stands recognized as a player not bound by the same standards of behavior that you follow. That alone can make you cautious because you cannot predict what antics he will display when successful on any attempt. You spend a certain amount of effort keeping an eye on him so as not to be surprised when he does something unexpected. Plus he distracts you from your game thinking and planning by his excessive and loud celebrations.

Some of his tactics on any success, minor or major, can include:

- Dancing and spinning in place.
- Jumping up and down.
- Racing from one end of the playing area and back with great leaps.
- Shouting "Whoo, whoo, whoo" while doing the above.
- Shouting "Yippee" and "Yahoo" while doing a two-step.

The more exuberant he can be, the more it will irritate you. Publicly, he will have no shame. He knows it is out of place. And the idea of irritating you is close to his heart.

Response

You could try tripping him as he prances by, but that is really not recommended. However, nothing says you can't suddenly get in his way by stepping up and into his path. The earlier in the dance the better. (You might even get a cheer from spectators.)

Unless you have a suppressed and repressed celebratory personality, don't try to do the same activities as your opponent. You would discover that some practice is necessary to make the moves look good. Besides, you may not want to offer railbirds a chance to snap a video clip of you on their cell phone to upload to a social network.

Instead, be stoic and calm. At opportunity, denigrate his childish behavior. If you can pull off a good sneer, throw that at him. Solicit negative commentary from any railbirds. Use whatever social pressure you can generate. If there are sporting officials, see if you can get them to give him a warning or even apply an unsportsmanlike behavior penalty.

Cell Phone

If you are a person who absolutely must stay in instant contact with everyone in the world, either by voice or text message, you are an easy victim of this distraction. Being sensitive to the communications of friends and non-participants is a destructive habit in any competitive situation. Just when you need to focus and concentrate on a critical effort, receiving a phone call or text message is guaranteed to be a maximum disruption.

The cell phone offers an insidious freedom to bother others. The slightest impulse to reach out and talk to someone can be immediately satisfied with an instant call or text message. When needy people need to talk, the cell phone is their tool of choice. There is nothing you can do to prevent them from reaching out to you.

With the wide proliferation of cell phones, you never know how far your phone number has traveled. You can get a lot of calls at awkward and inconvenient times. One of those times can be when facing off against an opponent. The more tense the moment, the greater the distraction of receiving a call. Each occurrence can be costly, ranging from a game per call, to an entire match. Any call requires this action sequence:

1. All game-related thought processes stop.
2. All game-related physical processes stop.
3. The phone must be physically picked up and checked.
4. If not answered, phone must be returned. Or, if answered, a complete communication cycle is required, however long that takes, and then finally put back the phone.

Now you have to return to the game, and perform these activities:

1. Recall where you were before the interruption.
2. Reassemble your plan.
3. Reassemble your attitude.
4. Implement the plan.

When your phone number has been disseminated, here are several ways that your cell phone can be used against you.

- Your opponent's buddy can have your number set up, only needing a signal to hit the dial button. When activated, the call is made.
- A series of timed calls, such as every five minutes.
- A series of randomly timed calls.

Some of the calls can include a variety of different ploys:

- "Sorry, I dialed the wrong number." (multiple times).
- Proposition for a date from a girl admirer (or guy admirer) from afar.
- Wrong number with a message, i.e., "Paul, make sure you pick up pizza tonight."
- "Do you need new pots & pans? Have I got a deal for you."
- "Do you want a joke a day? Call 555-5555 and hang up."

Note: An unexpected twist has been observed recently. Several friends of the player were contacted and told that he had some kind of emergency. They were then asked to call him at differing times, 5 minutes to half an hour and he would explain the problem. This led to multiple calls from friends, all worried about the unknown emergency.

Response

There is some risk to a caller. All cell phones trap the incoming phone number. With this identification, you can take action against an offender with multiple calls and filling up their mailbox with tirades. This activity is all after the match and after the damage has been done.

If you are so important that you can't turn your cell phone off, at least don't carry it around. Put it with your equipment and either mute the ring or set it to vibrate. And since the communication line is so important, you have time to check it while waiting your turn. Allow your opponent to receive calls.

Clothes & Accessories

This is a multilevel attempt to distract. On the surface, it tries to generate a little envy (if you are susceptible to such things). Underneath that is the eye-ball distraction of his apparel as you try to concentrate on your game. Just his movements anywhere in your line of sight can pull your focus away.

When your opponent dresses up the part, he is noticeable from across a big room. Just his walking around will draw all eyes to his attire. For him to dress up like this means that he is more than a little vain about his appearance. He enjoys the looks and glances that recognize his presence.

The clothes and accessories that your "fancy" opponent uses are usually theme-based. They can be historical from various time periods and eras. He could be dressing up as southern gentry of the 1850's, a zoot suit throw-back to the 1940s, or the Victorian gentleman. They can be ethnic-based, such as African chic, German traditional or Hawaiian beach. You might even see a rhinestone cowboy with all the fancy embroidery and colorful glitter, right down to the ostrich skin boots. Items that purposely clash or are a mix of period genres can also work.

Further eye interference can be incorporated through the inclusion of assorted accessories. These can be any variety of items from a clashing silk scarf or a fancy pure-white sash with gold buttons. Others can be hats, belts, ties, vests, feathers, head bands, even hair styles. Bling can be a big factor, with everything from wrist bands, necklaces, and/or head bands. Anything that can be used to attract your attention works.

If his clothing doesn't distract your game, certainly his clothes hound conversational topics will, especially with you referenced as a poor second in comparison. And don't forget the shallow mind-set he presents.

These distractions wouldn't be so bad if he then followed normal competitive behavior. Instead, he concentrates on using available quiet times during the competition to brag about the coolness and cost of his outfit. He even gets in a jab or two about your low-quality clothing standards, with a sneer thrown in for good measure.

Response

If you comment about any item, there is always an interesting story behind it. Mention it in a complimentary statement. Don't forget to ask how/why he chose to buy that specific item. Do this when it is his turn to shoot and that will divide his attention between shooting and bragging - usually bragging wins.

Mentally, these efforts can be handled easily provided you are not distracted by the vagrant pathways of fashion. Decide going in that you are going to be impressed by abilities alone, not by any external facade, however stylish. Just to make sure that he doesn't get lonely and decide to concentrate on beating you - continuously compliment him. Since he is a peacock, he should be very susceptible to your positive reinforcement.

Compliments

This is an insidious effort, and one of the easiest to implement. Clothed in good sportsmanship, its deadly effects develop over the length of a match. In the beginning, if you are partial to being flattered, you can be easily pushed into over-confidence. Achieving any kind of smug assumption of competence has proven over and over to lead to false pride.

To quote the King James Version, Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." By stepping into the trap of prideful fantasy, you carelessly attempt shots that deserve thoughtful consideration and caution. By the time your ego balloon is deflated and you descend back into harsh reality, you have given him several free chances to win.

If you are not an easy victim of flattery, then your opponent's compliments become irritants. The more you hear, the less you want to hear - a reaction desired by your opponent. It starts out with the standard "Good shot." Then he includes additional commentary such as, "You must have worked pretty hard to master that type of shot." This is followed by other compliments, like, "You're a pretty good shooter." and "That was excellent control." and "I've seen a lot of shooters. You're on your way to becoming one of the better players."

He watches closely to determine your reactions. If he sees you smile and act slightly embarrassed, it is working. When you include a "Thank you", he has the go ahead to continue with more of the same.

If you are not responding to his flattery, the same words can be turned into an annoyance. To do this, he begins to compliment you on shots that do not deserve even the most minor recognition. Even on the simplest efforts, he expresses praise with "Pretty good shooting." He continues saying admiring statements for any shot, however awful.

To this false idolization, he begins saying "Good try." on misses. Sometimes he mixes it up with an "Almost." This just adds insult to injury. Not only are you relinquishing your turn, he is making a point of telling you the obvious.

Response

If you have full control of your mental faculties, you can easily ignore his efforts. Continue to focus on your analysis, routines, and proper execution to ensure that none of this affects you. It helps to be able to develop a deaf ear.

If you are "sensitive" to actions and sounds around you, then your only chance to stave off his efforts is to immediately become proactive. Return the shark back at him. Use slightly more enthusiasm and add an additional adjective or adverb to the complimentary statements. Feel free to ramble. If this starts affecting him, continue.

After some period of time, you might want to offer a truce. Negotiate a deal to cease and desist, and get on with the game. That should end it. Keep in mind that one agreement doesn't mean he is prevented from pulling something else out of his bag of tricks. There are many tactics that do not depend on verbal communication.

Consoling

Somewhere, someplace, in an alternate universe, there is a book entitled "The Correct Behavior of Bad Sportsmanship". If there was such a book, there would be a section that talks about proper behavior of a player when his competitor suffers a massive reversal of fortune. In that section would be recommendations of decorum for competitors and spectators. These responses to a player's tragedy would range from silent unsympathetic observation to recommended commentary.

This distraction is what would be detailed in that section. It must be applied when you have just suffered a major disaster that disintegrates the careful efforts of many plays. In football, it would be like a turnover on the 1st and goal with the ball run back 50 yards. In 9 ball pool, it would be like running out the first 8 balls, and then missing the nine ball and leaving it in the jaws of the pocket for your opponent to make for an easy game win.

On the initial realization of this huge misfortune, your brain shuts down as your emotions overwhelm you. Your stomach ties up in knots and you have a sinking feeling that a major disaster has just occurred.

Your opponent has to be ready to use this when the right situation arises. The timing is critical in order to achieve its maximum destruction of your playing ability. He must apply it only after you have realized the full extent and magnitude of your error. If he says something too early, it has little affect.

He has to watch your face carefully. When he observes that you are beginning to put yourself back together, he makes his remark of consolation. With a sorrowful tone of voice, he pats your back, and says something like one of the following:

- "Don't worry. You will do better. I have faith in you."
- "That could have happened to anyone."
- "I wish you could do that over again."

This renewal of the memory delays your recovery and extends the time that your setback is in the forefront of your mind. While you are focused on suffering, you have little ability to play well. He can renew your pain several times as he works to advance his game.

Response

Stifle your immediate reaction to turn around and punch him heavily in the bread basket. Use all of your self-restraint and put on your best poker face. Ignore him as if he doesn't exist. Don't acknowledge him in any way.

Do not immediately resume play after a major setback. Take a break or a time out to recover your equilibrium. Get away from the playing area and perform a few physical exercises such as deep knee bends, a round of quick toe-touches, or a minute of jogging in place.

Let the physical effort wash away the tense after-effects of the bad experience. Then do some deep breathing to fill your body with oxygen. Be careful to avoid hyper-ventilation. Then, with your emotions back under control, and your brain ready to get back into the action, return and do your best with renewed intentions to win. You have a chance to recover if you can regain and maintain control. You do not have a chance if you go temporarily insane.

Cripple Yourself

This scheme is rarely used between fierce competitors or when winning or losing the match is important. It is most often seen when you get into games with non-regular players and there is an obvious skill level difference. Varieties of this trick can be used by older players against younger shooters, by girls playing boys, and casual, pass-the-time matches with a pick-up player.

When you are the better player or start winning more games than your opponent, this is the first shark many of your competitors use. Research indicates that those who apply this effort seem to do so instinctively. It is driven by the desire to "level" the playing field.

Your opponent starts with moaning and groaning over the evident skill differences between the two of you. It is initiated with something like, "I can't possibly have any chance of winning against you. You are just too good." He follows this up with, "Why are you playing so hard against me. I'm not that good of a player. Aren't we playing for fun?"

He is attempting to shame you into not taking the games seriously. If he can convince you to back off on your intensity, you commit a number of playing sins. You spend less time thinking about your plans, don't set up properly, and certainly don't concentrate on proper aiming. Essentially you are intentionally downgrading your own skills, just to make your adversary feel better.

Now you are letting him win a few games. You dialed down the intensity and become downright lazy. You have degraded the "value" of winning. If there is no rationale for playing well, you begin considering it acceptable to lose, and not even care whether you win.

If you relax your standards, this could lead to allowing some bad habits to get started. Because you don't do proper analysis, you no longer calculate shots for the best offensive or defensive results. You stop considering defensive plays completely. Because you are now careless on your routines, you follow this up with not getting set up properly. You become very casual about your stance. Aiming

certainly no longer gets the attention it deserves. Your fundamentals deteriorate several levels.

Sometimes you are guilty of this downgrading without coaxing or coercion. You become your own victim of balancing the scales and thereby hobbling yourself. There is some research that indicates this impulse goes all the way back to when you were a toddler. The giants around you constantly badgered you into "sharing" toys. And when you didn't want to, were punished for being greedy and selfish. It was further enhanced in later years by teachers and parents trying to be "fair" about the outcome of games.

Response

There are times in life when making it all fair is an important and necessary action. In competition, this impulse helps you lose games. Keep in mind this one most important fact about any competition, "There are no friends on the playing field." If you are playing with individuals, friends or not, with much lower skills, the answer is not to back off your speed but to handicap the games so that you must play at your best. Here are some pool examples:

- If playing an absolute beginner, let him pick his positioning, while you play under a tailored set of restrictions.
- If playing someone just past the beginning stage, give him two attempts every other turn.
- If there is a small disparity, handicap yourself slightly.

Drinks in Turn

This is a trap that can only be used in those social circles where all activities are performed with polite and gracious courtesy. In games of all types, participation demands that opponents treat each other with the greatest level of good sportsmanship. The gamesmanship in this environment must be more subtle.

Drinks are defined here as alcoholic adult beverages. The purpose is to create a social obligation that is difficult to bring back into equilibrium. This imbalance then creates a nagging irritation that reduces the effectiveness of your game. (In the social environments of the unwashed masses, this does not work.)

Generally, the players are acquainted and have a reasonable knowledge of each other's skills. The effort begins at the negotiation of the stakes and the game format. Your opponent buys the first round of drinks at the beginning of the bargaining. You both come to an agreement and move to the pool table.

The timing for the next round by your opponent is critical. About five to ten minutes before you would order a round, he gets the jump on you and buys the round instead. When you look across to your opponent, he smiles and indicates with a little lift of his glass, that you accept. You are now two down.

In a break between games, you might try to order a round. However, he is quite insistent that your offer cannot be accepted. He uses some excuse like, "No, no. Two is my limit for the night." and "My wife always knows when I've had one too many." Your attempt is politely rebuffed. What was a minor social obligation now takes on greater importance in your mind.

When the match reaches the end-game (assuming the score is staying close), one more drink magically appears. The score is now three and zero, with no way to bring it back to even. On eye-balling your opponent, he gives a nod welcoming your acceptance

By the unwritten rules of your social group, you are now seriously in arrears. He has blocked the normal path of repayment and

maneuvered you into an impossible situation. Your mind is now divided between concentrating on winning the match (with its prize) and the personal standards of obligations. Underlying this is the implied threat that he could mention (without many details), that you are a "taker" in the schema of social behavior. Something like that could color other people's opinion of you.

Response

As a general personal standard of playing any competition - avoid consuming more than the single drink required in polite company. You must maintain a high level of alertness during the match. It doesn't do to lose because you had just a little too much alcohol.

In any match where even a small stake is at risk, the standards of behavior are usually well defined. Each person comes to the table with all of the attention focused on competing to the best of their abilities. Just because you are a nice guy, and wouldn't dream of attempting psychological tricks does not mean that your opponent follows your standards of chivalrous and knightly sportsmanship. Many people pay only lip service to social conventions.

As soon as the first drink arrives from your opponent, make sure that you have one or more excuses ready at hand. For example, "My doctor only allows me one drink per day. Thank you." Or, "I get physically ill if I have more than one drink a day. Thanks anyway."

If so inclined, you can make this confusing offer, "I'll tell you what. If I win, I'll buy you the next drink. If not, we're even." He'll have to stop and think this over. You have effectively body slammed him to block any disruption in this little game of social balance. You are now only obligated to buy him a drink if you win - with his money.

You can use the sneak trick of taking a break between games, and on the way, order a drink (or two) sent to your opponent. This kicks the acceptable time for him to buy the next drink down the road. Another way to prevent him from getting another round in is to leave the last drink untouched. (It is bad manners to buy a round when a full one is still in front of the recipient.) At the worst, you are only one down, which you can address after the match.

Emotional Opposites

Sometimes you face an opponent who has a natural talent to affect the emotions of others around him. If he is enthusiastic, others become interested. If he is upset or angry, the neighborhood is also affected. Something in his personality causes others to follow along. If you are one of these "followers", this will have a significant impact on your game.

An amateur user with this talent will do so unconsciously. He will only occasionally hit upon ways to distract his competitors. He can't even make the connection between his ability and the results of a match.

But, an expert user applies his particular talent intentionally, with a little acting skill. Because he is mimicking the opposite emotion that you experience, he can configure and control what he does without affecting himself. He begins his analysis of your temperament on the initial meet and greet based on your tone of voice and facial expressions. Throughout the match he fine-tunes both the emotion and volume to maximize his influence.

Here are some examples and how he responds:

- You are feeling happy over some kind of success - he forces a sad story on you (about his trials and tribulations).
- You are on the edge of depression - he is all upbeat and enthusiastic. He attempts to cheer you up (and doesn't stop trying no matter how irritating).
- You are quiet and contemplative, wanting to consider all things before making decisions - he is noisy and chatty, plus impulsive in his actions (and is constantly talking and disturbing the general atmosphere).
- You are exuberant and outgoing - he is telling you to tone it down (while complaining that he has a headache and is not interested in listening to your little happy moment in time).
- You are feeling upset and irritated - he is smiling and joking (oftentimes at your expense).

- You are full of optimism - he is depressing in his predictions of gloom and doom (putting a serious damper on your positive viewpoint).

Response

If you prefer a passive response to his efforts, then you need to stop talking and assume your best poker-playing attitude. Nothing makes you happy, nothing makes you sad. You play, and play, and play with no positive or negative reactions. Assuming a stolid and emotionless game face also affects his ability to carry on any peripheral conversations with you. And with the communication lines being cut off, his efforts begin to look pretty lonely.

You can try the meditative style. This also ignores any of his communications. You only have to close your eyes and assume a statue-like appearance. Let him remind you of your turn.

Try a variation of the "superior-above-it-all" approach:

- With a proper adult tone of voice, say, "How childish."
- Paste a sneer on your face and an insult on your lips, such as, "Is that the best you can do? I am so disappointed."

"The Look" is also effective. Stop all other movement, stand up and direct an unblinking stare at your opponent. Make sure you get eye contact, however momentary. Then shake your head slowly for five seconds, followed by a turn of your body back to the game.

Equipment Envy

This presentation uses personal pool equipment as an example. This intent to modify your attention is designed to generate envy and jealousy in the heart of players who are susceptible to coveting the possessions of others. It is a close relative to the legendary "keep up with the Jones" psychological profile.

It begins before the match. Your opponent comes to the table and begins assembling his shooting equipment taken out of a beautiful custom designed 3x5 case. While he is doing that, he mentions that this case is hand-tooled leatherwork. He points out the gorgeous detail and bright colors along two sides.

As he has your attention, he points out the case features - the many pockets, zippers, snaps, and embedded storage areas. He shows you the real silver buttons, covered in gold chasing. He points out the different leathers that go into the case's assembly, explaining which of the panels are made from lizard, ostrich, buffalo, etc. Then he explains how many of the details were his own design - pulling out several sketches that he created and provided to the craftsman.

Providing details about his sticks is next on the agenda. Filling the case are gorgeous cues, all with patterns and designs of his own creation. There is some fancy gold inset filigree and ivory inlay among the six or seven exotic woods used to assemble the butts. The sticks alone are worth more than you make in six months. Even the shafts might have some design work incorporated - a special signature swirl or swash carved into the base of the shaft. Any hint of an "oh" and "ah" and you get a description of how he created every little feature. The guy probably spent months making sketches.

In between shots and games, he continues extolling the glories of his equipment, the designs, the cost, etc. He depends strongly on your continuing wistful and longing looks at his possessions. Your attentions indicate that his equipment is a successful distraction. You might think that with such an ostentatious display, he is trying to cover up a weakness in skills. Don't expect this. He is a decent player, and has skills to surprise you during the competition.

Response

If you are going to be impressed by anything, let it be by the table skills of your opponent - the true demonstration of competitive competence. With that high-minded statement out of the way, let's get down to the fun part.

Begin your response by being suitably impressed. Do this with continuous compliments on the work. Tell him how cool you think each of his possessions are. Follow this up with admiring statements over his design skills. Ask him how he came up with them and what they mean. (There's always a story.) While he is distracted by his explanations, you should be able to gain a lead. If you can keep him talking about his prides and joys, that distracts him from his game.

If that doesn't look like it is working, ask to look at his shooting stick again. Focus on the very small details. Closely inspect the artwork and start finding very minor flaws in the work, maybe a slight roughness around an inlay, or an uneven application of lacquer, or a filigree curve that isn't even. Just about any minor flaw can cause him to change his focus from his game to checking out the problems you have just discovered.

Fundamental Errors

This is more often observed in a player who developed bad habits early in his playing career, never worked on correcting them, and somehow or another figured out how to be accurate in spite of the bad fundamentals. However, the person who has one or more of these problems and can still play well can use this as a tactical distraction.

