

NO ODDS AND ODDS GIVERS

SOMETHING STARTLING IN BILLIARD ARITHMETIC.

A CLOSE DIAGNOSIS OF THE DISEASE OF PROFFERING POINTS IN "BUTTONS" TO BIG PLAYERS.

No sooner have the projects of experts to compensate themselves for playing without winning been discussed in billiard circles than another topic presents itself. At first glance it certainly seems to be a most courageous hankering after poverty that tempts Schaefer to the adventure of giving odds to Slosson and Daly, who for about a year past have been his special objects of professional attack in this regard, Sexton, Vignaux, and Carter escaping. There is really so little risk run that Schaefer will never come to want because of his seeming temerity.

No American billiard player claiming to be first-class has ever accepted odds in points. The earliest conspicuous instance of odds giving occurred in 1855, when Phelan gave Damon 20 per cent. and a beating in San Francisco, but Damon was a Frenchman, and they played the three-ball game. In 1857, for \$2,000, Phelan offered Benjamin the odds of "discount" at the four-ball game or 3 points in 16 at the best in 17 three-ball games. Choosing the much lesser odds, on the principle that the weaker player has always the better chance in a game in which the possibilities of counting are slightest and the "runs" lowest, Benjamin was defeated, but he was an Englishman. In 1864 Tleman gave Choate 500 in 1,000 and a beating, but Choate was not then a professional. McDewitt in 1865 gave Cyrille Dion 300 in 1,500 and an additional warning of 441; but the Canadian, although bald-headed, was years away from first-class at that time. In 1871 Rudolphe gave Garnier 90 in 600 and a beating by 90 more, but Garnier was inexperienced and many decades of points behind first-class. Just about that period Rudolphe undertook to give 300 in 2,000 to Cyrille Dion, who was then a first-class player or thereabout, and won quite readily, owing to the unsuspectingness of Rudolphe when Cyrille pocketed his own ball. Thereupon the Canadian recovered his heart. The change of cue balls occurred while Dion was in his seat. That was a game in which five balls were used, although the referee had decided that the fifth should not be introduced. In 1873, when Daly was considerably less bald-headed than the Canadian, he was induced by the wily Chicagoans to offer 100 in 600 to Slosson, who was then just about third-rate callow in billiards, and managed to pull through by 7 points. In 1882 Sexton failed by 500 to 403 to give the late Eugene Kimball 150 points at cushion carroms, and a few weeks afterward Daly succeeded by 500 to 347, but Kimball was only technically a professional. In the same year a St. Louis amateur gave Catton a beating at the three-ball game at odds that deserve to be mentioned, because no one will ever be able to determine anywhere near what it amounted to, for the amateur spotted the balls whenever he ran 50, and the professional spotted at 60; but Catton was easily a third-rate then. Apart from the memorable 16-hour "double-discount" contest for \$2,000, in 1865, between Wickes and McKeever, both amateurs, in which there was no pause, McKeever, munching sandwiches and Wickes merely biting lemon-peel through a glass slyly, these comprise the worthiest cases of odds giving in points. In 1885 there was a novel instance of odds of another kind, Sexton taking the short end of the match of \$1,500 to \$1,050 at cushion carroms between himself and Slosson. While it was not strong enough to warrant his attempting to enforce the eighty-fourth billiard commandment, "Thou shalt not divide gate money, but the winner shall pay all and take all," the Moses of which was Sexton himself in 1882, his abiding faith in a fetich enabled him to win by 500 to 486 a game in the last half of which Slosson "averaged" fully six points to the run, his gait being so convincing that he scored about 250 while his antagonist was putting up about 100. The fetich was the odd \$50. It won the match, and Sexton had it embalmed at once.

It will have been seen that, while foreigners have been ripe for odds, the only natives of prominence who have yielded to the temptation have been aborigines—a pappoose crying for points in Chicago in 1873, and a Comanche skirmishing for the short end in New-York in 1885. Foreigners have always been accorded the freedom of our cities, but the moment an American claiming to be at high-water mark ventures to clutch at odds in points he must sink out of sight, as comports with a lack of that spirit which alone gives an American buoyancy. As has been shown, the first instance of odds giving between men claiming to be of top grade was that of Rudolphe and Dion in 1870. Acceptance has been duplicated but once since, the parties also being foreigners. Vignaux, in Paris, gave Charles Burger one-half of a 1,000-point game. But Burger had long been in retirement when Vignaux defeated him.

