

SHARKING

DON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN



ERIC S TOWNSEND

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AUTHOR

Eric S. Townsend

EDITOR

Sue LaLumia

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SHARKING — DON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

We thank you for your interest in *Sharking — Don't Get Fooled Again*, as well as Go Booklets. Our parent company, EST MKTG, provides full-spectrum marketing consultation and services to a select number of clients. That website is located in the footer of this and every page of the publication.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to anyone who's been distracted, stunned temporarily, fooled, or all the way swindled by a form of sharking.

FOREWORD

Dad introduced me to the game of pool in 1983 in Denville, New Jersey. Grandma had a 1950s era table that he kept immaculate. The table was baby blue with chrome detailing.

My father wasn't serious about the game, by any stretch of the imagination, and we mostly played the game as a way to talk about life. Pool was and remains a multi-level conversation.

He and I made frequent trips to Loree Jon's billiards shop. Her store was filled with autographed glossies. The nicknames, stories, and jargon made for a fascinating subculture.

It wasn't until college that I started entering tournaments for action and a little bit of scratch. Cash turned pool into a more careful pursuit. Precious? Not yet.

In 2000, I entered my first team-based amateur league. The APA, or American Poolplayers Association, became a difficult habit to break. It took me eight years of playing multiple nights a week to attain their highest skill level. I stitched the "7 Handicap" patch onto my pool cue bag. Two years later, the APA released the "I Beat a 7" anti-honor. Jaded.

In games played outside of league, I was regularly challenged by the least of human intentions. Hours upon hours were spent observing, studying, and tangling with competitors on the dark side of the game. I competed with champion poolplayers and slick hustlers.

Colorful scenarios and dozens of inside trade secrets were etched into my memory. Lessons learned in pool rooms informed broader, more critical aspects of my life. They can do the same for you, if you allow for that.

Eric S. Townsend continues to shoot pool today. The money games and sharking are behind him. He's currently a partner in NOVA BCA (<http://www.novabca.com>), the Northern Virginia division of the second-largest member organization for poolplayers in the United States. Eric also runs a full-service marketing firm (<http://www.estmktg.com>).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

“To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction.”

— Sir Isaac Newton

“You can stroke people with words.”

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”

— Proverb

“He who cannot endure the bad will not live to see the good.”

— Yiddish Proverb

*“There is in the worst of fortune
the best of chances for a happy change.”*

— Euripedes

*“The only person you should ever compete with is yourself.
You can't hope for a fairer match.”*

— Todd Ruthman

“The game of billiards has destroyed my naturally sweet disposition.”

— Mark Twain

“A man surprised is half beaten.”

— Thomas Fuller

“Forewarned forearmed.”

— Cervantes

“Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal. Nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.”

— Thomas Jefferson

“When anger rises, think of the consequences.”

— Confucius

“You can measure a man by the opposition it takes to discourage him.”

— Robert C. Savage

“Let me listen to me and not to them.”

— Gertrude Stein

“You’re either part of the solution or part of the problem.”

— Eldridge Cleaver

“There is no little enemy.”

— Benjamin Franklin

“He who wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper.”

— Edmund Burke

“I do desire we may be better strangers.”

— Shakespeare

I. OVERCOME SHARKING

WHAT IS SHARKING?

RLR: A NEW FORM OF SELF-DEFENSE

STEP 1: RECOGNITION

STEP 2: LAUGHTER

THEORIES OF LAUGHTER

STEP 3: RESOLVE

WHAT IS SHARKING?

Some devastating attacks are void of physical contact. Sharking is a highly-determined form of psychological warfare that bullies your focus through distractions.

What constitutes a shark? Believe it or not, it could be as minimal as a well-timed twitch. Often, it's a series of substantial actions that disrupt execution. The most surprising form of sharking may be friendly conversation that's ill-intentioned. Southern charm, anyone?

Haters, vampires, and other detractors lurk in most business meetings, social circles, and family outings. Their subterfuge is often childish. To the unprepared or lightly-focused, their tricks will be difficult to ignore and quick to endanger. Their objective is to deconstruct, delay, deny, or deflect your success and happiness.

*They're not happy. Why should you be?
You've got what they want. They'll trick it from you.
When you're at your worst, their best has a chance.
They believe in winning by any means necessary.*

To protect those who've worked diligently to build momentum, and who have what it takes to proceed "fair and square," I recommend a simple shark antidote. The pages that follow provide that three-step strategy.

Confidence tricks aren't necessarily deliberate. Some people won't know they're resorting to them. They're simply weak, nervous, inconsiderate, or unaware of the genre.

Even in these amateur exchanges, there's an opportunity to connect on shared values. You're on alert for sharking, it's dirty business, and you won't stand for it. Perhaps your new friend will play ambassador and tell her friends. The subject gains further attention and traction.

If you're not there yet, then one thing will soon become clear. The most talented sharks know exactly what they're doing — and they're doing it quite well.

RLR: A NEW FORM OF SELF-DEFENSE

Has your patience, hard work, reputation, money, or physical well-being suffered from a shark attack? Perhaps the stakes were high when you were compromised? While some sharks are little more than a zinger, others can lead to brutal and unforgivable outcomes.

How do you go about defending yourself?

My three-step routine:

Recognition. Laughter. Resolve.

Remember R.L.R. for short.

Unlike some resources on the topic*, I'm asking that you take the highest road. Don't resort to "an eye for an eye." Think about it. The upmanship that's essential to counter-sharking leads to more treacherous tricks being developed. How's that ideal?

I've chosen to examine sharking from inside one of its most famous forums — pool rooms. You won't need to know a hustler or how to pocket balls to make sense of what follows. The lens is a device to sharpen conversation. It's a means to a greater end. You're attacked by sharks daily.

Gray areas, whispers, wiggle room, roasts, sweet talk, false pretenses, bait and switch, smoke and mirrors, inside tracks, and much more exist so the wrong crowd can gain favor (and remain in advantage). It's become a prevalent, insidious practice in the United States.

It's time to do the right thing, in pool and other endeavors. It's time to clear the playing field of the gamesmanship and other nonsense. Neutralize the worst. Amplify the best.

**Examples include Stephen Potters' *The Complete Upmanship* and Allan P. Sands' *Psychology of Gamesmanship*.*

STEP 1: RECOGNITION

Sharking utilizes the notion of smoke and mirrors. Words are spoken, gestures are made, actions are taken — yet things are not as they seem. There's a secondary meaning behind the best shark techniques that's dangerous. The damage can be irreversible.

Successful sharking relies on timing. An element of surprise is critical. Attacks come during moments when you can't afford to be distracted. Imagine that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You must learn to anticipate and disarm distractions before they cost you dearly.

Your defense against sharking begins with a few easy commitments.

