



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

"By Inheritance of Association"

by Jim Parker

Historically, the public side of American billiards (all cue games) has seldom been regarded as little more than a nickel and dime public pastime, a game with the unique distinction of surviving in America not because of its public promoters, but rather in spite of them. To the industrious and ever promising majority of our American society billiards is forever seen as the free spot on a "Bingo Card," used primarily by tavern keepers as a marketing toy to attract and maintain the sale of alcohol. FREE POOL, \$1 BOTTLES OF BEER and \$5 PITCHERS are but a few of the window banner marketing techniques that have for generations, by inheritance of association, contributed to the games orphan like existence. Even today, publicly, billiards survives primarily on the shirttail of alcohol and tobacco sales and is seen as little more than a tavern sideshow as opposed to a main-event, popular professional sport.

The game's promoters are primarily divided into two divisions defined simply as traditionalists and visionaries. While at times and only by centimeters the later division is nonetheless forever moving the game forward, making it more appealing to those only recently understanding its endless list of values. Using both their knowledge of billiards history along with their well-earned sense of sound business practices they remain focused on bringing about betterment for both society and the game itself. Simultaneously and in complete contrast the traditionalist's cling to means and methods long since proven unsuccessful and all too often professionally uninspiring and socially offensive.

As of recent months an American billiard table manufacture hosted another of its tournaments that lasted some nine consecutive, twenty-four hour days. It's basic format has been promoted as one used in tournaments some forty years ago that eventually were raided and shut down by state and federal authorities. Aside from the mention of a man diagnosed with

relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (RRSM) that attended the recent event, the hosting community's largest newspaper, The Courier Journal, didn't publish a single word regarding the nine-day event itself. An event whose sponsor boastfully promoted, as "One of the largest tournaments in the world." Enough said about poor marketing, traditional poolroom advertising techniques and the game of billiards forever being plagued by inheritance of association.

Long overdue, certainly, but visionaries nonetheless. Extending an act of enormous importance, the second oldest billiards organization in the history of



Born a century apart, but nonetheless two boys that each shared the same timeless love of a father's heart.

Left 1905 photo: 17 year old Willie Hoppe and his father Frank Hoppe.

Right photo: Tiger Woods and his father Earl Woods.

American billiards, the Billiard Congress of America (BCA) has of recent years adapted concepts first implemented some sixty years ago by their predecessor, the Billiard Association of America (BAA). In good faith and in the name of better tomorrows for billiards, the BCA has with integrity moved forward and begun promoting the importance of educational billiard programs and is exercising grass root efforts to service our nations children with various youth programs.

If one single issue were to remain the most important act ever promoted by any industry offering competitive and social activities, it is this single issue of youth

programs. Popular professional sports in America remain so, largely through organized elementary, high school and college sports programs. Activities that since the 19th century have remained almost non-existent in American billiards. The BCA's current offerings are small and limited in concept. Yet given time and support, have extensive socially benefiting potential when after learning and incorporating a more in-depth knowledge of man's domestic evolution and never-ending importance of strong inner family relationships that could effectively be applied to billiard programs.

Studies regarding the importance of a



Photo credit for the Woods picture Courtesy of Time Warner Books

wholesome family environment and positive results of sound parental guidance are found throughout the entire spectrum of man's history. Unfortunately, in America the public side of billiards has seldom been associated with inner family activities. However, in other family/billiard related areas there is no better example of time-honored family values practiced to the fullest than within the life of the greatest and most enduring billiard champion of all time, Mr. William (Willie) Frederick Hoppe.

Willie Hoppe won his first professional billiard title as "Champion of the World" in 1906 at the young and unheard of age of

eighteen. The same title that he forty-six years later retired with in 1952 after winning his 52nd professional world billiard title. A personal accomplishment that within the entire recorded history of humankind remains a professional sports status achievement that even to this very day remains unequalled.

Within an article reporting the achievements of another 19th century child prodigy, Frank Christian Ives, it was suggested there was a similarity between Frank Ives and other sports figures spanning a hundred years and ranging from icons that included Willie Hoppe to today's Tiger Woods. Two men who in contrast to Ives, both shared such wholesome family values and healthy lifestyles that even their mention with Frank Ives, whose alcohol abuse was said to be the actual cause of his premature death, would appear as a superficial comparison. There is however a lesson to be learned from Frank Ives along with another mentioned child prodigy, Mr. Ralph Greenleaf. A man whose youthful rise to billiards fame that led to some 20 world titles came to an agonizing end when defeated by his most relentless competitor, a bottle. His alcohol abuse forced even Brunswick to bar him from the 1946 world pocket billiards tournament. A bittersweet lesson indeed, learning two invaluable lessons from perhaps the two greatest pocket billiard champions that ever lived. One, the soul and inner art of championship billiards, and the second, the damaging effects of alcohol abuse to those even appearing invincible and of extraordinary talent.

When recalling his first meeting with Frank Ives, in his autobiography William Hoppe wrote; Less than two years later I was to learn of the Young Napoleon's (Ives nickname) premature death at Progresso, Mexico, a victim of tuberculosis. My father told me afterward that it was drink and dissipation that killed him. "Frank Ives thought he was a superman," my father said; "he thought he could drink

twice as much whiskey as anybody else, and still retain his steady nerve and his health. That's why he's dead at thirty-three. You remember that end-table game he showed you at Cap Anson's in Chicago? That was a valuable lesson. Let this untimely death be a lesson to you, too, Willie, and never touch a drop of liquor." Hoppe concluded; "So I am doubly indebted to poor Frank Ives, one of the greatest billiard players that ever lived."

