

# ALBERT JOHNSON

## THE ART OF NURSERY CANNONS

*This is a copy of three articles written by Albert Johnson, for Billiards & Snooker magazine for the March, April and June 1970 editions.*

### MARCH 1970

Poetry has come back into billiards! The proposed easing of the consecutive cannon restriction makes wonderful news. It will undoubtedly encourage many players to develop skill at what was fast becoming a lost art. But don't count your 150 points too soon! The close cannon run is notoriously elusive. But since it is once again remunerative let's try to master it.

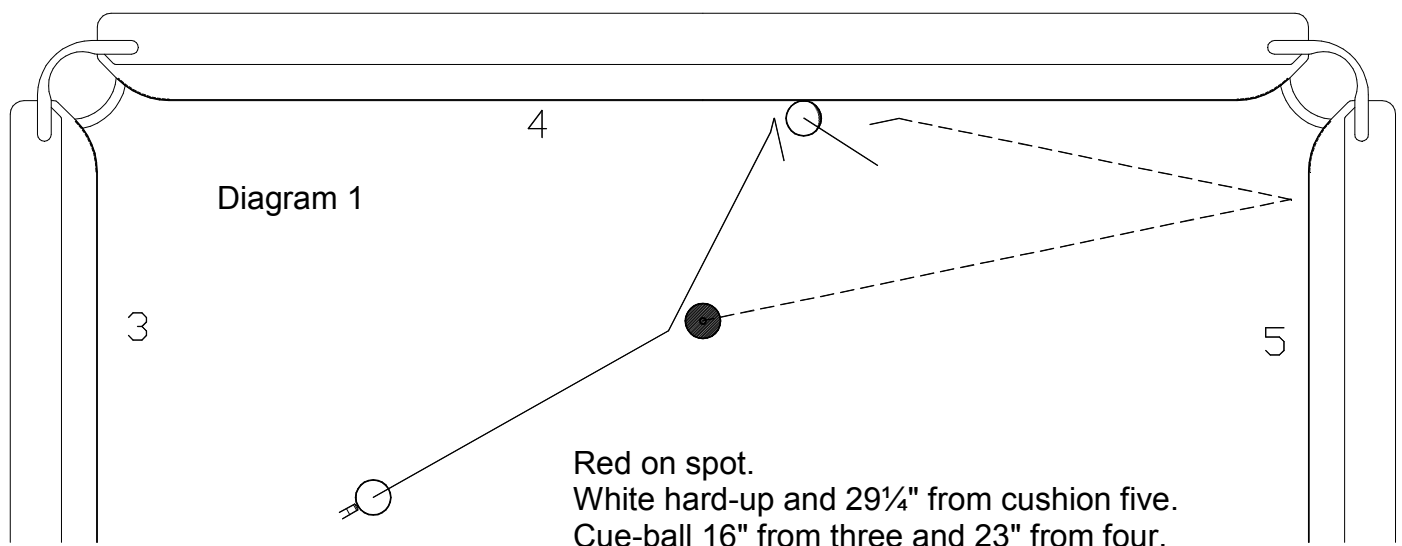
A few general observations first. You'll need access to a good table of moderate pace. The cloth should not be superfine nor should it be coarse and slow. An advantage of the cannon game is at given enough sets of balls four players can practise on one table. The balls, by the way, should be responsive. If in doubt, buy your own set.