(i) You're now a believer in Murphy's Law — that which can happen, will happen. Are you on a roll? Guess what? You will be opposed. Don't be surprised or upset by human nature.

(ii) As you work on the skills that lead you to fire on all cylinders, become more aware of the moments when you most need to concentrate. These are precisely the instances when the very best shark techniques will be deployed. You must poise yourself.

(iii) Evaluate the degree to which members of your circle are aligned with you. A word of caution here. Don't make excuses for anyone. Start an objective scoresheet. Those closest to you should provide the most reliable support. The reality is that some aren't (and won't). When you're nipped or clubbed consistently at close range, your momentum is greatly reduced. You're too focused on survival. You're more likely to break even than surge ahead.

(iv) Welcome the purest forms of honesty into your life. Anything less can be detrimental. Invite second opinions. Hold yourself accountable where you fall short against sharks. You can't allow for gray areas any longer. They're an asset to the sharks who confront you.

Knowledge leads to recognition, which can mature to ongoing awareness and self-defense. Distractions can be rendered invisible (or at least far less effective).

STEP 2: LAUGHTER

The most productive counterpoint is often the most natural one. Shark techniques are generally unnatural interjections. The two offset each other.

There's something startling and undeniable in an uncomplicated response. A deviant who's sharpened his craft and preyed successfully is confident. He expects you to be rattled.

Laughter's a common human response to conflict.

Become amused and allow sharks to roll off you.* Diffuse aggression with the least expected reaction. If laughter's too pronounced for the situation at hand, then simply smile or smirk.

When you're tickled by sharking, a positive result's achieved. They're bit by it instead of you.

- (i) You've exposed how silly the antics are. That makes the shark look and feel stupid.
- (ii) You've shown that he doesn't bother you. That renders him ineffective at derailing you.
- (iii) You've taken a potential negative and made it a positive, firming your resolve to keep at what you're doing. That signals a total backfire. Sharking has instead aided your momentum.

Laughter isn't a new foil.

In *The Hustler*, "Fast" Eddie Felson (played by Paul Newman) tells Minnesota Fats (played by Jackie Gleason) just how "beautiful" he is. He adjusts his opponent's suit coat to make him look sharper. Fats is hardly a looker. Instead of escalating matters, Fats laughs. He then beats Felson out of his money. The movie shows him winning for hours.

Like Fats, learn to manage the people who seek your worst. What tortured you will become a source of amusement. After all, people do the craziest things for attention and advancement.

* *A similar approach is touched upon in Phil Capelle's book, A Mind For Pool.*

THEORIES OF LAUGHTER

Can laughter alone offset sharking — or is it too weak, passive, or over-simplifying? Talented thinkers weigh in below. If history bores you, then skip ahead to Step 3.

In *Philebus* (347 B.C.), Plato states that “pleasure and pain lie in the malice of amusement.” **A laugh injures when it signals ineptitude.**

In *Rhetoric* (350 B.C.), Aristotle spins laughter as “educated insolence.” In *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 B.C.), he calls it “a kind of abuse.” **See also Plato above.**

“I find nonsense singularly refreshing.”

— Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord

In *Human Nature* (1840), Thomas Hobbes defines laughter as “sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others.” **Associate laughter with triumph.**

In *The Physiology of Laughter* (1860), Herbert Spencer ties laughter to a “hydraulic theory” of nervous energy. Excitement and mental agitation produce energy that “must expend itself in some way or another.” He argues that “nervous excitation always tends to beget muscular motion.” **Laugh it off before you do something stupid.**

In *Cheerfulness as a Life Power* (1899) Orison Swett Marden offers this poignant passage:

“Laughter accelerates respiration and gives warmth and glow to the whole system. It brightens the eye, increases the perspiration, expands the chest, forces the poisoned air from the least-used lung cells, and tends to restore that exquisite poise of balance which we call health, which results from the harmonious action of all the functions of the body. This delicate poise, which may be destroyed by a sleepless night, a piece of bad news, by grief or anxiety, is often wholly restored by a good hearty laugh.”

In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Sigmund Freud describes a “relief theory” whereby hostile energy from emotional and intellectual challenges is stored at first, but then released through laughter. **Don't burden yourself. Laugh to remain free and loose.**

SHARKING — DON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

In *The Enjoyment of Laughter* (1936), Max Eastman develops a “play theory” of humor whereby “we come into the world endowed with an instinctive tendency to laugh in response to pains presented playfully.” He recommends a disinterested attitude toward what might otherwise be serious. **When a shark bothers you, ignore or laugh at him (not with him).**

In *The Essence of Laughter* (1956), Charles Baudelaire characterizes laughter as an “expression of dominance.” **Show you’re stronger by laughing in the face of a shark technique.**

In *Laughter* (1980), Henri Bergson states that “humor serves as a social corrective, helping people recognize behaviors that are inhospitable to human flourishing. Anything that threatens to reduce a person is prime material for humor.” **Shark, meet shame!**

“Mirth is God's medicine.

Everybody ought to bathe in it.

Grim care, moroseness, anxiety —

all rust of life ought to be scoured off by the oil of mirth.”

— Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes

“Not work, but worry, fretfulness, friction —

these are our foes in America.

You should not go here and there,

making prominent either your bad manners or a gloomy face.

Who has a right to rob other people of their happiness?

Do not hang a dismal picture on your wall;

and do not deal with sables and glooms in your conversation.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Humor can be one of our best survival tools.”

— Allen Klein

STEP 3: RESOLVE

The final blow to the shark was your ability to continue forward. Whether you pivoted with laughter, shared that you know the shark's intentions and tricks, or kept the joke to yourself — you weren't deterred. That's huge for you!

The shark will pursue one of three paths next.

(i) He might experiment with your will power through another technique. If he does, then expect him to increase aggressiveness and/or reduce predictability.

(ii) He might become desperate. You may get a temper tantrum or a challenge to do something you have no interest in doing next. Remind the shark that you know exactly what you want to do. You just want to do it without his interruptions!

(iii) He might quietly take his tactics elsewhere. He doesn't likely have the skill to pace or outwit you without the shortcuts. His patience wanes. You're too difficult of an adversary.

Most people want to be in a leveraged position. They want to matter. Unlike most, you won't allow distractions to negatively impact your goals. When you've chosen and executed this commitment, you place your efforts in a different category from most others.

Sharks know when you're no longer a legitimate target. They avoid you. Those who seek focus are drawn to learn from you. Successful people approach, perhaps for the first time. In the least, they nod their head toward you. It's now a brand new day.

The power of your network is defined by the quality, control, and influence of your contacts. Navigate and overcome sharks to attract the right people. Communicate a strong sense of purpose through your attitude, actions, and the results you achieve.