Odds throwing among presumed native equals is an invention of the past three years. It has been tested frequently enough to have suggested its abandonment. No match has ever resulted from it. While it is only unprofessional in Schaefer to offer Daly odds, it is both that and impolitic for him to make the same tender to Slosson. The latter and himself are our only match players. Whether Slosson rejects Schaefer's overtures by remaining passive or accepts them to be beaten, the effect is to retire him, and that in turn must put Schaefer upon the shelf. So clearly is it the latter's true course to make it appear that Slosson is a worthy competitor that the wonder in billiard circles is that he ever adopts any other. There is, of course, some degree of vanity in it. It is one of his methods, the cue being his first and best, of impressing his personality upon billiards. It would be better for the game and its various interests were he to affront his vanity a little by making believe that Slosson is a man worth backing against him. It is not so extremely hard to assume this attitude if Schaefer will only cork his ears to the madcap enthusiasts who environ him, and who, as a rule, do not know billiards from bosh. They are simply pleased to know that he is "Jake," and to feel that he owes it to them that he is alive. On the contrary, many of them owe much to his effusive and radiant large-heartedness. Should he ever escape long enough from these madcaps to bethink himself that mayhap Slosson needs no odds to crowd him quite up to the verge of peril, he will at least have figures to back him in the thought.

Knowledge cannot always be just without at some time being iconoclastic. As no modern expert has ever staked quite all the wealth he craves credit for having risked upon his skill, so not one has been quite so successful as he would like others to believe, or as for a few minutes he himself probably sometimes believes. There is no player living who has noticeably a better record than Schaefer. There is none whose record is more noticeably that of a specialist, and yet he has undeniably developed into a general player of quite admirable excellence, without being wholly commanding. Influential patronage has done much for him through favoring him along in the channel that was most to his liking. While he has shown no very decided superiority over Vignaux at the balk-line game in the aggregate, at that alone has he shown any strength over Slosson. At cushion carroms he has a record second only in feebleness to that of Sexton, whose intensity of lustre in this specialty is due solely to the fact that he has defeated Schaefer four times out of six; but Daly has beaten Sexton four times out of five, and Slosson has beaten him twice out of thrice. These figures as to Schaefer and Sexton run counter to the popular notion. This is not simply because both possess qualities in private that have won for them many friends. The public idea of the doughtiness of Sexton at cushion carroms and of the invincibility of Schaefer at all times save when contending with Sexton at cushion carroms has been cultivated by their partisans, who make voluble proclamation of victory, but are either prudently silent as to defeat or in their soreness treat it with a sneer which implies that they would rather unjustly impeach their idol for carelessness than confess that their own judgment of his actual ability could by any possibility have been at fault. There is one especial merit in Sexton's victories over Schaefer at cushion carroms, and that is that they were achieved in spite of the fact that Schaefer had led him by three years in practicing the game. It was a game Sexton despised, a game he refused to play when Schaefer from Chicago challenged him in 1879, (and challenged Slosson as well,) and a game he accepted near the close of 1880 only because he had discovered in 1879 and 1880 that he could not spare the time for that practice at billiards by which alone he could continue in the van at the other two games then in vogue, of both of which he had been the champion. The fact that Sexton was able to defeat Schaefer at the game the latter had made a specialty of ever since early in 1878, when he "discounted" the late John Flack at it, leads to the reflection that Vignaux also deserves credit for having been almost able to hold his own at balk line, for Schaefer had had a good start of him in time, and superior advantages in practicing due to professional association. The player who had had longest and broadest familiarity with balk line was Slosson; but it was not until May of 1884 that he was permitted to encounter Schaefer, who meanwhile had had such ample practice with Vignaux here and in Paris that, while in no one of their three matches, aggregating 6,800 points, was he less able to send his "average" up 80 per cent. beyond the commonplace one by which he had won the balk-line championship in the Chicago tournament of March, 1883, a year of memorable inequities among the billiard players, whose boast was that they would make Slosson so rusty from lack of practice that he would never again be heard of as an expert. The boast was not wholly fulfilled, although Slosson has never since quite had his form of 1882-3; but had there been the slightest admeasurement of sporting justice Slosson would have been awarded that championship not once only, but also twice, merely through Schaefer's refusal to play him. That Schaefer was afraid of him is not for a moment to be entertained; but that his influential patrons were afraid for him is abundantly in evidence. Slosson may or may not recover his old form, of which there has been a glimmer only in the New-York tournament of 1881, but even as it is he is not a sub-