Few players are interested enough in this tactic to spend the hours of practice it takes. The presentation has to violate one or more of the basic performance fundamentals. When well performed, watching this violation of best practices mesmerize your attention and continuously makes you wonder how he gets around that problem.

If your opponent had to secretly develop the routines that make this an effective and proper sharking attempt, then his efforts must be practiced until it is convincing and nearly automatic. That does take some time. Using a mirror and a video camera helps to make this work.

Here are some pool-related examples:

- While doing practice strokes, his upper body rises slightly with the forward movement of the cue stick. It looks like he is bobbing slightly on each back and forth. When he does commit to the stroke, he not only raises his body, but also leans into the shot.
- Lines up on a shot and does a couple practice strokes. Then picks up his whole bridge hand and places it to the side for a couple more practice strokes. Then the bridge hand is moved back into position. Can be repeated several times.
- When doing practice strokes, pumps his elbow up and down. The backstroke lifts the cue butt up. On the forward stroke, the elbow drops.
- Shifts his weight alternately from the front foot to the rear foot and back, as he does his practice strokes. This rocking back and forth repeats until he executes the shot. If his weight is on his forward foot on the shot, he also rises up. If

on his back foot, he tends to follow through properly. It's a toss-up which foot gets the weight.

- Sets up normally for a shot, but shifts his head side to side. Tilts his head one way and takes several practice strokes. Angles his head the other way and repeats. Eventually settles on something and shoots. He may also squint one eye, like aiming a rifle.
- Sets up with an awkward stance, does some practice shots, and then rises up and come back down on the shot in a slightly modified position. Repeats this until he "gets it right".

When observing any of these gyrations, you tend to experience a slight tightening of your stomach muscles in anticipation of his effort. If he backs off, you relax slightly. This reaction can be repeated several times for each shot. Only the actual execution breaks the spell.

To be fair, some players do have weird setups caused by ingrained bad habits enforced with years of practice. Somehow the problems were overcome enough to become a good player. Regardless, whether any of these are intentionally designed to distract your attention or is an automatic routine, it is still disconcerting to watch.

Response

Don't look at the execution of the shot. Focus your attention anywhere but on the playing area. Have a quiet conversation with a railbird. Perform those long delayed maintenance tasks. Or, simply close your eyes until after you hear the completion of his attempt. If you can't see the violations in fundamentals, you can't be bothered by them.

Gayness

This trick requires practice to ensure its presentation is smooth and easy to implement without any rough edges. Few people can or want to put in the effort to make this work effectively. If your opponent is going to pull this one on you, he has to do some work on his presentation.

The first thing you notice is that he wears a colorful shooting glove. Generally, this type of glove is designed to appeal to women players. This is because guys who use gloves, prefer black. If asked where such an unusual accessory came from he provides a story about a seamstress friend of his. She makes them up from interesting stretchy colorful material that he supplies. He likes the way it looks when he stretches out his bridge hand onto the table.

If the glove is commercially made, he says that it was the prettiest that he could find. You may even get a story about how he searched and searched and finally found it on a web site in Europe. Every time he sets up on a shot, there that glove is, blindingly obvious against the table cloth.

The next step is during the introductions and hand shaking at the beginning of the match. He does not present the firm grip recommended by John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. Instead, you get a slightly limp-wristed hand with a weak grip. A welcoming smile is included, along with something like, "It is sooo nice to meet you." If you still weren't sure if he was putting some moves on, right as he grips your hand, he pulls your hand towards him a few inches, and says, "I like you." Only then does he release his grip.

While you are recovering from that move, he continues the game as if nothing has happened. As the match proceeds, he moves around the table. When opportunity arises, he passes by your chair. With a slight hesitation and a quick wink in your direction, he returns to concentrating on the game.

Depending on your reaction, he performs these jabs as needed, depending on your personal reactions. When he passes near you throughout the match, he is able to judge the effectiveness of his efforts. All he needs to satisfy himself that this is working is to see you step or turn slightly away as he passes by.

Response

Shrug it off. If the guy is what he is indicating, nothing you can do is going to change anything in his attitude or behavior. Proceed through the match using your regular sportsmanship courtesy.

You can also simply relax. Close your eyes and pretend to doze off in your chair. Force him to remind you to play. You can also watch a game at another table or get into a deep conversation with any railbird. Like many one act plays, no audience can stop the presentation dead in its tracks.

Generation Gap

This tactic is commonly used by older players (qualified AARP members) on younger shooters (20-somethings). They do this as an obligation and tradition, passing down to the younger generation the same insults, scorn, and indignities they suffered when they were the next generation.

Any young person likes to believe that he is mature enough to handle his own affairs without interference from "old folks". Add in the desperate need to look cool (or at least not a dork) to his peers and you have a walking bulls-eye.

Young folks make themselves easy targets with their attitudes and dressing styles. They attempt to appear certain, but that is a facade. Along comes some old dude who insults and belittles all of his efforts to be cool. That can be quite frustrating and insulting to boot. The more uncertain the young person is about his self-worth and status, the easier he is to rile up.

It begins before the match. The older guy stares at the younger player with fixed intensity. The kid finally responds with "What?" With a wondering and curious tone of voice, he asks, "Did you really pay money for that <haircut, shirt, etc.>?" There is a slight pause, then the zinger, "It looks kind of stupid. Who are you trying to impress?"

Further into the match, additional input is offered, "What did you spend on those clothes? Can you get your money back?" A few minutes later, he says, "I suppose that haircut can grow out in a month or two. In the meantime, wear a hat."

Every comment or question is crafted to get a jab into the kid's psyche. Each verbal thrust is closely monitored for effectiveness. Positive results are noted when observing a slight tightening of the lips, a passing frown or a roll of the eyes. Additional prods help keep the youngster off balance.

If there is someone else in the area with any age and appearance similarities (young, unusual haircut or clothes), mention is made on how stupid that person looks. Included is speculation about probable upbringing, such as, "Looks like his parents have some kind of degenerative brain disease to let him look like that." Even though targeted at someone else, this is a back-handed insult.

For the old-timer, this is pure personal entertainment and an opportunity for revenge against the flow of time. It's not often that he is presented with such an easy target. It is his way of passing on the suffering that his old dudes gleefully used to put down him and his buddies. Now he is gifted with this opportunity to be just as witty as they were back then. (This is strictly a one way street for the youngster. To take his revenge, he has to let a few decades go by to pass it on to the following generation.)

Response

If you happen to spot such a competition between generations, stop to enjoy the show. It can be entertaining to watch the expertise in which the oldster disintegrates the focus and concentration of his target. Young players all need some seasoning and it is up to senior citizens to provide this type of education. It might even be considered a right and privilege of getting old.

If this is happening to you as the younger player, grow up and use your head. You are not your clothes or haircut. In the competition, you are a player. Smile to the person and thank him for the opinion. Then focus your attention on the game. Use the pokes that attempt to distract you to drive your focus and intention to be the winner.

Health Queries

This method is designed to get you to seriously consider whether your health is at a lower level than you originally thought it was. It redirects some of your focus from your game onto thoughts and worries about specific health issues. If you are an introspective personality, this can be very effective.

It starts when your opponent extends his hand for the regular greeting of the competitors. As the introductions are completed and the appropriate wishes for a competitive match (i.e., "Let's have fun kicking each other's butts."), he continues his grip for a fraction of a second longer as he stares into your face. At the moment of release, he says something like, "You look in good shape but ..." and leaves the rest of the sentence dangling in mid-air. He lets the silence drag out as if implying there is more to be said. With a look of concern in his face, he slowly nods.

The conversation proceeds with:

<you> "What?"

<he> "Did you just recover from an illness?"

<you> "No. Why?"

<he> Somewhat vaguely, "You look a little off. I'm not sure.
<pause> Could be nothing. <pause> Are you sure you weren't sick the last couple of months?"

<you> "I'm sure. Nothing wrong with me."

<he> "Fine - fine. Don't worry about it. Let's play."

If you ask for further clarification, he follows up with, "Well, it looks like you are a bit tired. You seem to be a bit pale too." He can provide suggestions that you take it easy. If well crafted, you are soon thinking about how soon you can get to your doctor or even wonder if it might be better to go straight to the emergency room that instant.

To make this work, he needs a medical vocabulary to impress you with his knowledge. Chances are he spent a few hours accumulating information from a number of medical websites and old textbooks. This adds further weight to his opinions as an apparent health advisor.

He nods sagely as he opines, "I have seen something like this before. One person I talked with got some tests that showed some problems with his red cell count. If he hadn't checked, he might have died." He implies it was based on his suggestions, but never says it was someone's routine test.

Response

Whenever you let an opponent guide your thinking patterns, you become susceptible to his influences. This does exactly that - if you let it. To stop this, distract him onto another path. Since he is an "expert", tell him about a relative who complains about health. Ask him his opinion about what their problems might be and his recommendations. When he stumbles through that explanation, bring up another relative. (These can all be fictional.)

His efforts to internalize you appear pretty weak once you are on the offensive. When you can get him on the defensive, he is soon looking for ways to stop your constant badgering. Since he opened the door with this attempt, you have carte blanche to handle the situation to your satisfaction. When you have him flailing around for answers to your questions, you have turned the tables and are distracting him. Anytime it looks like he is recovering his ability to compete, start talking about another aunt.

Helpfulness

It's nice to have allies. You just don't expect your opponent to volunteer to be one of those individuals with your best interests at heart. There are two reasons why an opponent would provide help and guidance. Either you are not a threat to him, or he is working to enfeeble your intentions to win. (Could be both reasons.)

During the match, your opponent acts (or pretends to act) as your mentor to improve your game. Every shot you have turns into a teaching moment and he becomes your guide to better playing. Whatever the situation, he is there with an idea or suggestion.

For example, when you have an easy shot, he explains how you should apply spin and speed to get the best results. If you have a more difficult shot, he provides tips on bisecting angles and several ways to become more accurate. He even helps line up the shot. You get a lot of guidance on offensive efforts. Rarely, if at all, does he help you with a defensive shot. That is one skill he is not going to pass on to you.

When you start listening to your opponent, you stop thinking for yourself and become dependent on his thinking to get you out of problems. When that happens, you also stop analyzing whether his ideas are good for you. There are two dangers:

- He can shade his advice so that you are not shooting the best choice. An unsuccessful effort is easily blamed on your poor execution, while he says, "Well, I tried my best."
- He can stop providing help. Even with a small dependency on his support, the sudden cut-off requires some time to get your brain out of neutral.

Response

Think about the idea of your opponent helping you beat him. Why would he ever be serious about doing that? Of what benefit would he gain from assisting you to win? Consider being straight-forward, and ask.

Do you really want advice from someone who doesn't have a keen sense of competition? You are better off persuading him to help himself and stop bothering you with his advice. Once you can convince such a person that his misguided help is unneeded, you can get back to properly learning from your successes and failures.

Only when you handle your own problems do you gain the value of the experience and the variety of lessons learned from the consequences. If it goes well, you have a tool that can be called upon in the future. If it goes wrong, you can learn. The lessons can be as simple as "Don't do that again." to "Put a little more (or less) speed on that type of shot." Only by making your own choices are you able to mature in your skills, mental and physical.

If you do need advice, suggestions, or ideas, ask known allies. You can trust their motivations and intentions. If he is persistent about providing his knowledge, say, "I appreciate your help. How about we set up a time when you can give me some lessons and instruction?" If he really is competent, that is when you want to pick his brains.

How & Why

Your opponent begins this scheme by establishing an over-anxious desire to improve. He exhibits some minor flaws in his fundamentals, such as gripping the cue butt a little too far back, getting down in a slightly awkward stance, a bridge that is too long, or any of a dozen minor problems.

When you listen to his questions, your game focus is not continuous. It also takes away thinking time for proper analysis. That affects your development of appropriate strategies and the selection of your best tactical choices.

He starts by offering a series of compliments to you, along the lines of, "I've checked around and you are one of the well-respected players." and "I've admired your stroke for quite some time. It sure is smooth." He leads with several simple questions that can be answered easily with a yes or no and without extended explanations.

- How tight should I grip my stick?
- Are my feet in the correct positions?
- Is my stance OK?
- Is this a good bridge?

The next stage is a series of questions that do require some extra thinking and more detailed answers. These types of questions now relate to your skills.

- How did you draw like that?
- How do you know how hard to hit the cue ball?
- What kind of English was that?
- How did you make that shot?

If you are unaffected by the above efforts, or he is simply advancing to the next level of complications, he begins hitting you with the "Why" questions. These are usually activities that you have automated and give little thought or consideration.

- Why did you hit that so hard?
- Why did you hit that so soft?
- Why did you use that English?

By this point, your concentration on your game is minimal and you are lucky if you can plan, much less make two balls in a row. This is where he steps up his game to get ahead.

The final level of distractive questions is rarely used. The earlier levels are usually more than sufficient to cause you to plan and play poorly. He begins asking why you selected certain shots, but only after the results were obviously disastrous. It's not easy to explain why you made any of these poor decisions, especially with the mistakes so obvious for everyone to see.

Response

Do not get sucked into actually giving advice, no matter how nice and innocent your opponent tries to make himself appear to you. If you want to keep it friendly, ask him how much time he thinks it takes to learn <whatever question he asked>. Then say it took you about ten or twenty times that long. If he presents another question, give a short answer, and then request that he pay a fee (\$5, \$10, or \$20).

In a serious competition, be blunt. Use straight-forward and brief responses (a little rude is OK), such as, "Figure it out yourself." Also try, "Not my problem." Or, answer every question with the standard query, "What do you think?"

Ignoring

This is a clever gambit that attempts to ostracize or somehow exclude you from general membership in the human race. It is rarely seen in low-level competitions, but can be observed in professional matches. It does occur once in a while as an unintentional action.

It begins at the introductions. There is no acknowledgement in his eyes or actions that recognizes that you exist. If he does shake your hand, it is done mechanically and with no eye contact. Below are several ways that he won't pay attention to you.

With his eyes closed:

- Smiles while stroking his chin or nose. An occasional giggle or chuckle can be added to make him appear to be thinking of something pleasant.
- Appears to doze off. The occasional snore is thrown in. Head bends forward with chin on chest.
- Listens to an MP3 player and taps fingers or toes in time to the music.
- Sometimes sways side to side or back and forth.

Other efforts involve not paying attention to the playing area:

- Converses with a friend.
- Flirts with nearby eye candy.
- Watches activities elsewhere.
- Stares off into space.
- Reads a book.
- Wanders away without explanation.
- Ignores any query from you.

Every time you complete your turn, you have to get his attention so that you can inform him to play. Sometimes you yell at him, other times a tap on the shoulder is sufficient. Even that will not be directly acknowledged.

There won't be anything wrong with his game. He takes each turn with all of his normal skills. Upon being notified, he never looks in your direction or says anything to you. There is no eye contact, facial expression, or any other indication that you are a living, breathing human being.

Your game is distracted in two ways. One is the total disregard for your existence. The other is the extra work you have to do to constantly remind him of his turn.

Response

You can just live with the problem and get through the match as best you can. Accept the fact that you have to do something each time you finish your turn.

If you want to be proactive, instead of a courteous notification, try a jab in the ribs - not hard enough to hurt, but noticeable. Extra point if he appears irritated by this method.

You might want to test how far he wants to take this. Instead of reminding him, quietly wait. If he gets up too soon (within a few seconds), he was paying attention. After that, you don't have to remind him about anything.

If he actually is ignoring you, eventually he will realize there has been no game activity for some time. If there is a penalty for delaying the game, be very quick to claim it. Otherwise, his curiosity will get the better of him. When he takes a quick peek to discover everyone looking at him, the embarrassment will be fun to watch. If he attempts to restart, repeat your waiting process.

Injuries

To apply this duplicity, your opponent either suffers or fakes the suffering of some limitation that restricts body movement. The goal is to get you to take him less seriously, even slack off on your usual game intensity. Any indication of an injury usually means that his abilities to play are limited or restricted in some way. This is a valid assumption in sports where there is physical contact (basketball, football, rugby, and soccer). The automatic assumption in other sports is that a banged-up competitor also indicates that his abilities are also reduced.

The attempt to lull your competitive spirit begins when the two of you shake hands at the start of the match. Your opponent approaches you with slow and obvious physical restrictions. He may even wince during the hand clasp. Each movement is an example of slow and careful planning of how different body parts are moved and shifted.

Your adversary won't volunteer any details about why he is so obviously hampered. He intends to give the impression of a brave and gallant competitor regardless of any personal limitations (for the love of the game, of course). When you can no longer hold back your curiosity, and finally ask about it, he grudgingly provides a short minimal explanation. To get more details, you need to continuously badger him.

The story that emerges involves some seemingly miraculous escape from a potentially deadly circumstance, resulting in only this minor souvenir. Or, it can be an injury suffered while performing a heroic act such as saving a kitty or puppy. On finishing an explanation of his self-inflicted heroism, he implies that you should take it a little easy on him since he is struggling with his handicap.

The story, plus the careful adjustments to play (so as to not aggravate the injury) appear to validate the claim. Even a partial buy-in to the effort takes some of the edge off your game. This must be well presented and requires some practice in front of a mirror to provide just the right level of suffering.

Even if the injury was real, it can be further exaggerated for effect. A sore toe (stubbed on a night-time trip to the refrigerator?) results in intensive hobbling. Appropriate medical accessories, etc. can be included to add some veracity. When presented by an expert, the acting is of Oscar quality. He can get you to feel so sorry for him that you apologize for getting temporarily ahead in the match.

Response

Do not be sympathetic. In fact, the more unsympathetic you can be, the more you can get him upset over your seeming callousness. Even if he is faking, you should be able to get him irritated over your lack of concern. If you don't mind a little "in your face" work, tease him on his foolishness on getting injured.

Check for fakery. Closely watch his routines and execution. Look for lapses in his act, such as effortlessly moving around or leaping from his chair to take an easy advantage you accidentally gave up.

If you can't catch him in an obvious forgetful moment, become over-solicitous. Constantly ask if he needs help. Go over and offer a hand to assist him out of a chair. Constantly be solicitous of his health. Even if he does have some injury that he's enhancing, his constant response to your solicitations throws his game off.

Insults

There are some opponents who specialize in insults. A player using this does not disguise his efforts with any subtleties. He comes out with straight-forward statements of disrespect. He won't use the direct, in-your-face, intent-to-wish-you-harm insults, or the deadly defamations guaranteed to require friends on both sides to physically restrain the two of you. He uses the almost friendly insults between acquaintances. These are on the level of rude comments, with the occasional dig at your pride and jab in the bloomers.

These tributes to your lack of skills occur on every attempt you make. Even if you were successful, he will find some comment of un-appreciation. Each commentary is intended to test your reactions. When he identifies a knee-jerk reaction from you, he flags as a useful tool to be used throughout the rest of the match and perhaps even in future competitions.

On the results of shots, he offers comments similar to this:

- What were you thinking about?
- I've never seen anything so far off target.
- Don't you put in any practice time?
- You must have had a brain-fart.
- You are shooting far below your skill level.
- Let me know when you get your game back.
- I am disappointed in you. I really thought you were a decent player.

Any of dozens of other comments, all on a similar theme, keep you from concentrating on playing your best. He can get personal too, insulting your hair style, clothes, and equipment. Examples are "Who cut your hair? I want to stay away from that place." "I think I saw that shirt in a discount store for about \$4.99. What did you pay?"

Silent insults are also available. On making a great shot, he says nothing and acts if it never happened. On a screw up, he catches your eye, shakes his head sadly, and does a slow, thumbs down.

He knocks your skills, rides your dignity, and vilifies your reputation. His creativity is only limited by his imagination. He probably spends hours searching the internet for insult dictionaries and put-down collections.

Response

You could provide the coldest shoulder possible, and proceed at your best pace. Or, use the blunt force approach to request that he must be ever so quiet in the name of good sportsmanship. It's debatable whether this works.

If you are clever and experienced at slinging insults, play the comeback insult game (common in schoolyard disagreements). Keep up the back and forth. This will distract both of you from the game, but it can be fun. And, because you are initiating this distraction, you should recover faster and make some quick gains while he is still reeling from your volleys.

If you happen to be around when two players are involved in a insult/counter-insult challenge, stick around and soak up some of the exchanges. You might pick up several good ones to be remembered for the next time you need a few zingers. A good library of these phrases is also handy when berating someone who lacks social courtesy.

Invisible Friend

When this effort is well-played, your first thought is to wonder if your opponent really might be insane. Any second thoughts are an internal debate as to whether he might live a more fulfilling life under 24/7 supervision. This is finally replaced with the realization that if he really did have a serious problem, someone else would have handled the situation long before today. Because he's in a public place competing with you, you can assume that enough people have concluded that he is not dangerous to the general public.