SHARKING — DON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

Please enjoy 9 colorful stories that follow. Pool rooms are notorious for sharking. You'll find both varieties in full force — laser-targeted, purposefully-fired hustles and the nervous behaviors of amateurs.

II. 8 TALES OF SHARKING

POOLPLAYER VS. HUSTLER

YOUR MONEY IS MY MONEY

THE LIZARD WON'T MISS

REACHING FOR TRUTH

CONTROL THE WHITE GIRL

“KUSH KUSH” PANTS

SAM HAS A COLD

THE MATCH THAT NEVER ENDED

THE YING YANG MAN

POOLPLAYER VS. HUSTLER

By the summer of 2000, I'd struck thousands of balls. My pool game was nowhere. I decided to join a recreational league at Buffalo Billiards, the pool hall down the street from my condo in Washington DC. It changed my life.

The first person to approach me was a soft-spoken member named Deeqa. She didn't mince words. "If you want to know where your game stands, then go shoot with Carlos." She pointed me toward a 1950s era martini man.

His jacket was flung over a stool. His shirt was crisp. His tie was tossed over his shoulder. He obsessed over a rack's alignment at the same time that he threatened the felt with a dangled cigarette. He was a likable contradiction, like Al Pacino's portrayal of Carlito Brigante.

Carlos was an amateur champion in his homeland of Portugal. He was slight in stature but big in personality. He was graceful yet gritty. He had a nasal laugh that resembled a duck call. While he appreciated the finer things in life, Carlos was also a killer pool shot — which meant he welcomed action from any dirtball with money in his pocket.

His tutelage began with a simple lesson: there are poolplayers, and there are hustlers. While casual observers might use the words interchangeably, Carlos drew a clear distinction.

"Hustlers don't mind misses. It's part of how they win. To a poolplayer, missing is a plague. Once it sets in, the end can be sudden and cruel. You have to decide who you'll be."

Carlos was a poolplayer. For a stretch, I would be his rack boy.

YOUR MONEY IS MY MONEY

The signature occasion in my friendship with Carlos took place at the seediest bar in posh Dupont Circle: The Big Hunt. Say it three times fast and you'll get the potty humor.

We didn't expect to shoot pool that night. It was muggy outside, and Carlos fancied an "inkling" (a.k.a Yuengling in Portuguese). This was the closest establishment at the time of that craving. As luck would have it, there was a bar box* upstairs.

We were in business.

I was the first to pull a cue down from the wall. We hadn't come prepared with our own sticks, and Carlos was a believer in house wood.

"I can beat you with a banana tree" was a line I heard in every hole-in-the-wall. He was talking about a warped stick. "An amateur will roll a cue on the table to see if it's straight. What does it say when you go straight to shooting?"

If there were two things that got the attention of bar box regulars, it was the crank of a quarters tray and sixteen balls dropping. My job was to ignore any movement in the room, rack the balls, and get down to shooting. If I built it, they would come.

We had been there no more than ten minutes when I was approached. This dude's leg wouldn't stop bouncing. "You should play my friend, he gets here around 10 pm." At this point in my education, I only competed in league. I was an apprentice. I watched Carlos work and assisted him, as needed.

"Hey, man, I'm not all that good," I said. The next move was the same just about every time. "See that guy over there? That's the dude he should play. He's been playing his whole life. He knows more about the game than I ever will."

It was important to let people know that Carlos was a serious poolplayer. If I didn't announce that, or if I downplayed his skill, opponents would call bullshit and cry hustler.

We weren't trying to sucker people. I was portending the hurt was coming, and they were hungry for the pain.

Carlos' opponent arrived. He adored nature-scene apparel — a pack of wolves running in the foreground, a howling silhouette above the evergreens, a glorious moon that backlit it all.

The Wolfman was a billboard for fear. Carlos was thoroughly amused. He spit out his beer and countered with an almost secretive “ankle-biter.”

Unlike other games, this one was different. I expected the regulars to lay down money on their pack leader. Instead, they entered into side bets with each other — all in favor of the stranger, Carlos. Needless to say, this made the hair on the Wolfman's back stand straight up.

“This guy can't beat me,” he announced to his mates. You got the feeling this wasn't the first time he had to prove himself to the pack. Carlos said nothing.

The Wolfman claimed that he didn't need to shoot first to win, so Carlos broke open the rack. Nothing fell. The pack leader sank one ball, then quickly tanked a second. A few choice words were shared. Carlos ran the rest. The game was over in minutes.

In that instant, it was clear that the pack had long hoped we'd enter their den. They sought a new leader.

The Wolfman slammed his paws over the cash and leaned forward defiantly. “We're going to play again — THIS TIME, we play with YOUR money!”

Carlos shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. For a guy who was short on the Queen's English, he was quick to strike. “YOUR money is MY money!”

** A bar box is a smaller than regulation pool table. Restaurants and bars like them because they enable a billiards attraction without committing a large swath of the floor plan. Most are coin-operated. Four quarters are slotted into a tray, which is inserted firmly to release 16 balls for racking. While professionals compete on 9-foot long regulation tables, these 7-foot long miniatures have become the staple of amateur poolplayers.*

THE LIZARD WON'T MISS

**Some wins were losses. All losses were wins.
I learned a ton from my mistakes in pool rooms.**

Such was the occasion at a small, upscale room called Bedrock Billiards in the Adams Morgan district. This would've been Autumn 2001.

Carlos and I had lifetime memberships. The program was probably designed to sling beer and build customer loyalty. One problem: most serious poolplayers don't drink heavily while they work. For us, membership meant our preferred table was held in advance of any game we wanted to schedule.

Our biggest game there was our last. The house had a no-tolerance policy on gambling, and the general manager had been looking for an excuse to ban us. The opponent on this day was a particularly proud two-headed serpent. This match wouldn't proceed or end quietly.

We'd arranged to play scotch doubles* against Javier, a frequent betting opponent of mine, and his friend. Instead, the friend brought a hustler.

Carlos recognized him. He shook his head and broke down his cue. "The Lizard won't miss."

The hustler resembled Andre the Giant — except with greasy, stringy hair. Throw in a wife-beater t-shirt and ample back hair for good measure. The Lizard was too tall to drive a Trans Am, but he'd definitely twisted a wrench or two under the hood of one.

I told Carlos that I didn't care if the switch was on. I would front all bets for us. I liked nature shows. I wanted to see The Lizard hunt. I got a half-approval from Carlos. We were going to be beaten again and again, but it was a lesson that needed to be learned.

Despite his size, The Lizard was nimble. I found him to be a fascinating creature. Bedrock was an underground establishment. Its ceilings hung low. He bounded around the table and dodged light fixtures like he designed the place. To my knowledge, he hadn't played there. This was an away game for him.

