# THE WAR OF BILLIARDS

## *THE CHAMPION CUE FURIOUSLY BATTLED FOR.*

### ITS DISFIGUREMENT — DRAWN CLUBS AROUND A BILLIARD TABLE—SOME NOTABLE GAMES.

The "billiard war" grew in intensity. At first but a mere spark in the East inflaming the too combustible West, it soon had local fuel heaped upon coals already glowing. After Philip Tieman as a challenger of Dudley Kavanagh for the championship came William Goldthwait. He was a native of Littleton, N. H., and at that time was 22 years old. His improvement had been positive and rapid. There has never been anything like it save, seemingly, in the case of another New-Englander, William Sexton, who almost at one bound, as if in a night, came to the foreground among experts. But Sexton's wonderful flight into proficiency was due to his suddenly gaining an insight into "rail playing" as then primitively and crudely applied to the three-ball carrom game first by John Deery in San Francisco, next by Joseph Dion in New-Orleans, and afterward quite conspicuously in this city by Maurice Daly. Sexton so enlarged upon what, as a boy working in Peter Braisted's room, he caught mere glimpses of in Irving and Tammany Halls while elder players were engaged in matches that he may be said to have been the creator of the wide-open system of rail playing, which in in its tendency to obviate the dreaded "freezing" of the cue ball so liable to occur in the close nursing still adhered to by Daly, Slosson, and Schaefer as late as 1877-8, became practically so formidable that in 1879 it invited its own abolishment at the hands of first-class experts. Unlike Sexton, "The Little Giant" from New-Hampshire owed his swift progress to the development of no specialty, but improved all round. While scarcely one point in his rapid yet effective play conveyed the idea of being particularly brilliant, there was a high artistic charm in all that the youngster did, and during his first match in this city, when, at Chris O'Connor's rooms, Deery defeated him in the longest and most important of four games, as well as in one of the three shorter games, his comparative non-success could not repress the reflection that in him there was every promise that with maturity his manifest genius, if that term can properly be used to denote general fitness for billiards, would flower into splendid development, checked only, if at all, by his light physique and his scant stature for tables not only much wider and longer than those of to-day, but also two or three inches higher. Kavanagh and he had a most spirited tussle before the little fellow challenged for the championship. They played a match for $1,000 in Irving Hall in the Spring of 1862, Kavanagh winning by 1,500 to 1,282, although they were nearly even as to high run, Goldthwait's being 130 to the other's 126. The winner averaged 14 44-104, the highest ever reached in that length of game on a 6 by 12 six-pocket table, although Goldthwait had already acquitted himself of seemingly better work by making against Deery an average 14 per cent. higher in a string of 1,000 points on the same form and scope of table for a stake of $100 a side.

