

Potatoes Help Mosconi

Achieve Billiard Fame

BY CHARLES BARTLETT

It was 10 o'clock on a night in 1920. Papa Joe Mosconi was counting the day's receipts from his combination billiard academy and gymnasium at 8th and Wharton streets in South Philadelphia. A stranger walked in, and allowed he would like to shoot a spot of pocket billiards. Papa Mosconi said he was closing up, and there was no local talent handy.

"I'll play him, Pop," came from a voice in a corner. The speaker was 6 year old Willie Mosconi, who will defend his world pockets championship next Friday, Saturday and Sunday as a climax to the International Sports, Travel and Boat show on Navy pier.

Papa Isn't Astonished

After chiding his son for not being in his little trundle bed upstairs, Papa decided to humor the youngman. Willie hopped up on the table and won hands down, running 15 twice to the visitor's astonishment, but not to Papa Mosconi. He had suspected his progeny's knack for dropping 'em in the side pockets. Fact is, when Papa used to close up shop in the afternoon to go out and root for the Phillies, he would return and frequently catch Willie ripping off runs of 30 and 40, not to mention the cloth now and then. Despite several paternal paddings, Willie kept sneaking back. His dad sought to block these drills by locking up the balls when he left. Small Willie licked that in a conspiracy with his mother, from whom he used to borrow the roundest potatoes in the family bin.

Willie Gets Ice Cream Cone

Papa Mosconi surrendered after Willie's 1920 challenge to the stranger. He began booking the youngster in exhibitions. The one Willie recalls best was a match in which he beat one Joe Angelo, an established player, at Asbury Park. Papa booked Willie and Andy Ponzi, the latter one of Willie's chief rivals in the Navy pier doings. Andy was about ten years older. Papa and Andy split the money after Ponzi and Willie beat

BILLIARD STANDINGS

THREE CUSHION			POCKETS		
Crane	2	0	Lauri	2	0
Irish	2	0	Franklin	2	0
E. Navarra	1	0	Ponzi	1	0
Denton	1	0	Crane	1	0
Procita	1	1	Caras	1	0
Lindley	1	1	Cranfield	1	1
H. Allen	1	1	B. Allen	1	1
Davis	1	1	Tozer	1	1
J. Navarra	0	1	Russo	0	1
Davenport	0	1	Eufemia	0	2
Knapp	0	2	Coslosky	0	2
Ponzi	0	2	Boatman	0	2

Angelo. Willie's take was a double ice cream cone.

Chicagoans will recall the dapper, prematurely grey Mosconi as a 19 year old kid who made his first big time mark in the world's tournament at Bensinger's in 1933. When it was all over, Willie had proved he wasn't a flash in the pan by tying for second back of Winner Erwin Rudolph. He charges his loss of the title to his first game, in which he had Rudolph down, 124 to 82, but choked on the decisive shot. Rudolph then ran out on him.

He's The Boss Man

Since that 1933 debut, Willie has more or less been in charge of the world title beginning in 1941. There have been interruptions by Ponzi and Irving Crane, but Mosconi is now the boss man. He lost the crown to Crane in December, 1946; tournament, but regained it in a challenge match six months later.

Willie holds the world exhibition record of 309 consecutive pocket billiards, and shares with Jimmy Caras, who is also holding forth on Navy pier this week, the challenge match mark of 127. He also has tied the great Ralph Greenleaf's record of running out in two innings.

Mosconi won't go to work until Friday, when he will meet the winner of the national tournament now in progress on Navy pier in a three day battle wherein he will play 150-ball blocks thrice daily. Willie Hoppe, world three cushion champion, will duplicate the procedure against the national angle winner on the same three days.