It didn't take long before the Lizard missed, and before I realized that his misses were essentially hits. There was a false hope each time.

From where you were standing, the miss quickened your heart rate for a turn at the table. By the time you walked over to survey shot options, you knew it was a trap. You couldn't find a productive rhythm.

We shot for close to seven hours. We won a handful of racks, all by virtue of shots we shouldn't have made. A broken clock is right twice a day. I had bet \$100 a rack and lost a pile of money. The investment was sound.

Carlos concentrated on balls. He executed runs. The Lizard focused on you. He chopped at your knees so you couldn't run. He chose unusual shots and left you with virtually nothing. Even when you escaped with a win, the confidence was endowed so you'd bet that much longer.

** Scotch doubles is a poolplaying format that involves two teams, each with two players. Teammates alternate shots, regardless of whether a ball is pocketed. The game is well-known for its ability to turn teammates against each other. Where one player leaves the cue ball dictates what the other player can achieve. The format can create two levels of opponents.*

REACHING FOR TRUTH

Carlos got bored of beating people in the league where I had met him. One night, I emerged victorious against him in what I thought was a friendly tournament. That night at Atomic Billiards in Cleveland Park was the last time I saw Carlos for over a decade.

The pool subculture was full of competent players and colorful characters. I was in no rush to replace my mentor. At league, fear was beginning to set in for many. That translated into lay-down wins for me. Outside of league, better players lured me into money games. They knew how to unravel confidence into despair.

The new top gun on our league team was a silver-haired attorney named Jack. He frequented the Atomic tournament. As was the tradition, the new guy was asked to name the team for his first session. Jack chose the curious moniker “Reaching for Truth.”

He looked and acted a lot like Andy Warhol. Conversations were generally fragmented and short. He laughed like you would never understand what he knew. He kept mixed company.

By day, Jack operated by the book. By night, he was tearing pages from the same volumes and using them for kindling.

“Crackhead” Rob was a hustler that Jack liked to play. Their proving ground was a joint called Babe’s near American University. The pairing was unconventional, to say the least. Jack would sit in his high chair, smoking a cigarette, still in his best suit. His drug-addled opponent would putz around the table, twitch, pull a wedgie from his sweatpants, and try to rattle Jack with trash talk.

Each game ended with two words: “that’s good.” What seemed like courtesy was actually relentless body punching.

It was easy to confuse these exchanges with quitting. Halted games, even those at the point of falling action, denied a number of misses by either or both of the players. It appeared that these guys were betting a substantial amount of money to compete yet concede.

Jack and I would meet for breakfast. One morning, I asked about “that’s good” and why he chose “Reaching For Truth” for our league team name. As always, a laugh came first.

He had entered a professional event a few months back. He played the best pool of his life. He ran the first five racks in a race to nine, but missed an easy shot at the start of the sixth. His opponent ran the next nine. You didn’t read this incorrectly. Each player shot once. Jack was defeated 9-5 before he could atone for his only mistake.

“I’ve spent my career looking for lies, separating what’s real from what’s storytelling, registering wins. In pool, there are only the cruelest of defeats. I’ve come to accept that, at best, we’re only *reaching for* truth.”

When Jack and Rob mumbled “that’s good,” each fractured the other’s rhythm. Advances upon money balls were denied, as was the confidence that should’ve grown from sinking them. Imagine the person who cuts you off mid-sentence, when you’re excited to share something. Deflating.

When you’re playing for money, racks blend into each other. Each completed run naturally provides momentum. Some don’t want an undeniable force rolling full steam ahead.

“That’s good” denied the truth from being spoken.

CONTROL THE WHITE GIRL

I've only met one successful hybrid in a pool hall. Depending on his mood, Steve switched between hustler and poolplayer. He was one of those people whose last name looked fake. This guy gambled. His last name was a term used in gambling.

Steve was very much like me. His mechanics were unassuming. He was a hard worker. He didn't carry a weakness for alcohol, drugs, or women with him to money games. It was Steve and the balls when he was on the clock. That's it.

Steve never met a table he didn't like. Their quirks never bothered him. He eased balls across tables that played like air hockey. He clobber-stroked balls through jungle grass.

He would never punish a proprietor for equipment that needed to be fixed. The cumulative effect was a deadly quality. Opponents were reduced to self-conscious, uneven divas.

Every once in a while, we'd meet up with his Confederacy-loving brother for Thai drinks. Steve's older brother was never sober and always a distraction. He always told the same story. Evidently, the two liked to close down a room "in the black part of town" for marathon sessions of one-pocket.* Unlike Steve, this guy was uneasy like Wednesday morning.

"I taught Steve how to control the white girl."

I know what you're thinking. Pool has a jaded reputation. This guy is a redneck. Steve was milk toast. Are these clowns also misogynists?

"The white girl" was his nickname for the cue ball. Steve was absolutely the controlling type. His brother found that to be hysterical. Conversation was regularly tinged with racism, as a means to unnerve the faint of heart.

** One-pocket (sometimes also called "one-hole") is a pool format for two players or teams. The object of the game is to score points by pocketing pool balls into specific pockets. A point is scored when a player makes any object ball into that player's designated pocket. The winner is the first to score an agreed-upon number of points (most commonly 8).*

“ KUSH KUSH ” PANTS

The other weapon in Steve's arsenal was what an ex-girlfriend of mine called “kush-kush” pants. Unlike Carlos and Jack, and more like The Lizard and “Crackhead” Rob, Steve dressed down to play. Comfort was king. His favorites were canvas tear-aways. He looked like he was getting ready for a slam-dunk contest.

Some who interrogate prefer water torture. Steve adored his “kush kush” pants. The rubbing sound wore you down. It was a constant reminder that he was on the go and you were sitting on the stool — waiting to be productive.

Kush, kush, kush, kush, kush, kush, KUSH!

Steve knew that most wouldn't go head-to-head with him for money. We would frequent a bicycle courier happy hour at The Lucky Bar on Connecticut Avenue. They had a single bar box upfront. It saw steady traffic.

Bicycle couriers peddled from one rush job to the next. Steve liked to take his time. They were perfect opponents. They were risk-takers of the measured variety. By day, they lived dangerously. By night, they wanted to unwind. Steve looked tired from a workout.

He called the venue's action “rails full of drinks.” Nobody wanted to put real money on the line, but everyone was drinking away an edge. Steve playfully invited the couriers into an innocent wager. Pick a friend. Let's play for a drink.

Unlike how Carlos and I shot scotch doubles, these games required a few more misses. We weren't playing top-flight professionals here. These were thrill-seekers on depressants. We needed to entertain, prop up hope, hold their interest, and help them to unwind.