Your opponent is shadowed by his invisible friend with whom he has continuous discussions about the game. He carries on his game analysis discussions with his companion as he develops various strategies and tactics. His conversation goes something like this:

"Well, George <name picked at random>. What do you think?"
<pause for an invisible answer>

"I like that. If I start with the 3 ball with some top left I should be able to line up on the 4. And a short draw should get me to the 7 ball. Pretty good idea." <pause for an invisible comment>

"That's right. Half speed should do it. I don't want to hit the ball too hard." <pause for another invisible comment>

"I'm glad you agree." <pause>

"What?" <pause> "Yeah, I keep forgetting to do that. Thanks."

And he gets down, sets up on a regular set-up routine, and fires off the shot.

He gets into arguments about tactics and choices. He may even have a tiff resulting in a length of silence. If you ask why he isn't talking to his "buddy", he'll say something like, "I'm not talking to George. He's too damn stubborn for his own good."

Then the two make up and the conversations continue. The two even talk about you as if you were the invisible person. "Who am I playing?" <pause> "That's <your name>?." <pause> "What do you mean he doesn't know how to draw?" <pause> "Oh yeah, he did blow that shot."

Any questioning as to who his quiet friend is leads to a refusal to provide details. The success of his distraction depends on his ability to act in character. Even when poorly done, the play-acting keeps you from fully focusing on your game. Remember, just because he acts crazy, doesn't mean his playing ability is also weak.

Response

If you want to pursue the passive response, simply enjoy the conversational exchanges. If you can ignore the behavior, just proceed at your best speed.

If you are distracted, you need to be proactive. The most effective response is to participate in his dialog. Wait for an entry into his conversation, and then try something like, "No, no. He's wrong! With that stroke you're going to end up over in the corner. Use a medium hard stroke at 4:30 and go back and forth to end up on the 4 ball." Make sure all of your conversation contributions are real suggestions. Just sticking in your two cents with any silly statement gets you glared at by both your opponent and his invisible friend.

With these interjections, you force him to apply more attention to maintaining and defending his distractive efforts. While he is burning up his limited attention span, you can advance towards the win.

Jokes

This tactic uses your own appreciation of humor to prevent you from playing with all due intelligence and intention. You have an adversary who is a wanna-be comedy club regular. He is accustomed to being the center of attention of any group that he joins. To him, the game is just another venue for his funny presentations. You are another of his many audiences - only one person, to be sure - but to his viewpoint, still a qualified (and captive) public spectator.

The amateur user can have problems timing the delivery of the punch lines for the maximum destruction of your focus. He doesn't take into account your game rhythm. As a result he finishes too early or too late for the best reactions. The variety of his repertoire is equally limited. His routine is exhausted before getting to the mid-game. Even so, a few of the jokes are good enough and can cause problems to your due diligence.

An expert user has figured out your playing rhythm. Over the years, he has honed the style and delivery to achieve the maximum impact and results. His collection of jokes is immense, garnered from years of being the class clown and the designated entertainer of his group of friends. He has a variety of clean jokes suitable for any church social. He has a selection of suggestive jokes for mixed company. For guys-only situations, he knows enough dirty jokes to keep everyone in stitches for a couple of hours.

As soon as he provides you a turn, he begins a joke. He times the delivery of the gag line to arrive during the time when you should be doing analysis and making tactical selections. If successful, your resulting laughter destroys any game focus. By this disruption, your playing routines are disturbed. The greater the success of the joke, the longer it takes you to get restarted. Without proper concentration on the game, you cannot maintain the serious intent needed to get to the win. That is what he wants to accomplish.

Response

Don't try to out-joke him. He has far more experience being the center of attention and the designated clown. Instead, try making a big deal about having respect for the "Game". Explain that the competition is a place to show the courtesy of good sportsmanship and respect between opponents. Include an appeal that he must also have some consideration for those around him who want to enjoy the challenges.

If that doesn't work, stay in your chair when it is your turn and wait for him to begin his latest joke. He will do so because it will be impossible for him to leave an empty silence without an attempt to fill it. The trick is to lean forward as if to get to your feet so that he starts the joke. Then you lean back and let him finish. Because his jokes are timed to your regular playing rhythm, staying seated means your attention to the game is not affected. Dutifully laugh at the delivery of the punch line. (This will also throw off his timing and delivery because you are not acting normally.)

Stay seated until you have regained control of your intention to win. Once that is in place, rise up and take over the playing area. If he tries to start another joke, hold up your hand in the stop signal, then place your index finger against your lips in the "shh" sign.

This makes him a bit uncertain about when and how to start his next joke. While he is in this minor state of confusion, you can advance your game. Because you changed your routine, you screwed up his rhythm.

Jump Starting

If you like to go along with the crowd and unconsciously adjust your attitude to fit others around you, this puts pressure on you to change your playing rhythm. You speed up your own pace in sympathy with your opponent's accelerated routines.

In sports where players take turns (pool, golf, darts, etc.), the competitions have regular timed routines that change little throughout the match. Being pressured to hurry up or do things faster than normal is not anticipated in regular competitions. That makes it difficult to watch a competitor performing at speeds outside of the expected range. When all actions are faster by 20-30%, your unconscious reaction is to also speed up. You end up being off-balance and feeling slightly confused.

Here is how he gets this started. The instant he determines that your turn is over, he leaps up to begin his turn. If you happen to be in his way, he crowds past you. He may say "excuse me", but as an afterthought. His analysis, setup, and execution routines are similarly accelerated.

If he is standing off to the side, he may strike a temporary pose of patience as you prepare to play, but toe-tapping will start within five seconds to indicate his displeasure at your slowness. To add some additional pressure, he eyeballs you to hurry it up, even gesturing to get the game moving.

On every shot you make, he is there with obvious resentment of your slow processes as you bear down to play your best effort. That intense staring is accompanied by immediate action to leap into the playing area as soon as it is obvious your turn is finished. Being the target of such ardent attention is distractive in itself, especially if he stands within your peripheral vision.

In the rare situation where he jumped up a little too quickly, he halts, but does not return to his chair. He moves behind you and waits for the instant he take over. This is a further distraction because you know he is there.

Response

You do not want to allow his hurry-up offense to force a change in your playing rhythm. If you begin speeding up your normal routines, you have less time to consider all options. Your normal rhythm suits your thinking processes. Less time in consideration translates to poorer quality choices, causing mistakes and judgment errors.

Instead of acquiescing to his implied need for you to speed it up, slow down even more. When it is your turn, stay back. Contemplate the playing area from the comfort of the sidelines and do so for an extended period of time. If he tries to encourage you to rush, look at him with a serene gaze for several seconds. Just when he is ready to say something, speak up, "I'll be ready when I'm ready, <pause> and not before." This easily wears away at his anxious enthusiasm.

Try false starts. For example, take a couple of quick steps forward on your turn, then stop and begin your serious contemplation of the state of the game. Ignore him and his first attempt to get your attention. Only on the second attempt, slowly turn around and address his concerns.

When you have a difficult situation and he is eagerly leaning forward in his expectations, stop and ask, "What would you do with this?" He is forced to pause and consider your question. Regardless of his response (positive or negative), you have momentarily changed his thinking patterns. However he responds, nod a thank you and return to your analysis. An extra point if you manage to force a considered opinion from him.

The standing stare also is useful. When you see him leaning forward in his chair, stop your shot, and assume the pose of the patient player while looking at him. Wait until he verbally responds, usually with a "What?" Then ignore his question and go back to your shot.

Late to Begin

Have you ever gone out with someone who was constantly and consistently late in getting ready to go or meeting you someplace? Remember that sense of frustration as you waited impatiently with nothing to do but count seconds to keep busy? That is just one of the feelings your opponent wants you to experience with this distractive effort.

This can only be used during tournament play. It does not work during casual or pick-up games. In all tournaments, the pace of the event depends on individual competitions getting started within a certain time frame, usually 10-20 minutes after the names of the competitors and the playing area are called out. If one of the players does not show up within that period of time, the person present is awarded the win and the no-show forfeits the game.

One of the tricks that is used by an unprincipled opponent is to wait in the background through the second and third call for the match. He carefully keeps track on his wristwatch as the seconds and minutes of the grace period tick away. Then, just before the final minutes passes into history and the winner is declared by default, he appears magically at the playing area, ready to go.

During that waiting period, you are going through several emotional experiences. At the beginning, you are filled with purposeful intent, mind focused on the competition and maybe a bit of nervous anticipation. Halfway through the waiting period, you start considering that he might not show up. You relax slightly, because holding yourself in readiness is physically exhausting. When the final five minutes starts ticking away, your hope for an easy win rises. The closer to the final seconds, the higher the anticipation.

Just when you are beginning to consider this your match, and going to a total victorious enjoyment mode, your opponent shows up. He is looking fit, exuding confidence, and ready to battle for the right to advance in the tournament. You feel a sudden hole in the pit of your stomach. Your mind scrambles frantically to adjust from the feelings of certain victory to the realization that you really now must go through with the match.

Response

This emotional roller coaster experience can slow you down in the early part of the match. It takes time for your mind to change directions and address this new set of circumstances. To allow yourself the necessary time to get back into the competitive mood, slow down everything you do.

- Walk slowly and deliberately.
- Take extra time to analyze the playing area.
- Perform a longer than usual pre-shot routine.
- When you execute the shot, regardless of its results, stay in place to analyze the rights and wrongs of the attempt.
- Repeat and repeat and repeat.

This allows you time to regain control of your inner game and also acts as a distractive effort to your opponent. Closely watch his reactions to your actions. Look for signs of irritation (grimace, tightened lips, and/or frown). If you see any of these soon after you begin the reassembly of your focus, continue those activities long after you are back into the spirit of the game.

Lingering

This effort is designed to test the far reaches of your patience when your opponent finishes his turn and your turn begins. Depending on how smoothly he can present this delay, he can prevent the beginning of your turn from 30 seconds to two minutes. It creates a timing obstacle just when you are ready to take control of the playing area.

Here is how he pulls this off. When he completes his turn, he does not immediately move away to leave the playing area to you. Instead, he assumes the statue-like impression of the Thinker (in a standing pose). For a considerable length of time, he silently stares over the playing field and the consequences of his last effort.

While in this pose, there are some minor movements (a slight turn of the head, weight shift to one foot, etc.) to indicate he is still alive. If you look at him closely, you can see his lips moving silently and the twitch of a finger as it traces out an imaginary pattern. Except for that he is buried in intense concentration.

Many people do this same activity as they perform a quick review to figure out what went wrong, but do this in moments. In this careful game delay, he extends the time frame of his turn. This prevents you from advancing onto the field of battle to take your turn at the game.

He continues this until he appears to reach some kind of conclusion. Only then does he come back into himself and time begins to run normally - at least for him. For you, it has been an interminable period of impatient waiting. He may not even realize he's been holding up your turn. If he does, he moves off while extending his deep apologies. Otherwise, he will casually saunter off to his waiting area. Either way, the damage is done.

If you try to interrupt him to encourage his exit, he puts you off with, "Just a minute. I'm trying to figure out something here." A repeated request from you will also be rebuffed. It's not like you can march up to him and rudely shoulder him aside.

He won't perform this process at every turn. But it will always occur in the middle of an important part of the game. It is especially distracting if he has left you with an easy opportunity to advance. The more you want to get out there and make it happen, the more he will be imitating the patience of a statue. He will also use this when it looks like you are on a roll or are getting ahead. By interrupting the beginning of your turn, he is working to modify your rhythm.

The results are cumulative. The irritations of each lingering attempt pile onto each previous effort. As the match proceeds, your irritation grows to the point where he only has to stand still for a few seconds and he will have trained you to begin muttering obscenities.

Response

Once you identify this type of delaying tactic, never jump up to advance out to take your turn. Stay in your seat and remain relaxed. When your opponent finally does return to his chair (however long that takes), remain there until he notices that you are not getting up and around. Start your turn only when he has to encourage you to begin.

If you want to be proactive, come up behind him while he is deep in thought. Tap his shoulder several times until you get his attention. When he acknowledges your presence, silently offer a rude gesture followed by a wave to move away.

To test his hearing, loudly tell a nearby railbird, "Five bucks he doesn't notice me coming up to tickle him." Any reaction from him weakens the apparent deepness of his thought process.

Listening

If you are the type of person who likes to hunt down people interested in hearing your viewpoints, this is a trap designed just for you. All your opponent wants to do is to listen to you. He will appear as a genial kind of guy whose only purpose in life is to find you and become your confidant. His intent and purpose is to get you talking, a lot.

There is a common saying that says, "To appear wise, disengage mouth, engage brain." In other words, if you want to learn something shut up and pay attention. The converse of this little morsel of enlightenment is simple, "To make bad decisions, spend too much time talking." This is the entirety of his effort to significantly decrease your analysis skills. How can he convince you to not do a proper analysis? Make sure you are too busy talking about your favorite subject – i.e., yourself.

It begins when the two of you meet to perform the usual introductions. His first comments are, "Hello. My name is <Joe or some name>. I've heard good things about you." With this little tickle of a compliment, he can find out if you are a person to fall for this type of shark.

This is your first opportunity to step into his trap to ask, "So what have you heard?" He responds with some general compliments, such as, "You're a decent player and a good all-around competitor." With this confirmation and invitation, you first bask in a moment of self-congratulations, and then proceed to take over the conversation.

As needed, he will provide leading questions to keep you going.

- How old were you when you first started playing?
- What was it like?
- Who have you played with?
- What are some of the other places in the world you played?
- Where do you play now?
- How often do you practice?
- What do you like best about this sport?

In the process of answering, your appreciation and respect of your opponent rises. He is very good at his chosen life purpose to be your avid listener. Any request for more details happily provided. He encourages you to talk continuously.

Response

Everyone appreciates the occasional opportunity to brag up oneself to a keen listener. Unless you are blinded by your own ego, sooner or later, you figure out what your new best friend is doing - preventing you from playing well.

As a general rule, do not get friendly with an adversary before and during a match. It is very important that you constantly remember there are no friends in a competition. If you can catch yourself, first stop the verbal diarrhea. Take responsibility for yourself and get back into the competition, assuming you wake up before he has too much of a lead. Thereafter respond to any queries with simple grunts.

This is a type of trap that you may have to experience a devastating loss before you understand what happened. Only by suffering a calamity because of your own verbosity can teach you to value self-control. Once such a lesson is learned, you will not easily become a victim in the future.

Lucky Me

Every once in a while you face an opponent who uses this approach to distract. It is his intention that you buy into the concept that he has the majority of the good luck and you have the majority of the bad. Here is how he gets you thinking that way.

Every time your opponent makes a moderately difficult shot, he asserts in surprise, "I must be lucky today. That shot was not simple." He commonly uses a two sentence announcement. The first sentence documents his luck, followed by a comment about the difficulty of the shot.

He will state this when he makes a good shot and another time when he has a good position for the next shot. To make sure you get the message he even comments to you (several times) that he would rather have luck than skill.

His efforts to appear blessed by luck are bragged up at every opportunity. If it's good for him, it's because of his clean living and high moral standards. If it's bad for you, it's because you are being punished for some offense to the moral code. The more you hear about it, the more bothersome it is to you. Even against your good judgment, you could start believing. The more often you hear something being asserted, the easier it is to think there could be something to what he says.

When this is backed up by results of the competition, you might start accepting his declarations that this is not one of your better days. He wants to instill within you the feeling or impression that there is no way you are going to compete against him. After all, he has so much good fortune, and you don't. It appears that today is not your day but is his. The constant repetition wears away at your faith in your abilities.

If that wasn't enough distraction, in the second half of the match, he begins to finesse you. Every time you do poorly, he states (in the most innocent of voices), "Don't you wish you had good luck like me?" and "I guess you can't be lucky like me." Claiming the good luck is irritating by itself. Declaring you the victim of bad luck is a double-whack at your focus.

Response

Luck does come in streaks. There is a cycle to everything that is a series of ups and downs. Look back at your playing experiences and you can identify days when you played better and days that you played worse. When you enjoy an up time period of playing well, there will certainly follow a similar time period when your skills are not so accurate.

Like all smart players, you must have a set of tactics to fit both circumstances. When things go your way, you can open up and take some extra risks. When obstacles appear to slow you down, you tuck your horns in and play more cautiously. That's all part and parcel of the game. References to luck, good or bad, cannot change these cycles.

Be patient. An opponent using this trick often falls victim to his own declarations. This is indicated when he hits a bad streak and starts complaining. That's when you jump on him and turn the tables. You begin crowing about your successes and observing that he is being punished for bragging. Every time he gets a bad layout, use the "I'd rather be skilled than lucky." Also use the shorter, "Skill beats luck." In other words, act exactly like he was doing earlier. While he is suffering this setback, advance as quickly as possible while he is on the down side of the cycle.

Mental Intimidation

These are tricks to enhance the natural and ordinary nervous anticipation felt by many competitors at the beginning of an important match. It is the body's fight or flight response getting prepared to do one or the other. Since you have not chosen either one, you experience this nervous condition. Some of the symptoms can include:

- Fast breathing.
- Constriction of the throat.
- Tightness in the chest.
- Sweating and dizziness.
- Difficulty in concentration and focus.
- Hyper-awareness of sounds and movements.

If your opponent realizes you are suffering these reactions, he can improve his chances by making you even more nervous. If he is successful, your game suffers during the opening of the competition. It is to his advantage to "help" you stimulate worries in your head. Here are some of his techniques:

- Make statements that early mistakes demonstrate that you aren't ready for prime time.
- Brags up his own past victories and successes in this venue.
- Implies that these competitive circumstances are much more difficult than anything you previously experienced.
- Describes how easily other newbie players choked and lost.
- Describes how only perfect play can be considered satisfactory.

You may not need input from "experienced" competitors to increase your nervous condition. You can do this all by yourself. Here are some of the ways you can self-destruct and sabotage your chances to win:

- Obsessing about losing.
- Remembering past failures.
- Becoming panicky and losing any focus.

Response

If you are self-inflicting your own intimidation, this generally passes after several minutes of play. Utilize the same actions that you used to beat others. Perform a proper opponent analysis, define his strengths and weaknesses. Craft plans to manage his opportunities. Then execute those plans.

There is one emotional reaction that almost immediately washes away any indecision and fear. Anger is the fight response. This is not the wild reactionary anger of lashing out to damage something. This is the cold, focused anger of Popeye, when he is finally forced to grab his spinach. It is embodied in his signature quote, "That's all I can stands, and I can't stands no more!"

And, finally, simple experience overcomes this problem. The more times you place yourself in similar competitive situations, the more comfortable you become in handling anything that happens.

Missing Ball

This pool shark combines some delaying tactics with the game of hide and seek thrown in. Your opponent can use this at irregular times - not every rack, but once or twice during a match. It is rarely the only shark he is using against you. But, piled on top of other distractions, it can be one more nail in the coffin of your loss.

It doesn't matter whether he is racking for himself or racking for you. As he assembles the balls for the rack, he leaves one ball off the table. Only when he throws the rack around the balls does he "realize" that one of the balls has gone missing. This generates a desperate search for the last ball. In this game, any missing ball is a major distraction. Without all of the balls, a competition grinds to a halt.

Pocket Table

On a pocket table, as the balls are pulled out of the pockets, your opponent leaves one ball in the right or left side. Every other ball is thrown onto the table to be racked. When he gathers together the balls into the triangle, the mystery of the missing ball is discovered. Looking confused with a slight frown on his face, he desperately scans the table surface to see if he forgot to include the ball.

On this failure, he looks over to you for help. Performing the obligatory assistance to his silent request, you go around and start checking each of the other four pockets on the table. If you don't respond, he remains and looks imploringly at you to see if he can get you started or if an actual verbal request is necessary. If you still don't bite on the request, he reluctantly and with a disappointed look on his face over your lack of cooperation, goes himself around the table to check the other pockets.

You acquiesce and start checking the other pockets. Just as you arrive to check the last pocket, he rechecks the pocket where he left the ball, and with an exclamation of surprise, pulls it out. He happily completes the setup and the game continues.

There is a minor variation to this. He can leave the far side pocket holding the missing ball. Then you only discover it when you check the last possible pocket it could be in. The distraction is then based upon your new-found personal dissatisfaction over his careless setup procedure. It is still a distraction.

Ball Return Table

In a ball return table, he leaves the last ball in the box. When he finds that a ball is missing, he asks you to check each of the pockets to see if it's stuck in plain sight. On your unsuccessful verification, he throws you several balls to roll down the tubes or rails. After the last ball comes down, he reaches in to grab the returned ball and "finds" the missing ball as if it came down with one of the balls.

In the same manner as above, he is only interested in making you jump around the table pursuing a missing ball that he already knows where it is. Being forced to perform on demand is what distracts.

Response

Only allow the occurrence of a missing ball to happen once. After that, whenever he racks, do something so that you don't "see" his signal to look. Anything works as long as you are not facing the table. Even if he calls out to you for assistance, tell him to wait a minute while you fiddle with something. After about 20-30 seconds, look up and ask him what the matter is. If he hasn't already given up, you should discover he is impatiently waiting for your "help". Give yourself an extra point.

Musical Talents

Are there styles of music that you enjoy? Maybe some rhythm and blues, jazz, classical, doo whop, heavy metal, show tunes, etc. are part of your music library. The stronger your appreciation of music, the greater will be the agony suffered from this shark. Your opponent is going to do things with musical notes that offends - greatly. There are three variations on how this effort is presented:

- Humming.
- Whistling.
- Lyric mumbling.

