

# HARDER TEST FOR BILLIARD EXPERTS

## 18.1 Balk Line May Be Employed for Title Competitions to Maintain Interest.

### CONSIDER 18.2 TOO EASY

#### Original Jake Schaefer and Vignaux in a Sensational Game in First Balk Line Tourney.

Owing to the remarkable averages and the numerous high runs that expert billiard players like champion William Hoppe, Jake Schaefer, and Welker Cochran have been making at 18.2 balkline, a movement is now on foot to introduce 18.1 balkline as the standard game for championship competition. As a result, it is probable that 18.1 will be the style of play in the tournament which it is planned to hold some time late this year or early next year, to decide a championship.

The change from 18.2, which has been the popular game for many years, is being urged by veteran players and promoters of the game as a means of making the game more difficult and stimulating interest. Such veterans of the game as Maurice Daly, who was one of the great players of his time, and others who see the progress that has been made, are behind the plan.

"The present-day players, that is, the real topnotchers, have so completely mastered the 18.2 game," said Mr. Daly, "that a change is needed. It is necessary to make the game more difficult. It has become a common thing for the players to make runs of 300 and to make averages of 30 or better in a series of games lasting over a week.

"That is all right for the players, but the game loses interest with the public when one man can hold the table so long. The game tends to become monotonous. And, like those who like any other form of amusement, the billiard fans like action. Not long ago Jake Schaefer, in a series of games with Welker Cochran, twice ran out a string of 300 in four innings, for an average of 75 each time. When a player can do that the competition loses interest. A match becomes more a question of which player wins the break shot and starts.

"While I am advocating 18.1 as a remedy, I do not think it will solve the problem for all time. In another five years some new device to handicap the players will be needed. The point is, that professional players who devote their entire time to billiards will in time overcome most any handicap that can be placed on them. The present day experts know all the tricks of the 18.2 game, how to keep the balls together at one end of the table and avoiding the long drives, and none of them has much trouble in clicking off 200 or more every time he steps up to the table.

"The 18.1 style of billiards is just that much more difficult that only one shot is permitted in balk. For a time at least, it would upset the steady game of those who have mastered the other style. It would take some time for the players to become as expert as they are now at the 18.2 game. William Hoppe holds the title in this style just as he does in all other balkline styles. He plays a remarkable game at 18.1, yet he cannot make the high runs or the high averages that are possible in 18.2 and the fans who watch the games will get a better run for their money under the proposed plan."

The proposal to change the present style of play brings up the story of how balkline was first introduced in billiards, when the old timers of thirty and forty years ago had so mastered the straight rail game that competitions lacked interest. There is a story told that balkline was introduced because of a remarkable showing made by the veteran Jake Schaefer in a match game at San Francisco in the early '80s. Schaefer played a match for 1,000 points at straight rail. He won the break and ran out the entire 1,000 points, his opponent having but one turn at the table.

However, balkline billiards were really introduced by M. Bensinger, for many years President of the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company. Schaefer's game may have had an influence on his action. However, in the Spring of 1883 Mr. Bensinger promoted the first balkline tournament in Chicago, at which the best players in the world at that time took part. Balkline had been played previously to some extent but never in championship matches or tournaments, and this tournament introduced the game which for nearly forty years has been standard.

This tournament was notable for the fact that it brought together Jake Schaefer and Maurice Vignaux, the great French player and champion of Europe. The tournament was for the championship of the world. The players who entered were Jake Schaefer, Maurice Vignaux, Maurice Daly, William Sexton, Joseph Dion, Lorenzo Morris, and Thomas Wallace. The tournament ran for a week and finally simmered down to a final contest between Schaefer and Vignaux. This was probably one of the most historic games in billiards.

Vignaux had played with remarkable skill throughout the tournament and had not met defeat. Schaefer had played brilliantly and was also undefeated. But the day before the final game was to be played Schaefer was placed in the care of a doctor. It was said that he was suffering from a bad case of nervousness. This was attributed to his coming match with the French champion. Vignaux had been remarkably cool throughout the tourney.

Schaefer remained in care of his physician all of the day he was to play. Report had it that he was in bad shape and would not be able to play. But just before the time set for the game he showed up wearing the jacket he always wore in matches. Vignaux was attired in full dress. There was much speculation over Schaefer's ability under the conditions.

Vignaux early took the lead, and was leading by 100 points at the end of the fourth inning. Then the "Wizard" took the balls in hand, clicked off carom after carom, made brilliant shots, got out of difficult positions, and went along as though he would never make a miss. Soon he had crossed 100, and when he reached the score of his opponent there was a great demonstration. He continued his great playing until he had made a run of 220, the first great run at balkline billiards. Later the Frenchman got close to him again, but with another great run Schaefer pulled ahead again, and with an unfinished run of 108 ran out his string on the Frenchman and won the championship of the world.

Since that time William Hoppe has come into the game as one of its greatest players. He holds the record high run at 18.2 or 308, and is the champion at all styles of balkline. Since Schaefer's time the players have improved on the present style of play. The game in which Schaefer played was eight-inch balkline. The lines have been extended ten inches since then. The only means left now to handicap the players without introducing something entirely new is to try 18.1 balkline, and this may hold the experts in check, for a time, at least.

The New York Times

Published: February 9, 1919

Copyright © The New York Times