

# **How to maintain your billiard or snooker table**

**Note:** This document refers to the care and maintenance of an English billiard or snooker full-size table commonly referred to as 12ft x 6 ft table. While it is generally suitable for the maintenance of pool or 8/9 ball tables it is not written for that purpose.

## **Contact with Table**

Leaning heavily, standing, sitting, bumping, or lifting the table will have a detrimental effect. Any pressure on the table's playing surface will put pressure on the joints between the slates. The slates are machined level, the joints between slates are very exact in the way they fit together, any pressure can crack or chip these joins. A damaged joint, or one that has moved, can be felt through the cloth and will not only effect the direction of a ball in play, but will also wear the cloth from underneath. A player should never sit on a table to make a shot, use the rests. Any adjustment, levelling or repairs should be performed by an experienced billiard table installer.

## **Food and Drink**

Billiard tables are a great source of entertainment. Drinks should be kept as far away from a table as possible. Spilt food and drink will stain a table's cloth. Soiled hands from finger food will transfer dust, crumbs and oils to the surface of the cloth or stain the cloth. Consumption of food of any sort is usually not allowed in billiard rooms.

## **Balls**

Clean the balls from time to time, they get dirty from frequent handling and with chalk that is ultimately transferred to the cloth. They can be wiped and polished with a clean towel, or washed with soap and water and dried thoroughly. There are also commercial products available designed for this purpose.

## **Wood**

A table's external wood parts should be treated just as any good quality piece of furniture. They are best cleaned with a dampened soft cloth followed by a soft dry cloth. A good furniture polish will bring up the woodwork on the legs and sides of the table. Take great care if you polish the rails as some polishes leave a residue that can be uncomfortable to the touch and may be transferred to the cloth.

## **The playing surface - Cloth Care**

Cleaning the cloth on your table is perhaps the most important and the most frequent task necessary to maintain your table's high performance. As billiard cloth is the most contacted and exposed part of your table, it often becomes the dirtiest. Keeping the cloth free of dust, chalk, and any other foreign material is important. Material left on billiard cloth is not only aesthetically unpleasing, it can also become distracting to a player during a shot or even affect the course of a ball in play and will cause the cloth to wear more quickly. A dirty table will become slower in pace and more difficult to play.

- 1. Table Covers** - A very simple method to assist in maintaining a clean cloth is by just keeping it covered when not in use. Vinyl, or cotton covers should be used to cover the table, they prevent dust from

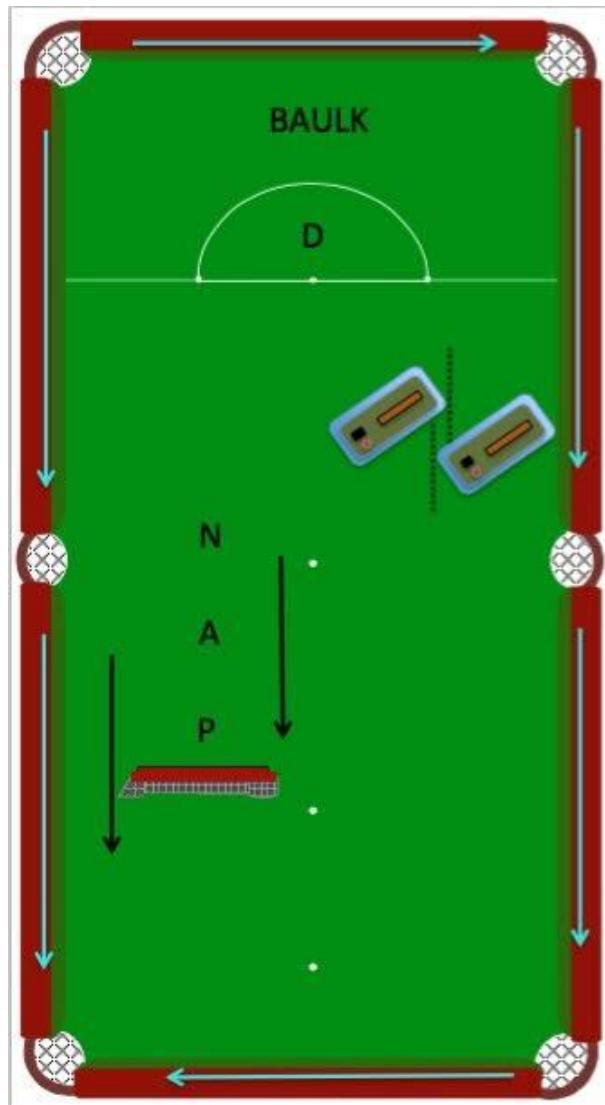
settling on the cloth. There are commercially made thicker vinyl waterproof covers that provide protection for the rails and the playing surface and allow a secondary use of the table top when not being used for play. Besides dust, sunlight is the next greatest enemy of billiard cloth. If at all possible, a table should not be placed in direct sunlight. Ultra violet radiation from the Sun will fade the cloth over time. Keep your table covered when not in use. Covers should be shaken outside to remove the dust from them on a regular basis