The choice of the musical notes is a personal preference. Whatever is used, the selected segment contains from four to nine notes. If the notes are extracted from some song, there has to be enough of the selection so that the tune can be recognized however mangled. The notes can be in multiple keys. Your sense of musical appreciation will be further aggravated and abused by constant and continuous repetition, and at varying volumes.

There are three game situations where he can offer his contribution to musical notoriety. The variations can be mixed and matched during:

- During his analysis.
- During his setup.
- During your analysis and setup.

If your opponent happens to be a champion whistler, he can use that skill in place of the "good shot" distraction scenario. His virtuosity can be even more effective than just for simple repetition. It can also be effective when used immediately following your miss or his miss - perhaps a sad melancholy or plaintive tune in a minor key.

The length of time he exhibits his competence can range from 3-4 seconds to 15 seconds. A successful shot (yours or his) can lead to the performance of a jaunty little number for the same period of time.

Response

As soon as you notice the intrusion of this unusual distraction, interrupt him and ask, "What song is that? It seems familiar." On receiving an answer, say, "I love that song." When he starts up again, join him. But instead of staying in tune, feel free to be wildly out of tune. When he stops, you carry on. Use the same presentation style - whistling, humming, or lyrics. If the mentioned tune is unfamiliar, it doesn't matter, keep right on going.

Basically, you want to distract, confuse, and irritate him in this turnabout effort. You can override his attempts by being more aggressive and louder. When you notice that he is wincing or frowning, you have beaten him. After that, a snatch of music here and there keeps him distracted enough to affect his game. As needed, include a few encouragements along the way, such as "Come on, all together now." and "You're not keeping up."

Nit Picking

This is a series of small distractions in the disguise of friendly sportsmanship or what could pass as normal playing chatter. Nits are little nags about being careful about something important during play. The once-in-a-while reminder in the course of a match could be considered mere courtesy. Multiple unsolicited inputs from your opponent will disturb your intention to win and replace it with irritation. Individually, nits are minor. When presented as a swarm of nits, they are major disturbances.

Are you a person with low tolerances for interruptions to your focus? If so, you are an excellent victim. What begins as a minor irritant in the beginning of a match, by mid-game are major intrusions into your concentration. By the end-game, just hearing your opponent's begin a comment ignites an internal battle to maintain self-control.

Here is a common nit in pool, phrased as a courteous kindness. "Wait a minute. You should be shooting the 5 ball, not the 11 ball." If he was correct, you have to make the aiming change and are forced to give him credit for good sportsmanship. But it is still a distraction, in spite of the apparent helpful assistance.

In an important competition, there is no reason for him to notify you that you are committing a foul. If you are aiming wrong, he just needs to keep quiet to receive the benefit of the penalty. But, by "appearing" to be full of good sportsmanship, he justifies this intrusion. He only needs the appearance of a potential playing error from his angle of view in order to interfere with your attention.

Regardless of your internal feelings, you need to address this notification. You are forced to stop your setup and alignment, turn to tell him that you are not doing whatever he thinks you might be doing. Because of that redirection of your attention, you now have to restart your preparation routine. While doing that, he is peripherally interfering again by profusely apologizing. He will keep quiet for a turn or two, then suddenly intrude again with the same sincere desire to prevent you from making a stupid mistake. This

must be presented with innocent sincerity. Any indication of intentional malice could result in a more dramatic confrontation.

In other games, nits can be applied by requesting verification of some playing condition, such as, "I'm the whites, right?" or "I'm going in that direction, correct?" again followed by the "Are you sure?" An expert with this can even incorporate a third confirmation by momentarily being distracted (i.e., a wave to a railbird), and then seemingly forgetting the answer and has to ask again. He works you until you are just at the boiling point. Finally, when he wins, he inserts a final nit by thanking you for the victory, something like, "Thank you so much for letting me win."

Response

You could handle this effort passively, letting it slide off by simply ignoring anything your opponent says. This only works if you possess excessive patience or are mildly amused that he would seriously think that using such an obvious trick would affect your game.

If you like to become proactive, become a nagger. Constantly admonish him to do the minor preparations necessary for a setup. Include reminders to think of something, consider another thing, don't forget to pause, and afterwards, do a proper follow-through. As this gets to him and he makes mistakes, insert the jab of "I told you to be careful. Why won't you listen to me?" And, when he glares at you, make sure you grin hugely.

Noises

The idea of using noise to distract an opponent during an important or critical shot is an old, old concept. In any situation where the playing area requires focused attention, noise distractions can be highly effective in destroying concentration.

Back in the 1920s, the jingling of coins in the pocket was a popular golfing shark. It quickly migrated to the billiard room. This and other game changing noises have remained in use to this day. The coin jingling still shows up every once in a while when some kid "discovers" it and finds that it works on his friends. When he finally tries it on a seasoned player, his efforts usually result in public embarrassment.

That specific shark may be old hat, but noises in general are still popular and effective. These do not require line of sight to work. They can be done to you when facing any direction and only need to be loud enough to reach your ears.

There are two types of noise distractions.

- Repeated noise. It can vary in volume and used at varying lengths of time. It can be a foreground (directly intrusive) or background (cumulatively intrusive) noise. It is very effective if you are sensitive to sound.
- Abrupt noise. This is louder and sudden, timed to coincide as closely as possible with your shot.

Here are a few tricks that can be used against you:

- Knocking and rapping, sometimes in time to any juke box music. If knuckles aren't loud enough, he uses a tool, such as a pen, pocket marker, cell phone, lighter, etc. These ensure the sound penetrates the noise of the juke box.
- Finger snapping is common, especially when used with music. He can also use the process if he has an MP3 player plugs stuck in his ears.

- Chalk grinding requires a quiet environment. It is very penetrating if done during perfect silence. To a purist, this can be bothersome.
- Tip tapping with a cue tool can require active banging to roughen the tip so that it holds chalk better. Excessive use can be effective.
- Stick bouncing is a common way to self-entertain during long waits. The cue is lifted up a few inches and dropped to bounce on it's rubber bumper. (Does not work on carpet.)
- Stick falling requires a hard floor. If carpeted, a bunch of house cues have to be knocked over to make enough noise.
- Coughing and sneezing is popular. In an establishment where good manners are a standard of membership, these have to be done using the "stifle" method (turning slightly away and holding one or both hands near your mouth).

Response

If an inexperienced opponent attempts these, you can usually embarrass him into stopping. Ask, "That old shark has moss growing on it. I haven't seen one of those in years. Where did you dig that up?" Glance over to any railbird and say, "What an amateur."

When you face an experienced user, tell him, "Once, but not twice. OK?" If he acknowledges your recognition, you won't be facing other variations on the theme of disquiet. But if he denies any attempt, you have a free-hand opportunity.

In your turn, you are not restricted in quantity or volume. Feel free to be blatant about it. When you finally are the target of his dirty looks, he is ready to agree to a cease fire. On your inquiry of negotiated peace, he should be pathetically glad to end the battle of the noise-makers.

Odd Habits

This is often used in circumstances where there is almost no verbal communications between players during the match. That limitation eliminates any of the efforts that require some sort of conversation. This means that your opponent has to come up with activities that are distractions because you see him perform them.

Among the variety of the unusual things that he can do are these examples:

- Wears a baseball cap, frontwards when it is your turn, backwards when it is his turn.
- Wears a cowboy hat, with a one or two pheasant feathers dangling backwards off the brim and which waggles dramatically on every movement.
- Chews on a series of toothpicks the whole match, mutilates them one after the other, then carefully stacks the remnants in parallel lines.
- Chews on an unlit cigar. When getting ready to make a shot, carefully puts the cigar down with its wet gross-looking end pointed towards you, shoots the shot, picks up the cigar and continues, cigar in mouth.
- Does a hop or a skip on every other step when walking around the playing area. May throw a twist of the hips in for good measure along with the occasional elbow jutting up to fend off a nearby person or wall.
- Hangs an unlit cigarette out of the side of the mouth. When he's thinking, waggles it up and down and around in alternating circles. When ready to shoot, clenches his lips over the filter.
- Chews gum and then pops it loudly every once in a while regardless of who is shooting.
- Has a habit of constant stops to peer down at the ground or underneath chairs to look for something. After a few seconds of hunting, straightens up and proceeds.
- Drops several things onto the floor during your turn. Makes a big deal about grunting and groaning while bending over to

collect them to make sure you get a good view. Very effective with a stack of coins.

- Develops an irregular tic on one cheek. As the cheek lifts in the beginning of the tic, the eye on the same side closes tightly. Only does this when looking at you.
- If he wears dentures, pushes the top or bottom out of his mouth, and then sucks it back in with a slurping sound.
- Walks around with a pair of glasses perched on his head. When ready for a shot, pulls them down and squints at the entire playing area, then pushes them back up.
- Develops the hiccups, which can get worse and louder when it is your turn and less frequent during his turn.
- Pulls a small bottle out of his pocket, opens it and sniffs deeply, smiles hugely with eyes closed, caps the bottle, and puts it back (really contains water).
- Brings in a can of Lysol spray, and sprays his seat every time before sitting down.

If you mention anything about his odd habit, he acts embarrassed, maybe walks away for a minute or two while he apparently gets himself under control. He comes back a bit upset and a little angry. He says, "Most people have enough courtesy not to mention my personal handicap to my face." and then goes to his chair to sulk for several minutes. He has to be coaxed back to the game with profuse apologies.

Response

Because these are distractions not involving your direct participation, there is little you can do to stop these being used. He keeps close tabs on your reactions to determine the effectiveness of his effort. Your tightened lips, frowns, or grimaces gladden his heart. For best results, cultivate a tolerance for unusual behavior.

Old Geezer

If you are a younger player, you play opponents of all ages. At times, you are matched up against an oldster. This is a person who is 60+ years old and has been playing most of his life. Generally, he will be a nice, easy-going fellow who is happy to lend a hand or try to fulfill any request or favor you might ask.

As a life-long player, he has been around a long time, seen many things, and learned more than a few lessons about life, especially how it relates to pool. That history includes being on the receiving and giving end of dozens of sharks of all types and intensities - hundreds of times. There won't be too much that he hasn't already seen and figured out how to use to his advantage. He knows all the tricks, traps, and sharks in this book and several dozens more.

A person with this kind of background and the life lessons learned from the experiences of scores of years always has one trap or another prepared and ready to use. Even if you evade two or three of them, he'll catch you with the next one.

He will be cunning in all of his presentations. The first and foremost effort he will pull on your innocence will be to use his age. First, he activates the "I'm not very healthy." approach, with the implied, "So take it easy on me, OK?" To make this more real, he moves around slowly and with obvious care. He may limp, or hobble, or wince on alternate steps. Each movement is a study in careful execution. By emphasizing his infirmities, he works hard to convince you that his old age prevents him from playing well.

Along with these seeming life style restrictions, he cheerfully converses with you to convince you to relax your standards and treat him as an eccentric but nice old uncle. He acts as if the match is unimportant. He runs on about the old days. He mentions pool halls and players from long ago.

With this random series of topics, he softens your game attitude as he works to make you comfortable and relaxed. All of this is his effort to blunt your game edge. Against your will, he ingratiates himself into your confidence which prevents you from considering him as a deadly serious competitor.

Response

Ignore it all and concentrate on your game. Keep an eye on him and anything he does. He is sure to display one or more sharks from the days of yester-years that will be true classics (and no longer in vogue or even widely known). They can be added to your personal collection.

About the only action that causes him to be irritated is being "helpful". Elderly people like to think they are still as capable as when they were half their current age. To do this, be overly courteous and condescending. If asked about your respectful behavior, say, "I respect your age as an elder of the game."

Stay a little close to him. If he asks why, say, "In case you have trouble getting around; I'm ready to give you a hand." Old folks really hate being offered physical assistance of any kind. When you can get him to glare at you, you are the one affecting his game instead of the other way around.

Partner Divorce

This tactic is used when playing any type of partners game. Your opponents have a wide variety of one on one efforts they can use against the two of you. But there is one trick for this format that can be very effective against an unprepared team. This works best in sports where playing is done in turns rather than head to head.

Here is how your team can be tricked. Your enemy adversaries closely watch the two of you play through several turns. They identify which of you has the least loyalty to the partnership. Usually this is the weaker player who constantly receives advice from the stronger player. If there is any indication of resentment or a bit of reluctant participation, they know who to work on. An irritated "OK" when told how to play is all that is needed.

Once they select their target, they get down to business. Let's assume it is your playmate. Opponent player "A" who immediately follows your partner now becomes the agent provocateur. This allows "A" to work on your buddy for the longest time period. It starts innocently enough with a casual conversation while you are playing your turn. "A" looks for common interests, all to develop a pleasant relationship.

After a "friendship" is established, your associate's new-found buddy begins support and compliment efforts. These are designed to help your playing partner feel he is a second class participant who is somehow slighted by you. Opponent player "B" chimes in with his whole-hearted support, all done while totally ignoring you.

When you make a poor playing effort, the second part of the plan is put into action. "A" asks your sidekick how the two of you ever got together. Both "A" and "B" express appropriate sympathy over your comrade's predicament about being associated with an obvious banger like you.

This is the way they drive a wedge between the two of you. All of this is done to sway your partner not to play his best. Not including the affect this has on your partner's mindset, it also irritates and frustrates you to listen to them knock you down. Overall, this results in less concentration on the game to their advantage.

Response

When you enter a partners match, assume that your goal to battle to the win is also matched by an equivalent intention from your colleague. If you observe that your opponents' efforts are affecting your associate's game, it is you that must carefully bring him back into focus. If necessary, take a short break and perform an appropriate pep talk to keep both of you focused.

A pre-game planning session helps establish cooperative tactics to coordinate your efforts and win more efficiently. You can make plans on handling common distractions offered by your opponents. Working together and synchronizing tactics provides an effective shield against any kind of distractive efforts by the opposing team.

If the two of you have experience playing together, you will be able to work on common efforts to counter sharks and maybe even set up a trap or two. If this shark is tried on your team, turn it back on them. Have a plan to split off their weaker player. You don't have to expect any success. All that is required is to tie-up the attention spans of your opponents while the two of you drive towards the win.

Politics

This trick does not directly affect your game if your political opinions are either in the soft middle or you are politically illiterate. On the other hand, if you have a passionate interest in political discourse and debate, your adversary can use this to affect your game.

He can take either of two ways. One way is to be the antagonist, taking a stand against your ideas and beliefs. He will do his best to become your political enemy, taunting and teasing. The other way is the protagonist, declaring his support for your opinions and viewpoints. He will ingratiate himself into your trust.

As the antagonist, whatever you like, he hates. What you hate, he loves. He only needs to know whether you are a flaming socialist-leaning progressive liberal, or a conservative Neanderthal still trying to live in the 1950's.

If you are on the left, he starts off with the standard far right patter, "Those god-damn liberals. Always want to take my money and give it to lazy people." Or, "Women shouldn't vote. They're too air-headed to think clearly. What a bunch of morons."

If you are on the right, he complains, "What's wrong with letting gays marry? We need the workers, so make all illegal immigrants American citizens. What a bunch of morons."

At the protagonist, he supports your political point of view and is your best buddy forever. He heartily agrees with every idea and concept from your side of the fence. He is a kindred spirit.

Finding a sympathizer immensely improves your opinion of him. Instead of the competitive adversary you should view him as, you begin treating him as a good buddy. Not a good strategic move when you want to win.

Whichever approach he uses, his goal is to generate a strong emotional reaction from you. If you let him sway your emotions during a serious competition, you lose.

Response

Don't mix politics with competitive sporting events. The outside world does not exist on the playing field. Only the competition and the players matter. In important face-offs, strictly enforce a no politics policy. If he does try, cut him off.

If you have a bit of the devil, throw a few monkey wrenches around. When he applies the antagonist approach, let him run on for a while. Then appear to flip yourself and suddenly start agreeing with everything he says. Act as if he converted you. While he is momentarily confused, advance your game.

Just when he does adjust, switch back to your original position. Lambast him for being a fool and an idiot. Even if he gives up this attempt, you can continue jabbing at his foolish political ideas.

Powder & Chalk

(This description is specific to a pool hall, but can easily be adapted to other sports.)

To implement this shark, your opponent uses the pool hall's powder and chalk as weapons of mass distraction. Among regular players, this is a disgusting way to shark. It is one of the few efforts that stretch the tolerances of even the least serious players. Most of the people in the area would be appalled to observe this shark and happily sign a petition to demand its use be outlawed.

This works to destroy your game on several levels. If you are a neat and tidy person, the messy results could lead to a nervous breakdown. If you love the sport, this desecration generates a major irritation. If the room owner is a friend of yours, you get incensed on his behalf too.

When your opponent gets ready for the match, part of the equipment that he puts out includes a small bottle of baby powder. This is his primary tool to screw up your game. His other tool is the chalk which comes with the table. He might bring some cheap chalk that easily disintegrates when used with force.

When he is ready to begin, standing next to his chair, he vigorously shakes baby powder into his hand, both front and back. This process creates a white circle around his feet. When he has applied too much, he vigorously rubs the powder evenly across his hands. This leads to another rain of powder. He brings his stick and leans it against the table. This is followed by a loud clap of both hands. This sends out a blizzard of powder that covers half the table and more across the floor. When he gets down on a shot, he leaves visible palm prints on the rails and cloth. At the third imprint which is faint, he stops to refresh the supply. A few turns at the table makes the immediate area look like a paintball war zone.

He grinds the chalk onto his stick, attempting to drill a hole through the cube in ten tries or less. When he finishes dressing his stick, instead of placing the cube gently somewhere on the rail, he adjusts it in his hand and slams it face down onto the rail. This marks up the rail, scatters chalk dust, and breaks pieces off that spin across the table. These tiny little pieces deflect balls from their intended paths.

Response

Stop this at the first palm outline or chalk cube slam. If you can't personally get a behavior change, appeal to any available higher authority. Look for the opponent's team captain, tournament director, room manager, owner, bouncer, or even other railbirds. (Don't ask any of his friends. They're having too much fun watching their buddy mess up the playing area.) Hopefully, one or more of these individuals can convince him to tone it down. A threat of expulsion might help.

In an absolute last resort, rather than attempt to play under such conditions, first threaten to quit. If that doesn't lead to a behavior modification, without another word, break your stick down, pack up and go get a drink. Don't worry about hurting his feelings. He is too callous to be concerned.

Practical Joker

A practical joke is a humorous prank played on a victim (you), designed to be funny to an audience (the trickster and everyone around you). Your appreciation of the joke is not required and is immaterial to the joke's success. The more public embarrassment, discomfort, or indignity you are exposed to; the more enjoyable it is to the instigator. The experience is usually shocking (sometimes literally) and always surprising. At the very least, the subsequent laughter by the audience over your ridicule is a test of your self-control.

Infrequently, you are faced with an opponent who experimented with practical jokes as a kid and managed to survive to adulthood (probably successfully out-ran his victims). If you dislike being made on the receiving end of a joke or teased in any way, being the butt of your opponent's tricks will be painful to your sense of self and dignity.

If he is a life-long trickster, his selection of devices and setups can be extensive. If he is a dilettante, his prop department will be smaller. The types of jokes depend on the tools that were packed for the competition. Unless he carries a backpack, this is limited to a selection of a half dozen or so gags.

Each prank was pre-tested, often on co-workers who are the guinea pigs for his new tricks. The ones he uses are selected to prevent you from developing focus. In a pool hall, the common tricks are the off-weighted crazy cue balls and 8 balls that wobble as they go down the table. Hundreds of practical jokes are available in catalogs and on the web.

Here are just a few:

- Rubber snake or spider.
- Fake poop, vomit.
- Fake wounds, blood.
- Bald head wig.
- Whoopee cushion.
- Hand buzzer.
- Fart spray.
- Breaking glass noisemaker.
- Remote control rat.
- Sweat spray.
- Spilled drinks.

Response

Your opponent's intent could be as simple as the misplaced desire to be funny or the malicious intention to apply the maximum possible embarrassment. Regardless, there is not much you can do at the moment of infliction. You may have to force yourself not to take violent action.

If you have some pre-warning of his intentions, there are several things you can do. Your response depends on how pro-active you want to get. At the most dramatic end of the action scale, get wildly upset, then collapse to the ground. As everyone crowds around, you slowly revive. In a gasping effort, say something about a nervous condition or a weak heart. He should be very much afraid of bothering you again. If you are a pretty good actor, he will be almost pathetically anxious to let you win.

For a more passive response, try this. Without a word, walk away from the table and leave the general area. Get a drink or cup of coffee and walk far away to meet and greet friends. After about 10-15 minutes, come back and take a seat in the spectator area. Act as if nothing happened. Do not inquire as to the status of the game and do not even look at the joker. Whether you let yourself be talked into coming back to the competition is a personal preference.