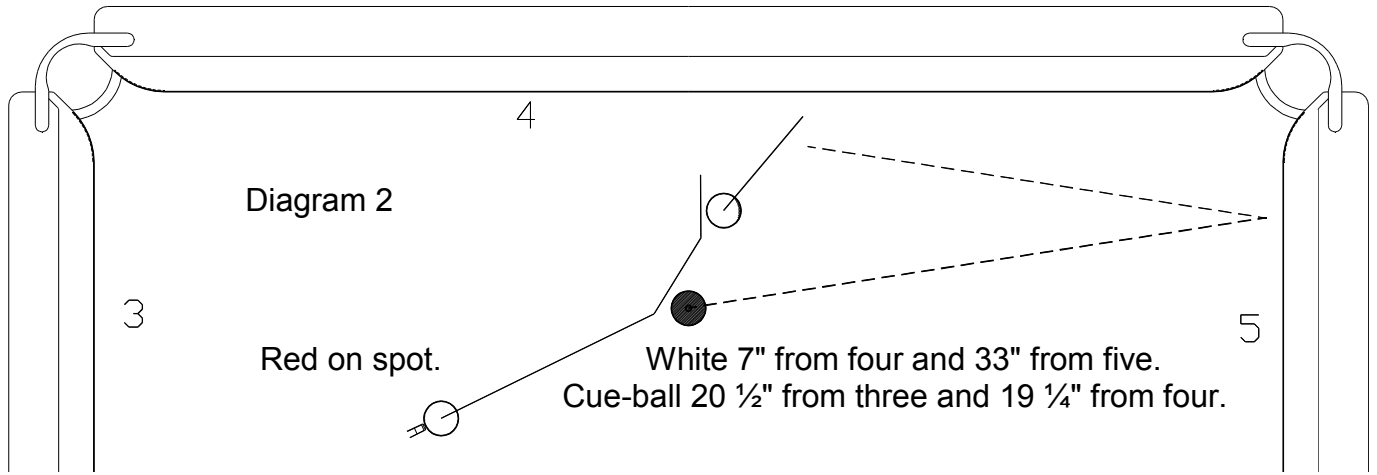
A cue of your own is a must. If it stands higher than your chin it is too long. Finally, observe the rules. Resolve from the outset to start again after a push or cue-ball touch.

Let's go to the table. No, that stance won't do at all! The stretched-out chin-on-cue style is no good for nurseries. The expert stands almost upright, holding the cue eighteen inches or more from the end and using a short, loop (boucle') bridge.

This bridge prevents the cue tipping backwards so don't feel obliged to hold it behind the point of balance.

On the principle that you must first catch your hare, we'll start with two key gathering shots. Measurements (ball centres) are given to ensure accurate translation to the table by means of tailor's chalk. Cushions are numbered clockwise from baulk.





Neither shot should require side, and the desired result, the 'ideal position' shown in Diagram 3, is the same in each case. Each shot is something of a run-through, the first shot entailing a quarter-ball contact on the object white to displace it from the cushion to leave room for the returning red. Too thick a contact with the white will give a 'cover', the ever present trap for the close-cannon player.

The 'loose-white' position shown in Diagram 2 is a classical route to close cannons and is altered fundamentally by even slight changes in the lie of either cue-ball or object white. The subtle variations on this theme will be dealt with in a later article. Meanwhile practise the shot as shown and divert yourself with a little experimentation.

The 'ideal' cannon shown in Diagram 3, if really ideal, would be played half-ball off the inside object ball without side, and if given perfect treatment would leave a precisely similar cannon for the next shot and so on. Actually, the position will rarely be so uncomplicated. Side will often be necessary, or a thicker or thinner contact on the inside ball; sometimes both side and altered contact together. Often, too, a delicate screw will be called for. But though relatively few 'ideal' cannons may occur in a run, the position is always in the player's mind as the sought-after goal, the basic nursery cannon position.

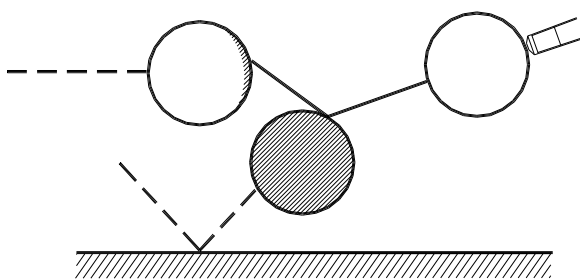


Diagram 3

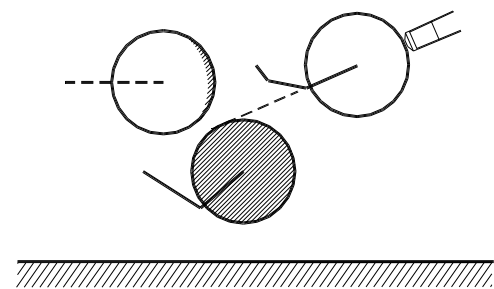


Diagram 3B

Imagine two lines parallel to the top cushion, one an inch and three-quarters from it, the other three and a half inches. The inside object ball returns from the cushion to resume a position in the inside line some two inches further on. The outside ball moves straight along the outside line for an equal distance. Often the inside ball gently kisses its neighbour. The cue-ball comes to rest on much the same line as the outside object ball. Hard to achieve? You are learning a new art, which is always as troublesome as it is fascinating. More next month.

