

THE BILLIARD CHAMPIONS

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE CHICAGO TOURNAMENT.

THE TRIPLE TIE AN UNFORSEEN OCCURRENCE

—NO PROVISION FOR PLAYING IT OFF—

THE WORK OF THE PLAYERS.

CHICAGO, Nov. 2.—In two respects the tournament that all last week commanded the attention of billiard devotees here and elsewhere was a six days' wonder. The quality of the attendance on any one night has never been surpassed by that of any one night in any tournament that has been held since, in 1880, competition of this kind were first instituted. No tournament has ever come anywhere near approaching the quality of the audiences that continuously, night after night, without an interruption, honored this one. The other respect in which this series of games has proved a marvel is financially. Other tournaments have opened their box offices twice a day without any of them taking in during its initial week within 30 per cent. of the gross receipts here last week when there were no afternoon games. Comparing it with the only other tournaments in which night games alone have been played, the gross income here was more than double what it was in New-York City in 1876, and about one-third in excess of what it was for the entire 10 nights of the 14-inch bank line series in the same city, last Spring. The receipts here footed up in round numbers \$6,200.

The games between Schaefer and Slosson "drew" best of all—\$1,170 in their first game and \$1,227 in their second.

The playing was excellent, having been much better on the part of all three contestants than Schaefer and Slosson showed in the New-York tournaments. The supposition that Vignaux, because of a natural lack of interest due to increasing years and the receipt of a handsome guarantee whether he won or lost, would lack the stimulus that would spur the two experts who had to play for their bread and butter proved erroneous. He practiced longer and more regularly than Schaefer and twice as much as Slosson after the tournament opened. This rendered his guarantee an advantage. It gave him confidence, as he was "playing on velvet." At the table in Central Music Hall he exhibited many weaknesses. Few match players of his speed have shown poorer judgment. This was manifest even in the height of his success on the night when he averaged 75 against Slosson. Much that he did was wrong in theory, but nothing that he did or could have done was or could have been wrong in fact. Stimulated by a run of 195, which, owing to a "scratch" at 65, was 141 more than his due, his subsequent work was clearly a case of inspiration. He had simply to hit to two balls to have them come "right," and had but to raise and lower his cue to keep on counting. The bank shots, the massés, and the "spreads," (and of the last he missed more in this tournament than was his wont of old) that heretofore had so frequently sent him to his seat, were no longer bugbears, for they rarely came to him in other than inviting shape. It has been remarked that the Frenchman is weak in several particulars at the bank line game, but he fully makes up for it in being strong where Slosson and Schaefer are weak at any game. He is a tireless driver of billiard balls, and there is no limit to the possibilities of his open table play so long as his cue tip holds out. When it was first proposed to establish the bank line game it was predicted that eventually success at it would depend less upon the man behind the cue than upon the capacity of the leather to retain its power to "hold" to the ball, and it was also predicted that a man of Vignaux's height and endurance would not only play this game as if there were no lines at all on the table, but would also have a decided advantage physically over Schaefer and Slosson at any system of billiards in which they cannot, as a relief to the muscles of their arm, "nurse" plentifully. Omissions in placing the restrictive line at 14 inches have handicapped their own short-statured experts almost as heavily as they would have done had they adopted the proposition, first made 15 years ago, to map the table out in one foot squares, no carrom to count unless made on balls no two of which are in the one square.

The rail play that Slosson did at 12 or 13 inches two years ago or more, when, in his quiet and secluded room in Twenty-third-street, New-York, he had advantages he lacks in this city, is now of no consequence. He is not playing the 14-inch rail at all noticeably. Schaefer alone is, but he is running needless risks in doing it. It is of no decided help to him. It makes him unsteady and subjects him to the unmerited reproach on the part of blinded hero worshipers that he is not exerting himself to win, or is not keeping himself in good condition. Next in unsteadiness to the Schaefer system is Vignaux's, if it can be called a system. Much depends upon how the driven balls roll. The average speed may be 75 points to an inning, or it may only be 17¾. Physiques being equal, Slosson's system is the best. Deduct the difference between his highest runs and those of his antagonists, and his average is about equal to theirs. His is a system from which a run of 150 may reasonably be expected in any 600 points, and yet he played four games without ever reaching 100. This was because he was in no frame of mind to exercise the foresight essential to the development of his system. Nevertheless it is to be doubted, were he in his best mental and bodily form, if he could in the long run prevail against the height, the tireless physique, and the direct at-ball-to-ball billiards of Vignaux. The Frenchman was the ceaseless hammerer of the tournament, Slosson was the non-extremist, and Schaefer, the man of splendid natural abilities for his profession, was the genius.

It was a mischance that the tournament ended in a tie all round. No provision had been made for such a finish, because a tournament of only three contestants was something heretofore unknown. Yet the tie should have been looked for. There have been ties of three in larger fields, and in attempting to play them off the contestants have tied again and play has had to be abandoned. A tie of three was peculiarly liable to occur where every man played two separate games. The presumption is that had the games been continuous, or of 1,600 points each, there would have been no tie, as Vignaux would not have been beaten, his total score against both Schaefer and Slosson being greater than their's individually, as Schaefer's was greater than Slosson's. The occurrence of the ties has seemingly justified the prediction of those boastful, far-seeing ones who declared that additional games were contemplated from the start in order to augment the gate money. Yet it is even now uncertain whether the ties will be played off in private or in public. It is not certain that they will be played off at all. There are sound reasons why the last mentioned course should be adopted, as Central Music Hall cannot be secured for more than one night inside of several weeks, and no other appropriate house is accessible. The assertion of the prophets, after the failure of their successive predictions, that it had been arranged for Vignaux to win the tournament, for Vignaux to lose his second game with Slosson in order to give the prize to the latter, and for Schaefer to yield in his final game with Slosson, in order to prevent the foreigner from sharing in a then possible tie, and that the management had desired a tie is wholly baseless. Every game, so far as intent would direct it, was played on its merits. Placed as he was by his defeat of Vignaux and Schaefer and Vignaux's conquest of Schaefer during the first three nights, Slosson should have been the winner, and he would have been had he been in form enough to run even more than 89, or to have even won the lead off in banking. In every game he led into at least the second hundred, but in only two was he able to keep up his pace.

The tournament committee, Messrs. M. Bensingler, C. J. E. Parker, and Thomas Foley, have no financial interest in the affair, the entire net proceeds of which, along with the subscribers' purse—\$1,950, now made public for the first time—and \$1,000 added by the manufacturers whose table was used, go to the winner. Ever since Wednesday night, when a tie seemed barely likely, Mr. Foley has been in favor of the decisive games being played in private.