Propositions

If you are a younger player, you are more susceptible to this trap. As a general rule, less aged shooters seem to be willing to take larger chances on shots that old-timers would not attempt. In a situation where a long-time player would seriously consider defensive options, the youngster is happy to take a flyer if he thinks he has even a small chance to pull it off.

Your opponent must first determine if you are vulnerable to proposition bets and challenges. Early in the game, he will throw a little test at you. On a tough shot where you should play cautiously, he offers, "I'll give you a buck if you can make it." If you try it, he knows you are a prime target for this distraction. It doesn't matter if you succeed or not.

If you refuse, he prompts for a rationale. If you respond with a sensible answer, like, "That's beyond my ability." or another intelligent remark, he knows you are a thinking player. He might still offer a proposition, but mainly for its temporary distractive value as you turn him down.

Here are a few circumstances where this can be applied:

- At a key shot in the game, that if successful would win the game.
- The difficult but not impossible shot.
- Just past the mid-game point on an important game.
- On a very low percentage shot, for the fun of it.

He can make the proposition as simple as an even up offer, or handicap the offer to make it more attractive. But it is not the size of the bet as much as the distraction it causes.

1. Any rhythm you might have had is now disrupted.
2. You must stop and listen to his proposition.
3. You evaluate the possibilities.
4. You respond - yes or no.
5. If yes, you have the new pressure of the bet.
6. If no, you must refocus your attention.

If you take the bet, it doesn't matter when you win it or not. He accomplished the original intent - taken your attention off your game.

Response

There is not much you can do to stop your opponent from throwing out a proposition. It is a blatant effort to interrupt your rhythm. If you have been exposed to proposition bets before, you can immediately wave him off, and continue your shot. If you do this, it is no more upsetting than any background conversation or the jukebox suddenly starting up.

If unfamiliar with proposition bets, you probably will allow him to make his proposal. Your best option is always refusal, no matter how interesting the offer. Apply a couple of internal calming routines as you get back to the game.

By making the first offer, your opponent opens the door for you to present your own propositions while he is shooting. When you see a similarly difficult position facing him - make your offer. Time it just as he has made one or two practice strokes.

Put-downs

Unlike insults where your opponent makes no bones about pushing your ego into the mud, this effort pretends to have a veneer of good sportsmanship. He cloaks the effort with a meaningless compliment and then presents his slanderous statement. If you take the opinions of others personally, you will be easily affected.

The subject matter of his observations covers the entire gamut of your playing skills. He has something to say about your pre-shot routine, control, intentions, results, and the intelligent thinking behind each shot. Anything you do is fair game for his attention, so long as it can divert your focus, even slightly.

Every comment he makes utilizes a two-part statement. First is the obligatory compliment in the spirit of good sportsmanship. This is followed by the dig, jab, or poke at your self-esteem. Here are a few examples:

- That was good. And, you almost got position too.
- Congratulations on that tough shot. You just got lucky.
- Nice positioning. Too bad it doesn't do you any good.
- Good try. But it looks like you don't have a shot.
- Good run. It looked good right up until you screwed up.
- I'm impressed with the shot, but not your control.

This won't work if you don't care what anyone says about you in specific or in general. And when you can't be affected in this way, your opponent is wasting his time. To check your sensitivity level, he will throw out a couple of investigatory jabs, and then closely watch your reactions. Any twitch, frown, or grimace encourages him.

The intensity will increase as the game progresses. By the end-game, the level will depend on whether he is winning or losing. If winning, he reverts to the milder version. If losing, he is more aggressive and may abandon the veneer of sportsmanship and go to straight insults.

Response

If you have little concern about other people's opinions, this effort cannot bother you. Use his offensive remarks as a personal affront to your abilities. This can become your incentive to develop a more intensive desire to win. Regardless, take the time to properly do your analysis. Perform all of the proper routines through to the execution.

You can withdraw yourself from all communication with your opponent. To do this, turn away from the playing area to put your attention elsewhere. Get into conversations with others. Perform equipment maintenance tasks. Make sure you have no eye contact.

Alternately, if you can handle a more aggressive approach, trade put-down for put-down. Play the same schoolyard games you used in elementary school. See who can come up with the best put-down. This will distract both of you during this process. Since you are doing it intentionally, you are less affected. Use this edge to advance your game.

Random Sharking

Every once in a while, some player comes along who has discovered that sharking affects his competitor's game play. Like a boy with a new toy, he hunts up every idea he can find.

Because he doesn't do a proper study of gamesmanship, he can not properly select which of them will best fit the situation. He just puts together a string of sharks that works somehow or other, and delivers them as a raw stream of one attempt after another. Basically, it is like flinging a pile of mud against a wall to see what sticks. Most doesn't, but some always does.

Because this is a new dimension of the game, he usually believes that this type of playing is the true shortcut to winning. Some of his bad habits include:

- Rambling on while you are shooting.
- Constantly moving around.
- Freely offering his advice whether wanted or not.
- Making and laughing at his own bad jokes.

In addition to those underlying elements of his playing style, he will have a number of specific jabs to apply to your psyche.

- Constantly saying "Could be worse." or "Could be better."
- If he is a little older, addresses you as "Hey kid." interchanged with "Son, listen to me."
- If he is a little younger, uses "Old man." and "Hey geezer."
- On a successful shot, says, "I guess even a blind squirrel can find a nut once in a while."
- When you accidentally leave him an opportunity to advance, enthusiastically says, "You are a kind person. Thank you so much."

This assumption that this is an acceptable tactical effort also makes him blind to what works and what doesn't. Fortunately, this inability to observe the obvious also means that he won't be able to fine-tune his presentation.

Response

It is very important that you educate him immediately as to the consequences of regularly using sharking as a tool to win. Point out that he will lose playing friends. He will certainly gain a reputation of being somewhat of an idiot. Explain that regular players will refuse to play him, and that he is demonstrating his foolishness. He could even be ostracized.

Once you perform this service to the game-playing community, you are under no further obligation to straighten him out. Proceed to hustle him and ensure that he does indeed learn some life lessons.

In a formal match, check with any officials. Regardless of whether you can effectively stop him, you are still responsible for applying all the necessary attention to playing your game. Knowing that this is simply part of the obstacle course, you can make mental adjustments to reduce the affect of his efforts. Above all, do not reduce your will to win.

Rules Expert

No matter how carefully the writers on committees of rule approvers work to ensure clarity and explicit explanations, there are always many areas where interpretations can be applied. It's the old, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is." problem. This category of nit-picking and quibbling is what makes this endeavor work.

A significant amount of preparation and study is required before your opponent can be ready for prime-time. He probably already had a personal fascination with the intricacies of the rules before he realized that this can be used to shark his competitors. He will have taken this self-study very seriously if he also shows knowledge of the rules for less common games.

At the low end of the scale, you find the dilettante dabbler. This is a person who attempts to appear to be an expert rules master. Because he hasn't put in the necessary study time, he happily misinterprets the rules and gets many of them just plain wrong. He can even be capable of making up rules on the spot. He covers up his ignorance and half-knowledge by increasing the strength of his convictions. He can get downright loud when his rulings are challenged.

In action, your opponent's eagle eye closely watches your every movement starting when you come into the playing area. He focuses in on all your actions. Every body movement, shift and adjustment is judged against every possible interpretation of the game rules. If there is any probable action that can be declared a violation, he jumps up with great enthusiasm to declare the offense, stated with absolute certainty.

If his exuberance catches you unawares, not only is your rhythm disrupted, but he gets a bonus of completely removing your attention on the game to his complaint. If you argue about it and somehow win, you return to your focus while angry and upset. This is not a good mind-set for competitive situations. If you end up performing poorly, you are further upset with yourself for not doing well. This is on top of your feelings about his interference.

If you are too careful to get caught this way, he implements the "constant reminder" tactic. During most of your setups, he "helpfully" reminds you of a potential rule violation and you must be careful not to commit. By intruding into your setup and preparation he distracts your routine and disrupts your playing rhythm. All of this benefits him and hurts you.

Response

When you come across such an opponent, every time he calls out the penalty, insist that he get out the rule book and show you the exact wording. Do this even when you know you have committed the violation. It never hurts to keep him concentrating on looking up rules instead of playing his best game.

If he declares a violation you are unfamiliar with, force him through the proof process. You might learn something. Use him to educate yourself about some of the more obscure rulings. You might pick up a tip or two to use against future competitors.

If he doesn't have a rule book, dramatically express shock and dismay. Ask him, "How can you call a foul if you don't even have the rules with you? What's the matter with you?" Mock him for the rest of the match. Every once in a while, catch his eye and sadly shake your head. The embarrassment alone should cause him to lose.

Self-delusional

This is a self-inflicted false ideology constructed on a delusional belief in one's own competency. If there is a single fault that prevents any player from being intellectually honest about his skills and capabilities, it is this major personal assumption: he thinks that his true skill level was established during the one competition when everything went right and all was successful. That was a glorious day when nothing went wrong.

If you suffer from this potential for over-estimation, then every game and match since that last perfect event has always been less than satisfactory. It doesn't matter that you have never since come close to that level of performance. And yet, for some unknown reason, the majority of scoring attempts since then have somehow been of lower quality, and sometimes even awful. This is the delusion at work. The reason cannot be that you are really playing at your true speed. It can only be because of a bit of bad luck.

This presumption of proficiency has become your basic assumption. And you can't understand why there is such a significant break between that fantasy and the reality of your current competitive skills. With the true dedication of the slightly insane, you refuse to learn from experience. You continue holding up that past triumph as the truth and the whole of the truth - actual circumstances be damned.

This is why you hear players (like yourself) moan and groan when they miss a tough shot. They KNOW the attempt was within their skill level. They recall the past success quite vividly. This is often carried forward into attempting a crazy shot because they got lucky once in 30 tries.

After an attempt fails, you complain aloud or mutter under your breath, "Should have had that." and "Just once I'd like to play my regular game.", and "Damn. That was not a difficult shot." In addition to expressing your personal dissatisfaction, you also revealed to your opponent exactly what types of shots are outside your playing capability. This provides him with another weakness to be exploited.

To an opponent who is intelligently analyzing the playing area and your abilities to handle situations, this is a an indication of your fantasy. Once you reveal one weakness, he will be carefully looking for more.

Response

One of the most basic realities of intelligent competition is this little bit of Shakespearean advice, "To thine own self be true." If you can truly know what you can and can not do, you can make good tactical decisions and your chances of success increase significantly. Without this reality-based knowledge, you will attempt efforts that have minimal to no likelihood of success.

Only on rare occasions are you capable of being super competent. Don't judge your game abilities beyond what you are capable of today. Make continuous adjustments to your expectations based on the immediate feedback of your current match. Be aware there is a top and bottom of your skills for the current competition. Plan your game within those limits.

Self-doubt

If you are introspective by nature, you are a careful and thoughtful person who knows how important fundamentals are. During practice periods, you spend part of that effort to work on drills or exercises to keep them grooved in. Coincidental with this, you may have a small library of instructional material used to provide additional insight. You may also take lessons from instructors.

To make this work, your opponent must establish himself as a "student of the game". To do this, he must know something about the various authors of the instructional material for your sport. It helps if he has more than a decade of playing experience. He will even offer a minor lecture or description of a basic stance fundamental to create an aura of knowledge.

Once you listen to him, he works on disintegrating one of your automated routines. All he needs to do is direct your attention on the muscle movements of a basic position. For example, it might be the placement of your foot when you get ready to set up for a shot. You've made thousands of attempts without a thought on this little thing. He says you will get better results if it is shifted a half inch to one side.

To all of the other actions on a setup, you have now added a conscious effort to shift your foot a half inch. He will constantly remind you about this on every setup. It might actually be a good idea too. Here are some situations where he can force you to "re-think" a routine:

- How far back you move a hand or foot before execution.
- How far your follow through goes.
- The various back and forth distances for practice shots.
- Where your feet are placed.
- Your body balance.
- The set and angles of your shoulders or hips or knees.

Your mind might be able to handle one little adjustment to a routine, but now that he has gotten you to accept one small change, he will smoothly add another, and another. He traps you in

the world of introspection. It's like one of those mind games where someone says, "Don't think about purple elephants."

Your mind can only handle so many things at a time. Once he has gotten your head tied up with these additions, you have less time to focused tactical analysis. Your planning abilities become non-existent. When he gets done, you are lucky to be able to stand without staggering.

Response

A reality check is needed here. Why would someone be offering his advice while competing against you? If he is such an actual expert, he should be beating you first and then hand you his business card. Then he can pitch his special 12 hour correctional shooting analysis and tune-up course at a one-time price of \$239.

The proper reaction to any ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and/or assistance being offered by an opponent is healthy skepticism. Throw in a big dose of suspicion and you have the proper attitude to handle this shark. Once you discredit his status as an expert, any further statements about your "faults" can be discounted and ignored.

If you want to dismantle this effort, and even turn this around on him, ask about the source of this knowledge. What expert proposed that this or that idea is so valuable? Dig for the details. Make sure to nag after him about how's and why's.

If he's just posing as an expert, you should easily get him stuttering and fumbling to answer your queries. Even if he does know what he's talking about, getting him explaining about the background material will distract him from his game. In either case, while he is justifying himself, you concentrate on winning.

Sex Appeal

In sporting venues where male and female players can compete directly, female players are well aware of their effect on any guy opponents. In some respects, they have an unfair advantage. Competing with an opponent of the opposite sex is always distracting to young guys and even older dudes are not immune to the affects.

When facing a female opponent, the dynamics of the game get more complicated. How effectively she uses her position as the enforcer of civilized behavior among males depends on her decisions on presentation. If she assumes the modern independent-thinking woman persona, she de-emphasizes her appeal. That simplifies your situation since she consciously abandons the use of her natural talents. That takes much pressure off of your psyche and helps to ensure only her playing skills are the sole arbiter of who wins.

On the other hand, if she accepts her natural advantages as her due, she can be distracting on multiple levels. Even dialed down for public consumption, it is hard for a guy to pay full attention to the playing area when in the company of the opposite sex. Age and beauty is actually immaterial. It is manners and attitude that determine how effective her efforts are.

Some of the tools women opponents have available are:

- Sweaters.
- Pants.
- Tops.
- Shorts.
- Dresses (long and short).
- High heels.
- Earrings & necklaces.
- Perfume.
- Hair styles.

Here are some of their delivery mechanisms:

- Walking.
- Talking.
- Smiling.
- Manners.
- Attitude.

If she is using this as a shark, she will be carefully observing your reactions. Your focused attention on a body part, a nod of appreciation, or a look of speculation are all indicators that she is interrupting your concentration.

Response

There is not going to be much you can do to stop her from using her tools and tricks. Guys are pretty much victims in the battles between the sexes. Attempts to become a misogynist (woman-hater) for the duration of the match are usually short-circuited by a smile or pleasant word.

The best thing you can do is concentrate on winning as quickly as possible. Stay as far away from her as the playing area allows. Look only upon the field of play and consciously avoid looking at or towards her. If she is acting courteous and friendly, avoid eye contact, keep communications minimized, and pay attention to the game. After the competition, you can make whatever moves you are so inclined to make.

Shark Yourself

You can play for 50 years against all types of players with skills great and small. Each and every one of these opponents owns a variety of sharks of varying effectiveness. Many of these are of the minor variety, relatively benign in effort, intention, and application. If you watch anyone play for half an hour, you can probably spot a minimum of three sharks. When pointed out, the player often is surprised and astonished. He has been doing the same things for so long, his sharks are a natural part of his playing style.

If you ask 10 players if they regularly shark, five deny it with righteous indignation, four blushingly admit to the occasional sin, and the last is forthright in declaring he has an addiction. Even counting all of these in the total number of distractions that have been directed at you throughout your playing career; that is a fraction of the sharks you played against yourself! This is an astonishing truth that few want to face and address. Here is a very short list of some of those ways you confuse yourself.

- Saying, "I hope I don't miss, or look stupid, or scratch."
- Someone maybe, might have, could have sharked you.
- Someone moved, or stopped.
- Someone laughed, or cried.
- Someone said something, or didn't.
- Shirt is too tight, or too loose.
- Shoe laces are loose, or too tight.
- Pants crotch digs in, or doesn't.
- Belt too tight, or loose.
- Music too loud, or not playing.
- Forgot to splash on some cologne, or put on too much.
- Someone turned away, or turned the other way.
- Someone dropped something, or picked it up.
- You didn't drink enough, or too much.
- Ate too much, or not enough.
- Room is too hot, or too cold.
- You have a personal problem, or maybe two.
- Itch here, or there, or there.
- A pretty girl, or another pretty girl.

- Poor execution or equipment.
- and so on and on and on.

There are thousands of things that can bother you, from the simple to the complex, from the personal to the impersonal. With the right frame of mind, you can be distracted by gravity.

Response

Physical exercise can help by dulling the too-bright intensity of your mind and get it back down to something more ordinary. Try doing one or more of the following (out back if possible - don't want to get people talking):

- 20 jumping jacks (make sure you have room).
- 20 deep knee bends (use the handicapped stall support bar in the bathroom).
- 3-5 minutes of jogging in place (quietly).
- Brisk walk around the block (make sure the neighborhood is safe).

Another way is to take a moment to count your blessings, starting with the fact that you are alive and mobile. Think for a moment on what your life would be like if you had the problems that other people have mentioned. Once you can trivialize your original distractions, you can get on with your game using a more vitalized point of view.

Shockers

A shocker is any activity designed to destroy your game focus and make it difficult to recover any ability to play effectively. It does this with an action that is a complete surprise. It can be a shock to your sensibilities or to your nervous system. It can even go so far as to appear to be dangerous enough that you consider it a threat to life and limb. At its stronger levels, this is a gross violation of the spirit and idea of sports. The weaker applications fall within the spectrum of juvenile horseplay.

There are always a few individuals with a poorly developed sense of propriety that are willing to try this. If you are a nervous person, starting at sudden movements or sounds around you, you are the primary target for shockers. Users are only concerned with the fun of executing the surprise attack and then achieve victory from the shattered remnants of your concentration.

Unless you have been exposed to a great variety of noises and surprises, your mind generally shuts down and your hind-brain is suddenly left in charge. When your fight or flight response is triggered, your body prepares to act. This can generate an embarrassing reaction ranging from diving for cover while emitting a shrill scream to the frozen immobility of a possum. Besides the immediate reaction, the entire body tenses up as it is flooded with adrenalin and endorphins - not a good thing for a player.

Shocks have varying degrees of intensity and affect people differently. Here are some various types:

- At its most extreme are the very loud dangerous noises, including explosions and rending metal. The sheer volume indicates something life-threatening is extremely close and seriously dangerous. Most people react with panic.
- Just below this are the sudden sharp noises that occur nearby when least expected, such as firing off a starter's pistol, lighting off a fire cracker, the blare of a juke box after several moments of quiet, or knocking down a rack of sticks. While the reaction is not the desperate scramble to save your life, it

can include jumping away from the immediate area or a crouching drop to the floor.

- Below this, you have the sudden actions coming from nowhere. It could be someone hitting you on your blind side, or a sneak poke of a body part. It can also be a social surprise, such as the exposure of a normally covered part of the anatomy.

Note: Rarely is the extreme shock used. It takes a sadistic joker or someone so desperate to win that anything goes regardless of the consequences. If someone becomes this desperate, it would be simpler if he just took a gun out and said, "You WILL let me win."

Response

An opponent who pulls shocks as a distraction usually has a reputation that precedes him. When he arrives at an event, the word is out and people are on their guard. But the attempt to be prepared will also affect how well you can concentrate. Sometimes one shocker action in the past can affect other players long into the future.

If he does apply one to you, do something that shakes him. Make a big scene so that others get involved. If you can get other people yelling at him for being so stupid, extra points. Also try "fainting".

If you were deeply affected, and are unable to get him censured, you still have to finish the match. Take a short bathroom break. Use the short physical exercises (jog in place, toe-touches, windmills, etc.) to settle any kind of nervousness. Then direct your strongest, most focused attention to go directly for the win.

Slow Racker

This is a delaying shark. In other sports, the equivalent action is to take an excessive time in getting ready to start a turn of play. It is most often seen in table billiards during the set up of the balls prior to the beginning of a game.

Your adversary focuses his total attention on his attempts to give you that "perfect" rack, regardless of the imperfection of the table, balls, cloth, and spot. To him, the only perfect rack that passes his minimum standards includes all balls touching and the head ball exactly centered on the foot spot. Anything less is abhorrent to his personal quality standards.

It starts when the balls are collected and rolled down to the foot of the table. Instead of sweeping all the balls into the triangle with a quick swoop, he will pick each one up and carefully drop it into a position in the triangle. Immediately following the ball placements, he will pick and move the balls around for another test of your patience.

When a table has seen a lot of action, many incidental activities have occurred to make playing conditions less than perfect. That includes sprays of chalk from tips, cloth burns from balls hit at high speeds, indents from bouncing balls, and general use abuse.

All of this wear and tear makes it difficult to keep any of the balls in the rack in touch with each other. Putting the rack of balls into position, then lifting the rack often finds several balls drifting away from each other like reverse magnets. Yet, everyone else that racks balls for their competitors can usually do so in under 30 seconds.