*I hav added Diagram 3B which i think shows more accurately the specifications mentioned by Alby. Also, in fact, the exact dimensions mentioned by Alby don't quite work. Perhaps hiz "half-ball" is outish or perhaps the 2" per cannon is outish. No big deal.*

# APRIL 1970

Even in the hands of a master the nursery cannon run rarely becomes repetitive. The balls seem to have a mind of their own and are reluctant to be shepherded for long into the ideal half-ball position shown in Diagram 1. However this is the position you will constantly be trying to capture and repeat or to recapture when lost.

Diagram 1

Try the stroke now. No, don't play it timidly. The cue-ball is not a little land mine, likely to explode. The term 'delicacy of touch' certainly does not imply half-hearted apprehensive play that barely makes the balls move. It denotes the ability to produce freely-played decisive strokes that keep the cue-ball two or more inches from the nearest object ball. Play the shot again. Good boy! - or, perhaps, good girl! - for i am hopeful that the delicacy and refinement of close cannon play will improve attractive to women. Once again, A little too

forceful, this time. You've left the position (a) shown in Diagram 2. A good shot will restore the position.

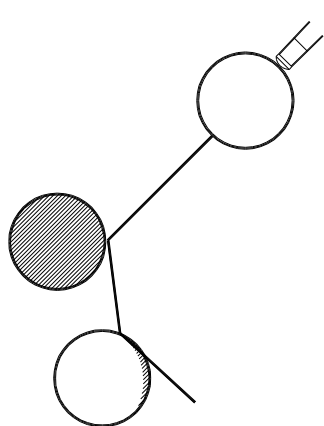
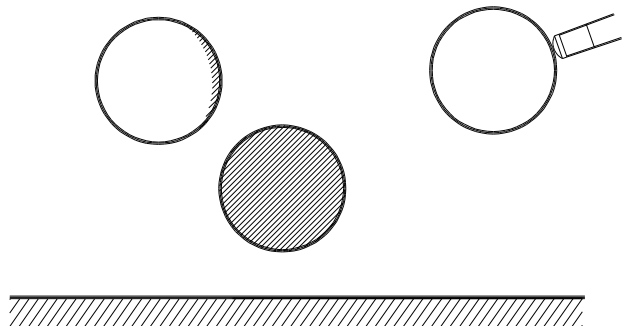


Diagram 2(a)

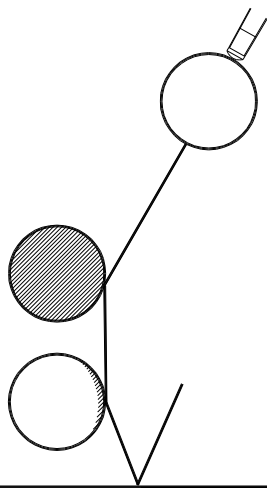


Diagram 2(b)

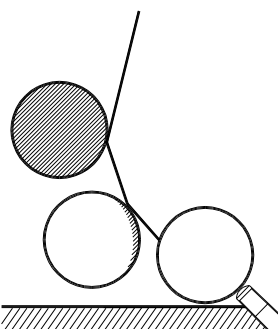


Diagram 2(c)

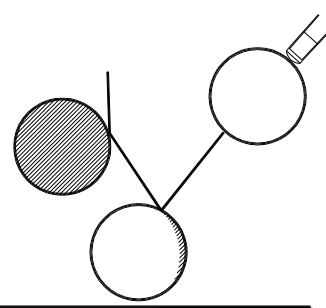


Diagram 2(d)

This stroke and the others shown in Diagram 2 will present themselves frequently, try as you might to be a perfectionist, so make up your mind here and now to master them.

**Stroke (a)** as the balls lie, is a centre-ball stroke. Use side only if the angle is narrow (right-hand side) or wide (left-hand side).

