



Illinois Billiard Club

The Country Club of Pool and Billiards

8446 Archer Avenue, Willow Springs, IL 60480 . 708.839.1331 . www.IllinoisBilliardClub.com
Lessons . Leagues . Tournaments . Memberships . Private Functions

A tribute to the king of televised championship billiards in America

By Jim Parker

If in the 1950's when walking down Chicago's north side 5100 block of west Dakin St., you happened across a man some five and a half feet tall carrying a leather cue case, aside from the case, you'd never recognize anything unusual about the man himself. ...That is of course, until you overhear his conversation regarding his concept of promoting billiards in America. His name was Mr. Frank Oliva, an energetic visionary that left nothing to chance when it came to promoting his endeared game, that he preferred to refer to by its correct name, pocket billiards, and not simply, pool. The term "pool" was and still is a suggested gaming term the game inherited some 200 years ago by its association with gambling. And the last thing Oliva set-out to promote was gambling. In 1958 Frank designed a pocket billiards game he had copy written and titled: "Ten -Twenty." Unlike today's popular tavern games of eight and nine ball, Frank's version was championship 14.1 straight pool, yet with a new angle.

Oliva realized for billiards of any form to gain public popularity it required exposure only television could provide. Yet with its more challenging and time consuming design, straight pool, to be adapted to television would be as difficult as hosting the entire Olympic games in one single day. All high-end levels of competition require commitment to intense concentration. In addition to luck verses skill, when pocketing undeclared balls on the opening break shot, the level of concentration required in today's championship eight and nine ball games is extremely limited. Limited simply because the span of concentration doesn't exceed the consecutive pocketing of more than nine balls. ...With championship straight pool often realizing consecutive runs in excess of 50 balls in a single inning.

Oliva brought together the best of both worlds. He created a concept that would hold the interest of spectators within televisions limited air time, yet not allowing luck to be overbalancing as in today's eight and nine ball tournaments. Frank's game of "Ten-Twenty" was an innovative concept that allowed the pocketing of up to ten balls, in each of his format of eight innings. Each ball was valued at one point. While in any sequence, each ball and pocket had to be declared. If during the final eighth inning either contestant successfully pocketed their tenth ball, they were allowed to continue their consecutive run that ultimately could include an additional twenty balls. Thus came hope of a trailing players come back,

along with the name, "Ten-Twenty." A perfect score would be 100 points ...the pocketing of eight runs of ten, plus an additional twenty points in the final inning.

To step up the drama and also control the programs air time the creative billiard maestro included a time clock. When nearing the close of the program and displaying a large time clock, to pocket an additional ball or two, the intimidating movement of the clocks second-hand speeded up not only the shooters hand, but his feet as well! While Frank's concept was a wonder in itself, his ability to sell it to television bordered on pure genius. And genius he was. The clever insurance broker not only sold his idea to television, he sold a thirteen-week series to television! ...And by doing so, Frank was already in his sixth consecutive rack of winning our nations title of America's greatest promoter of televised professional billiards.

Oliva's next step was to orchestrate a network of top national challengers that by their position in the rank and file of America's best pool players would have equal opportunity to compete against one another over the weeks that lie ahead. He solved that problem by allowing each week's winner to return the following week to do battle with a new qualifying top contender. Seldom did anyone hold the championship beyond two weeks. One of our IBC members now retired, Mr. Bob Sterling pocketed his way into a fourth week, until losing to "Cowboy" Jimmy Moore. Cash awards were modest, yet public exposure and related business opportunities were enhanced.

Not unlike the creative directing of Hollywood's Steven Spielberg, Frank Oliva set his stage with an exuberant gallery of well-interested and well-dressed spectators. This was during the 1950's and early 60's. A time in America that in respect of the occasion, and not simply self-interest, men still wore ties and sport jackets and women wore dresses and hats. ...All of which conveying the suggestive message of both family and corporate attendance.

Director Oliva then enhanced his carefully thought out performance by enlisting the aid of sports announcer, "Whispering" Joe Wilson. Wilson was to sports announcing in the 1950's and 60's, as what Howard Cosell was in the 70's and 80's. ... Only Wilson didn't have a Mohamed Ali or Monday night football to help boost his popularity. Wilson's style of sports announcing was comprehensive, emotional and simply unbeatable when combined with Oliva's enthusiastic officiating and fancy footwork. When time permitted, the dynamic team even



Mr. and Mrs. Frank and Tess Oliva "When love and talent work together ... expect a masterpiece."

played the roles of educators when giving instructions in both the games rules and proper handling of a billiard cue. After its second week, "Ten-Twenty" was well on its way of becoming a smash hit.