The key to “rails full of drinks” was counter-intuitive. You couldn't allow the drinks to accumulate in plain sight. Keep things breezy. Rotate in a new pair for the wager.

If you weren't the player breaking the next rack of balls, then you quickly shuffled the latest trophy drink to a customer of your choice. No one was reminded of defeat.

It was like the movie *The Tao of Steve*. Show your excellence and retreat. Instead of buying a round drinks for everyone, we were winning them. We may not have been winning money, but we weren't spending it either. What we were doing was gaining favor for free.

SAM HAS A COLD

Monday nights weren't great for action. I was able to set up a regular game with an amateur named Sam. We would close down a place called Carpool in Arlington, Virginia. By 2004, I had begun to stake less on pool. The losses were more brutal than the wins were uplifting.

Sam wasn't a flashy or consistent player. He was "a threat to run three balls." What he did have was a nice wad of cash in his pocket, and a healthy appetite for \$50 games.

The tactic that worked best on Sam was payment after each rack. He rarely strung together back-to-back wins, while I would take several in succession. Seeing \$200 leave his pocket every half hour unnerved him. Nervous players miss.

One particular shift saw Sam race ahead on me. I was off my game in a big way, and he had capitalized. He was up \$300 as closing neared. I asked for a double or nothing game in hopes of breaking even. This was Sam's moment.

While he had a bit of a reputation for sharking during league matches, our games had been uneventful. Respect was too strong of a word for it, but Sam appreciated the chance to earn some extra money on a weeknight.

The rack began sloppily. Neither of us seized the opportunity after a few turns at the table. By the fourth shot, I put together a run that left me one shy of the 8-ball. Sam began to shift his weight from right leg to left. It wasn't enough to fully distract me, but I noticed it.

As I lined up the critical shot, I was careful to take a few extra looks. It was an easy enough shot. It offered natural, favorable shape on the money ball. Still, this was break even or owe Sam \$600. It wasn't to be taken lightly.

As I stroked, Sam coughed abruptly. I yanked my follow-through to the left and missed. Without hesitation, I walked over to him and stuffed \$600 in his hand.

"That was an expensive move you just pulled. We'll never play again."

THE MATCH THAT NEVER ENDED

During one of the last seasons that I competed in the APA (American Poolplayers Association), one of the most disconcerting and unsportsmanlike events took place. It was late Summer 2008 at Q-Ball Billiards in Springfield, Virginia.

On the final night of play in the season, my team stood in first place by one game. Our opponents were hungry to compete, but were nowhere to be found among the leaders.

As was the practice, captains from the second- and third-place teams were checking in on our progress. One captain, a sand-bagger* named Meg, was in our opponents' ears all night.

By the fourth match, it looked as if we had first place locked up, which meant a bye through the playoff brackets to the championship. We were ahead in the fourth match and wouldn't need to win the fifth to remain atop the standings.

That was when things got crazy.

There was a courtesy rule in our league that was designed to get people home earlier than later. Most players had work in the morning. If a matchup was dragging, the next matchup could be started on a second table concurrently. Otherwise, you were scheduled to compete on one table only.

The most common time for a captain to request the courtesy would be 9:30 p.m. It was the earliest that you could commandeer a practice table for match play. By our fourth match, it was 11 p.m. Even if we accelerated outcomes, it was already late.

While we didn't know it at the time, Meg had found a loophole in the rule book. She had walked the opposing captain through how to do it. The division representative approached us to name our fifth player and begin that match. We didn't have a choice in the matter.

I was playing in the fourth match. I wouldn't be able to coach our fifth player. I sensed this was being done to frustrate me and handicap my teammate.

Our captain, Brian, asked for time to make a decision. The hope was that I would win the current rack, take a sizable lead in the fourth and render the fifth a non-issue. We wanted to play someone who didn't compete most weeks, in a less-pressured fifth matchup.

I couldn't get back in stroke after the interruption and lost the rack. We named our fifth player out of frustration, about ten minutes after it was requested. For some reason, our opponents didn't move on setting up the fifth match on a second table. I went on to lose.

Perhaps it's obvious what happened next. I had competed for years and didn't see what was coming. Now needing to win that last match to secure first place, our opponents refused to finish the evening. They walked out in single-file protest.

Paperwork was sent to the league office, including our counter-complaint. Our opponents invoked a little-known provision and delay-of-match penalty. They claimed that we had forced them to compete later than was reasonable, which encumbered their final player (who was an older, cranky person). They sought reward of the match's final point. Unbelievable.

We insisted upon an audience with the league's regional head, Lee. He refused us. He left us to talk with an administrative staffer — who wasn't a decision-maker.

Brian and I were livid over what seemed like a blatant sportsmanship violation. You don't refuse to compete.

Our opponents were awarded the point in question. Meg's team leap-frogged to first place, with a bye to finals. We advanced through playoffs, but lost 3-2 in the championship. The protest played a direct role in how we competed during finals.

We wanted to win too much.

Brian and I formed a competing league under the second-largest member organization for poolplayers in the U.S., Cue Sports International. Visit <http://www.novabca.com> for more.

** A sand-bagger is a player who misses shots on purpose, in order to maintain a lower, more favorable handicap. The lower the handicap, the less games needed to win a race against a better player. Since league teams tend to be limited in how many handicap points can be played in a five-player match, each sand-bagger enables a stronger team to compete than would otherwise be possible.*

THE YING YANG MAN

An important pre-game ritual for the rising amateur is the macho-posture.

“I’m two balls better than that guy.”

“He won’t go up on me.”

“I know more about the game than he does.”

The list goes on and on.

What this type of player doesn’t realize is that he’s walking into a trap. For every silky stroker, there’s a ball banger whose shots wiggle in the pocket (and drop). For every focused champion, there’s a distracted hack who continues to get lucky.

The perfect foil for many a deserving victor or likely favorite is often the ying yang man — the gamesman who assumes the opposite manner of his opponent.

“To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction.”

— Sir Isaac Newton

A great example of this theatre was performed in a BCA match at a dive called Fast Eddie’s in Fairfax, Virginia. The tables were junk. You were rarely given a matching set of balls. The roof leaked. The ventilations system was broken. Guess who loves these playing conditions?

Andrew was the favorite. His game was fast and loose. He never hesitated. He wore the fluorescent sneakers from the London 2012 Olympics. He wasn’t looking for a silver medal.

The ying yang man was William. It was late summer, yet he chose a sweater befitting of the 1980 Winter Games at Lake Placid, New York. He navigated a pool table deliberately, like a cigar aficionado savors a Cuban. He looked confused before most shots. He wasn’t precise.

As the balls were collected for the rack, the favorite already couldn’t get his opponent’s attention. There was tension. Andrew was new to the league and was verifying his break, a common courtesy. William was feverishly texting on his phone. He looked disinterested.