There he is, pushing the rack up to the spot, lifting it slightly to observe a ball shift, then putting it down and moving the balls again. He tries fiddling with the balls, pushing each this way and that to try to get them to stay in place.

The rack is pulled down, sideways, back up, and re-attempted. This is followed by shaking it hard, moving the balls around, then thrusting them forward in a sudden jerk. Over and over and over,

with inhuman patience he attempts to be successful. Three minutes later, he's still going at it.

On each variation attempted, he glances up at you, displaying a helpless look of resignation. He is looking for indicators that you have run out of patience. Once he identifies that reaction to his efforts, he can quickly finish setting up the balls.

FINALLY, if you haven't already angrily taken over the rack, he adds insult to injury. He looks up at you and asks, in all sincerity, "Do you want to inspect the rack?" If you refuse, he begs for your inspection. "Please, I want this to be as perfect as possible." If you grudgingly come down to look, he asks, "Is this OK? I can try again."

Response

Once you know that this is a shark, there is no need to worry. Since he is doing all the work, it makes no sense waiting at the head of the table. Go back to your chair, kick back and enter into conversations with buddies or even use the time to go get a drink or a snack.

This effort requires an audience of you. If he sees that you are not being bothered, he usually just finishes the rack. If you feel playful, go inspect the rack and declare that you are not satisfied, and ask him to rack again. Return to your chair and your conversations. Repeat this twice, upon which he should be the one whose game is thrown off line with this reversal.

If you are in a hurry, wait for the balls to be sent down to the foot of the table and he has gotten the rack out. Then rudely push him aside and do it yourself. When finished, smile at him and go to the head of the table and start the game.

Slow Shooter

This is another delaying shark that is often observed in pool. In other sports, it would be extending the time needed to prepare for a turn or set up for a scoring attempt.

To implement this effort, your opponent turns his basic shooting routine into a game of patience. His purpose is to stretch out the amount of time that he is standing at the table and you are sitting down.

Sometime in the past, he discovered that when extra care was taken, his challengers' reactions made him realize their concentration was affected. As he gained experience in more and more matches, he turned this into a regular part of his shooting routine.

It is immaterial whether this activity is naturally embedded into his routine or he has cultivated it with malice aforethought. This will be deadly to your concentration, if not from impatience then from sitting down too much. Here is the basic shooting routine for a pool shot.

1. He lays the tip of his cue stick behind the cue ball to use it to look for the shooting line.
2. He then positions his feet. First the back foot down and then steps forward to place the front foot and his bridge hand.
3. Adjusting his balance, he then sets the position for the bridge hand.
4. Next the height of the stick is adjusted so that he can do a draw or follow shot.
5. Checks the aiming line.
6. Runs several practice strokes.
7. Fires off the shot.
8. Considers the results.
9. If unsuccessful, returns to his chair. If successful, he restarts the whole process for the next ball.

At every step, he can make a production out of the effort. For example, he can spend a minute just making sure his feet positioning is acceptable. The practice strokes can be extended out to 20+. A full-blown effort could easily turn one shot into a two to three minute marathon.

If he has a talent for torture, he can first setup on the wrong ball to make you pray that he shoots it to cause a penalty. Then, as if realizing his mistake, gets up and moves to set up on the correct shot. This allows him to extend the time at the table even more because he is doing it twice.

Response

How you handle this is a matter of viewpoint. Wanting him to hurry him up is hurtful to your game. His efforts are intended to turn the smallest touch of impatience into a raging insanity of frustration.

In tournament play, you can invoke Rule 19 of the World Pool-Billiard Association Rules and demand a shot clock be started. In a personal game, you won't be successful in implementing this rule. That is going to require that you make a decision. You have to decide whether you are the master of your emotions or if you will allow him to control the quality of your rationality.

If you chose not to be temperamental, use the time he provides to good advantage. Study the layouts and consider the many dozens of shooting options available. Mentally play them to evaluate their feasibility. In other words, use your head. On every shot that he is successful, you have a new layout to consider. By the time you finally come to the table, your mind will be bursting with clever ideas.

Smoking

There are still a few jurisdictions and countries where smoking in a public place is not strictly prohibited. These lonely locations are usually in areas where tobacco has not been super-regulated. If you play in places where smoking is still allowed, watch out for this shark attempt. This requires a relatively limited space where air flow is minimal. A small bar with a beat-up pool table would be a venue for this effort. It will not work in outdoor situations. Your opponent has to be a smoker and you should be a non-smoker.

When the competition begins, your opponent (the smoker) begins puffing tobacco rather quickly. The source can be a pipe, cigar, or cigarettes. For ease of building volume and density, the pipe is more favored. If a cigar is used, it needs to be something cheap. (No need to waste a good cigar on a sharking effort.) If cigarettes, two packs are necessary.

The density of the smoke is an important aspect. It should be enough so that players have to peer through the smoke to see more than a few feet away. Anything less does not achieve the maximum distraction. The density is maintained by the continued presence of smoldering cigarettes or cigars in two or more ash trays.

In the process of developing this "atmosphere", smoke clouds are blown in your direction. Every time he walks around the table, he makes an effort to hesitate in your vicinity to add or renew the smoke thickness. This is repeated if it appears to be thinning out.

If he doesn't asphyxiate himself, he is certainly trying to reduce the oxygen content in the air. Parts of his calculations include reducing the oxygen flow to your brain. If he can do that, your ability to develop clever shooting solutions will be reduced. He is further helped along if you also are bothered by the smell of fresh-burnt or previously inhaled tobacco odors. The quantity can also generate a sore throat and tearing eyes.

Response

If you are unable to stand presence of tobacco smoke in your atmosphere, you should find another playing location with a more intolerant view of smoking. At least, find a place with much larger square footage to spread the smoke out.

If you are caught up in this enclosed tight space, the first thing to do is go around and put out every smoldering cigarette you see. Explain this off as a reaction to a near-death experience suffered years ago. (The excuse doesn't have to be true, just reasonable.)

If you know you are entering a smoke-filled room, bring in one of those cheap folding paper fans or get a battery-powered little air mover. When playing, make a production out of fanning away the air above the table. Only then do you perform your regular shooting routine.

Another option is to demand a fresh air break. Take five minutes. To really jab at him, take the break just when it is your turn. Then, take another break after you make two or three balls and while it is still your turn. As a last resort, pull the nuclear option - refuse to play as long as any lit cigarette is within 20 feet of the table.

Stand By Me

This can only be applied in situations where the competitors are free to move around in the playing area. It is effective in table billiards, golf, lawn sports, etc. where turns are taken one after the other. It is not useful in sports with direct head-to-head competitions such as tennis and others where the player position is pre-defined. This is not used in formal competitions where player movement is specifically addressed by the game format and tradition. Only in the less formal venues can this be used.

This is a simple shark that begins quite inoffensively when you begin your first turn of the match. Your adversary innocently poses this question: *"Where would you like me to stand so that I am out of your way?"*

In apparent good sportsmanship, he wants to ensure that there is no interference with your shooting. When you answer the question, however casually, you just gave him a convoluted free pass. He can now move around everywhere in front of you as long as you are not immediately getting ready to shoot. If you try to get him on his traveling ways, he reminds you that he is merely on his way to get out of your way.

Just because he asked does not mean he will precisely follow your answer. There are many ways to make this work to his advantage. In the process of getting out of your way, he will always take the route that ensures he spends the longest amount of time in front of you. While doing so, he can momentarily become a frozen statue, or stop to have a word or two with a railbird. He can even change his mind about going in one direction and hurry back in the other. He can do a variation where he stays in your sight until you are just about ready to shoot. Only then does he scurry out of the way.

He may have a chair, but prefers to wait for you while standing. As he moves around to keep out of your way, he will occasionally ask, "Is this OK? I'm not in your way?" This is to make sure you don't forget him while you are focused on your game.

One other trick he has is to get immediately in back of you and cough, to make sure you know he is there. If you do turn, he makes a feint as if to jab you, reminiscent of your juvenile horse-play days. Whether you flinch or not, you will also recall those times when you were "jabbed in the bloomers". Worried about the shot and remembering your past screws up your focus.

Just because he asked where you want him to stand doesn't mean he will always follow your suggestion. For example, you set up on a shot and he moves over to just within your peripheral vision. If you call him on it, he says, "Sorry," and then shifts about six inches over. If a second request is made, another six inch shift is made. (Eventually he wears you down and he always moves to the edge of your peripheral vision.

Response

This is easy to stop, once you recognize its intention. Even if you are a little slow on the uptake, you should peg this as a premeditated distraction fairly quickly. The correct solution is obvious - when the question is asked, simply point to his chair and demand he stay there during your turns at the table. Add one more thing. Say, "Do you mind?" With the verbal agreement, you have him on record. It'll be a bit more difficult for him to "forget".

Even with these direct statements, his strolling can still occur at inconvenient times. On catching him, his standard response is "Sorry" or "I forgot." as he scuttles away. Make sure to catch his attention, point towards the chair, and wait silently as he slinks to his corner.

Stick Whisperer

This is a distraction effort that extends the concept of horse whispering, dog whispering, and pizza whispering, and the always popular money whispering.

In this exploitation of your gullibility, your opponent addresses his cue stick as if it was an actual, real life, thinking, conversing entity. The stick has a name (let's use "Jack" in this example). He talks to Jack, carries on conversations, makes and listens to comments, and asks and answers questions. And, just as if he was a real person, does all this right in front of you.

The effectiveness of this ploy depends on you finding his efforts interesting enough that you start following the banter that goes on between the his buddy and him. A secondary affect of your fascination is that you also reduce your concentration on the game. It doesn't really matter whether you believe he is due for a visit to a mind doctor or if someone should call his wife to come pick him up. The well-craft presentation and apparent reality will still drag you into his world.

His side of the verbal communications will be spoken in a normal tone of voice. The other side of the conversations from Jack are always covered up with an appropriate length of silence. Only your opponent has the keen ear or is tuned into the mental wavelength to pick up Jack's responses.

This requires a total mental and personal commitment to be effective. He may even have to appear to split his personality in order to present this in total seriousness. He will defend Jack against all teasers and pooh-pooh'ers. If he breaks cover even for a sentence, the entire effort is wasted and he is in danger of being laughed out of the pool hall.

During the competition, shot choices and options are discussed, advice offered, and problems with aim, accuracy, speed, and spin resolved. He will tone it down when you are shooting as a courtesy. But, a nearby person will hear the two of them making fun of your stroke or laughing about your poor shot decisions.

In all other aspects, your competitor has full use of his faculties. If you talk to him directly, he appears to be normal. But when you address a comment directly to his stick, he acts as an interpreter, telling you what it says. Only when the stick is properly put away does your opponent act as normal as you and me.

Response

You would think that if you ignored his antics that it would soon fade away. An amateur who is less than totally committed would wind down the attempt since you aren't paying attention. But an expert is not so easily deterred. He will carry on. This is distracting only if you get pulled into the fantasy. As long as he doesn't converse over your playing time, there shouldn't be any problem.

If you want to have some fun - interrupt the conversations. Never talk to the opponent, only to the stick. Ask about where it grew up and its family. Then pose questions that put-down your opponent, such as these:

- "How did you hook up with such a loser?"
- "Doesn't it bother you that he doesn't know how to do a proper follow through?"
- "How do you feel when he grabs you incorrectly?"
- "Does it hurt when he puts you together?"

Add others as your imagination allows.

Stories

Many people enjoy telling stories about their experiences (real and imagined) to any interested audience. Good storytellers are always good entertainers and fun to listen to when presenting a well-crafted tale. Their narratives can range from short, quick and humorous anecdotes through to the longer tall stories with mini-adventures building up to an interesting conclusion.

In a competition, you are tied to the playing area. If your opponent is one of those who can't stop performing, finding himself with a captive audience of one triggers his favorite pastime. Stopping him probably will require rope, gag, and a couple of assistants.

An amateur at this just starts right in. He is not intending to shark or distract. He can't help himself. He might have enough self-discipline to make minor concessions to the game environment. Sometimes he waits for you to complete your turn, other times he talks right through every shot. About the only time he won't be advancing his story line is when he's setting up on a shot. (He doesn't want to distract himself.)

An expert storyteller who uses this as a shark is more canny and cunning. He knows that when he is entertaining you, you are distracted from focusing on playing your best game. He makes sure that his story-telling time steps over that time frame when you should be analyzing the situation and creating a plan of action.

If he does an effective job of it, you are spending more time enjoying his yarns than enjoying the competition. As a result, the level of importance you originally intended to apply to this game is reduced to the perspective of a casual, pass-the-time-of-day effort. As long as he can keep you from thinking carefully, that is all the edge he needs to end up winning. If you did suffer this result of his mesmerizing tricks, you generally are left with a vague feeling of confusion.

Response

It's always enjoyable to listen to a good story, especially when delivered by someone who is good at it. But in a match, devote the whole of your thinking to the game. Only this level of focus ensures that you make good and proper decisions that result in your best chances to win.

You can try the hand up, palm out, traditional "stop" signal. Hold that pose until he stops talking. Then nod to him and restart your game. Repeat as needed. Story-telling is a personality addiction. More likely, this simple attempt to stop will only work for maybe 30 to 40 seconds.

There is a high-road approach that might help stop this shark. Begin with a courteous and firm request that he not talk while you are shooting. If he is using this as an intentional shark, this should stop half of his storytelling time. If he is an amateur doing this accidentally, you will have to increase the firmness of your request.

The low-road approach is more effective. During his turn, encourage the continuance of his story. Be appreciative and attentive so that he puts more passion into his delivery than his game play. This gets him to self-shark (always a nice turnaround). To further destroy his game, ask questions about the storyline. For example, "And then what?" "What does <character> do next?" "Are you sure that is what happened?" Continuous interruptions cause confusion and become an effective means to handicap him.

Sympathy

Early in the competition, your opponent offers the usual good sportsmanship compliments when you perform slightly better than usual. It is necessary to establish a history of speaking up whenever you make a shot. Once his verbosity is accepted, he can then implement his tools of distraction.

Upon offering up his congratulations, he does not limit himself to the simple "good shot". He will be a bit wordier. For example, he says, "Good shot. You are on target today." or "Pretty good. It looks like I've got my work cut out."

At the mid-game point of the match is when he can begin extending his sympathy for a few of your unsuccessful efforts. He does this by offering the normal sober sorrow and apologetic demeanor that a supporter or an ally would mention at a failure to perform. His considerate words are offered like this:

- *First*, "That was a good try." *Sympathetic put-down*, "Maybe if you used a couple more practice strokes."
- *First*, "You almost made that work." *Sympathetic put-down*, "Don't hurry the shot. Take your time."
- *First*, "Aw, man. You were robbed." *Sympathetic put-down*, "That should have been yours."
- *First*, "I wish I could give you a do-over." *Sympathetic put-down*, "You don't deserve to lose from such a small error."
- *First*, "You almost had that." *Sympathetic put-down*, "I think you didn't follow through properly."
- *First*, the Maxwell Smart trademark line "Missed it by that much." *Sympathetic put-down*, "Maybe if you adjusted your stance."

If you are not too deeply mired in your disappointment, you might realize that he is being two-faced with his sympathetic responses to your failures. You missed, he's at the table, and he is faking sympathy for your miss - AND mashing your face into your lack of success too. You suffer your personal disappointment, and then have to bear up under his sympathetic remarks. After hearing this a half dozen times or so, you begin considering inventive ways to shut him up.

Response

On every statement from him, thank him ever so much for caring about how well you do. Be over-enthusiastic and more than a little sarcastic. See if he catches the hints along with the implied indicators of displeasure at his contributions to your well-being. If he doesn't stop at that point, he might be a little less intelligent than you suspected.

Since he initiated the original transgression, you can push the same sharking effort back at him, with more enthusiasm and more extensive sympathy or recommended solutions. This is not going to directly help your game, but it should cause his to go on a downslide.

For example, here is a standard counter response, "So close, yet so far. You really could use some practice on that shot. I know this instructor who can help you with that problem." When you begin getting glares of irritation or grimaces of frustration, you are succeeding. Respond with bright and cheerful smiles. The occasional, "you're welcome" also helps.

It might be a race to the bottom, but you want him to hit first. While he disentangles himself from his self-generated confusion, use the short timeframe to advance your game.

Table Critic

This is a distraction effort that occurs when competing on a playing area that is not in excellent shape. You are the visitor and your opponent regularly practices here. This example describes how you will be sharked on a bad pool table.

Sometimes you are competing on a table with many condition problems. Regardless, it's the match table of the moment and you are faced with a whole series of discoveries. Your opponent is the home player and familiar with the place. He has experience on the table and is aware of all of its faults and flaws.

From the start of the match, he is the perfect helpful sportsman - sharing with you details on the table's problems. He opens with, "There's a few things about this table you should know about." He points out that on a slow roll, there are several areas on the table where the ball goes off line. He also gives you the secrets of the local workarounds. He will hold back on a couple faults for you to discover, and then say, "Oh, yeah. I forgot about that."

While you are absorbing this information and making adjustments to your shooting options, he piles on more information. Some examples are:

- "The 1 ball has a chip, and the 4 ball has several nicks."
- "The cue ball sometimes rolls lop-sided. Make sure you watch for the problem."
- "The rack makes it impossible to get a tight grouping of balls. Make sure you use this corner for the head ball. It's marked with a piece of tape."
- "There is a dead cushion right there that makes banks impossible, no matter how hard you hit the object ball."
- "Be careful with the mechanical bridge. It has a sharp edge on one of the grooves, so don't use that side."

By the time he finishes, you feel like you are playing on a mine field. You are so nervous that you are afraid leaning on the table will make it collapse. Why this table is still in use is a testament to the measly and paltry mindset of the room owner.

By mid-match, you are tracking about 20 different table defects. With his helpful input, you are considering every possible problem (roll off, slow cloth, object ball throw, etc.). All of this mental work is on top the usual problems of picking speed, spin, and aim. These additional concerns that have to be factored into each shot can make the effort extremely complicated. And this is the state of mind he wants you to achieve.

Response

Always be suspicious of anyone volunteering information. As a general rule in any game anywhere in the world, volunteered information is suspect. It is a rare occurrence when any opponent really has your interests and successes in his heart.

Whatever is offered, be courteous and thank him for his contribution to your knowledge. Regardless of any input, depend only on your own tests and examinations. Watch how he plays. Your observations can provide a lot of insight into the truth of his claims. Make shooting adjustments based on these discoveries. Even if you received some initial information that you verified as good, you can't trust him not to insert a false tidbit at a later time. Proceed at your own best speed without dependence on your opponent.

Team Tricks

Just about every pool hall participates in some sort of amateur league teams program that plays several nights a week. The group might be a local pool hall league, or a part of a national league setup (APA, BCA, ACS, etc.) The rules generally support good sportsmanship, but there is a lot of room for sharks to sneak in beneath the radar.

In addition to the many individual sharks which are basically one-on-one efforts, some teams develop their own sharks based on available talents. Two of the most common of these are listed here.

Cheerleader

This is the team member with the greatest amount of "team spirit". He sits there, watching every game and is the single most vocal and active supporter of the team. Successful shots by his teammate are followed by loud exclamations of joy and support. Unsuccessful shots evoke exhortations to do better on the next inning.

On a miss by the opposing player, he whoops it up and challenges his team mate to do his best on his new turn at the table. On a game win, there seems to be no limit of his exuberance. He does not directly boo or hiss the opposing player, but he visually enjoys the opportunity to support his team mate.

Response

Pay very close attention to the timing of the verbal support. On any situation where the cheerleader looks like he is pushing the edges of intruding on your teammate's turn at the table, you want to immediately jump in and get the opposing team captain to put a lid on his team member.

Annoying Voice

This is a team member with an irritating, loud, intruding, Jerry Lewis-like voice. It penetrates any jukebox music. It slices through any conversations within 25 feet. It is unavoidable and a constant factor the whole night long. Added to that, the owner is outgoing, striking up conversations with everyone that comes near. Just being near the match table affects anyone not used to hearing such unpleasant audio vibrations.

His team buddies are all used to him and tune him out easily while playing a match. To your team, who are not acclimated to such a voice, it intrudes across every moment he is speaking. He doesn't even have to be close by your match table. Any conversation within hearing distance disturbs your teammate's analysis and shooting routine.

Response

As in the cheerleader, there is nothing you can do until he somehow steps over the boundaries of behavior. If he were to directly address your teammate while shooting that would be enough to claim foul to the guy's captain. Generally two requests an evening keep him under control.

Temper Tantrum

Generally, the "volume" of verbosity and threat-level used by a person implementing this method is pretty much social class-dependent. For example, members of the upper class maintain more control over their temper in social situations, but can still manage a glowering intensity. Participants in the middle-class are much more verbal. (Witness the parents of players at school sporting events.) The extreme-threat type is more often found frequenting business locations with copious alcohol and furniture of low-quality and in poor condition.

The fault of an opponent using this approach to intimidate his competitors is never, ever himself. It's certainly not his fault that his is suffering setbacks and failures. It is always something or someone else to blame.