**Stroke (b)** is a fine shot played across the object balls. Use left-hand side to turn the cue-ball backwards from the cushion. This shot too, can result in the ideal position.

**Stroke (c)** is another fine shot. Play it without side.

**Stroke (d)** is a kiss shot much used by the expert. Use no side for the position shown. If the inside ball lies closer to the outside ball a little right-hand side will return it to its proper relative position. If it is lagging behind left-hand side is indicated.

It follows that the use of side to control the movement of the inside object is a most important feature of the close cannon game. We'll study it in detail next month - also the crossing of the pocket openings.

# JUNE 1970

Yes, i know! Stroke (d) in my last article, the little kiss cannon, has turned out a real teaser.

I'll admit i was a bit tongue-in-cheek about this shot, the idea being to make you FIND OUT BY DOING. To acquire any skill one has to make a million errors. You are now well on the way!

Let's examine this important position in more detail. As shown in Diagram 1 the stroke requires no side or screw.

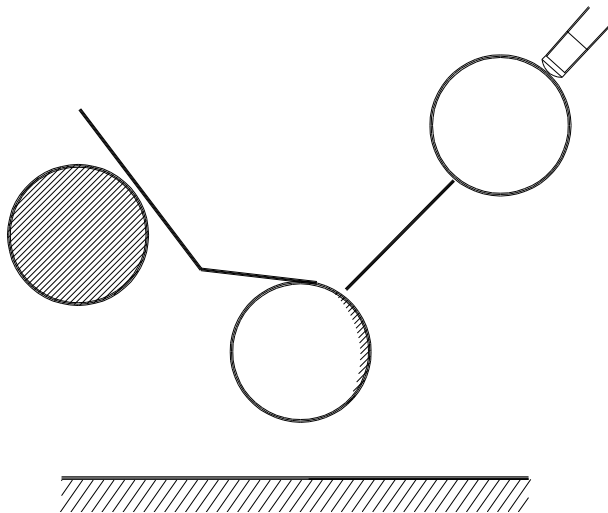


Diagram 1

The white ball is sent to the cushion with a fullish shot and rebounds to kiss the cue-ball BEFORE the latter makes the cannon. The kiss occurs where the cue-ball's change of direction is shown.

With the white closer to the red the kiss will occur AFTER the cannon. This is almost always the case when the three balls lie farther from the cushion, screw now being necessary to hold the cue-ball for the kiss.

We touched on the use of side in the last article. Its most important function is to control the inside object ball --- to move it along with left-hand side, to hold it back with right-hand side. (I assume you are a right-hander, playing with the balls disposed as in the diagrams).

These side effects are best seen when the inside ball is hard-up. Play at this single ball with your cue-ball straight out from it. Without side the cue-ball will come straight back to you, leaving the object ball unmoved.

Watch the object ball when side is used. It turns one way or the other along the cushion.

Transmission of side, then, is a fact --- WHEN THE OBJECT BALL IS SANDWICHED. Not otherwise. But this limited application of it is of the utmost importance in close-cannon work.

## How to Cross the Pocket Openings

The 75-cannon rule will usually limit the cannon run to two cushions, which means that the middle pocket will rarely be crossed. Just as well, for this is a feast for the master.

Diagram 2

The balls are steered quite close to the pocket to the position shown in Diagram 2.

The white is then struck first to leave the stroke shown in Dia 3.

Diagram 3

The red is now played on to the near jaw.

Diagram 4

The corner crossing, fortunately, is much easier. The cannons are opened up somewhat to leave the position in Diagram 4. As shown, this stroke requires no side or screw.

Of course it has a great many variants, but I'll leave you to discover them for yourself - and how to play them. The emphasis, once again, is on CREATIVE PRACTICE.