As a result of this dynamic, the game took surprisingly long to finish. William offset Andrew. It was as if the favorite had been dragged into enemy territory for sniping. He wasn't prepared for guerilla warfare. He was more of a surgical bomber.

The key exchange was a deft safety* by Andrew that left William locked to a ball that couldn't be pocketed directly.

Three forces presented themselves: vanity, fear, and abandon. William wasn't vain. He didn't care if he looked bad on the felt. He wasn't afraid of losing on a poorly-executed retort. His game left convention out of the equation. He responded in unsuspecting ways.

The ying ying man waited two seconds after Andrew's satisfying result. He whipped the cue ball around four rails (basically, the entire table) and left the favorite in a compromised position. He didn't plan for the shot to resolve so well. It was icing on the cake.

Andrew was rattled. It's not every day that you see a top player act hastily or recklessly at the tail end of a rack. It's too risky — unless, of course, there are two games being played.

The favorite now wondered how he could be so unlucky. The stunning turn of events never ceases to captivate the pinned player and those watching.

While Andrew boiled over his meager options, William returned to texting.

The favorite tried his best to return the favor one more time, but his effort fell short. The ying yang man won the game on a short run of completely normalized, conventional shots.

After the two exchanged customary handshakes, Andrew wanted to cue the instant replay for anyone who would watch it with him. He was fuming.

William sat down at the bar for a wine tasting.

** A safety is a shot choice that offers only unsettling options. It's a measure of control. Match momentum is at stake. Champions can be stopped dead in their tracks by shots like these.*

I thought you'd also enjoy a catalog of shark. Some sharks are obvious. Others will be veiled or subtle. Perhaps you've endured or used multiple techniques to date. It starts with one and advances into others. It's generally a layered, escalating attack.

By themselves, the traps may seem harmless. You may find yourself saying "nah, that can't be what's going on." When you consider that you're dealing with someone who's trying to gain advantage, then your eyes should open wide.

*For the easiest read of the following list on a smartphone, please purchase **150 Sharks: Pocket Guide to Billiard Distractions.***

Be sure to join us at Go Booklets or on Facebook to continue the discussion. Let us know about your own experiences with sharking. We're happy to grow the list to 1,000!

III. 150 SHARKS

SHARK TECHNIQUES

01-30

01. Nurses hiccups. *She's going to drive you crazy with them until you can't think clearly.*
02. Likes to laugh a lot. *His laugh will be tolerable at first, yet become increasingly annoying.*
03. Forgets how to stand. *He's literally shifty. Your eyes wander away from the table to whether he'll fall.*
04. Rests cue in view. *Your shot is easy. He surrenders. You relax and miss. Used at the end of games.*
05. Grabs the rack, stands near ball return. *See 04.*
06. Walks in front of your shot. *You're startled. Your eyes should be trained on one thing.*
07. Plays with her lighter. *The simplest noise, when repeated, can drive a calm person to edgy.*
08. Buys you a drink. *You feel like you owe her one now. That can come in the form of a missed shot.*
09. "Your pool bag is classy." *Compliments lead to fuzzy feelings and fuzzy math.*
10. Shows her cleavage. *The pool balls look a little less interesting from here on out. You're preoccupied.*
11. Hoards all of the chalk. *You'll need to walk out of your way to wrestle them back from him.*
12. Chalks while you're shooting. *Disrespects your turn at the table. He's suggesting that you'll miss.*
13. Places the chalk face down. *Dirtyes the table apron, which stains your hands and clothes later.*
14. "You're going to kill me." *Being the favorite relaxes or adds pressure. Things should be even to start.*
15. Pretends to break down his cue. *Your eyes betray you. He sees you'd welcome the easy way out.*
16. Competes with headphones. *Simple communication is now a pain in the ass.*
17. Needs to leave suddenly. *It's no longer a two-way commitment. He's hastening your rhythm.*
18. Uses bathroom after you win. *Denies momentum. You rack and wait. Your time isn't valuable.*
19. Sands cue shaft. *Like hearing fingernails across a chalkboard? She's suggesting that you'll miss.*
20. Drops what he's holding. *You're startled. You assume he's clumsy. He doesn't miss behind the move.*
21. Talks to herself. *She's not crazy. Making you think she is scares you a little. Repeated sounds annoy.*
22. Asks for a referee/witness. *He's calling you a cheater. This angers you. He knows when to cheat.*
23. Enjoys snacks. *His choices are fattening. Disgust is a high-yield distraction that can set in for hours.*
24. Blows smoke. *It dries your contacts. She won't go outside. If she did, then you'd still be left waiting.*
25. "You don't need to call shots." *You think he trusts you. Wiggle room helps him cheat you later.*
26. "That's good." *Conceding a rack prevents the full confidence that comes from sinking the money ball.*
27. "What's new at work?" *She's not your spouse. She just wants to get your focus off the game.*
28. "Here's what I would've done..." *Unprompted advice agitates most people.*
29. Introduces boyfriend/girlfriend. *Like the multiplying agents in The Matrix, distractions amplify.*
30. "I didn't know I was doing THAT!" *He did, however, know he was doing other bad things.*

SHARK TECHNIQUES

31-60

31. "Listen to those rail birds." *You become aware of side conversations. They sense that you're listening.*
32. Bounces his leg. *He appears to be jittery. Maybe he looks angry. It's unnerving.*
33. \$%#^&! (insert loud cuss). *You're startled. This could end in a fight, should you win.*
34. Buries herself in a pool book. *She's not a beginner. She's reinforcing lessons she learned a while ago.*
35. "My coach says ..." *No one cares to coach you, or it costs too much. He pays someone to help beat you.*
36. Pals with Johnny Archer. *You start to wonder if Johnny has taught him a few things.*
37. "I beat Francisco Bustamante." *Maybe he's out of your league? Regret sets in. Don't miss.*
38. "Let's play for money next time." *He lost to you today, so he can really beat you tomorrow.*
39. "Something's on your shirt." *You're a slob. You make a mess of everything you touch.*
40. "Forgot to ditch my gun." *This could end worse than a fight, should you win.*
41. Grinds (sans stripper pole). *She was just an opponent a minute earlier. Now she's someone else.*
42. Takes notes. *He wants you think that you're better. People overstep when they're teaching a lesson.*
43. Celebrates (perhaps excessively). *You think she's new to winning, or the showboating annoys you.*
44. Claps powder on the table. *He wants you to think that he's careless. You hate the mess he's made.*
45. Questions the room temperature. *You question your perception. That's increasingly uncomfortable.*
46. Racks hastily. *He's suggesting that you can't break well. You're the bad guy if you ask for a re-rack.*
47. "Take it easy on me, I'm old." *You play down to his motor skills out of respect for elders.*
48. Argues with the waitstaff. *He shows you what it's like to fight him. He bites hands that feed him.*
49. Won't leave the table after a miss. *She's leaving negative energy behind to burden your next shot.*
50. "Figures." *She wants you to feel like a hack, when she would gladly run with the same lucky break.*
51. Changes one thing. *Ever notice how a dog obsesses over the smallest difference made in a room?*
52. Throws a temper tantrum. *You now have a headache. More negative energy's at the table. See 51.*
53. Shares how much winning means to him. *You put less on the line because this is all he has in life.*
54. Reveals a recent tragedy. *You don't want to add to her pain. See 47 and 53.*
55. Loads music into the jukebox. *Music can dictate our moods. He takes you from Ozzy to Celine.*
56. Asks the score repeatedly. *You think he's unfocused, but the game isn't getting away from him.*
57. Slow to choose/execute shots. *He wants to dictate the overall tempo. He makes you play his game.*
58. Plays with house wood. *If she's superior to you, then she can win with inferior equipment.*
59. Wears noisy pants. *He wants you to be perfectly aware of how long he's at the table.*
60. Misses/hangs easy shots. *It's "missing with benefits." Behavior's contagious. You miss next. See 56.*

