

## SKETCH 3003

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### WILLIE HOPPE

Billiards Champion

Born, Oct. 11, 1887

(By The Associated Press)

Billiards and Willie Hoppe were mentioned in the same breath for half a century.

Christened William Frederick Hoppe, the world knew him as just plain Willie from the time he was a boy wonder at the age of six and on through the years when he ruled the ancient indoor game.

Quiet, unassuming, always immaculate in dress, he was poised, self-assured and courteous alike to friend and opponent. He looked more like a cleric than a great figure in the sports world.

He began his dazzling career by touring the dirty, smoke-filled pool rooms of bygone days but so dignified the game that he drew kings and princes, ranking members of world society and opera stars to see him weave a spell with his magic cue.

He probably was the only billiard player ever to give a special exhibition at the White House, playing before President Taft in 1911.

He reached the heights of balkline competition before the first world war, declined somewhat during the "golden twenties" and then came back to be recognized as the greatest three-cushion player in the world.

#### A Young Champion

He was crowned 18.1 balkline champion in 1906 at the age of 18; ruled the 18.2 world from 1910 to 1920; was unchallenged 14.1 king from 1914 on and tried 71.2 successfully in 1938.

As the exacting balkline game took its toll of top-notch players, he turned to three-cushions. Although always a threat, he was unable to win the world title until 1940 when he ran off twenty straight victories, believed to be a record for tournament play.

A year later he collapsed while playing a challenge match with young Jake Schaefer, but in a month he had rebounded from a severe case of pneumonia and retained his title with the loss of only one game out of seventeen. In the 1942 round-robin championship he won eight of the nine contests.

A great player when he was so young that he had to mount a soap box in his father's pool room, he never enjoyed normal boyhood. Baseball was his favorite sport but he never dared play it for fear of injuring his hands.

But, in later years he became a

- 2 -

rabid fan and often took a chance of injury by "working out" with the New York Giants. A real student of the game, he could be found in a seat at the Polo Grounds or the Yankee stadium near the outfield. He wanted to be away from the noise and crowds.

Oddly, he never was able to master golf. He was powerful off the tee but that delicate touch that amazed onlookers at the green-cloth table was missing when he got onto the green.

#### Trained Like Pugilist

He trained for his matches like a prize fighter, doing several miles of road work a day, getting plenty of sleep and watching his diet. Even in later years he could be seen doing his daily walk in Central Park, New York City,—close by the Metropolitan Billiard Academy, where he worked and lived for years.

It was at this academy that he loved to meet his small circle of friends, show them a trick or two about making a difficult shot and give lessons to those who were willing to pay the fee of \$10 an hour.

He was born Oct. 11, 1887 at Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, N. Y., where his father was hotel-keeper, barber and a billiard player of local repute. His mother also played the game well. Willie always gave his father credit for making him practice. If he made a good shot, he received a word of praise; if he made a bad one, his ears were boxed.

He was only six when he and his brother, Frank two years older, began taking on the "drummers" at the hotel. He liked to recall that he and his brother "two-timed" the drummer who thought he was good. Willie would make a good run and then leave the balls open for brother Frank to do likewise. Frank, in turn, would try to tie up the opposition with an impossible shot.

#### A Professor's Opinion

When he was nine he gave an exhibition before a group of Princeton University professors. One of them explained his uncanny skill by saying that his eyes had a peculiar faculty of measuring angles with mathematical precision. He solved billiard problems at a glance.

Two years later, the parents took the boys on a tour of the United States. Some weeks they made \$100, if the father placed his bets right, but there were lean times when the mother had to pawn her diamond ring to get the family out of town.

He was only 12 when he beat

- 3 -

such established stars as Ora Morningstar and Tom Gallagher. After practicing two years in France he defeated Maurice Vingneaux, recognized as the world's best, 500 to 323, in the 18.1 match. That established his world fame.

Short of stature and the necessity of using a box or climbing up on the table to make shots in his early youth resulted in the development of an unorthodox side-arm style. In the middle twenties he developed neurosis in his right arm and often found himself nearly unable to make his favorite masse shot. It was then that he gave up balkline and took up three cushions.

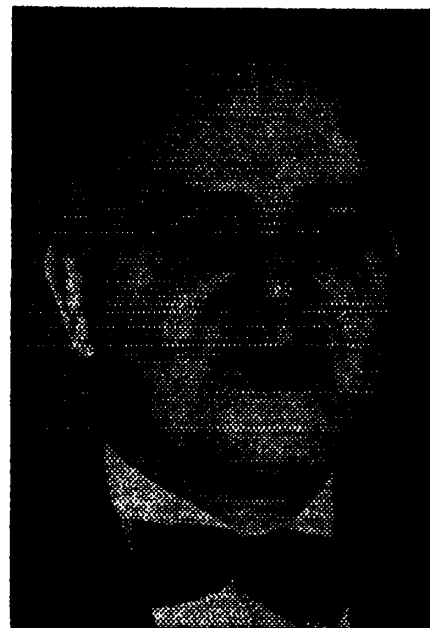
#### Hands Insured for \$100,000

He tried his hand at running a billiard parlor but proved to be a better player than business manager. Although at one time his hands were insured for \$100,000 and he made upwards of \$50,000 a year, he never was wealthy.

Although his face grinned from billiards and posters endorsing all kinds of tobacco and beverages, he did not smoke or drink until late in life; then in extreme moderation.

He was twice married. In 1910 he eloped with Alice Walsh of Baltimore, sister of George Walsh, film actor, and Raoul Walsh, director. The story is they became acquainted when Willie rescued her from drowning. They had a son and a daughter. The marriage ended in divorce in 1924. In 1925 he married Dorothy Dowsey, an actress but became estranged four years later and they were divorced in 1931.

—ORLO ROBERTSON—



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