[ END OF COPY OF ALBY'S ARTICLES ]

## NURSERY CANNONS

Albert Johnson, B.Sc., Dip.Ed., NSW Australia

*May I add a voice from Australia to the gathering opposition to the present nursery cannon restriction? The most usual place for a run of cannons to start is near the top-cushion about halfway between the spot and the corner pocket. For a player proficient enough to turn the corner, '30 cannons' will be called when the balls are in a no-man's land somewhere along the side cushion.*

*Instead of being able to continue the run on to the middle-pocket, there to end it logically and artistically, the unfortunate player must perforce destroy it in its prime (along with the fascination of the audience) in the desperate hope of leaving a pot or in-off 'on' in the middle pocket.*

*As often as not, this enforced act of billiardistic vandalism ends both run and break and the frustrated player is finally compelled to ask himself if nursery cannons are worth the candle, much less the midnight oil, the more so when he adds to the debit side the factors involved in securing the position in the first place -- the abandonment, usually, of a good position at the top of the table, the risk of a break-ending cover.*

*All this, note, for the player already well equipped with the necessary consummate skill. If, even for him, nursery cannons are of doubtful value in compiling points and winning games, what of the nursery cannon player in embryo? Obviously he will either be stillborn or will emerge from the billiards nursery with no notions of nurseries, his game distinctly less hazardous though replete with hazards!*

*In short, the 35 cannon limit, if allowed to stand, must inevitably become the obituary notice of fine billiards.*

*I appeal to the Council to take very seriously the opinions of Rex Williams, Frank Holz, J P Jackson, Reg Wright and Victoria McDougall as expressed in recent issues of 'Billiards and Snooker'. These people, like myself, are devout lovers of Billiards, the 'game beautiful', but they are only a vocal few.*

*I doubt if anywhere there is a complete player of English billiards who would not wish the wonderful artistry of the game fully restored. Who, on the other hand, would be outraged by an increase from 35 to 50 in the permissible number of cannons?*

### July 1969 **McCONACHY ACCEPTS CHALLENGE.**

*Clark McConachy, World Professional Billiards championship from 1950-68, has accepted Albert Johnson's challenge for his Australasian title.*

*Johnson played many games against McConachy in Queensland in 1934, the season McConachy made a break of 1,927 under the baulk line rule in Brisbane, but has played only sporadically for the last thirty years until just over a year ago. Since then, Johnson has made over fifty breaks over 500, including one of 957. Johnson, who was billed as the Australian Boy Wonder in his youth, is a nursery cannon expert but does not "find them a great scoring force under the present rules". (See Johnson's contribution to Readers Letters, May issue).*

*Johnson, a university lecturer, is particularly interested in promoting Billiards in the universities and Inter-Varsity Championship is on the cards for the near future.*

*Articles have appeared sporadically in Billiards and Snooker expressing the desire that the restrictions on runs of consecutive cannons be lifted.*

*A great deal of interest in this art made famous by Claude Falkiner, Tom Newman, Clark McConachy & the great Walter Lindrum, has been shown of late by a large number of people in Sydney.*

*Everyone that we have spoken to concerning nursery cannons has expressed the opinion that the restrictions now in force are unreasonable & undesirable. We all agree that the restrictions, in reducing the size of breaks, have greatly reduced the game's spectator appeal. Although we must agree that there is, today, no one of Walter Lindrum's calibre there are a great many players whose breaks would be substantially larger if the rules of the Golden Age of Billiards were still in force today.*

*The rules therefore seem to be at fault as one cannot expect the same order of breaks now as in the past, & moreover the game has undoubtedly lost some of its great artistry. Spectators, a large number of whom had only heard of, & never seen nursery cannons, sat spellbound when they saw them played by Albert Johnson at recent exhibitions.*

*If, as it appears, nursery cannons were restricted partly because they were boring, we fail to understand how so many people could be enthralled for an hour by nursery cannon play. On the other hand, why is it alleged that top of the table play is not boring? Top-of-the-table play is indeed a most interesting part of the game of Billiards, but, we do feel that nursery cannon play is more beautiful & immeasurably more difficult to play. Why then should either of these most attractive parts of the game be restricted in any way?*

*With the lifting of any limits on close cannons we feel that the game will become more varied. Larger breaks or portions thereof will then be obtained within a very short time as a run of 100 cannons can take as little as two minutes. The game will then become very much faster whilst allowing greater scores by players capable of obtaining them, thus satisfying the public.*

*This public **Does** want to see another Walter Lindrum but never will while the present restrictions on cannons remain in force. Congratulations on your excellent publication: may your coaching classes & Billiards Foundation prosper..*

Nov 69

## NURSERY RHYMES ..... by Albert Johnson

To his audience rapt and adoring,  
The player said, "Cannons are boring".  
But though he was able,  
At top-of-the-table,  
He soon had the onlookers snoring.