SHARK TECHNIQUES

61-90

61. Concurs with your choices. *What an agreeable guy! His shot-making abilities won't agree with you.*
62. Plays cards between shots. *He's perfectly comfortable gambling. He might even be a professional.*
63. Experiments with shiny objects. *There's a light over each table. The reflection finds your eyes.*
64. Texts everyone. *Your session with her is just a sideshow — one that pays for the rest of her day.*
65. Exhibits too much confidence. *No one likes a bragger. More negative energy is left at the table.*
66. Rescues you from a distraction. *It takes a doctorate in distraction to keep saving you from them.*
67. Cleans up the table for you. *Reminds you of your spouse. Implies you're careless.*
68. Whistles or sings out of tune. *It's practice for breaking other things that flow — like your game.*
69. Throws equipment after a miss. *This could end in a fight, should you win.*
70. Has an unstoppable itch. *Disgust is a high-yield distraction that can set in for hours.*
71. Sports bad breath or body odor. *If you're willing to endure, then you must be desperate. See 70.*
72. Gets others to side bet. *Implies that nobody likes you. You're no one's favorite to win here.*
73. Decides it's time for grooming. *She's careful, you're careless. See 70.*
74. "You shoot different..." (interesting). *She's not nice. You invest too much in trying to beat her.*
75. Lines up quarters to feed bar box. *He surrenders. You relax and miss. Used at the end of games.*
76. "If you win, then you get HIM." *If you can't win your next matchup, then why win now?*
77. "I don't practice much." *You assume that she'll be rusty. She just wants an early lead.*
78. "Let's keep the bet in plain view." *He's calling you a liar. The manager's a friend. He's a regular.*
79. Stares you down. *Pool's not face-to-face action. This could end in a fight, should you win.*
80. "I hate to win this way..." *You're beating yourself, which makes his job easier. Hate here means love.*
81. Spits in a cup (chewing tobacco). *Disgust is a high-yield distraction that can set in for hours.*
82. Spills his drink on himself. *You think he's nervous or lacks coordination. He doesn't miss after this.*
83. "Am I stripes or solids?" *He wants you to think you're boring him, or that he lacks presence.*
84. "I walk away for two minutes and you leave me this?" *Why did he leave the table mid-game?*
85. Denies it's a rivalry. *Instead of an even contest, you over-extends to prove your worthiness.*
86. "I'm taking medication for..." *You feel bad for her and play with less intensity.*
87. "I'll rack for you." *Let me pretend a favor. You'll owe me. I'm about to encumber your break.*
88. "I didn't deserve that." *Line from The Color of Money. You don't want to increase his pain. See 86.*
89. "Tough miss." *All of your misses help him. What's so tough about that? False sympathy agitates.*
90. Refers to the pool gods. *Clichés annoy. Aligning a higher power against you is cruel.*

SHARK TECHNIQUES

91-120

91. Babbles about problems. *She transfers nervous energy to you. You can't shake it.*
92. "I like to have fun when I play." *Winning is hard work. She wants a more casual workplace.*
93. "Double or nothing? Work calls." *You're off. Timing is right to win one rack and clean up.*
94. Mirrors what you do. *You realize some of the dumb stuff you do. That kills your mojo.*
95. "I had this cue custom-made." *She has all the money she needs. If you don't, then this tweaks you.*
96. "You look pale." *He implies that you're struggling. You feel the heat even more now.*
97. "I know a guy with a lathe..." *You're more cautious than free with your stroke.*
98. Mentions food, doesn't order. *Hunger is preoccupying. If you order, then your game will slip.*
99. "They should fix these rails." *You will be left with difficult bank shots. The table will screw you.*
100. Points to security cameras. *He's looking to do something bad. He's been bad. You're on edge.*
101. "Rag for your hands?" *See also 96.*
102. Wears a glove. *You assume he's an amateur. There's wiggle room. It's a prop.*
103. Loves zip line or stick chalk. *See 102.*
104. Shows her jump cue. *They're not allowed in amateur pool. 9Ball players like them. She has game.*
105. "No phenolic tips in BCA." *He wants you to know he's played a pro event.*
106. Displays league award patches. *He's an amateur, but he's beaten skilled players. He rarely loses.*
107. "You'll get sick here from the food." *She's a regular. You hate getting sick. Feeling sick yet?*
108. "I have a nasty headache." *You think he's struggling. He wants you to get greedy with the wager.*
109. Asks when the venue closes. *Implies a long, hard battle. You bunker down instead of being lively.*
110. "Have you ever played at..." *Wants you to think he's been everywhere, and played everyone.*
111. "My stroke feels off today." *Implies the game you see is all she has. She knows other ways to win.*
112. Mentions recent eye exam. *He's seeing the angles sharper than usual. Don't miss.*
113. Complains that the felt is slow. *He plays on fast, quality tables. He wants you to over-compensate.*
114. Tugs on a pocket or two. *She plans to mix in misses and runs. She plays on tight equipment.*
115. References "table roll." *He wants you to shoot firmer than usual. You should doubt the equipment.*
116. Sports strange shaft markings. *Don't ask about them. Methods and madness say enough.*
117. Undresses waitress with his eyes. *If he acts sleazy off the table, then he'll play dirty on it.*
118. Uses blue chalk on a red-felted table. *He doesn't respect others. You can't get to him.*
119. Tinkers with an invisible measure. *You think that she's just an amateur. She's a pocket scientist.*
120. Takes photos/video with phone. *He plans to show his friends exactly how he beat you.*

