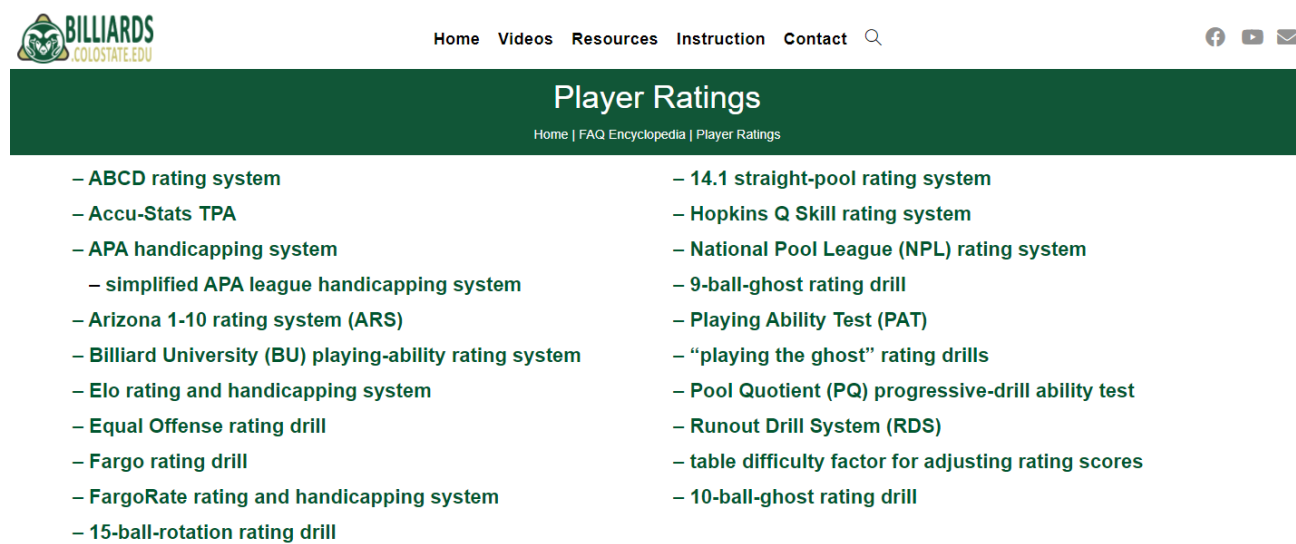


Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, technical proofs (TP), and all past articles are available online at [billiards.colostate.edu](http://billiards.colostate.edu). Reference numbers used in the articles help you locate the resources on the website.

Do you ever hear pool players use letters and numbers to describe how well they play, or how poorly others play? Do you have a FargoRating? If so, do you know what the number means? Do you know how to rate yourself if you do not already have an accurate rating? I recently posted an online video ([NV J.56](#)) that answers these and other related questions, and I summarize the highlights here.

**Image 1** shows the [Player Ratings resource page](#) linked in the video description. There, you can find detailed explanations for all common rating and handicapping systems and drills. The best and most widely used is the FargoRate system. FargoRate continually uses an optimized statistical analysis of win/loss data for all players in the system to come up with accurate player ratings that can also be used to handicap matches. The good thing about FargoRate is it is based on actual competition performance data, and it results in ratings that are compatible across the world. The downside is if you have not played in a CSI/BCAPL/USAPL sponsored league or tournament or in other pro tournaments, you probably do not have a FargoRating. Also, the numbers and ranges do not mean much to people who do not have much experience with the system.



**[Image 1](#) Player Ratings resource page**

**Image 2** shows a [Player Ratings Comparison Table](#) from the Billiard University (BU), which is also linked in the video description, that compares many common rating and handicapping systems. Referring to the 5<sup>th</sup> column, if your FargoRating is above 700, you are a top player. And if it is the high 700s or above 800, you are considered world class. Strong league players are usually in the 550-650 range. Intermediate league players are usually in the 400-500 range. And beginner level players are usually below 350.

If you are in an APA, a VNEA, a BCAPL, or other pool league, you have a handicap which can also serve as a player rating (see the last four columns in **Image 2**). Assuming people are not sandbagging, these handicaps can provide an approximate comparison rating among the players in your league; although, the handicaps do not distinguish very well among top players (see the numbers in the top rows). Also, these handicaps and their implications can vary a lot among leagues and regions depending on the level of competition.

## BU Rating Comparisons

BU Score	Player Level	ABCD Rating	Alt ABCD	Fargo Rate	RDS Level	ARS (AZ)	APA 8-ball*	APA 9-ball*	BCAPL, VNEA 8-ball*	BCAPL 9-ball*
185-200	world class pro	A++ / AAAA	Master	> 770	16	10-2	7	9	10	10
175-184	semipro / pro	A+ / AAA	Master	730-769	15	10-1	7	9	10	10
165-174	upper shortstop	A / AA	Master	690-729	14	10, 10-1	7	9	9, 10	9, 10
155-164	lower shortstop	A- / A	Master	650-689	13	9, 10	7	9	9, 10	9, 10
140-154	upper advanced	B+	AA	600-649	12	8, 9	7	9	8, 9	8, 9
125-139	mid advanced	B	AA, A	550-599	11	7, 8	6, 7	8, 9	8, 9	6, 7
110-124	lower advanced	B-	A	500-549	10	7, 8	6	7, 8	7, 8	4, 5
95-109	upper intermediate	C+	B	450-499	9	6, 7	5, 6	6, 7	7, 8	2, 3
70-94	mid intermediate	C	B, C	400-449	8	5, 6	4, 5	5, 6	6, 7	1, 0, 1
55-69	lower intermediate	C-	C	350-399	7	5, 6	4	4, 5	5, 6	-2, -3
40-54	upper beginner	D+	C	300-349	6	4, 5	3, 4	3, 4	4, 5	-4, -5
30-39	mid beginner	D	C	250-299	5	3, 4	3, 4	2, 3	4, 5	-6, -7
20-29	lower beginner	D-	D	200-249	4	2, 3	2, 3	1, 2	3, 4	-8, -9
0-19	novice	D--	D	0-200	1, 2, 3	1, 2	2	1	2	-10

\* These ratings can vary quite a lot among leagues and regions depending on the level of competition.