Between the amazing duo's ability to broadcast the action to their cheering studio audience, combined with the super shot making of their cast of fast moving billiard pros that included names like Cicero Murphy, Irving Crane, Jimmy Moore and the fastest, most exciting player of the 20th century, New York's, Little Joey Canton, they sold the TV producers an additional 13 weeks of air time! Netting not

only the first consecutive twenty-six week series of nationally televised billiards entertainment in the United States, but today, some forty years later ... the last and longest running series of public, nationally broadcasted billiards entertainment ever recorded in the history of both American television and the game of billiards!

Long before "King Frank Oliva" left this world, he gave birth to another enduring segment of his illustrious legacy. He organized and

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founded our nations most enduring, ladies billiard league in the recorded history of American billiards. The "Frank Oliva Ladies Pool League." While poolrooms and their owners have the reputation of coming and going, this enthusiastic team of ladies have over the past 35 years hosted their events at various locations. Yet over those years their desire to perpetuate Oliva's dreams of a more perfect world of billiards, has been as heartfelt, as their hellfire determination to each win their next game of 14.1 straight pool!

Recently, Bonnie's Dining & Banquets and The Illinois Billiard Club had the distinct honor of hosting the ladies 35th anniversary dinner celebration and tribute to the late Mr. Frank Oliva. Seated at the dinner table was Mrs. Tess Oliva, now 90 years young and as entertaining and inspiring to be with, as she was surprised when learning her late husband was once again that same evening, going to be appearing in his 1950's "Ten-Twenty" program, premiering on the IBC's 2002 television.

Later that evening after watching the epic battles between 1950 billiard legends Irving Crane, Willis Covington, Don Tozar and Joey Canton to name a few, the ladies attention shifted to a few brief billiard instructions and history lesson given by Wisconsin's pool and billiard instructor extraordinaire, Mr. Jerry Briesath. Also in attendance was billiards straight pool champion of the literary world, author and columnist Mr. George Fels. The warm personality of Mr. Chrisman, now retired and former owner of Chicago's Chris's Billiards, brought with him memories of the leagues well spent evenings at his Milwaukee Ave. billiard room. Acting president of the organization, Pat Hays, along with IBC member Joan Rincken organized the event. ...And later in the week called to book their annual December Christmas party at Bonnie's and the IBC.

In tribute to Mr. Frank Oliva, beginning Sunday, January 19, 2003, The Illinois Billiard

Club shall host its first, of four monthly tournaments in a perennial series of national pocket billiards championships, titled: "The Frank Oliva, Ten-Twenty Series." The prestigious 14.1 Straight-Pool events shall be open to the public by advance reservations and governed by similar rules as Mr. Oliva's original TV program. For further information or to register for the "Frank Oliva Ten-Twenty Championships," contact the Illinois Billiard Club by either phone or Email at ...708.839.1331 / PJimandBon@aol.com.

The Illinois Billiard Club is a private club and billiard museum founded in 1975 for the preservation and promotion of the elegant, historical, professional and social side of billiards. The IBC is not a poolroom, barroom or any other form of public place of amusement. Yet by its design, popularizes the game of billiards to all positive sides of society. This Newsletter and all of its contents is copyrighted material and is not to be reproduced without written permission from the Illinois Billiard Club, and its president and founder, Mr. James K. Parker.



Mr. Frank Oliva, King of televised championship billiards in America.

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<p>C Tournament Face to 5 • Double Elimination • \$35 Entry Fee \$5 Green Fee • \$5 Final Tournament \$25 goes into tournament purse! \$1600 purse based on 64 players</p>	<p>D Tournament Face to 4 • Double Elimination • \$25 Entry Fee \$5 Green Fee • \$5 Final Tournament \$15 goes into tournament purse! \$960 purse based on 64 players</p>

Registration 11 am • Start Time Noon

Tournament Dates January 11, 2003 • February 8, 2003 • March 8, 2003 • April 12, 2003 • May 10, 2003 • June 14, 2003
 July 12, 2003 • August 9, 2003 • September 13, 2003 • October 11, 2003 • November 8, 2003

Finals December 13, 2003 • To qualify to play you must play in 6 tournaments

<p>Open Tournament Entry fee \$100 \$10,000 purse based on 64 player fields</p>	<p>B Tournament Entry fee \$75 \$8,000 purse based on 64 player fields</p>
<p>C Tournament Entry fee \$50 \$6,700 purse based on 64 player fields</p>	<p>D Tournament Entry fee \$40 \$6,000 purse based on 64 player fields</p>

*125,000 based on all tournaments having 64 player fields. Finals cash purses will be less if tournament fields are under 64 players or cash purses will be more if fields exceed 64 players

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