SHARK TECHNIQUES

121-150

121. Fidgets away with a video game. *They're capable of managing distractions and beating you.*
122. Worships Stevie Vai. *His cue is now played like a guitar. He's a rockstar, you have no rhythm.*
123. Scores someone's number. *He scores on and off the table. He wins in everything he does.*
124. Cues the instant replay. *Reinforces what she just did to beat you. Treats you like you're new to this.*
125. Tilts head like Fido. *Your shot choice is not what he anticipated. Maybe you should reconsider it.*
126. Yeps as you execute. *She knows everything you know. Matching isn't beating someone.*
127. Introduces politics. *Increases the heat in what should be a cool conversation or competition.*
128. Exercises hand/wrist. *She's not in pain. Repeated movements distract.*
129. Vacates area to imply best/next shot. *He leads you to do what he wants. He expects you'll follow.*
130. "I may have pink eye." *She's been touching the chalk, the table apron, the felt...*
131. Grabs chalk behind nasty habit. *Picks nose or ear, then grabs the shared chalk.*
132. Plays the disapproving mother. *Her frown makes you feel self-conscious and inadequate.*
133. Shows commando/tramp stamp. *Again, the balls are less interesting now. You're preoccupied.*
134. "Scratch." *Once you hear this mumbled, it's going to be difficult to keep the cue ball on the table.*
135. "Flip instead of lag?" *Why decide things by skill? Let's leave things to chance. She likes to gamble.*
136. "I work on commission." *She risks and wins for a living. She gets what she wants.*
137. Mentions investment properties. *He values having leverage. He's a safe bet.*
138. "Do you have kids?" *He has them, yet he's there playing games with you.*
139. "You like fruity drinks?" *His favorite drinks are manly. He wants to soften you.*
140. "What's best for back pain?" *It's not painful for him to bend down. He wants you to take it easy.*
141. I'm a huge hockey fan. *He thinks a stick is for whacking people. Fights make a game more fun.*
142. "I shoot with a thicker shaft these days." *See 133.*
143. "Nice rack." *The cheapest one-liner zings because you're wasting time with the slug.*
144. "Just got back from Vegas." *Was he there "for business" or just an amateur event? Unsettling.*
145. References "Diamond System." *She can execute complex shots. She's a student of the game.*
146. "Balls get stuck in the return." *She's a regular. She implies you'll be racking often.*
147. "You'd like my table at home" *Great. She can practice whenever she wants.*
148. Enjoys "one-pocket." *If he like that game, then he's patient. He learns from elders (who like it).*
149. Wants to soft break. *She fakes weakness. She seeks a slower game. She likes when you sweat.*
150. Thanks you after you lose. *He wants you to think he's lucky. He's setting you up for a bigger game.*

IN SUMMARY

It's easy to believe that people have the best of intentions, when we know that many don't. What seem like pleasant, well-meaning words could be part of a loaded, lethal agenda.

It's also easy to fight fire with fire. Someone acts in way that hurts you, or that you suspect is designed to injure. Perhaps your first inclination is to strike back. There's a better way!

This resource has prescribed an adult answer to childish behavior. Choose the highest road. You're the one in control of outcomes. Don't allow yourself to be derailed or defeated.

You have the talent, tools, network, commitment, and work ethic to succeed. If you're not there yet, then there's even greater urgency to find that focus.

When a serious competitor or a desperate pretender to the throne challenges you, watch for extraneous methods — energy spent on things that aren't required to compete or win.

Don't allow for a second level of competition. It's difficult enough to score in the exchange at hand. Don't pivot away from that focus to win a secondary battle. Eyes on the prize.

RLR. Recognition. Laughter. Resolve.

Think of peek-a-boo.

- (i) I see you.
- (ii) Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...
- (iii) The child runs away or surrenders.

Guess what?

The approach remains the same between adults.

- (i) I see what you're doing.
- (ii) That's pretty funny...
- (iii) I'm not joining you in that, so you might as well quit it.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

“Life, as we all know, is unfair. Some people simply possess more intelligence, good looks, ability, money, and social position than others. But if you happen to be one of those ‘others,’ there is no reason to despair. The psychologically well-equipped can win at the games of life without really being able to play them.”

For more, we highly recommend the satire of Stephen Potter’s *The Complete Upmanship*.

“When one player is at the table, there is nothing his opponent can do except sit and hope that he misses. The player at the table, on the other hand, knowing that a miss will give his opponent a chance to make a long run and win, is under steadily increasing stress to keep pocketing balls. Thus, the nature of the game puts a premium on self-control and on skill in psychological warfare.”

For more, read the landmark Sports Illustrated article (April 4, 1955):

<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1129513/1/index.htm#ixzz1CY5YE62O>

Read more about pool “gamesmanship” at this forum from author Allan P. Sand:

<http://gamesmanship99.forumcircle.com/viewforum.php?f=4&>

For live and previously-recorded billiards action:

Watch ESPN most Sunday afternoons, or Google “ustream pool” for recent videocasts.

Wikipedia offers this extended grid of “confidence trick” topics:

[Advance fee fraud](#) · [Art student scam](#) · [Badger game](#) · [Bait-and-switch](#) · [Black money scam](#) · [Bogus escrow](#) · [Boiler room](#) · [Charity fraud](#) · [Clip joint](#) · [Coin rolling scams](#) · [Drop swindle](#) · [Embarrassing cheque](#) · [Employment scams](#) · [Fiddle game](#) · [Fine print](#) · [Foreclosure rescue scheme](#) · [Forex scam](#) · [Fortune telling fraud](#) · [Get-rich-quick scheme](#) · [Green goods scam](#) · [Hustling](#) · [Intellectual property scams](#) · [Kansas City Shuffle](#) · [Long firm](#) · [Miracle cars scam](#) · [Mock auction](#) · [Patent safe](#) · [Pig in a poke](#) · [Pigeon drop](#) · [Ponzi scheme](#) · [Pump and dump](#) · [Pyramid scheme](#) · [Reloading scam](#) · [Shell game](#) · [Slavery reparations scam](#) · [Spanish Prisoner](#) · [Strip search prank call scam](#) · [Swampland in Florida](#) · [Teaser rate](#) · [Telemarketing fraud](#) · [Thai gem scam](#) · [Thai tailor scam](#) · [Thai zig zag scam](#) · [Three-card Monte](#) · [Trojan horse](#) · [White van speaker scam](#) · [Work-at-home scheme](#)

Lastly, purchase my favorite pool book — Phil Capelle’s *A Mind For Pool*:

http://www.amazon.com/Mind-Pool-Master-Mental-Game/dp/0964920417/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1348794144&sr=8-1&keywords=a+mind+for+pool

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NOTES

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