

CHICAGO'S PLACE IN CUE HISTORY ALL-IMPORTANT

Veteran Sport Writer Re-views Famous Matches Conducted Here.

BY T. Z. COWLES.

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The part played by Chicago in the development of the game of billiards has been a very important one. To this city, more than to any other city in the world, possibly excepting Paris, the original home of the three ball carom game, the world is indebted for the production of great players and the unfolding



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or the possibilities of the most genteel among all athletic sports. For billiards is rightly termed "the gentleman's game." A well conducted billiard room is today an irrefragable place of diversion. Good billiards and good manners go together. So do good billiards and temperate habits. Rowdies and hard drinkers are persona non grata in a first class billiard room. They have never succeeded in the physical dexterity of the game.

Calls for Clear Brain.

To be a good billiard player a man must have a clear brain and steady nerves. Alcoholic stimulants are destructive to both brain and nerve. The greatest billiard player in the world today and probably the greatest the world has ever seen, is and has always been a total abstainer. Willie Hoppe does not know the taste of liquor. He is a temperance sermon all by himself.

In sketching Chicago's share in the growth of billiards we will avoid the close chronology of the game and deal with records to a limited extent only. To begin with, it can be fairly said that the strongest single force in Chicago billiards was Thomas Foley, now, as well as half a century ago, a room keeper.

Tom Foley Once Champion.

But Foley has been far more than a room keeper. As long ago as 1806, when he dropped the management of the Briggs house billiard room and opened a place of his own on Dearborn street, at the corner of the alley toward Monroe street, Tom Foley was a strong player. He held the Illinois championship for several years.

To Michael Phelan must be ascribed the honor of having been the pioneer in American billiards. Phelan was playing championship and match games more than sixty years ago, and winning pretty much all of them, too. More than that, he was the first man in the world to bring out a good billiard cushion.

Previous to that the cushion was made wholly of cloth and had not anything like the strong and accurate resiliency of the cushions of today. The cushion is the heart and soul of billiards. How the earlier Frenchmen even played on tables fitted with dull cloth cushions is a mystery to modern billiardists. The only saving grace that can be allotted to those dreadful old cloth cushions is the fact that, unlike the huge 6x12 English tables with their six pockets, the French tables, having no pockets, compelled the cultivation of the art of making plain caroms.

Moves to Manufacturing Field.

Phelan's withdrawal from the field of contestants on the green cloth came with his success as a manufacturer of billiard tables. The Phelan & Collender tables held first place for a number of years, but finally lagged behind in the march of events. The house of J. M. Brunswick & Bros., in Cincinnati, began to loom up as formidable competitors in 1868, and put up so strong a bid for popular favor that after sixteen years of bitter rivalry the H. W. Collender company, successors to Phelan & Collender, was merged into the competing Chicago concern, and in 1884 the Brunswick-Balke-Collender company came into operation.

So inviting had the Chicago field become that the company had previously transferred its headquarters to this city, with branches in other cities. Beginning with the consolidation in 1884, this company has since promoted nearly all the billiard tournaments and matches worth mentioning.

Big Tournament in 1883.

The first big impetus to billiards came in March, 1883, when the first balkline tournament was played in Central Music hall, Chicago. Prof. Swing preached there Sundays, while for twelve out of fourteen days and nights the click of billiard balls supplanted the professor's liberal theology that was expressed in his quaint drawl. The off and on of religion and sport never bothered Prof. Swing. He was a good sportsman himself.

The players in the initial balkline tournament of 1883 were Schaefer, Vignaux [France's biggest representative], Daly, Sexton, Joseph Dion, Lou Morris, and Tommy Wallace.

Schaefer Causes Balkline.

The phenomenal rise of Jake Schaefer as an exponent of the unrestricted carom game, was what gave rise to the balkline game. Something had to be done to handicap Schaefer. In 1879, at McCormick hall, corner Clark and Kinzie streets, Schaefer ran out 1,000 points, straight rail, in three innings, with an average of 333 1/3 and a high run of over 600. Slosson was at bat only three times, and his total string was 44. So the balkline game was thought out as a means of equalizing the players by eliminating rail play.

Schaefer developed in Chicago. So did Slosson. So did George Suttor and Frank Ives in the professional ranks, and Calvin Demarest, and Walker Cochran as amateurs. Demarest had become easily the greatest amateur player in the world when he became a professional, and Cochran has also developed a skill that places him near the top of the professional list. If

the players just named were dropped out of the body of great billiard players a big hole would be left. Chicago is responsible for them all.

Frank Ives, who succeeded Schaefer as the leading player in the world, had his maiden entrance in a cushion carom tournament in 1887, which was played in the hall on Madison street, opposite The Tribune building. Ives was a Michigan boy, and this was his first public performance in good company.

The writer of this article was the manager of that tournament, and while Ives got none of the prizes, his style of play gave plain promise of what he subsequently became. Many think he became the greatest of all billiard players; greater even than Hoppe.

I have never accepted this view. In

my judgment Willie Hoppe is very much the strongest billiard player the world has ever seen. The cushion-carom tournament of 1887, at which Ives made his debut, had as other contestants Schaefer, Slosson, Eugene Carter, Tom Gallagher, Billy Hatley, John Donovan of St. Louis, and John Thatcher. The first prize was won by Schaefer, Slosson second, Carter third.

Cushion caroms would never go as a popular game. It was too slow. People want to see billiards made. They want big runs. When Willie Hoppe, in the big tournament of 1906, played in the Memorial Orchestra hall, on Michigan avepue, made his big run of 307 at 18-2 balkline—beating the previous world record made by Curé, the Frenchman—the spectators went wild with enthusiasm. Well they might, for it was a great performance.