

Cue Tips

Playing pool isn't all skill and knowledge! A big and often ignored part of the game is maintenance of your equipment. The place to start is your cue-stick, at the tip.

As you may have experienced, a miscue is a frustrating shot, particularly when it is caused by a badly maintained cue tip. I say "particularly" because with all the good products on the market to maintain your cue tip, there should be no excuse for a shiny, hard, unshaped cue tip today!

The advancements of these products over the years has been great. From the sandpaper attached to a curved piece of cardboard all the way to shapers and scuffers with gauges that let you measure the curvature of your tip. Several popular items on the market that are: the Brad Scuffer, Lou Butera's Tip Tapper, the Proper Tip Burnisher, the Cue Cube, and Willard's Cue Tip Shaper (disk with baked on grit that also contains gauge for judging curvature of tip).

So, why have these good products been introduced and so widely accepted? Well here's a little cue tip savvy to live by.

The reason tips need roughing up is because they are made of hard, compressed leather. The leather even becomes harder and smooth as glass after just 30 to 45 minutes of active play. If the tip is smooth it cannot hold chalk. Incidentally, when you do miscue, DON'T rub your thumb across the tip to figure out why! The oil from your skin will only make the tip more slippery.

In addition to keeping the tip surface scuffed for chalking, having it the proper shape is equally as important. A nickel or dime radius or somewhere between the two is recommended because these seem to be the shapes that "bite" into the cue ball the best, giving you the best results when using english, draw, or follow.

A too well rounded tip can slide off the ball and flat tips have a sharp edge. Flat tips also do not allow enough leather to contact the cue ball. In each case, less friction - resulting in more miscues.

Most professionals prefer a hard tip (Le Professional is one brand currently on the market). While hard tips must be roughed up more often, there is less "mushrooming" (cue tip spreading out over the ferrule) than in softer tips. However, I sometimes recommend a softer tip to beginners and amateurs (Elk Master is one brand of softer tip) because it won't need roughing up as often, and takes chalk well. As players become more experienced and develop the good habits of chalking often and learn how to properly rough and shape their cue tips, I would suggest they experiment with a harder tip. Of course, even some good players prefer a medium or somewhat softer tip.

If your tip does mushroom, fix it! Ideally, the tip should always be flush with the sides of the ferrule. Fixing it is easy with a little 220 sandpaper to bring it to size followed by 400-600 sandpaper to smooth the sides and "shine it up".

If your tip falls or pops off your cue, fix it - but with a new tip - throw the old one away.

The size of your tip is determined by the millimeter of your shaft. Common shaft sizes are between 12½ mm and 13½ mm. Some may be slightly bigger or smaller, but not by much and not very many. Many times, amateurs feel they have more control with a thin shaft and thus a small tip, but I don't recommend it. Amateurs think it feels better because it slides through their inexperienced bridge hand better, but in actuality, the thinner the shaft, the more opportunity for wobble between the bridge hand and the cue ball.

Keep your cue tips rough and ready until next month when we'll be discussing "Shafts, their care and maintenance" at the Coach's Corner.