At the start of his fall from grace, the equipment is blamed. As his luck continues to fade, others in the neighborhood become targets of ire. For example, a missed shot is attributed to someone moving, laughing, breathing, or just thinking of doing one or more of these.

Past a certain point, when things start getting intense, you need to consider his capability to invade your personal comfort zone. To get to this stage can take a matter of minutes or longer, depending on how much he shreds his self-control. The more the problems pile up, the more he is getting bothered. If he threatens (or implies) physical intervention (and seems capable of following through), this is probably the worse time to win. From this point on, he is a volcano ready to erupt.

Any adversary in the throes of this kind of emotional upset is not going to have the ability to fake his actions while coolly managing the game to his advantage. He is losing control which severely depresses his ability to think clearly. This is still a major distraction of your game.

Response

This is going to be a no-win situation, unless you are ready to take the confrontation up multiple levels (i.e., the Chicago way - he pulls a knife; you pull a gun, etc.). The only way you can leave the table with him happy is if you throw the match.

The first order of business in a situation like this is to evaluate the threat to your well-being. On sober reflection, make a decision as to your next action based on the potential consequences. Depending on his aggressiveness (and how many friends he has in the vicinity), you can:

- Escalate the situation into a knock-down, drag-out fight.
- Quit, gather your stuff and walk away.
- Win the match and expect/hope to leave the premises intact.
- Wimp down and let him win.

The next day, think over the circumstances that lead to you putting yourself up against such an unpleasant adversary. Make some personal rules to prevent future repetitions. And, if you did accidentally find yourself in similar circumstances, develop some options to gracefully extract yourself.

Thinker

Some playing environments do not allow any interaction between competitors. There are restrictions to prevent this because of the game rules, distance between the players, or the traditional playing venue. That means that your opponent can not use any of the conversational sharks against you. There are other ways to make you play less than your best. If you are an impatient player or you are easily affected by even minor delays in the regular pace of the game, this shark will adversely affect your game play.

All sports that are played in turns have a regular playing routine. Each competitor allocates a certain amount of time for analysis, set up, execution, and maybe a bit for post-shot acceptance of the consequences. For the vast majority of pool players, the analysis part usually ranges from 10 to 30 seconds. Some players use less time to come up with a plan, others use more time. This time period will vary according to the "accepted" standards of each sporting competition.

When your opponent extends the "thinking" part of his playing routine, he is interfering with your normal expectations of the game flow. An expert user will make this appear to be incorporated as part of his playing style and natural rhythm. Basically, what he does is extend his control of the playing area by taking a lot longer to come up with a plan on how to play his turn. If the regular amount of time used by most players is 10 to 30 seconds, your opponent uses up to a minute to perform the same process.

Here is an example of how this is used in a competition. Your opponent's turn comes up. He walks over to the playing area and stops stock still. He holds this statue-like position for the entire time he contemplates his options.

If you look closely, you can see his eyes darting all over the area as different ideas are considered and discarded - or kept in reserve as a possible option. He may evaluate dozens of ideas, concepts, options, and considerations. Only when he gets down to his last two choices does he start walking around the table. This can continue in one direction, or stop for a period and then reverse course. All of this adds more time that he is in control.

When he finally does make a choice, the shot execution is quickly done. Then the whole process starts over again. He will be immune to exhortations to hurry it up or complaints of frustration. Even if he is strongly pressured and cuts the time in half, you are still waiting longer than you expected. This is one of the sharks that can take the joy out of competition.

Response

Rather than waste energy getting frustrated while waiting your turn, use the time intelligently. To prevent your undies from getting in a twist, accept the fact that he is going to do this. When you take the pressure off yourself, you can mentally relax, kicking back and taking it easy.

This is an excellent opportunity to improve your thinking game. Do some "what if" scenarios. Watch him carefully. Observe how he studies the playing situation. See if you can identify the options he is considering. Try to predict his final choice, and then compare his plan of attack to what you consider the correct selection. You might learn something. At the least, you get an insight into how effective his choices are compared to yours.

Time-outs

When you are in the "groove" or "zone" and racking up points and wins, your opponent wants to find some way to get you back into your regular, less than top of your game condition. There you are, shooting well and being pretty near unstoppable. It is one of the few times when the comparison of sports to ballet is appropriate.

To sit there watching you advance steadily towards the match win has to be a minor form of torture. The rules of the game do not allow many of the more physically direct options that might slow you down or even stop your advancement. He has to do something not specifically forbidden by the rules.

When the flow of the game is with you and against your competitor, the smartest thing that he can do is take a time-out. By creating this delay, he has a chance to affect your game rhythm. Here are several rhythm-breaking choices:

- Goes to the bathroom and stays there for at least five to ten minutes.
- Goes to the bar to order a drink and just happens to meet a long-lost buddy on the way back.
- Gets in an animated conversation with someone else, then asks you to wait a minute while he continues talking.
- Goes over to another area to help a friend out with a playing problem, and stays to watch that match.

Of course, game play must pause to await his re-appearance. All you can do is settle down and try to find some way to pass the time until he comes back and the match can resume.

With game play in a holding pattern awaiting his return, he can accomplish what he needs most - a hiccup or bump in the road to the forward momentum of your game. There is no immediate incentive for him to come back soon. By the time he does return, he is hoping that your zone moment has gone into history.

Response

Unless there is a specified limit in the playing rules or convention, there isn't much you can do to stop him. When your opponent pulls this on you, do not go back and settle down in your chair. That allows your system to "cool down". Instead, while on your feet and near the playing area, mentally replay some of your recent efforts. Also, in your head, configure some of the drills that you practice. This keeps your head clear of distractions and focused on playing. When he finally does return, you are ready to pick up where you left off. When he is disappointed that you were not affected, he will abandon this as a tool. This does not mean he won't try other distractive efforts.

If you have a comfortable lead and he tries a time-out delay, you can have a little fun with him. As he goes away from the playing area, walk with him, just to be friendly. Stick close and be helpfully considerate, within the limits of social convention. If he talks with someone, hang on his shoulder and be an obvious listener. Or, pick subjects guaranteed to annoy. Rattle on about such sports as marbles, badminton, lawn darts, etc. Keep it up - until you see him getting irritated. These actions might be enough that he ends up being the one sharked.

Tragedy

Few people like to compete against an opponent who has just experienced a personal tragedy. If you are a sympathetic person, knowing that a fellow human being is suffering generates feelings of sensitive caring. In the wide world outside of sports, this is a completely acceptable, even praiseworthy, reaction.

Unfortunately, compassion for an opponent does not allow you to compete with all of your internal fortitude that you want to apply to the fight. It changes your viewpoint of the game and how seriously you play against your opponent. One of the assumptions you adopt is that, because of his problems, he is unable to apply proper focus and attention on competing. Because of that presumption, you intentionally slack off on your will to win. You no longer have the fierce joyful expectation of a hard fought battle of wills and skills.

How can you put the whole of your fighting spirit into beating up on someone who is already beaten down? God knows why he is even there to play - perhaps because of some obligation to show up. How much enjoyment can you take from such a win? It becomes more of an experience to be gotten over and finished for the sake of form.

Now let's take a look at how an opponent could use this against you. First, he sets up the situation where he claims to have a personal catastrophe. Then, he can show the brave face. This is where he gives the impression of stolidly soldiering on - a noble spirit, unbowed and unbeaten, head up till the end. With this approach he can act almost normal, needing only the occasional sad wistful look to cross his face every once in a while.

Or, he can take on the "life is beating me up and I'm hurting so bad" approach. This requires a constant look of sadness and reluctance on each play of the game. It helps if he can shed a tear or two. He approaches every playing effort with a morose and glum appearance. Talking is limited to monosyllables.

Here is an example of the two used together. Your opponent, as he shakes your hand, says "Congratulate me. I am now part of the idle class." On a request for clarification, he describes how he just got laid off. He accepts your sympathetic hopeful wishes for a better tomorrow with a wane "I'm doing my best" smile. After holding onto this for a few minutes, he then drops into the victim phase. He lightly touches on the financial problems, the wife cutting back on expenses, and the depression he is feeling. A few well-heaved sighs help.

Attempts to raise his spirits are poorly rewarded and barely acknowledge. He wants you to feel guilty about having a better life. With a convincing presentation, you allow him to win the match, just to provide a momentary bit of joy. A sober thank you and a sad grin of appreciation will cap the competition. He will have to remember not to appear joyful over the win.

Response

Be suspicious when an opponent presents most types of serious life problems. Think about it. Why would anyone with such difficulties want to get involved in a competitive contest? It would be better for him to stay home and address his problems directly.

Rather than back off on your intentions to win, consider doing him a favor and beat him as rapidly as possible. The sooner you can finish the match, the quicker he can go home.

If, somehow or another, you discover that he is setting up a fake situation, use the rest of the match to tease and berate him about the poor quality of his demeanor and acting. Tell all the railbirds too. The more you can keep him embarrassed, the easier will be your win.

Waiting to play

These are a number of smaller efforts that your opponent can apply against you while waiting in his chair or a regular standing location while you take your turn. His general accessibility to your attention is when you are shooting and he is somewhere within range of your eyesight.

This works because for at least half of your shots, he is visible to your eyeballs when you get into position to shoot. It is at this time while he is within your visual field that he can perform these distractions.

Several of his tricks are reserved for use when he is directly in your line of sight. Other efforts are applicable when he is just to the side of your direct line of sight. At the peripheral edges of your vision, activities must be more dramatic, usually involving full body activities.

Here are some examples.

- Flipping any small object from hand to hand.
- Squirming.
- Leaning slowly over to one side.
- Apparently dozing off, then jerking upright.
- Leaning the cue stick slowly over to one side.
- Scratching (everywhere from crotch to back).
- Exaggerated in-place dancing to some MP3 music
- Motions of encouragement - thumbs up, double-thumbs up, nods, and smiles, with the occasional "Whoo, whoo." thrown in.
- Tool maintenance activities.
- Muttering into a device that he says is a recorder.
- Using his cell phone.

Response

In a tournament, for the more obvious distractive movements, ask the tournament director to issue a warning. In a league match, discuss the problem with the opposing team captain. For the more subtle movements, you may have to live with the situation, so long as he doesn't become over-exuberant or too repetitive. Have someone monitor him closely to determine if he pushes the limits of acceptability.

In a casual match, the unwritten rules of tolerance are more flexible. Make a reasonable request that he stop. If he still is a bit active, attempt to shame him into ending the distraction by portraying his efforts as childish and immature.

Another option is to loudly tell anyone in the neighborhood that your opponent is demonstrating amateurish sharking attempts. Tell the audience, "Now watch him closely as I play. He will demonstrate some of the sillier sharking attempts." This public exposure will embarrass him into stopping. (And sometimes the unexpected notoriety distracts him enough to give you an easy win.) If it is more than you can handle and your opponent is so disrespectful of the game, the absolute last resort is to simply pack up and walk away.

Waive the Penalty

This shark is usually seen in pool. It has also been observed in casual pick-up games such as basketball, touch football, and some of the lawn sports.

It's hard to believe that this trap actually works so effectively. It is based upon your opponent apparently giving you an unexpected gift. It starts when you commit some kind of foul. It might be an accidental touch or shift of an object ball, an inadvertent tap of the cue ball with your tip, a double-contact on the cue ball, etc.

On committing any foul with a penalty of ball-in-hand, there is that shocking moment of realization. You just made a stupid, silly, and dumb, dumb, dumb error. You get a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach that you may have handed the game to your opponent.

Cue ball foul - Whether you or your opponent declares the occurrence of your foul does not matter. You both know you committed a serious breach of rules. To determine if he is going to set the trap, he has to make a quick decision, based on the table layout. If the ball positions favor him, he takes the ball-in-hand and proceeds.

If the table layout provides limited opportunities, he can be generous. He says, "Go ahead, shoot." If questioned why, he waves off any need for an answer and tells you to take your shot. If asked whether giving up the forfeiture is legal, he says, "There is no rule that says I have to accept it."

When you realize that you've been granted an exception, your first reaction is an immediate sense of relief. You can hardly believe your good luck as you get ready to shoot. Between the realization of committing a foul and then the sudden charity from your opponent, your concentration is going to be frazzled. That affects your thinking and shooting abilities.

If you committed the foul and picked up the cue ball to offer it to your opponent, he does the same quick table review. If it suits him, he still offers his generous forgiveness and tells you to use your best judgment to return the ball to its original position.

Object ball touched - If this is not a penalty like the cue ball foul, you still have to consult with your opponent as to replacing the balls. At the very least, you committed an act of carelessness which is a bit embarrassing. He can take advantage of your momentary confusion and make a production out of ensuring that the moved balls are repositioned properly. When he is fussing, he is also disrupting your attention.

Response

There is no advantage for you to accept any seemingly generous waiver of the rules, whether you think you gain an advantage or not. The affect it has on your thinking offers too many ways you can screw up. This can also lead to mental complacency. If you were given a gift once then you might expect another gift later.

It is not worth any temporary gain you get. He can still refuse your first refusal and be aggressive in trying to get you to accept his offer. That is another attempt to distract. Stay seated while he is forced to proceed with taking the penalty. Continue with the game as usual and concentrate on winning. Use the experience as a cautionary lesson and make sure you are properly careful in the future.

Walking Stick

When your opponent uses this medical and fashion accessory, he wants to emphasize and accentuate some kind of long term physical limitation. This makes him appear less than capable. You then make the assumption that he is an easier opponent to beat. You back off on your game intensity. After all, why work harder than you have to. He should be a pushover.

As he stumps around, he includes appropriate facial and vocal expressions as appropriate. He doesn't volunteer any reason for needing this tool. Sooner or later, out of curiosity, you do inquire about his health.

He responds, "Nothing's really wrong. The doctor insists that I use this thing when I'm out and around. It has something to do with needing it to not fall over." He now provides an over-abundance of information, talking about muscle degeneration, ongoing rehabilitation programs, the plans to inject neuron-stimulants, and so on. You'll probably get more information than you wanted to hear. (And that will also distract you from playing well.)

Once he has established his weakened ability to compete, he proves it with every turn. When he gets up, he wearily reaches over, grabs his cane, and positions it to lever himself out of the chair. With careful, slow movements he rises and prepares to play.

On getting ready for the shot, he carefully positions his feet, leans the cane against something, and then slowly sets up. He takes extra time for each element of his setup, making a production of the entire effort. On completing the execution, he reassembles his body and cane to move on. He repeats the process for every shot.

If he is able to pull this off convincingly, he will have had to put in some serious practice time with his walking stick. Many of the movements have to be done in front of a mirror in order to appear realistic and near automatic. He would be highly embarrassed if you caught him forgetting himself. For example, he jumps out of his chair to stride forward to take an easy win.

An expert with this effort will not use the cheap aluminum canes available at any thrift store. He will have a beautiful looking carved and polished walking stick that would be the envy of any rich octogenarian. If asked, he will provide an interesting history about the stick and how it came into his possession.

Response

Just because he looks decrepit does not mean he is decrepit. The use of a cane does not take away from his real game skills. Start by assuming he wouldn't be in the competition if he couldn't handle the pressure.

Smile indulgently and express keen interest as you regularly badger him about his need for the stick. Every time it is his turn, jump quickly over to help him out of his chair or to extend a helping hand. Constantly ask, "Does it hurt much? Should I call 911?"

Repeat this until you start seeing him become irritated. This definitely helps throw his game off. All you need then is the occasional helpful request to offer assistance or to ask if he is still capable of remaining vertical. You can even run on (and on) about details of similar problems suffered by your relatives.

Warming Up

There are times you come to a match table and your opponent has arrived a minute or two early. Instead of standing around being patient, he is setting up and playing some sort of shot. He is demonstrating a shot that apparently requires great skill and abilities. Here are a few examples:

- Around the world shot, a three rail kick to pocket a jawed ball in the corner.
- Four rails to a pocket.
- High spin, reverse angle shot that goes two rails to a pocket.
- Table length draw shot.
- Masse that curves around one ball to pocket another.
- Jump shots.
- Any of a dozen two or three ball trick shots.

The purpose of this performance is to impress you with his high level skills and knowledge. If this is the first time you have observed him perform these tricks, it looks like he was able to do it with casual competence.

He might prepare you by saying something like, "I saw this on a DVD a couple of days ago, but never tried it. Let's see if it is as easy as it looks." He then proceeds to demonstrate just how easy it is. Even if he doesn't totally succeed, coming close will impress you.

What you don't know is that he has practiced these hundreds of times. By his demonstration, he wants you to be a bit nervous about the upcoming match. If done properly, your impression of his competence should last long enough for him to get a quick lead.

When a person spends a great amount of effort to prepare their library of special shots, there is a two-fold purpose. One is the "impress and intimidate you" effort. The other is for proposition bets. There are many places where bets of this type find ready takers. Although proposition bets are hustles, he can still get some value. Anyone observing his demonstration who plays him later will still be affected.

Response

Don't downplay this type of setup as simple show-boating. Anyone who practices and develops the skills necessary to perform such shots will always see an improvement in other aspects of their game.

Engage him in conversation. Start by being generous with your compliments (regardless of the quality of the shot). Ask questions such as:

- "How much practice time did that take?"
- "Where did you get the idea for that shot?"
- "Are you working on any other shots?"

Make sure he knows you are truly impressed. A person always feels good when being admired. Put some serious effort into your flattery. That helps relax his intensity. Continue the admiration throughout the match. This keeps his ego balloon inflated. By the time he "wakes up", you will have a comfortable lead or already have the match won.

Minor Sharking Tricks & Traps

These are sharks of opportunity. The right situation has to arise, and the moment grabbed by your opponent. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don't.

Advance Notice

This tactic is used during the introductions at the beginning of a competition. Basically, your opponent informs you that he is going to shark you during the match. He will phrase it as something he will be doing accidentally or absent-mindedly - and by the way would you please forgive him in advance? Here are several requests that he could be asking for your advanced forgiveness:

- "Sometimes I get so wrapped up in the game that I forget myself. I might absentmindedly walk in front of you while you are shooting."
- "Sometimes I forget whose turn it is. Let me know when I do that and I will back off."
- "I have a cough tonight. I will do my best to suppress it and not interrupt your game."
- "I am expecting an important phone call. I will answer it immediately so that it doesn't distract you."

As a result, you enter the competition knowing that you are going to be sharked and waiting and wondering when he will pull it on you. He doesn't even have to do any of these. With the anticipation alone he has thrown you off your game.

Response

Always thank him for the pre-notification and indicate that you too may have some interrupts. When he pulls his, you pull yours - but with a louder, distractive style. Knowing you have a counteraction will ease your mind and make him worry about what your interruption will be.

Am I in your way?

In many pool halls, the tables are spaced away from the wall so there is just enough distance for a person to shoot normal shots. But then the proprietors place chairs and stools along the wall for railbirds and players to sit in while waiting. When a shooter has to play from that side of the table, courtesy requires that the person or persons in the way should move without having to be asked.

This situation can be sharked by the person sitting. He can be a team member or a supporter who wants to generate this distraction. He stays in his chair when you come around and get into position for the shot. As soon as you back into him or otherwise notice him in the way, you have to stop your setup, turn around, and say something.

Sometimes, he gets the jump on you just as you turn, and innocently asks, "Am I in your way?" When you agree, he slowly removes himself from the area, which delays your game rhythm. Or, just as you turn, without the conversation, he "notices" you and sets himself aside. Either way, he has forced you to take your attention off the table and whatever train of thought you had. With the "problem" solved, you now have re-gather your focus and attention and get back into the game.

Response

As you approach the place where you need to set up, and notice that someone is not being courteous, ignore him and step all over his feet and jam your butt right into his face. If he doesn't desperately scramble away to escape confronting your backside, he will certainly do so in the future if it even looks like you might consider shooting from that side of the table. Don't look, and don't ask.

Annoyances

Many people have habits or personal traits that are annoying. The degree of irritation suffered is dependent on the observer. These bad habits are frustrating enough in the normal world of work and family. Their intentional exposure to opponents creates circumstances that can seriously affect game concentration.

Your opponent has to run through a quick series of various behaviors to identify which of them violates your standards of social decorum. As each "social grace" is presented, your reaction is closely monitored. Sometimes he gets lucky and finds two or even three annoyances that bother you. Once discovered, he will utilize them at important or critical situations when their performance will cause the greatest impact on your state of mind.

Here is a short list:

- Talks on a cell phone - loudly and with great enthusiasm.
- Shares everything about his personal life.
- Greets or waves at everyone that comes close to him.
- Slurps on the straw of an empty cup of soda - multiple times.
- Doesn't cover mouth when coughing.
- Flips coins while waiting for you to finish your turn.
- Wears too much cologne or perfume.
- Throws trash on the floor, then uses his foot to push under a chair.
- Eats sunflower seeds and tries to throw the shells in a trash container six feet away.
- Chews food with mouth open, occasionally letting some fall out.
- Clips and cleans fingernails with meticulous attention.
- Always starts sentences with "You know." and "What?"
- Blows nose with noisy intent.
- Doesn't use deodorant, but performs the "wave" at every success.
- Forgets your name - and hems and haws as he then remembers the wrong name.