\*\*\*\*\*

Little Jack Horner stopped at the corner,  
Chalking a frustrated cue;  
"A close-cannon run," muttered Jack, "isn't fun"  
"When the limit is set at so few."

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## COPY OF ARTICLE IN BILLIARDS & SNOOKER JAN 1971

*Albert Johnson, B.Sc., Dip.Ed. Age 54, Inventor and Professional Billiards Player.*

*Commenced billiards at age 12. Break of 180 at age 14. Practised five hours daily for three years and toured professionally at age 17. At age 18 made a break of 191 in a match of 750 up to defeat Jack Lynch, the Queensland Professional Champion at the Irish Club in Brisbane in the presence of the Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson.*

*At age 20 gave up billiards and worked for his father, in spare time learning to play the piano. From age 28 to 34 a dance band leader. Resumed school studies and gained matriculation. Enrolled in Faculty of Medicine at Sydney University, supporting himself by piano playing. Passed first and second year examinations and married a medical student. Ran out of money, invented some household appliances and he and his wife sold these door to door. After six years during which time he also wrote short stories, enough money was saved up for both to go back to University. Both graduated B.Sc. Albert, in addition, gained a Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.). He was then age 44. Mrs Johnson went school teaching while Albert pursued his inventions which have developed into a full time business and now provide an assured regular income. Hence back to Billiards.*

*Two years ago, bought a table and commenced practising several hours daily. Since then has made a break of 1064 and five between 900 and 1000. Altogether more than 100 breaks of 500 or more. He has made 799 at top of the table without an in-off; a run of 357 nursery cannons taking the balls past both middle pockets; 516 off the red ball alone; 280 consecutive pots off the spot and 654 off postman's knock.*

*His greatest achievement!!!! the arrival of their first child - a son, Roderick, three months ago.*

*Incidentally, Albert Johnson in his youth was known as the "boy wonder of billiards".*

## COPY OF ARTICLE IN SNOOKER SCENE MARCH 1973

DRIFFIELD LANDSLIDE

BY MURT O'DONOGHUE

*Leslie Driffield had a one-sided 9,204 (33.3) - 4,696 (17.0) victory over Albert Johnson in his defence of the World Professional Billiards Championship (B&SCC version) at the Penrith Leagues Club, Sydney, a grand venue for such an important event. (some other comments).*

- the highlight was a 316 by Johnson in which he had two runs of 75 nursery cannons.*
- It was a great pity that Johnson's nervous tension prevents him reproducing his brilliant practice form in matches.*
- He is definitely the world's best nursery cannon player and however nervous he is will invariably take the 75 limit when he gets them on.*
- But away from nurseries his technique is woeful as he completely neglects top of the table in his haste to get nursery cannon position.*



.....Would you say our chaps are getting better? Of course you would not. The reason is rather simple. The competitive cannon player's come out of proper billiards clubs. The players here come out of boozing clubs with a couple of tables thrown in.

.....Incidentally, would you tell Mr Murt O'Donaghue that the world is a much too large a place to call Albert Johnson the world's best nursery cannon player by virtue of 2 runs of 75 cannons in about 8 hrs. at the table.

These journalistic exaggerations!

G. F. Gazdag, Bradford.

## JOHNSON DEFEATS SQUIRE BY 3,046 POINTS

by Dr Andrew Lian, Billiards and Snooker, Nov 1971

The Penrith Rugby League Club showed great initiative & far-sightedness in sponsoring the Australasian professional billiards championship ..... The match attracted packed houses to most sessions..... They saw Albert Johnson defeat Norman Squire, the title-holder, by 7440 points to 4394.....

.....His win was acclaimed by one of Sydney's leading sporting papers as "one of the greatest sporting comebacks of all time", as 56-year old Johnson had not played competitively for some 38 years. Much had been made of his long competitive retirement & it was widely made of his long competitive retirement & it was widely believed that he could not bear the pressure of a big match. It has also been commonly stated that Johnson, a nursery cannon expert would not secure close cannon position in an important match. It took him only one session to scotch both those rumours.....

