



The Illinois Billiard Club

"The Country Club of Pool and Carom Billiards"

8446 Archer Avenue - Willow Springs, IL 60480 - 708-839-1331 - www.IllinoisBilliardClub.com
 Lessons - Leagues - Tournaments - Memberships - Private Functions
 1975 - 29th Anniversary - 2004

Billiards in America; its Angles and Anglers

by Jim Parker
 Contributing Writer

Near the close of the 19th century the American newspaper industry, then the largest mass news media in the world first introduced the use of photojournalism. Meaning journalism in which news stories or features are presented mainly through photographs. By 1902 it introduced another new form of artistic illustration referred to as "sports cartooning." A form of sports reporting that maintained reader interest until its retirement in 1971. The popularity of billiards (all cue games) was so complete for most of the first half of the 20th century the game was often as much a part of professional sports reporting as baseball. Our country's major sport that even until the early 1940s, aside from a handful of sports like boxing, golf and horse racing had little competition simply because few other professional sports existed. Pro football then was just a sideshow and tennis only barnstorming. There were fewer Americans that knew the name of a basketball player than the actual location of Pearl Harbor. NASCAR didn't even exist, and you'd be hard pressed in finding another professional black athlete other than Joe Louis.

Today's society has evolved into a far more complex sports and entertainment culture than it once was when billiards was considered a popular professional sport. And like sports cartooning itself the popularity of professional billiards came to an end nearly a full generation ago. To succeed in today's sports marketplace is to first understand the needs of today's consumer and apply proven advertising programs. Like all phases of business if your product or service has lasting value, it might, just might succeed. Billiards public side has seldom ever followed conventional and proven methods of marketing. Not the indus-

Willard Mullin was named "Sports Cartoonist of the Century" by the National Cartoonist Society and was considered the Rembrandt of America's sports pages during the glory years of sports cartooning that was first introduced in 1902 and came to a close in 1971.

Mullin's originals can be seen at the National Art Museum of Sport, the library at Syracuse University and one hangs at both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Illinois Billiard Club of Willow Springs Illinois.



try's leaders so much but rather the little guy who claims to be selling the game of billiards. When was the last time anyone saw a local poolroom, or a tavern using pool as their marketing ploy to sell alcohol, launch an ongoing advertising campaign within their local newspaper, radio or TV station? And what little these facilities might promote billiards seldom exceeds much more than advertising some form of tournament within billiards media of trade journals, magazines and newspapers. While certainly a basic

advertising staple, few will ever reach or become of interest to our nation's largest and most fertile marketplace, the American family and general public.

Billiards should be dressed up to keep up with today's more demanding society. It should be treated for what it is. A three-dimensional game that's forever seen in little more than a two-dimensional market. There are hundreds of thousands of people in daily search of new and exciting ways of entertaining, and being entertained. Clearly the game

of billiards can more than fill those desires and become a viable part of such an uplifting area of our nation's society. To do so is to break the chain of redundancy that's held the game in a state of complacency within rooms offering little more than bland ceilings and floors, scads of pool tables, four walls and billiard balls.

Where are the games champions, its finest players, the men and women that at one time gave the public media something to write about, someone to illus-

trate in sports cartoons, photograph, and publicize in photojournalism. Someone the public might one day like to become? It's long since come time to take the game to its next and more illustrious level. Today billiards has gradually rebuilt a base of amateur enthusiasts that well might provided an initial audience of spectators. What better time to bring back some of those ever-popular two and three month cross-country championship matches. World title challenge matches that at one time filled our nations hotels and sports arenas with literally thousands of excited spectators in every city on the tour.

When working their way from coast to coast the accumulated wins and losses of both players were sub totaled and carried into the next match hosted in another city. Today it would be like playing catch-up in a race to 500 games of nine ball, but played in blocks of 50 games in each town. Collectively, when reaching a predetermined number of points and/or games needed to win the event the grand total of all accumulated scores would ultimately determine the world champion. Photos of each event and updated scores were published weekly within every major newspaper in the land. There was an ever-building presence of drama that eventually snow-balled into sold out audiences in each of the upcoming communities. The final match was generally hosted either in New York, Chicago or San Francisco, depending on where the tours first began. It was sports entertainment to the fullest.

This is the kind of sports marketing that gives the public news media a chance to stand up and take notice. It gives the public a chance to see billiards in its purest form; fans a chance to see and a meet their hero's, and for the contenders, to become one. The whole concept is a win-win proposition, and why not. After all, it's the way it was when billiards was truly a popular professional American sport. So I ask you, who's to say billiards can't regain and maintain its professional sports popularity title? Hoppe did it, 51 times!



Illustrations Courtesy of The Illinois Billiard Club