[BilliardUniversity.org](http://BilliardUniversity.org)

**Image 2 Billiard University Ratings Comparison Table**

Another very common rating system is the [ABCD system](#) (see the 3<sup>rd</sup> column in **Image 2**), which has been around for a long time. It is often based on qualitative evaluations of players; although, some leagues use letter designations to classify players based on their handicaps and performance in tournaments. Here is a simple interpretation of the classic A-D scale:

- A: a good player capable of running most racks and/or playing lock-up safeties.
- B: a decent player capable of running racks and playing effective safeties periodically.
- C: an average player who doesn't run racks very often and doesn't have much of a safety game.
- D: a novice player who makes many mistakes, cannot run even an easy rack, and never even considers playing safe.

One problem with the A-D rating system is it is interpreted differently by different people and in different regions. And to confuse things further, sometimes different labels are used (e.g., "AAAA, AAA, AA, A" instead of "A++, A+, A, A-"). And some league systems use ego-boosting versions with "Master, AA, A" labels which are usually very "flattering" compared to traditional ABCD interpretations (see the 4<sup>th</sup> column in **Image 2**). And the Masters level usually includes players over a very wide range of abilities.

One way to rate yourself if you do not yet have a FargoRating or an accurate ABCD classification is to take a playing-ability test. One of the most useful and comprehensive system for this is the [Billiard University \(BU\) Playing-Ability Exams](#), which consist of a wide collection of well-designed drills to test every skill important in pool. The first BU Exam (Exam I – Fundamentals) covers important fundamentals including shot making, CB control, and position play. The second BU Exam (Exam II – Skills) covers run-out skills, safety play, jacked up shots, kicks, banks, jumps, and the break. The maximum score on each Exam is 100 (just like in school), and the total BU Score varies from 0 to 200, which correlates with different playing levels as shown in the first two columns in **Image 2**. The Exams drills quantify ability level for each individual skill. This can help you identify strengths and weaknesses in your game. And if you keep track of your scores, you can quantitatively monitor and set goals for improvement in your game over time. If you want to [see Shane VanBoening and other top players taking the BU Exams](#), visit the link in the video description.

One disadvantage of the BU Playing-Ability Exams is some setup is required and it consists mostly of focused drills that some people do not like. A much simpler alternative to estimate your playing level is to try a ["playing the ghost" rating drill](#). The phrase "playing the ghost" implies you are playing by yourself against a fictitious opponent called the "ghost." You attempt to run a 9-ball, 10-ball, or 15-ball rack with ball in hand after the break. If you run out, you get a point or a certain score; and if you do not, the "ghost" (who never misses) wins. Various ways to score and rate yourself are on the page linked in the video description.

A new playing ability test I recommend is the [Runout Drill System \(RDS\)](#). As demonstrated in online video [NV J.53](#), it consists of a set of 16 break-and run challenges of increasing level of difficulty. The number of balls in each rack varies from 6 to 15 and the rules for each rack get progressive more challenging. Unlike drill-based systems like the BU Exams, where you repeat the same or similar shots or patterns over and over, RDS provides endless variation of shots, patterns, and game situations. And no table setup is required ... just rack, break, and run the balls ... just like playing regular pool. RDS tests and challenges all player levels from complete novice to seasoned professional. And you get to pocket lots of balls regardless of your playing level, so there is no major frustration involved. RDS provides excellent practice and helps one develop and improve strategy and pattern play in the games of 8-ball, 9-ball, 10-ball, and straight pool. RDS is also progressive and adaptive. When you do well, the level gets harder; and when you do poorly, the level gets easier. After an RDS session, your ending level and associated rating should be a decent indicator of your level of playing ability (see the 6<sup>th</sup> column in **Image 2**).

If you are curious to know how good a player you are, and if you do not already have a FargoRating, try out the BU Exams, a “playing the ghost” rating drill, or RDS. Not only will you get an impartial and accurate approximation of your playing level ... you will also get in some good practice. And be sure to keep track of your scores to monitor your improvement over time as your game develops. Good luck, shoot well, and have fun, from Dr. Dave!



[NV J.56](#) – Player Ratings – How Good Do You Play?

[NV J.53](#) – RUNOUT DRILL SYSTEM (RDS) ... A New Way to Practice, Teach, and Learn

PS:

- I know other authors and I tend to use lots of terminology, and I know not all readers are totally familiar with these terms. If you ever come across a word or phrase you do not fully understand, please refer to the [online glossary](#) at [billiards.colostate.edu](http://billiards.colostate.edu).

*Dr. Dave is a PBIA Advanced Instructor, Dean of the Billiard University, and author of the book: [The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards](#) and numerous instructional DVD series, all available at: [DrDaveBilliards.com](http://DrDaveBilliards.com).*