.....In the fifth session, he made a break of 370. It included three runs of nursery cannons in which every phase of cannon play was demonstrated to its fullest. Such maestria has not been seen since the days of Walter Lindrum. Johnson's top-of-the-table was excellent & his all-round game faultless; he only missed three long-losers in the whole of the match.....

Day 1 ..... Johnson made a break of 183. It included a magnificent run of nursery cannons.....The balls were taken from the top pocket to the side-pocket. The run was all the more praiseworthy as Johnson engineered nursery cannon position from a seemingly impossible lie of the balls. In the evening session, Squire made steady inroads into Johnson's lead, until the latter responded with 94 & 166 (which included a further run of cannons).

Day 3..... Then it happened ! Suddenly finding superlative touch, Johnson compiled a break of 370 in 17 minutes..... The 370 break was a gem of control & nursery cannon play. It contained three runs of cannons, & Johnson was called twice at 70 cannons. He continued one of these runs to the 75 limit. For his first run, Johnson gathered the cannons from a top-of-the-table position & took the ball round the top right-hand pocket to the middle-pocket. For his second run, he again gathered the balls from top-of-the-table & took them up to the right-hand corner pocket. He then played the c-b directly onto the side-cushion to secure nursery cannon position, again on the top-cushion, but facing the l-h pocket this time. Johnson coaxed the balls past the spot, opened them up, went through them, & worked them into the cushion once more. He then took them to the right-hand corner-pocket where he turned the corner only to be called for 70 cannons. Unperturbed, he played 5 more cannons to split the balls, leaving perfect position over both side-

pockets. After some all-round play, Johnson acquired nursery cannon position once again & played them until a cover cruelly ended his break. Johnson displayed the full potential of nursery cannon play & had the audience thrilled with his exquisite control.

Day 5.....So far, Johnson had not made a run of cannons when, about 7 minutes from the end of the session, he was told that a gentleman had travelled 400 miles from Cowra to see close cannons. At his next visit, Johnson obligingly played out time with 150, which included a run of about 40 cannons.

Day 6.....With one minute to go, Johnson had obtained nursery cannon position & scored 61 points. He asked for the time &, when told, started playing at a pace seldom seen in order to record a century. With the referee running around the table at top speed, the new Australasian champion came home with a flourish, making 101 just as the bell rang. This was a fitting climax to a great match.

One old-time expert (Murt ???) who had seen all the greats was heard to murmur that he had only seen such touch in Walter Lindrum.

## BILLIARDS IS AN ART

By Coach

Billiards & Snooker Jan 1937

*If billiard playing is accepted amongst us as an art we must all try to probe as deeply as we can into that fascinating aspect of the game which causes us to place it so high in our estimation. This requires both head & heart -- the brain to discern, & the heart to understand.*

*Then we must give service to attain a satisfactory degree of perfection in the practical side of the game.*

*The study of billiards as an art is not practised nearly enough by amateur players. The game is merely cues & balls, pockets & cushions to all but the observant few. We might as well say that music is just striking notes on an instrument, that painting is a series of brush marks & colours, or that poetry is mere words. I know there are unfortunate individuals who can see no more than that in any art. I am genuinely sorry for them, because they miss such a lot.*

*It is not what you do, but how & why. That indicates what a large percentage of players miss in their billiards. They score a stroke, maybe a good one, but they lack vision, & employ a mechanical sort of guide rather than the high, instinctive perception which comes to the man who has studied billiards as an art.*

*This study is not altogether a gift. It is as responsive to application & training as any other human acquirement. The fact that it lies dormant in so many players is mainly their own fault. If they strive to make billiards as beautiful as they can they will put themselves on the road to knowledge.*

*Do not doubt that this study will repay you. Experience has already proved that time & again. We all remember when close cannons were considered most delicate & artistic, but not at all effective in keen competitive play. Now this opinion is entirely altered because a deeper understanding of these beautiful strokes has revealed a match-winning force of supreme importance.*

*Before this, top-of-the-table play was considered by many amateurs to be a kind of fancy development, not to be relied upon in the compilation of big breaks. Their great standby was the all red route, which proved itself effective only up to a certain point. Quicker scoring methods have since established themselves in the first place of the art.....*