- Stares at you fixedly, never taking his eyes off of you (or some body part).
- Farts loudly, and pretends it was someone else.
- Picks nose and inspects the captured contents.
- Sniffles his way through a cold.
- Harrumphs with intent, and then spits on the floor.
- Clicks a retractable pen, in a race to see how many he can click in one minute.
- Wears sunglasses and a backwards baseball cap.
- Picks his teeth and checks to see if a tidbit came out to become a snack.
- Never makes eye contact.
- Chews on a pencil or pen, sideways.
- Shakes hands with a limp wrist and while leaning slightly away.
- Shakes with his left hand, saying his right was touched by an angel.
- Speaks in a terrible accent, that changes minute to minute.
- Acts like he is drunk - but only orders sodas.
- Pretends to be slightly deaf, and speaks too loud too.
- Cracks his knuckles in time to music.
- Speaks so quietly you have to ask for a repeat.
- Calls you "Kid" or "Son" if you are younger.
- Calls you "Old Man" if you are older.
- Calls you "chief" or "buddy" or something other than your name.

Responses

An opponent who uses these as devices to disturb cannot easily be stopped. It's not as if you could simply walk up to him and slap him silly. Loudly complaining that he is using such and such a trick to distract you will get some attention - usually strange looks and inquiries about your mental health.

However, you can tease him about any of his displays. Here are a few possible responses:

- Knuckle cracker - "Can you do that to send messages in Morse code?"
- Limp handshake - "A little gay today?"
- Chews on pen/pencil - "Does that come in other flavors?"
- Slightly deaf - walk up closely and speak very loudly and slowly into their ear. "Hooowwww arrrrre yyyooooouuu?"
- Avoids eye contact - speak up loudly, "Hey - I'm over here."

You can also offer suggestions to make his efforts more disgusting:

- "No, no, no. After you blow your nose, open up the tissue and inspect it closely, then offer it out for others to see."
- "Come on. When you let out a fart that awful, brag it up and challenge those nearby to do worse."

Remember, any such responses you use are for entertainment only. If you are going to participate in the human race, you need a minimum level of tolerance for idiots in order to not be driven crazy. Your attention can be better focused on your game and winning.

Concession

This occurs when your opponent is down to either the ball just before the win, or on the ball for the win. If it is a simple and obviously easy setup, well within his capabilities, he glances over to you and raises an eyebrow for a questioning look. He either implies or asks the question, "Do I need to shoot this?"

If you concede even the simplest setup, you open yourself to being asked this question every single time for the rest of your life. After all, why should he have to do the work if he can find a competitor who lets him off easy?

Response

The answer is always "Yes." Without any exceptions, make him shoot it. There is no reason for you to make his life easier when you don't have to.

There are occurrences where even the simplest and most obvious shot can be blown. The very simplicity might cause him to miscalculate or make another mistake.

True, it is rare that this happens, but when it does, you win the current match, and it is worth at least a quick advancement immediately following while he recovers from the shock of blowing a simple setup. Plus you can remind him for the rest of the match, "I'm sure glad I made you shoot that."

Leading Questions

Your opponent can use these types of questions for the sole purpose of forcing you to stop thinking about the competition and consider an answer to the question. It is used primarily as a distraction when it appears that you have advanced a bit more than your opponent feels comfortable about managing.

Any of these questions inserted into your playing routines will create a minor diversion of your attention and focus. Individually they have little impact. A series of these will become more distracting than you can handle. These are pool-related questions, but can be adapted to any sport.

- "Have you ever timed your break speed?"
- "Do you focus on the cue ball or the object ball when you shoot?"
- "How slow can you hit the cue ball?"
- "Have you ever played pool on an outdoor table?"
- "How long have you been playing pool?"
- "Is your follow-through always that short?"
- "Where did you buy your cue stick?"
- "Is that a custom or off-the-shelf stick?"
- "What kind of cue tip do you use?"

Response

It would be sensible to politely request that he not speak during your turn. If that doesn't work, in the same way that you can ignore juke box music, you can ignore him. As soon as he starts a question, put your attention elsewhere or begin a conversation or "notice" someone far away and rise to wave at them. If you can get him to consider you to be very rude, you have distracted him from his game.

Mixed Doubles

There are many variations of playing with partners. One of these is the mixed doubles format. The partners on each team are a guy and a girl. This type of competition is usually played in social circles as a way to pass an evening's entertainment. In the few situations where this format is played among better players, this particular sharking effort will be ineffectual.

At the social level, this competitive framework can provide some unique opportunities for sharking, based on the tensions that already exist between the sexes. This makes mixed doubles teams the perfect venue for the various pick-up ploys common among expert flirts. The guy on the opposing team gets a bit friendly on your girl partner. The gal opponent strikes up a conversation with you while waiting turns.

This two-pronged attack only requires that one effort to lower the competitive intensity be successful. The result is the victim spending significantly less time considering effective tactics and more time being receptive to flattering compliments. This of course makes the competition and the chances of winning go downhill.

Response

Always have a pre-competition discussion with your partner. Work out some of the interactive playing details and various tactical responses to coordinate efforts. This helps build team spirit and ensures both of you are focused on the goal of winning.

Let your girl select appropriate weapons from her library of turn-offs and put-downs. She can apply whichever she considers to be the most effective. Credit her with extra points if she can get the guy angry.

If the opposing girl is applying her "conversational" skills to distract you, here is a very effective technique. When she gets close to you to offer her little flirts, lean over and quietly murmur into her ear, "I think your partner is pretty. Is he available?" Extra point if she looks crestfallen.

My stick is better

This is a much more focused effort than the *Equipment* ploy. It is designed to make you question the quality of your equipment. It is an effort by your opponent to denigrate your shooting sticks while proving how much better his is. Extra point to him if you verbally blame your stick for a bad shot. When he makes a good shot of any kind, he praises his equipment:

- "My Bulka is designed to completely eliminate deflection."
- "The company who made this stick spent millions finding the right woods."
- "My cue has a sweet feel when I use low speeds."
- "Did you see the spin on the cue ball? That's the special tip I put on. Cost me \$75."
- "Did you see that stop shot? That's the perfect follow through that my stick almost forces me to use."
- "Look at that draw. That's from the perfect curve on my tip."
- "See that break? That's the embedded steel in the cue butt."

He blows off any taunts if he messes up with, "Didn't set up properly," or other similar excuses. But when you miss, he will mention something about sub-standard equipment. When you blow a critical shot, he pounces with comforting words, "You can't help it. It's your stick." Any attempt to defend your equipment only proves that this shark is working.

Response

A reasonably excessive, "Shut up." might work - but, probably not. Instead, politely tell him, "You are just trying to justify throwing away your money." (Extra point if he winces.)

Nagger

Some people, for one reason or another, always want to intrude upon your playing pleasure by offering up little reminders. This are similar to what your Mom used to do to you when sending you off to school. A number of these are:

- "Don't forget your lunch."
- "Are you wearing clean underwear?"
- "Don't forget to clean your room."

These and other reminders to be healthy, stay healthy, and don't screw up your life are nags. You know them and you really hate to be receiving them (even if you do actually need them). It's not the occasional reminder that is bothersome, it is the hundredth time you heard it that generates that flash of irritation.

Some opponents like to consider themselves to be the stalwart supporters of the sport, and love to provide kindly reminders. They can try to be helpful. They hold themselves up as supporters of good fundamentals. They want to be known as one of the kindly guides to the up-coming generation of players. For whatever reason, they are naggers, plain and simple.

Response

In the interests of good sportsmanship, you don't want to fulfill your first impulse to tell the provider of good advice to simply shut up. You do have to interact with the person after the competition, so insulting is pretty much out as an option.

If you are passive, simply accept the recommendations as just another of the many elements of the playing environment. It is just something to be ignored like juke box music.

If you like a more active approach, be very considerate to the point of sarcasm. Use something like, "Thank you. Without your help I couldn't tie my shoes." Even the most dense advisor will eventually figure out that their consideration is no kindness.

Overused Words

Of all the overused words that can become a distraction, the most common of all is, "Good Shot!" said with various degrees of enthusiasm. This can range from a monotone version said on a truly excellent shot and said with enthusiasm when you have just missed an easy shot. On the face of it, these might be considered complimentary or helpful. But it is the tinge of implied disrespect that can twist your mind. That's a lot of mileage from two words.

Your opponent can repeat them many, many times throughout the match, each utterance building on the frustration of each previous use as these are stacked up one atop the other. There are other words that can also be applied as tools of distraction. These include:

- Good luck.
- It could be worse.
- Better luck next time.
- Be careful.
- Good try.

And don't forget personal favorites that he might have picked up in a lifetime of finding ways to irritate people without apparently intending to do so. These can range from regional words such as "Dang-me" and "Hoot" to the universal inclusion of bad words that got your mouth full of soap as a kid.

It is the constant repetition of these words that wears away at your patience like water wears away rocks. A few here or there have little affect, but continuous use eventually cracks your wall of patience.

Response

Just knowing that these words are intended for the purposes of generating dysfunctional responses should protect you from being affected. Treat all such common words as toxic. Smile at his attempts to use this as a shark.

Self Talker

Sometimes you get an opponent who does his entire strategic and tactical selections in a conversation with himself. Most people occasionally verbalize their thoughts while they are making a decision. For example, while driving, they may mutter, "Should I go this way, or that way?". Others mumble at a restaurant menu, "Should I have the mignon or the New York strip?" It is a fleeting exposure to their mind set and generally is quickly self-censored.

In this bit of diversion, your opponent begins every turn with a complete situational analysis. Every thought is verbalized. Spirited conversations consider various options.

Eventually all gets boiled down to a final argument of "go this way or go that way". Finally, the shot takes place. If successful, the process starts over with all of its attendant delays. If unsuccessful, he returns to the sidelines saying comments similar to, "I should have gone the other way. I'm an idiot.)

Response

If directly confronted about this as a sharking effort, he vehemently states he is doing no such thing. He has probably been doing the same routine for his entire playing career. Even the buddies he plays with are so used to him, his verbal idiosyncrasy is ignored.

Just like in *Call Every Shot*, have a bit of fun by contributing every once in a while. You may want to accept his eccentricity. His run-on self-conversations provide an insight into his style of analysis. He is providing you valuable details about what he considers tough or difficult. He is also describing his entire playing capabilities. That information can be used to help you defeat him.

Start and Stop

If you expect your match to go smoothly through to the completion with a winner (hopefully you) and a loser (hopefully your opponent), this trick can bother you. Your opponent does all the preparation and setup to get ready to make a shot, and then stops and pauses as if he's been hit by a thought. He jumps back up and stands stock still. After a short period of time staring into space, he begins his pre-shot routine again.

He can do this several times on one shot if the game is at a critical juncture. Here are a several examples:

- Baseball - the batter steps out of the box and either fiddles with something on his bat or stops and stares way out at the top level of the furthest outfield seats as if trying to locate someone.
- Ping pong - sets up for the serve, gets ready to loft the ball into the air for the serve, and just as you tense up to react, he clenches the ball and stares at the net.
- Pool - sets up for the shot, performs the practice strokes, then draws back to get ready for the forward stroke, then stops, stands up, and stares down at another ball on the table.

Response

There's not too much you can do to prevent your opponent from initiating this bump in the flow of the game. If there is a limited time period for a turn, you can invoke that to stop too many repetitions. If there are officials around, you can appeal for a warning to be issued. Once you recognize that this will occur more often in the game, you simply anticipate that this is one of those distractive ploys you can expect.

The Gang is All Here

Sometimes you will have an opponent who travels as part of a pack, similar to wolves and hyenas. Wherever he goes, they go. They cling together, traveling from place to place. Every locale they enter, they take over and change the atmosphere. With loud and boisterous behavior, they overwhelm any other activities. If the environment was quiet and peaceful, they turn it into a loud, obnoxious party.

When you have to play against someone that belongs to this pack of verbal hooligans, you suddenly discover that you are not playing one person, but the entire group of people. When your opponent is playing, everyone shouts and cheers his progress. When you are playing, the mob is constantly distracting you. When you are preparing to shoot, they are making every effort to distract your focus. If you are successful, they shout obscenities and insults.

While gangs like this are generally low class, the lowest level of these groups go beyond hurling verbal abuse and begin threatening life and limb. If there is any amount of money on the game, they will perform every type of mental intimidation their little minds can think up.

Response

How you handle a group like this depends on your personality and experience. If you have dealt with such goons before, you can join in on their frivolity, and psych them into getting them to treat you as an equal. If you have a more retiring mindset, then you may want to take your first opportunity to escape, with or without your equipment.

Generally, when a gang invades a business establishment, do as much as you can to fade into the background. Turn down invitations to compete by using the "don't know how to play" excuse, then leave as soon as possible. When you have an opportunity, re-think your reasons for associating in such places where a gang or two may use as their hang-out.

Waffler

Similar to the "Start and Stop", your opponent goes through the entire pre-shot routine in all of its preparation. But instead of standing up to delay the game just when he is expected to shoot, he waffles off to one side or the other to make a complete miss of the ball. (No contact, no foul.) Nothing goes forward except his follow through. The ball stays untouched.

The purpose is to get you to tighten your muscles in preparation for action as the play proceeds. Doing these several times can exhaust your mental preparedness. Here are examples:

- Football - the quarterback goes through the snap count, then emphasizes one numbers as if that was the instant when the ball is carefully handed over from the center to the quarterback. Or, stops the count, scans the defense, and restarts the count.
- Ping pong - sets up to serve the ball, throws it into the air, and swings the paddle too early or too late to touch the ball. The ball drops to the ground to be retrieved.
- Basketball - the usual drive for the basket with everyone converging on the ball handler, then the ball is suddenly tossed off to another player who recycles the play. Eventually one defender relaxes his attention and a score is made.

Generally, you tense up a bit on his shot. When no legal shot is made, you dial down your muscles. On the next set up, you again tense up, but no action is taken. He is only waiting for you to anticipate another fake shot attempt when the real attempt is made. You get caught flat-footed and he gets an easy score.

Response

You might get fooled once or twice on this trick. Once you realize what he is doing, you can take steps to allow for this behavior. Instead of depending on other signals (count, pre-shot activities, wind-up, etc.) to be your signal for preparation, use only the actual ball movement as your trigger for physical movements.

Some Final Words

This book gives you the tools to prevent the majority of any opponent's efforts to take a shortcut to victory. It is up to you to learn about and become aware of all the various tricks, traps, and sharks that can be used in your sport.

Skill, competence, knowledge, and honed abilities all are necessary for a good competition. But when those are the basics of all players, the consistent winners are those who can recognize and stop attempts by lesser players to affect their will to win.

Do not take the contents as a textbook guide to gamesmanship of your opponents. For one thing, consider that if you bought this book and used it in that fashion, others are also capable of doing the same thing. It will be embarrassing to attempt one of these tricks and then immediately discover your opponent counters you. Instead, use this material to nullify efforts of others who do not consider that the spirit of the game is important.

Additional Notes

Here is more information about breadth and dimension about the ways that people can confuse your ability to play.

Definitions

Head-to-head sports - these are games where opponents are actively offensive and defensive at the same time. Examples are football, soccer, tennis, hockey, racing, martial arts, water polo, foosball, volleyball, boxing, etc.

In-turn sports - these are games where each player or team takes a discrete turn to score or advance the game. Examples are archery, pool, golf, darts, baseball, cricket, horseshoes, bowling, etc.

Patient player pose - this pose indicates a passive waiting position, held while standing. It indicates that you have a serene personality and are unaffected by actions around you. The body is a quarter turn from the playing area, with feet slightly apart. If you possess a personal playing tool, such as a golf club or a cue, it is grounded in front of you with both hands holding it. If a tool, arms are crossed. Observation of the playing area is casual. The whole of the impression is of one who is in no hurry and is completely unaffected by the competition.

railbird - 1. (from the Urban Dictionary) A person that watches or gambles on a game of pool without actually playing. 2. (Random House Dictionary) Any kibitzer or self-styled critic or expert. 3. Any spectator within speaking distance of the playing area.

About Hustlers & Gamesmanship

Every sport has elements of gamesmanship and sharking used by money players. From the small change amateur to the big money hustlers they want to win. If there is money on the line, these players are focused on winning - period. With money as the prize, the attitudes of the players become a bit more serious.

Every playing gambler has a library of well-practiced skits, presentations, and maneuvers used in conjunction with their skills. They all have a talent for the game, but they also know that winners are more often determined by the person with the most skillful use of psychological tricks.

In your life, you will be exposed to situations where these people can interact with you. If you have no experience with their activities, you can be given an expensive life lesson. Here is a technique that is not too costly, provided you treat this as a learning experience. You must keep your wits about you and constantly remind yourself - you are NOT there to make money, no matter how tempting your opponent makes it appear. You are there to study what these people do and their approach to competition.

The process indicated here is for pool. It also applies to darts, bowling, and other one-on-one competitions. This example assumes you have sufficient skill to play competitively.

1. **Find a local money player.** In the local pool hall, hang around enough to be able to recognize the local money players. These are not hustlers in the truest sense of financial disaster, but they all have various strategies designed to "educate" a newbie. Any railbird can point out those who are in at the time.
2. **Dangle the bait.** Appear reluctant to play for anything other than "fun." Negotiate a cheap match (table time, a couple of bucks, a drink, etc.). Play your best, but spend the majority of your attention watching and identifying the style and presentation of the sharks he uses. Even if he's trying to "hide his speed" while building you up, he unconsciously uses

a small variety of sharks. These are the ones he is most familiar with and are as automatic as breathing to him.

3. **Observe the action.** Get in two or three matches until he starts nagging about raising the stakes. By then, he has shown you all of his common mind tricks and a few of his defensive skills too. If possible, play a variety of games (8-ball, 9-ball, one-pocket, etc.) to stretch out the time, and observe his style. When you extract yourself, he should let you go easily, since he knows that you are always around, and this is just the first round of (what he hopes) will be a long and profitable relationship.
4. **Repeat with other players.** Use this process at several pool halls. By the time you have played five or six of these players, you will have gained a significant amount of information and experience, including identification of the majority of their sharks.

This experiment accomplishes several goals.

- You gain experience in money games.
- Intelligence can manage greed.
- Observation can identify useful information.
- Psychology is an important part of the game.
- Caution in new situations is good.
- Sharks come in many disguises.

The whole experiment should take about 3-4 weeks and cost no more than \$200. A little bit of pain now to prevent a lot of pain later. These are very cheap lessons indeed. With this experience, you can make smarter choices on the types of competitions you want to get involved with.

Expert Researching

Most of those who use tricks and traps (consciously and/or unconsciously) rarely take the time and effort necessary to polish their skills. They are quite obvious in their efforts. The expert considers these as tools, each one to be selected specifically for the personality and playing style of his competitor.

If a person wants to become an expert at distractions, he must develop a library of tested tools that he is capable of delivering well. This takes conscious effort and practice for some of the more involved efforts.

In addition to this, there is one element that makes the difference between a dilettante and an adept. It is the research of the various potential adversaries and competitors. Competitions can range from league matches to tournaments. Knowing the abilities and weaknesses of opponents provides information that helps select the most effective distractions.

To do this, he needs to do attentive research. This means creating a database of competitors and their competencies. In the sport of table billiards here are some general details that are collected:

- General skill level (e.g., A, B, C or APA 4, 5, 6, 7).
- Background (e.g., years of experience, average weekly playing time).
- Special skills (e.g., banking cross-side or sharp cuts).
- Comfort zones (e.g., up to 30 degree cuts, up to 5 feet distance).
- Chaos zones (e.g., off-the-rail shots, over 6 feet distance shots).
- BPI (e.g., 3 balls per inning, 5 balls per inning).
- Shooting style (e.g., short/long pre-shot routine, aims by feel).
- Personality (e.g., quick-tempered, patient).
- Habits (e.g., personal, and shooting).
- Strategy/skill (e.g., capable of planning up to 3-4 shots before getting out of line).

- Tactics/skill (e.g., good defensive shot choices, problem with slow speed).
- Stamina (e.g., can only play effectively about 5-6 games).

In his player descriptions, he includes each of their favorite sharks and quality level. He notes the effectiveness of the results. By knowing what can be expected, counter-sharks can be determined.

These details can be gathered from many sources. Some can be from spectator chairs. Whenever practice tables are open, he gets down among the players. By watching a player work on specific practice shots, he learns what shots that person considers to be problems.

He looks for opportunities to practice with the players. He plays a game or two, and then move on to another table. He won't win a single practice game. There is no advantage in revealing his true speed. With this table time, he gets a closer look at each person's skills and personality, plus leaves an impression that he is not a strong player.

If he is on a team, he observes the practice of scheduled opponents. By sharing his conclusions with team members, he helps them gain a slightly improved advantage.

As the serious student of gamesmanship learns more and gains experience, he is able to quickly size up an unknown opponent within a few minutes of playing. Over time he will develop an extensive library ready to use directly or as counters. As a keen observer, he gains a maturity in his game with a large variety of tools.

The material learned through observation and experience is usually maintained within the brains of the serious student. A few individuals maintain a diary that tracks information that has been gathered.