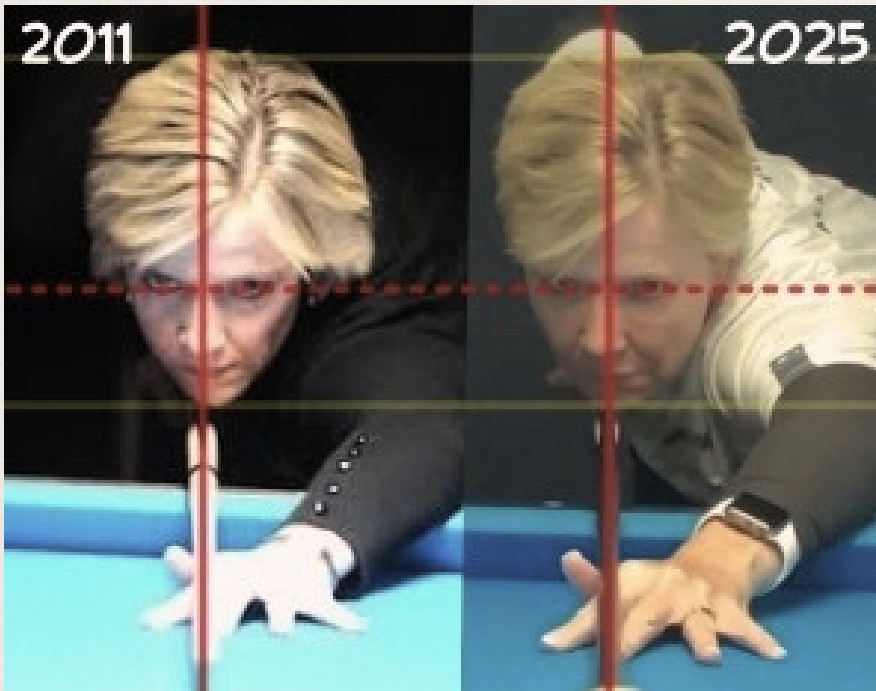


THE OFF-TABLE WORK EVERY PLAYER CAN BENEFIT FROM

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by Samm Diep-Vidal

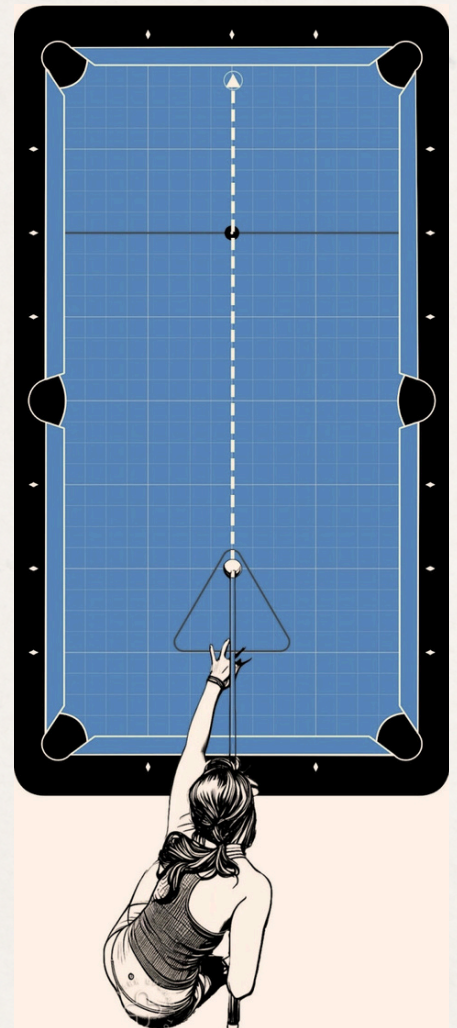


With age and maturity come patience and experience, but an aging body has its own limitations. Allison Fisher, the “Duchess of Doom,” G.O.A.T., world champion, and hall-of-famer, has been easing off lately due to shoulder pain that’s kept her from performing at her best. Let’s be honest: how many more titles does a girl really need? At the recent WPBA Olhausen Colorado Classic at Felt, I had the chance to catch up with her on this very subject. As someone who’s also been navigating ongoing shoulder pain and recovery, the conversation hit close to home. It was a reminder of just how much quiet effort lives behind every shot at the table.

As much as we love this game, our bodies weren’t built to hold these stationary positions for 30 seconds at a time. Long hours spent in an asymmetrical stance can lead to lasting physical strain—often not felt until years later. As we age, we lose strength and flexibility, both of which can subtly shift our alignment and vision center over the cue.

After much time scouring the internet, I was able to find an image of Allison from 2011 (courtesy of AzBilliards) with the exact same camera angle of a shot I took of her last month. I laid both images on top of one another to confirm her cue is aimed in the same direction. In a side by side comparison, it’s clear to see that her head is slightly turned in the more recent photo. I often see tightness in the neck and shoulders in my students which can lead to un-level eyes and misaligned shots. In Allison’s case, the difference is so tiny but at her caliber, it’s just enough to cause an object ball to not enter the pocket exactly where she intends. It was such a treat to have the opportunity to study her up close like this. As we discussed our findings, she admitted that she could feel something was a little off.

