

THE RULES OF SAVILE SNOOKER

AS COMPILED BY STEPHEN POTTER
New edition, annotated, 2005

With sample rules for the Annual Savile Snooker
Competition, and general rules as to balls, cue cases
etc., added 2008

“A line and a rule guide many a fool”

Norfolk proverb

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Savile Snooker

In 1968, the “Oldest Regular Player”, the author and BBC producer Stephen Potter, assembled, wrote down and annotated the “rules” of the variation on the game of snooker, a unique version of volunteer snooker, which had been played in the club since at least the 1900s. “Savile” is an informal game, noisy, irreverent, and fun, played on the Club's 1840s billiard table. There is always a cue and a welcome for new members. Older, more experienced, players expect to lose to the young until they, too, succumb to the conviviality and conversation, the latter seldom about the game, and swinging erratically from the erudition of a senior common room to the sort of commentary one might get from Smithfield bummarees should a fat man in a topper, tails, and patent leather shoes pick his way carefully across the market through a labyrinth of discarded tripe.

Stephen Potter is less remembered now for his innovative BBC radio programmes as for his seminal works “Gamesmanship” and “Oneupmanship”, both thought to be inspired by the billiard room and this game.

Badly-authenticated reports have reached us that Robert Louis Stevenson took the game with him to Samoa, and Howard (Tutankhamun) Carter to Egypt: I introduced it to Kathmandu on the slightly warped small table in the British Embassy club, and was soundly beaten in three out of three frames by a distinguished Nepali poet, and two out of three by a man in the British Council, neither of whom had played before. Our standards are not high.

So, enjoy your game. We hope this little book will help restrain the wilder flights of interpretative fancy. After all, snooker is no mere pastime, but Officially a Sport. Isn't it? .

John Turtle
Chairman of Billiards
2005

3. Walkover

If a match has not been played by the last hour of the last day for that round a walkover may be claimed by the player who has not been challenged or whose challenge has not or could not be accepted. Where neither party has apparently made an attempt to play the match by the day after the last day for that round, the Billiards Committee may impose a walkover on both players.

4. Commencement

The handicaps and draw for the first (and second where appropriate) rounds will be posted on and the Tournament will commence on

5. Disputes

Where there is any dispute about these Rules or the published Rules of Savile Snooker any member of the Billiards Committee may be appealed to. A further and final appeal may be made to the full Billiards Committee subject to an Appeal Fee of three bottles of Club claret.

6. Final

The Final and Snooker Dinner will be held towards the end of

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Snooker and billiard balls, cue cases, etc.

1. A member (or reciprocal member) must be the host and present at all times when a guest is playing.

2. A full boxed set of snooker balls, a set of billiard balls and a set of ivory billiard balls are available. They should be collected from and returned to the bar to prevent loss.

3. Locked and unmarked cue cases, or those marked with the name of a deceased or resigned member may be opened and made available to another member.

The rules of Savile snooker, as compiled by the "Oldest Regular Player", Stephen Potter, in 1968.

With notes on their interpretation 2005.

The rules of Savile Snooker have never been written down. They represent the accumulation of civilised custom and word-of-mouth agreement. These suggestions, made by Oldest Regular Player (sic), are, it must be remembered, a first rough attempt only, although I have had the advantage of help and criticism.

Note: It is believed the Savile game has been played at the Club since before 1900, though in Stephen Potter's time there were many members who also played billiards. The senior game is still played fairly regularly, but regular snooker has been almost wholly displaced by Savile.

1. Value and placing of balls

Savile Snooker is basically "volunteer", i.e. a colour may be attempted without first potting a red; but if no red is potted and the ball is missed, the value of the ball goes to the opponent. *Note: In the three-handed game the practice has developed of NOT giving the value to the opponents. Instead all start at +50, and the player making this or any other foul loses the points.*

The game is played with the normal number of reds. The spots for black, pink and blue are the ordinary snooker spots and the value - 7, 6 and 5 respectively are the same as the snooker values. But here the similarity ends; for the yellow and green are not used and the brown is put on a spot peculiar to this game - a point at the bottom of the table corresponding to the black spot at the top. The value of this Savile brown is not 4, as in other snooker games, but 8.