2. **Brushing** – It is recommended that the cloth area should be brushed prior to play. Before brushing, balls should be removed from the table to stop the dust settling on them if left in the pockets. Brushing your table cloth is the most recommended technique for cleaning billiard cloth, as it is the least invasive and manages to remove the majority of unwanted material. The type of brush used should be manufactured specifically for the purpose of cleaning a billiard table. These brushes are designed to brush dust and other matter along the table and then remove it from under the cushion and into the pockets. First brush the top and face of the cushions, always brushing in the direction of the nap. Brushing should be in one direction only, from the end of the table that has the “baulk” line or break line (ref diagram 1). Snooker cloth has what is called “nap”. Nap is a term used to denote the direction of a cloth’s weave and on a billiard table it points away from the “baulk” cushion. Use only as much pressure as required for all the bristles to make contact with the cloth, no more, no less. Lastly, with care, use the long bristles on one end of the brush to remove “dust bunnies” that can gather under the top cushion. Care should be taken that the timber of the brush does not come into contact with the cloth when using it in this way.
3. **Blocking or Padding** – This will straighten or pull the nap on the cloth in the correct direction, assisting in the removal of finger marks. After a table has been brushed it should be “blocked or padded” using a flat block covered in napped billiard table cloth. The block should be marked with an arrow to indicate the direction of the nap on the block. Once again, this should be done in the same direction as the table was brushed. Place the block against the cushion at the baulk end of the table with the arrow pointing towards the other end of the table, then drag it in a smooth manner to the other end of the table. Return to the baulk end and repeat until the whole playing surface has been blocked.
4. **Vacuuming** – Never! Vacuuming makes the nap on the cloth “stand up”, whereas you want it lying flat. If something has been split or broken on the cloth (e.g. a broken light fitting), remove all the largest pieces carefully (using gloves or tweezers if necessary). Then brush very gently.
5. **Ironing** - This is only recommended on “napped” cloth. It’s a great method for improving the playing surface, making the table play “faster” by flattening the nap. A table should only be ironed, after a good brushing and blocking. Only a special dry iron can be used, and should once more, be done in one direction only, from the end of the table that has the “baulk” line or break line (ref diagram 1).. Ironing should only be performed by an experienced individual, as a mistake can be quite costly.
6. **Spots, baulk line and “D”** – Spots should be replaced as soon as necessary to keep depressions from forming under the spots. The baulk line and “D” can be re-marked as often as necessary. You should use your own template or marking device to mark the “D” when the cloth first goes on, and keep it to use when remarking (there are subtle differences between some templates). Make sure that the pencil is not “needle point sharp” as it is possible to accidentally pierce the cloth.

## Summary

- Keep your table covered when not in use, in a club environment cover during closing hours
- Brush and pad the table before use. In a tournament environment, between matches, brush and pad, or, at least pad the table.
- Iron the table at least weekly. In a club environment where usage is consistent iron twice weekly. In a tournament environment at least daily, possibly twice daily
- Clean the rails weekly with a damp cloth followed by a soft dry cloth.

Diagram 1



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