

"Honor thy Father"

Story and results regarding the IBC's "Michael Phelan Open" Billiard Championships, June 22-23, 2002

by Jim Parker .

On Sunday June 23, 2002, the "Showcase" section of the Chicago Sun-Times featured a front-page story written by film critic Roger Ebert. Ebert's story descriptively presented his praising views regarding Hollywood's 1961 film classic "The Hustler." A movie using the shabby side of billiards to example the lifetime struggles of a host of various characters caught-up in each of their own personal conflicts. This classic 41-year old black & white film went on to pocket far more than Jackie Gleason's winning shots at a pool table. It officially established Paul Newman and another up-and-comer, George C. Scott, as major Hollywood icons.

Ironically, on the same day as Ebert's trip through the world of fantasy, cinema and make-believe, the game of billiards was examined in an all-together different light. In the light of elegance and the grandeur of the State of Illinois' million-dollar private billiard facility, The Illinois Billiard Club. In complete contrast to Hollywood's fable, pitting good against evil on the battleground of a pool table, today's realistic game of billiards was handsomely displayed by a cast of far more socially inviting and intellectual personalities than the sub-culture poolroom characters in the Hustler.

Spinning their magic across the billiard and pool tables of our nations oldest, individually owned, funded and actively operated private billiard club, were both fathers and their sons competing as family teams in a national eight ball tournament. Also competing in a national three-cushion billiard tournament at the same time as the IBC's premier father and son pool tournament, were players from 5 states that came together to honor the 19th century father of American billiards, Mr. Michael Phelan.

Michael Phelan, an Irish immigrant, first organized billiards in America as a professional sport when founding his Billiard Congress (no affiliation to today's BCA). To example the importance of corporate and professional organization to the prosperity of any game, Phelan gathered together eight of our nations top ranked players and hosted the first formal professional public billiard tournament in America on June 1st through 9th 1863. By the example set by Phelan himself, The Illinois Billiard Club, based on their personal integrity, gathered together for a national tournament, eight of today's three-cushion billiard players. ...Then, led by the father of our nations modern era of three-cushion billiards, Mr. Gale Johnson, together, celebrated the 139th anniversary of professional billiards in America.

Mr. Mazin Shooni, a top ranked player from Detroit Michigan with a smile as big, warm and friendly as the State of Michigan itself, locked up first place as he rolled by Deno Andrews, the handsome grandson of national billiard champion, the late Mr. George Pentaris. Andrews took second place in the prestigious two-day event. Frank Bondzinski, a Mt. Prospect IL resident, raced by Salinas California's, Jimmy Chen, to take third place

and put Chen in forth position. Paul Frankel, a glowing personality from Germantown TN., clicked his way into fifth place by what appeared to be more of a magical illusion when he left Ralph Kick, who traveled from Crete, IL, in sixth place. Mountain Home Arkansas's absolute best, Mr. John Ambrosi, reeled in his biggest catch of the tournament when landing seventh position after out scoring Memphis Tennessee's billiard scholar, Mr. Joe Savarin.

In addition to the three-cushion event, the first Federation of Fathers and Sons of American Billiards pool tournament came off without one bad roll. By 6 pm Sunday evening June 23, 2002, our nation saw for the first time the conclusion of a father and son team tournament that would catalyst a perennial series of five national eight ball tournaments.

A Chicago father and son, Mr. John Edward Budz and his 18 year-old son and recent graduate of Brother Rice High School, John Raymond Budz, took first place and forever registered themselves as champions of the IBC's newly formed national organization, The Federation of Fathers and Sons of American Billiards.

Second place went to Mr. David Sheesley and his son Adam Sheesley from Harmony, North Carolina. The Sheesley's managed to out-play a team of sharpshooters representing Westmont Illinois, Mr. Bob Erickson and his son Jimmy Erickson.

The next set of national tournaments to be held at the Illinois Billiard Club will be hosted on the last weekend in July and titled in tribute to the greatest, most enduring professional billiard player in the recorded history of humankind, Mr. William (Willie) Frederick Hoppe. This second in a series of five perennial father and son eight ball events will be a one-day tournament open to fathers and sons of all ages and held on Sunday July 28, 2002. The final three events shall be hosted on the last Sunday of August, September and October 2002.

The next three-cushion billiard tournament will begin on Saturday July 27th and end the following day on Sunday July 28, 2002. Then followed by August, September and October events, all hosted on the last weekend of each respective month. To more comfortably accommodate a larger field of three-cushion contestants, in addition to its century old Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Arcade billiard table, the IBC will also begin providing the use of its crown jewel billiard table. A 3,000 pound, \$52,000 antique Keefe & Hamer steel billiard table. A masterpiece of billiard equipment once removed by the IBC some 25 years ago from its original 1916 home designed by architect, Frank Lloyd Wright.

To enter any of the IBC's national events as either a player or spectator, advance reservations are required. Membership to the IBC or any organization is not required. To book your preferred tournament interests, call the IBC at 708.839.1331. For further club information either visit the IBC at www.IllinoisBilliardClub.com or write to: The Illinois Billiard Club / 8446 Archer Avenue / Willow Springs, IL 60480.



The First American - "Billiard Congress" of 1863

Mr. Michael Phelan and his first eight tournament contestants and governing body of formally organized professional billiards in America. Copyright by The Illinois Billiard Club, Willow Springs, Illinois. A never before published until the IBC's 139th anniversary celebration of professional billiards in America. An original albumen silver print by Civil War photographer and father of American photography, the Mathew Brady Studio. ...Taken some 30 years before the invention of photojournalism.

From left to right: John Seereiter, Detroit / John Deerey, N.Y. / Victor Estephe, Philadelphia / William Goldthwait, N.Y. / Mr. Michael Phelan, the father of American Billiards and tournament host. / Louis Fox, Rochester / Philip Tieman, Cincinnati / M. Foley, Detroit / D. Kavanaugh, N.Y. (tournament winner).

"The Michael Phelan Open of 2002" Mr. Gale Johnson and his first eight national billiard contestants enrolled in the 139th anniversary tournament celebration of organized professional billiards in America. Hosted at the historical Illinois Billiard Club, Willow Springs, Illinois ... June 22nd & 23rd, 2002



From left to right on all three rows, first row: Mr. Gale Johnson, Presidential custodian of three-cushion billiards in America for the past 30 years, and friend to every billiard enthusiast on the planet. / Paul Frankel, Germantown, TN / Ralph Kick, Crete, IL. Center row: Jimmy Chen, Salinas, CA / Frank Bondzinski, Mt. Prospect, IL / Mazin Shooni, Detroit, MI (tournament winner) / John Ambrosi, Mountain Home, AR. Rear row: Deno Andrews, Oak Park, IL / Joe Savarin, Memphis, TN.



Left to right: Three-cushion tournament director Mr. Gale Johnson, Elgin IL, presenting the IBC's first place award to Mazin Shooni, Detroit MI.



Left to right: Father and Son tournament director Mr. Tom Sarna, Downers Grove IL, presenting the IBC's first place award to Chicagoans John Edward Budz and his son John Raymond Budz.