ject for odds, for in these two men's public contests, or those announced for stake, prize, or purse, and for which an admission fee was charged, Schaefer has shown his superiority at balk line alone, having won seven out of eleven. The other man has won four out of seven at straight rail, four out of six at the champion's game, and three out of five at cushion carroms. Twenty-one of these games have been played West, and Schaefer has won eleven; of the eight East Slosson has won five. Between players so close in skill, local influences can shape results. Had all the games been played West, Schaefer should have won fifteen to be in practical proportion with those he has actually won in that section. Had all been played East, Slosson should have won nineteen. Neither has cause to be jubilant over the other. They are even in matches. Slosson simply leads Schaefer by one tournament game, or by seven to six.

Proffer of points tends to repress playing among professionals. It catches the multitude, but it impinges on the self-respect of every expert sensitive to the dignities of his profession rather than simply alert to the ring of money. The tender to such men as Daly and Slosson is fudge in the sense that it is largely deceptive, and it is wasted effort in that it defeats its purpose whenever the latter is sincere. If Daly or Slosson thinks that odds can be given him in safety he is surely not going to help the other man to prove it by playing him. If they believe that he cannot give it there are two reasons why they will not accept it. First, its acceptance will degrade them and glorify him. Next, they are liable to be beaten by the mere turn of a ball at a critical stage, notwithstanding that probably they could give quite as much odds and win quite as often. The meaning of this is that what seems to be big odds is very far from it. Schaefer offers Slosson 500 in 3,000. The 500 have a portentous look, while 16 2-3 are very insignificant figures. Yet the two are one, the less representing the percentage of the greater. Let any two men of nearly even speed play four such games, and three of them will probably be won by more than 500 points. The whole four will probably be won by much more than an aggregate of 2,000. This percentage is approximately true of any length of game. It is simply greater or less as the styles of the games vary. It will be most at straight rail, and least at three-cushion carroms or at bank shots. It is controlled by the possible length of the runs, but only the final run has any physical effect, whatever moral effect the intermediate ones may have in "rattling" a player more at one style of billiards than at another. All players "rattle" more or less, and none "rattles" more thoroughly than Schaefer, as none recovers more quickly than Vignaux. It makes no difference whether the game is one in which an average of 50 is likely, or one in which an average of 50 is likely, the big defeat will come. This was illustrated in the first series contest, that of Ubassey and Burger in 1867, where the average was in the vicinity of 5, and the other extreme has been illustrated often since. Schaefer has won by more than half the game at straight rail, and he has been beaten more than half at cushion carroms. He is a conspicuous example, because a good general player.

The assertion that all 3,000-point games will "average" a defeat of more than 500 points has the twofold merit of being new and startling. It would seem, and this, too, is startling, that it does not make a very great difference what the grade of the competitors is, and that they might as well be Catton and McLaughlin as Vignaux and Slosson or Schaefer and Slosson. Twenty-one protracted games between men of various degrees of speed and taken as they casually come in turning over pages of manuscripts show a total score of 60,400 points for the winners and 41,892 for the losers. This is an average shortage or defeat of 886 points. But the 21 are not a perfect test of the case of odds of 500 in 3,000, no more, no less. Eleven of the games will answer nicely. They were just 3,000 points apiece, and they show an aggregate score of 27,040 points for the losers, or 541 9-11 points shortage apiece. This is not eloquent in behalf of the modern professional idea of giving odds by telegraph or mail.