

Avoiding the nine-ball hype in billiards essay sample



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Although it has been referred to as the “ Noble Game of Billiards,” the game of pocket billiards has long held a reputation as a game played by, shady individuals, in smoke filled parlors only accessible through dark alleyways and basement stairwells, who have only one goal in mind, and that is to part the poor unsuspecting individual who happened to stumble in off the street, from his money. While this may be true in some cases, the reality is that over 36 million people in the United States play billiards (2012 USA Sports Participation Survey - Billiards). There are many different games in billiards, but eight-ball and nine-ball are the two most popular games played in the United States today. In billiards, the games of eight-ball and nine-ball both require certain skills and strategies however; eight-ball requires a more advanced player in order to excel. Even though nine-ball has not been around as long as eight-ball, its popularity has soured over the past few years because of, media coverage, the fact that the game does not typically take as long to play as eight-ball, and a minimal amount of thought or planning is required.

The most commonly recognized governing body for pocket billiards in the United States today is the Billiards Congress of America (BCA). The rules and standards established by the BCA are the basis for all billiards games played in this country today. Equipment standards are adhered to by amateurs and professionals alike although, professional standards are slightly more limiting. Pocket billiards is played on a table that is half as wide as it is long and has 6 pockets. The balls used in the game consist of one white ball “ the cue ball,” and 15 colored balls numbered 1 thru 15, the 1 thru 8 are a solid colored and referred to as “ solids” or “ little ones” the 9 thru 15 are white

with a solid colored stripe around the ball and are referred to as “ stripes” or “ big ones.” The cue stick usually referred to as simply a “ cue” or “ stick,” used to strike the cue ball must have a tip made of a material that cannot scratch or damage the balls. A more detailed explanation of the specifications as well as the rules that follow can be found on the BCA website at www.bca-pool.com. The basic rules of play are the same for both games however, the rules for eight-ball, are far more constraining, which inherently calls for a more skilled player.

Both games begin by the first player “ breaking the rack,” by using their stick to drive the cue ball into the object balls that have been grouped together or “ racked” at the foot of the table. Each player then takes turns “ shooting” at their object balls until they have all been “ pocketed,” once this has been accomplished they can then pocket the game ball to win the game. A player’s turn at the table lasts until either, the player fails to pocket an object ball, or the player commits a foul. Fouls can be committed in a couple of different ways, the first of which is by pocketing the cue ball also known as “ scratching,” and the second is by failing to make a legal shot, a legal shot is accomplished by a player either, pocketing one of their object balls, or contacting a rail with any other ball on the table after initial contact with the object ball. The penalty for a foul is, “ ball in hand” meaning the cue ball can be placed anywhere on the table by the incoming player. In addition to the general rules, there are additional rules unique to each game. In eight-ball all fifteen balls are used for the game, and they are racked in a triangular shape at the foot of the table with the eight ball in the center of the rack.

Once the balls are broken, the table is said to be “ open” until one of the player’s legally pockets a ball. A ball is legally pocketed when the shooter pockets a ball that they have designated or “ called” into a pocket they have also called, these rules are known as “ call pocket” rules. This is one of the reasons eight-ball players are typically more skilled than nine-ball players, because it is at this point that a nine-ball player has only the lowest numbered ball to choose from while only needing to get into a position or “ get shape” on the next lowest number ball on the table. However within a matter of a few seconds an eight-ball player has to, survey all of the balls on the table, identify and evaluate solutions to problem areas such as clustered balls, and decide whether stripes or solids will be more suitable for implementing the strategy that they intend to execute, even after the player has established their object balls this is an ongoing process that needs to be done every time the player comes to the table. Once players object balls have been determined (either stripes or solids), they are required to continue pocketing or “ running” those balls until they are all pocketed, at which time they are eligible to shoot at the eight.

The first player to legally pocket the eight wins the game. In nine-ball only the balls numbered one thru nine are used to play instead of all fifteen as in eight-ball, and the rack is placed in a diamond shape at the foot of the table with the nine ball in the center. After breaking, both players must always shoot at the lowest numbered ball on the table, and there is no call pocket requirement, these rules are known as “ slop” rules, and there is no requirement to pocket all of the object balls prior to pocketing the nine ball as long as the player makes contact with the lowest numbered ball on the

table first. In billiards, it is amazing to witness the concentration and intensity of a truly talented player as they shoot in ball after ball, while repeatedly getting shape on the next shot with laser like precision. Knowing the basics like, having a proper stance, a smooth stroke, and the ability to make balls are all important factors in becoming at best, a novice player in pool. However, possessing the ability to control the cue ball, by knowing how hard to hit it, and what spin or “ english” is required in order to get shape for the next shot, is what separates the advanced player from the novice.

There are two basic ways to play, either aggressive or conservative.

Aggressive players normally try to “ break and run” meaning they try to pocket all of their balls and the game ball during their first turn at the table. Conservative players tend to be less concerned with making all of their balls on their first turn; instead, they try to ensure that their opponent is left with no clear shot with what is known as “ safeties.” The use of safeties is common in both games, and if done properly usually results in a ball in hand to the initiator of the safety. However, safeties are typically much easier to utilize in nine-ball because the player is only trying to hide their opponent from one ball instead of up to all seven the players are required to pocket in eight-ball.

The predominant strategy in nine-ball is “ hit and hope” this is where the player hits the object ball as hard as they can, and hopes it falls in a pocket, in other words, relying on luck although, this can hardly be considered a strategy, it is a system that coincides very well with the rules of nine-ball. By utilizing strategies like hit and hope, and taking advantage of rules that allow slop, nine-ball is the game that is normally preferred by novice players, and <https://assignbuster.com/avoiding-the-nine-ball-hype-in-billiards-essay-sample/>

self-proclaimed advanced players who cannot intellectually compete on the same level as a truly advanced eight-ball player. Subsequently, with all of the previously mentioned variables factored in, it becomes apparent that the game of eight-ball demands, and therefore produces a more skilled player.

References:

Billiards Congress of America website - www.bca-pool.com

American Poolplayers Association website - www.poolplayers.com 2012

USA Sports Participation Survey - Billiards, conducted by the Sporting Goods

Manufacturers Association (SGMA):