2. When and when not to volunteer.

In the Savile game each player must at the start of the match hit a red. Once he has made contact with a red, he may volunteer whenever he wishes. *Note: The player does not have to sink a red. The slightest touch will do.*

But remember:

(a) Although a red in baulk can be struck "from hand" - i.e. from the D, no colour lying in baulk can be volunteered from hand.

(b) After three successive pots, from its spot, of the same colour, for the next shot the ball "stays down". And for this next shot, "any ball free", e.g. no penalty for a missed colour. Ball is then replaced. Penalty for failure to replace: nil. ("Fault of Marker")

3. Last Stages of the Game

When a player pots the last red, any colour is free to him. If he chooses to pot the blue, the blue comes up once more ("blue immediately succeeding the last red" rule). But for the next shot in this same break, only the blue is free.

When the four colours only are left, blue is the "free" ball, but the other colours may still be volunteered. When the blue is gone, pink is free, then black, then only brown will remain, and if the difference between the players is more than 8 points the game is over. ("One shot each at the brown", with farthing points involved, is a slightly tedious custom but not a rule). *Note: This custom has long since died out, as has the custom of playing for money, however trivial the sum. This may have had something to do with the disappearance of the farthing. The extraordinary sums in used notes that used to change hands in the billiard room of the old Eccentric Club was a source of wonder to Savilians, who still recall the phenomenon with the enthusiasm of a third former describing the more louche habits of a cage of monkeys.*

"All on the brown". If during the crucial moment the brown is missed, the game is over (penalty 8 points).

"Avoiding a draw".

If, after the last colour has been potted, the game is level, the brown is placed on the black spot and the white is played from hand. (This procedure is usually confined to competitions).

If point difference is more than 50, loser for the table plus one penny for every point over 50.

The Three Ball Game

There are a few rules which are or should be peculiar to this excellent threesome game, all against all:

Note: Rules 1 and 2 are now in apparent abeyance.

1. Handicap difference should not be doubled, as in singles, but increased by one third.
2. Half-way through the game, the order of play should be reversed.
3. If a player leaves a complete snooker, he should be the sole beneficiary of any miss or foul which follows.

This ends the Rules of Savile Snooker. Their status is as always: in draft, for comment and discussion. There is no deadline.

Sample Rules of the Annual Savile Snooker Handicap Tournament , 2007 draft

1. Challenge

It is for the first named player to challenge the second, and to agree a date and time for the match.

2. Matches

Each match except the Final will consist of one frame only. Savile Rules will apply. The Final will consist of three frames.

(c) It is not considered a decent act or necessary evidence of sportsmanship if, in normal circumstances, a player overlooks a foul by his opponent.

Safety Play

No kind of stigma attaches to safety play - a special art of this game. For various reasons, unless on a very "dangerous" table, no other safety shot is possible, it is not considered good Savile play to put the white repeatedly in the middle of the reds.

Slow Play

One or two attempts have been made over the past 10 years (*Note: at the time Stephen Potter compiled the document*) to legislate against a modern tendency to quite unreasonably slow play. "Not more than 45 minutes for a game if other members want to play" etc., but that is not really the point, for allowance must be made for the fact that the end game is one of the beauties of Savile Snooker. Speed between turns on the other hand is easy to maintain, and those who dwell too long on the stroke, or change their minds on the direction after they have assumed position, are never best strikers of the ball. It can also be remembered that when a game is lost beyond reasonable hope of recall, the phrase "I retire" involves no loss of face whatever in the eyes of members waiting to play.

Slow play is catching. Beginners should try to model tempo on the brisker styles, not on the over deliberate.

The Reynolds System of Scoring

Note: The practice of playing for money, and therefore this system, have been long in disuse.

Savile Snooker should be played for money - even if the money is as small as farthing points instituted when the game started 50 years ago (*Note: circa 1905, according to this*). Those who find farthing points rather fiddling prefer another method which commemorates a former member of the club, William Ellis Reynolds, a great student and spectator of the game. Namely, if point difference at one game is fifty or less, loser pays for the table. *Note: this refers to "table money" for the use of the table - recently this custom has also fallen into disuse.*

4. Additional Rules Peculiar to Savile Snooker.

It is uniquely typical of the Savile that certain rules have been accepted because they make things more, not less, agreeable for the player. For instance:-

(i) Pushing

The push shot is allowed, partly because it seldom helps, and partly to avoid long wrangling arguments.

