

BD BOOK REVIEWS

A Shortstop On Straight Pool

Bob Keller and David K. Sheesley

2020

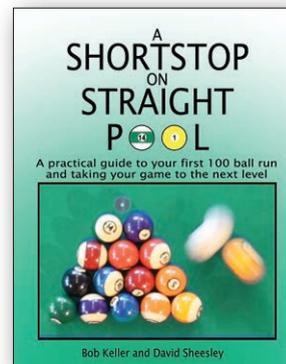
Reviewed by Nick Leider

POOl HASN'T changed much in the last 100 years. Sure, balls are made of space age plastic and cues made of stuff other than wood aren't just gimmicks. But all in all, running 100 balls in 1921 or 1951 or 1981 is roughly the same accomplishment as topping a century in 2021. This, depending on your outlook, is an asset or a liability.

Some argue that such consistency leads to complacency on the intellectual side. If you've ever been told, "Well, that's the way we've always done it," you understand the human tendency to think everything's been thunk before.

All this is to say it's easy to be skeptical when it comes to straight pool instructional material. The discipline is favored among some pool purists, though its popularity has waned. On top of that, unparalleled how-tos have been published by two of the sport's greatest writers, the late legends Bob Byrne ("Byrne's Standard Book of Pool and Billiards") and George Fels ("Mastering Pool").

"A Shortstop on Straight Pool," a nearly 300-page spiral-bound book by Bob Keller and David Sheesley, manages to make an argument that a new 14.1 instructional entry isn't just an exercise in rehashing what's already known. The two authors, both self-described shortstops, cover a lot of material that won't be new to dedicated straight-pool players. The drills, pattern plays and diagrams are clear and informative, but, again, such information can be found in previous books.



This book won't win any design awards, but the home-made cover belies its excellence in two areas. The first is in its incorporation of a multimedia approach to teaching straight pool. Like this magazine's technical master Dave Alciatore, Keller and Sheesley include more than 200 video clips to reinforce lessons in the book. It's one thing to read about a difficult break; it's another to watch an example.

"A Shortstop on Straight Pool" also succeeds in its approach to its reader. Unlike, say, the 1970s, when 14.1 might've been a player's first game when learning to play, straight pool is often a destination for today's players after learning the fundamentals in 8-ball leagues or through racks of 9-ball at the local poolroom. Knowing this, Keller and Sheesley ditch the sections on how to make a bridge or the keys to a solid stance. They write to a reader who is looking to run 100, which makes the material accessible to those who may only be able to run half a rack but understand more than absolute beginners.

Like with many new instructional efforts, this book isn't going to sell 30,000 copies. It's not the best present for your nephew or niece who just got a table in the basement. But for dedicated players, whether they can run eight balls or 80, it's a nice addition to a shelf already filled with instructional books from the past few decades.

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