In American billiards traditional story telling fashion beginning as far back as the 1800's, after some two thousand words neither a single word nor even an inkling of this protective and inspiring father/son experience and its family bonding values were even remotely mentioned. Values that most often when given the opportunity foster character, love, trust and productive futures for those clever enough to understand and inherit their benefits. As in the case of Tiger Woods, whose evolved into the unique champion he's become through more than personal ability, but equally through love and care of his family, and the never ending supportive devotion of his father ... as in the identical case of young Willie Hoppe a century earlier.

There's nothing any of us we can do to change history, but there's everything we can do when learning from it. It's so pointless to think about lost hours of yesterday and what others have or haven't done with their lives. To make learning a lesson of celebration rather than a cause for regret is simply to ask, "How can I use it today?" It's then our life's journey potentially becomes an endless experience of fulfillment and happiness for ourselves and the legions of people we help along the way.

Today more than ever our society is in need of help in finding new and better ways of caring for our nation's children. Soaring tuition's within private schools is forever on the rise and lack of state and federal funding is forcing public schools to cut classes; cut back on teachers aids, and cut off funding for long over due building repairs. School cuts, simply never heal, and it's our children that bleed and bear their scars. On the home front, as never before parents are putting in more commute and work hours than time together with their children as family hours.

None of this is any small matter, yet we, each and every one of us can play a roll in helping repair some of these seemingly unsolvable problems. We all carry with us an invisible toolbox containing some of the finest, most useful tools known to man. Love, trust, hope, honor and



Photos from the top down: Easter is a day of celebration and what better way for children to be introduced to billiards than hosting an "Easter Billiard Ball Hunt?" After all, who other than some clever 15th century egg merchant said the Easter Bunny only hid eggs? Formal weddings and billiards, why not? Not only does a thousand-dollar wedding cake look great atop a ten thousand-dollar glass covered billiard table, but it also gives wedding guests a glance at the memories of billiards historical guest, Mr. William (Willie) Frederick Hoppe. Not simply hidden away and gathering dust, for over twenty years the IBC and

Spread the good news. When hosting any function broadcast it to every local newspaper and any other form of public media in your area. There's simply no way the public can realize what special events are going on, in the inside, unless you broadcast them on the outside. And remember, any business without a sign, is a sign of no business.

integrity are only a few of these beaming, solid gold tools stored neatly within each of us. To various degrees we all qualify in using these tools, and some, as the artisans they are, use them with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.

To those of us having an interest in the welfare of both people and the game of billiards there are unlimited ways we might simultaneously service both. In one form or another billiard tournaments in America were first introduced over a



"Be creative, maximize billiards potential when servicing a broader range of society"

Bonnie's Dining & Banquets have made Willie Hoppe's personal scrapbook available to be viewed by literally tens of thousands of their guests and interested historians.

Learning geometric equations for the mind and food for body? What better way than inviting you're local high schools for lunch and classes in carom billiards?

An hour or two shared with his father at the billiard table can turn a boy's afternoon into a man's lifetime memory. Why can't a father/son billiards day become a weekly event?

hundred and fifty years ago and when their contenders arrived by horseback. While the concept of live professional billiard competition, had, and has value, their marketing, as in the same case today, was anything but professional when not gearing and directing the events to include the servicing of their potentially largest market, the American family.

There's nothing to be gained in name calling and personally criticizing others for what they don't do to promote billiards to

higher social levels, so why not simply get started using your own ideas; you're own energy and funding, and do it yourself? After all, it's an almost guaranteed fact you'll do a better job than those having already failed by use of obsolete and adolescent methods.

Bring all of the three main subjects together; the American family; billiards, and people with an interest in helping the other two. When first setting out on any new project it often helps when first using another man's proven ideas until we find our own. Listed below are a few start-up, "If Ideas," that over the past thirty some years had long since turned this man's dreams into realities.

If providing financial support to help offset local school budget cuts is at all possible, hosting dinner and billiards fundraisers promoted as "Fun Raisers" is an absolute must when benefiting everyone involved.

If bringing parents and their children together to enjoy inner family entertainment is your concern, you simply can't provide a better method than organizing family team billiard events.

If you personally, or know of anyone else owning any form of billiard table no longer in use it could prove a rewarding gesture when donating it to a local school, church or any other organized educational facility.

If ever attending the viewing of professionally organized national or local billiard tournaments, the next time, why not invite as your guests a couple of your neighbors and/or your neighbor's children?

If owning or operating a public or private billiards facility, with emphasis on family bonding, either weekly or semi-weekly, provide complimentary lessons while paying little concern to tournaments and other competitive events until individual self-confidence is well established.

If fortunate enough to have a billiard table within one's own home and enjoy using it, organizing and hosting mini events made available to immediate neighbors and/or their children could grow into annual family programs.

If celebrations of life, as wedding receptions, to retirement parties are in the planning, consider using billiards as the special events social centerpiece when playing billiards before and after dinner.

Other than running out of the ink and paper to record them there's simply no end to wholesome ideas that could ultimately bring a more socially inviting version of billiards to the centerpiece of our nations culture, the American family.