



Stags' Leap

EL OCHO / EIGHT BALL

Our hero is the white orb, and it is in shadows cast by delicate cigar smoke and crafty gossip that our hero is abused. Each mind is directed toward this vision of purity, yet it sinks, without complaint, at the quiver of a forearm.

Players: Equal teams of 1 or 2 per team

Equipment: Pool table; cue sticks; 16 billiard balls, including 1 white cue ball, the solid black 8-ball, and 15 object balls, numbered 1 through 7 (striped) and 9 through 15 (solid)

Object: Player or team pockets their group of balls first, either stripes or solids, and then legally pockets the 8-ball

Historical: The cue stick was originally the “queue stick,” or tail end of the mace used in croquet. The green of the felt comes from its origin in the croquet lawn.

Recommended Wine Pairing: According to one resident aficionado, you’re not going to drink white wine down in the billiards room, whether or not it was once the official post office for the property. Billiards is an after-dinner game, and it is recommended that players have a glass of Stags’ Leap Winery Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon in hand.

Beneath the tasting terrace on the main floor of the Manor House lies the cavelike billiards room, complete with humidors and cabinets holding alembic distillations. Games proceed into the early morning hours on many an evening. A sport that goes so well with fine cigars and spirits is played with authority on this estate by winemakers, enologists, travelers, food



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writers, botanists, poets, and vineyard workers. On any particular evening, the language of the game can shift between English, French, German, and Spanish, but whether the game was originally learned in Berlin or Mexico City, the rules are universal. The stance one takes while holding the pool cue in one hand and a glass of wine in the other is a friendly handicap that honors keen competition among acquaintances old and new.

Shooting: The cue stick's tip is used to hit the cue ball, which then hits the object balls. Object balls can either go into a pocket directly or be knocked in by other balls in motion. **Bank Shot:** The cue ball strikes a ball, driving it to a side cushion, where it rebounds before continuing on. **Combination Shot:** The cue ball hits a ball other than the one intended to be pocketed, which then hits one or more balls. The eight-ball cannot be used as the first ball in a combination shot.

Calling Shots: Eight-ball is a call-shot game; each player or team must pocket a group of balls, either the solid or striped, calling out which ball and pocket he is targeting before his shot if the shot is not obvious. Most games proceed with no shots being called, except the last sinking of the eight-ball. Bank and combination shots are not considered obvious, but are called only in more formal games. The opening break is not a called shot.

Play: To start, all balls except the cue ball are racked in the triangle at the foot of the table. Option to break first is decided by coin toss, or lag shot. For each subsequent game, winner of the previous game breaks.

To break, a player places the cue ball behind the head string, the line a quarter of the way from the head of the table, and shoots to break up the racked balls. The break is legal if the player either pockets a ball or drives at least four numbered balls to the rail. The player continues to shoot as long as any object ball has been legally pocketed on the break. Players



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and observers do not stand behind the foot of the table at the break, because it is the most forceful shot and the most likely time for balls to come of the table. It is also considered discourteous to stand behind the shooter. Some games are solemn, with little conversation or distraction; other games are boisterous and full of friendly jokes and teasing. But in all games, respect for fellow players predominates.

The table is considered open after the break shot (choice of groups, either stripes or solids, has not yet been determined) and remains so until a player has pocketed an object ball and determined his group of balls.

A shot is legal (aside from the break and when the table is open) when the shooter makes contact with one of the balls from her group. A player continues shooting until she fails to legally pocket a ball from her group. After a player has legally pocketed all of her balls, she shoots to pocket the eight-ball. If she misses her shot with the eight-ball, the scratch, or foul, is not considered a forfeit of the game; the incoming player takes the cue ball in hand behind the head string.

Endgame: When the last game has wound down, players can anticipate a stroll in the starlight back toward their cottages. This is where skill at spinning tales aloud in the theater of the night is best rewarded, perhaps down at the Power Spot, on the bench overlooking the Cabernet vineyards, a place where you might even feel a visitation from the spirit of the property in the form of a coyote's lament or an owl's abrupt hunting light.

Fouls: If there has been a foul, or illegal shot, the shooter loses his turn. The opposing team gets the cue ball in hand (with the ability to place the ball anywhere) behind the head string, and may not shoot any ball located behind the head string, except indirectly (via a bank or combination shot). Illegally pocketed balls are: those that go into a pocket on the same shot a foul is committed; called balls that do not go into the designated pocket; or if a safety (the



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shooter acknowledges she won't be sinking a ball prior to shooting) is called prior to the shot. Any balls other than the cue ball and 8-ball that are pocketed incorrectly, or on a foul, remain pocketed.

A Foul Occurs When:

The cue ball is pocketed (also called a scratch) on the break shot; all other balls that may have gone in on the shot remain pocketed

A scratch occurs on any shot

Cue or object balls land off the table; jumped balls are respotted at the foot spot

The break is not legal; incoming player can accept the table in position and shoot, or rerack and rebreak

The 8-ball is hit first when the table is open; no stripe or solid is scored in favor of the shooter

Loss of Game Occurs When:

There is a scratch on the break and the 8-ball is pocketed

The 8-ball lands off the table

The 8-ball is pocketed in a different pocket than the one called

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