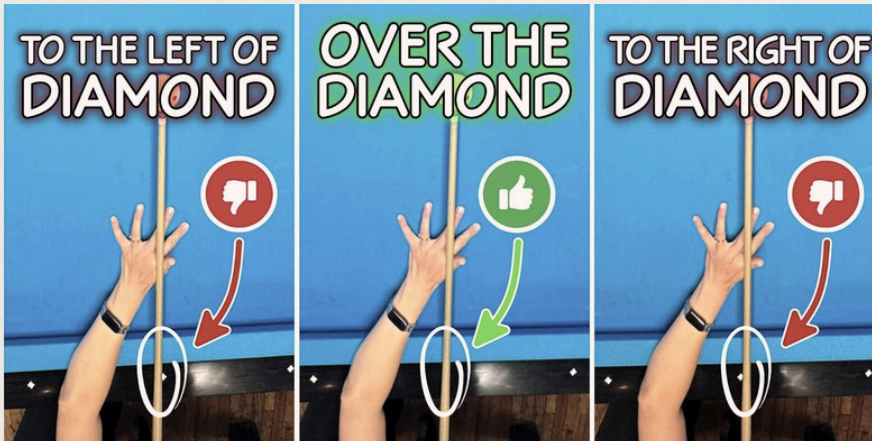
Sitting at a desk, being on our devices, even driving, all of it can lead to tightness in the pectoral muscles, resulting in rounded shoulders and a forward head posture that subtly throws off balance and cue alignment. That neck tension can make it uncomfortable to keep the head (and eyes) level, which matters more than most players realize.



Allison Fisher, the “Duchess of Doom,” is one of the most decorated players in the sport. With over 80 major national and world titles, a BCA Hall of Fame induction, and an MBE, her legacy is unmatched.

Grab a friend! Here's a down and dirty way to check your vision center and head alignment:

1. Place the cue ball on the head spot and set up to aim at the center diamond on the foot rail.
2. Once you're convinced you're aligned to hit your target, take a peek down. Your cue should be covering the center diamond underneath you at the head rail.



3. If you're exactly over the diamond, great! If not, adjust your cue to fully cover the diamond. When you look back up, slowly move your head left and right until your view matches the new reality. Stop when it looks like you're aimed at the center diamond. It may help to place the corner edge of a piece of chalk for a clearer target.

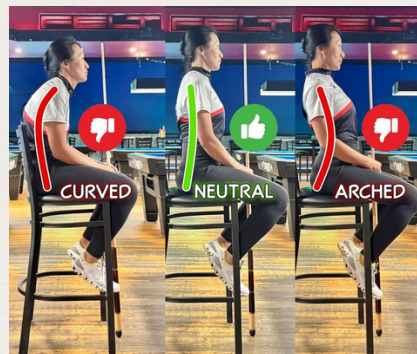


4. Once you get your new head position, have your friend snap a straight-on photo of your new head placement over the cue.

Ideally, your eyes are level and your nose is pointed as much toward the shot as possible as you move through these steps. If tension is keeping you from maintaining a level head and eyes (or from keeping your nose pointed forward) here are a few things you might consider sprinkling into your daily routine:

- Being mindful of your posture to keep a neutral spine
- Chest openers and Neck stretches
- Frequent shoulder rolls and windmills
- More pulling and less pushing exercises

It's never too early to start paying attention to your posture (on and off the table) and to build in some stretching. "It gives the young generation a head start," added Allison.



LEVEL UP YOUR GRIP AND STROKE TIMING

Two important things you can do to immediately start improving your pool game are:

1. *Have a more relaxed grip hand.*
2. *Slow down your final backstroke.*

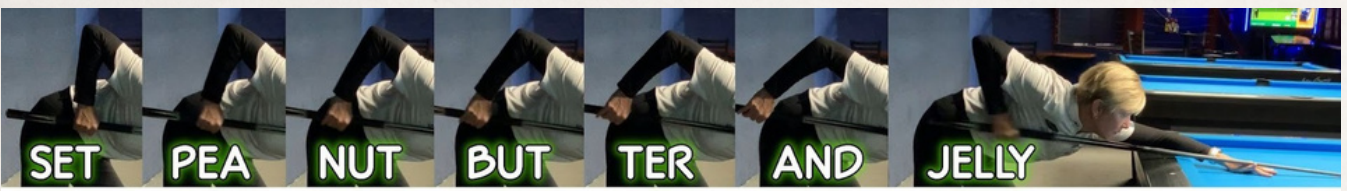
Both of these are simple, but not easy.

Relaxing the grip hand isn't the same as having a loose grip with a bunch of light shining through. That's not always effective, as any subtle change in grip tension can dramatically alter the tip direction as you come through the ball. Instead, find a comfortable loop connecting your thumb and index finger, or thumb and middle finger. Look for full contact on the cue without a gap or squeeze. Once you find it, lock in the loop size. The bulk of the weight should rest in those two connected fingers.

Now, here's the key: with each backstroke, think about letting the hand open up through the back fingers. The goal is for this to happen organically. When too many fingers stay wrapped around the butt during the backstroke, it can restrict your range of motion as you draw back. This can cause the cue to pull back at an angle and, in turn, not come through level or straight. Opening the back of the hand during each backstroke allows the cue to draw back straighter and more level.



[Allison Fisher's grip hand from behind and from the side]



As you're working on relaxing your grip hand, you may as well incorporate a slower backstroke. A slow and controlled backstroke helps you be more accurate with speed control and tip placement, where you're ultimately striking the cue ball. Once you've finished your warm-up strokes and you're ready to pull the trigger, think of a four-count backstroke: 1-2-3-4 to draw back, then a slight pause to separate the tricep from the bicep, followed by a smooth acceleration through the ball. A verbal cue I like to use with my students to help remember this timing is: "Pea-nut-but-ter" (for the four-count backstroke), "and" (for the slight separation), "Jelly" (for the final stroke). Give it a try, and be sure to fit in the full four counts. No PB&J!