(ii) Nomination

The Player is under no obligation to nominate the colour at which he believes himself to be aiming.

(iii) Alternative Spots

If a colour's own spot is already covered by another ball, colour must be placed on nearest unoccupied spot (not on the next below in value). If all spots are covered, then the brown spot of orthodox snooker must be used - failing that the green spot, then yellow.

(iv) Balls Touching

If red is the "on" ball and white is touching a colour, player may either volunteer or hit a red. But if white is touching a red, player is deemed to have hit a red. He can (a) play away, not necessarily hitting another red without penalty or (b) pot a red or (c) volunteer.

5. Fouls and Penalties

(a) Some of these have been dealt with under separate headings. Basically, the rule of orthodox snooker is followed; e.g. if the white is pocketed after first striking a red, penalty 4; after first striking a blue, penalty 5, and so on. It is the ball struck first which counts. Note: If a colour should have been played after a red, but a red is struck instead, the penalty is 5, the Player having been assumed to have aimed at the blue however preposterous the shot might have in fact been.

If a red is inadvertently potted when a blue is struck first, penalty 5. If a black is potted (*Note: or struck*) when a red is attempted, penalty 7. Here is the "highest value ball involved" which determines the amount.

(b) Some typical penalties:

White, having hit red first, goes into pocket.....4

White, having hit colour, goes into pocketvalue of first colour hit.

Blue is potted, but so is black.....7 (highest value same stroke involved in foul).

Blue is potted but so is black and pink in same stroke ("Lawrence Gilliam treble").....7

Note: Lawrence Gilliam was Head of the BBC's famous Features Department in Broadcasting House, and a fellow Savilian.

White, on a colour (pink) misses it. If no other ball is touched, player is "deemed to have been on blue" because of the No Nomination rule.

Pink is potted, but red goes in on same stroke.....6 (value of highest ball involved).

(c) Touching the ball

Fouls involving the inadvertent touching of the ball with and part of the body, clothes, cue or rest bring a break to an end and involve a penalty according to the value of the ball touched (red to count 4). Savile here follows orthodox snooker. The difference lies in procedure. In the (almost invariable) absence of a referee or marker, the player does not declare a foul: his opponent, if he sees it, claims it. This is his responsibility and traditional right.

If, in removing a rest, a ball is inadvertently touched, no penalty is involved if the balls have stopped rolling. Moved ball should be replaced.

Snookers

(a) As in orthodox snooker, a player is "snookered" from the next ball "on" if he unable to hit directly any part he wishes of the hemi-sphere. But if he is snookered after a foul, and no reds ore "on", the nearest coloured ball only is free. This rule is peculiar to Savile.

(b) If after this "nearest coloured ball" shot there is no score, and the ball hit snookers the player's opponent, this ball is free for the opponent's next shot.

(c) A fairly recent new (*Note: at the time these Rules were written down*) could and should be adapted for Savile Snooker (*Note: it has been*). It is worded thus:

After a foul stroke by his opponent, a player may play from the position left (with a free ball, if snookered) or ask his opponent to play the next stroke.

The notion here is to stop a player receiving benefit from his own foul, e.g. his opponent may not only be snookered but angled as well. Or competitor may purposely play for a miss and players are reminded that this stroke, useful and honourable in billiards, is not allowed in any form of snooker.

Etiquette

Feelings about Etiquette are particularly vague among players of this game. Everybody knows that no-one should actually place his hand or foot on the table while his opponent is playing, should not stand in his line of sight, and should not dance up and down during the few seconds while his opponent is actually making his shot. *Note Talking on the shot has become a particular issue. It is best if conversation, insulting barracking, angry debate and quiet analysis are all suspended during, again, the few seconds needed to take a shot.*

Most of the customs are concerned with fouls.

(a) "No tie fouls" means that no penalty is involved if the player's tie touches or moves a ball.

(b) Claiming. It seems now to be the custom not to claim a foul unless the ball is actually seen to move.