It was the New-Hampshire expert who had unwittingly added fuel to the billiard fire by going into business in this city on St. Patrick's Day, 1864. Having as a partner curly-headed Edward Cahill, then a smart second-rate with the cue, but for two decades past a publican in Park-row, and of late an influential political brave, under the banner of Tammany, Goldthwait had opened a room at 185 Sixth-avenue a few months before he challenged Kavanagh for the championship. With Capt. James E. Boyle, now returning from San Francisco with the visiting New-York firemen, Kavanagh had also opened a room at 83 Nassau-street, having vacated the establishment at Broadway and Tenth-street, in which he had succeeded Michael Phelan as proprietor. The latter house had been a thorn in the flesh of Chris O'Connor, and it aggravated him to think that, after he had had the satisfaction of seeing the Tenth-street room dwindle from three floors to one, and finally close, Dudley going into business down town again, Cahill should leave Capt. Tom Reeves's establishment, on Broadway, near Fulton-street, and, with so speedy a player as Goldthwait for a drawing card, go into business almost on a line with the thoroughfare, Fourteenth-street, on which was O'Connor's room, and which, until then, had no real rival north of the St. Nicholas Hotel and south of Twenty-second-street. Aside from his association with those who, however unwittingly, had brought about the unpleasantness characterizing the Kavanagh-Tieman match of April, 1864, Chris became a strong ally of Kavanagh as a matter of business policy, and Phelan, besides encouraging Goldthwait & Cahill with his means, was making their room his almost nightly headquarters, it being near his residence, while to O'Connor's he now seldom went more than once or twice a week. It can readily be imagined that it was easy for the championship match to evoke strong local feeling. The big Hippotheatron was packed on the night of June 9, 1864. The champion had a narrow escape. It was not wholly his superior play that rescued him, for the struggle was a powerful one on both sides, so far as downright execution with one could give it force and snap. Almost throughout his career Goldthwait was a genius thwarted by circumstances—a man of boundless capacity for personal wrack and ruin. He was of those who can easily touch victory with the tips of their fingers, who at times can even lay their palms full upon it, but who can rarely close their hands with the consciousness of having it firmly in their grasp. A wonderful player, Goldthwait would nevertheless have had a record almost barren of triumphs if he had not encountered Deery. Near the close of his championship match with Kavanagh, when "The Little Giant" had his antagonist beaten, if ever the latter was beaten while yet play was unfinished, he in some unaccountable way bungled in his stroke with the artificial "bridge," and left the two red balls and his own so near the right lower corner that only one or two shots were needed for his opponent to huddle them. Goldthwait had miscued, perhaps from overreaching. Off this gift, although early in the run the cue dropped from his hand, Kavanagh braced himself sufficiently to make the highest run of the night, and that feat quite used up "Goldie," who in one more inning found himself beaten 75. The incident in nowise detracts from the excellence of Kavanagh's performance at that trying juncture, but the opportunity should not have come to him. He was far behind, was feeling the effects of the hot pace his antagonist had set for him, and his ball was off table. Goldthwait should have seen to it, no matter what the temptation to score in his own behalf, that when it came his opponent's turn all the balls were in the "string;" yet he left them all outside. This was the stiffest and most furious four-ball game Kavanagh was ever called upon to play on a 6 by 12 four-pocket table, and it may be recorded that on that style of table he never again came near its average, (17 38-86, Goldthwait's being 16 65-85.) His best run was 154, while his opponent's was 117.

Tieman had now to be served once more, and for the last. He challenged because he thought that in Irving Hall he had not been accorded courteous and impartial treatment. They played in the Hippotheatron on Sept. 15, and Kavanagh won by 1,500 to 927. Tieman had the manliness to acknowledge that on this occasion he was fairly vanquished. The truth is that he lacked the cool blood for a successful match player. Kavanagh's average on this occasion was 14 53-103. The best runs were 147 by the winner and 139 by the loser. Tieman never played again in public. He was matched with Goldthwait for $5,000 in the following year, but rheumatism forced him to retire. Goldthwait, thinking that he would have an easy victory, permitted Tieman to substitute John McDevitt, then an Indianapolis unknown, for a stake of $1,000 a side. Cahill went on with Goldthwait to the anticipated picnic in Cincinnati. McDevitt won by 1,500 to 1,086.

It became Goldthwait's turn once more to make a fight for the championship. He and Kavanagh played at the Academy of Music on Jan. 20, 1865. It was the old Academy, a cold spot for carroms in the Winter time, and the contest passed into history as the first instance of *billard frappé.* One could almost fancy he heard the crackling of ice whenever two balls came in vigorous contact. Goldthwait resorted to the expedient of clutching a large stone jug of hot water whenever he was in his seat, thus presenting the suggestive feature of a billiard player squatting in the orchestra and cooking himself in anticipation of the "cooking" his antagonist was qualified to give him. The expedient was grateful to the touch, but unphilosophical. The big brown jug was a mistake in caloric. The familiar "little brown jug" would have done better work. Goldthwait's hands were warmed while he hugged the heated vessel, but their acquired humidity made them all the more susceptible to the cold blasts that swept upon them from the vast, untenanted stage as soon as he approached the table. Playing Joseph Dion in the new Academy, years afterward, Melvin Foster, "taking a fool's advice," improved upon the Goldthwait scheme for keeping his hands warm by bathing them from the inside with liberal doses of a decoction of juniper berry, and he won the match, even if he did have to be told that it was at an end. The fuller-blooded Kavanagh vanquished Goldthwait and Eddie Cahill's jug by 1,500 to 1,404, or one point to an inning. His average was 15 60-96, and his best run 158, Goldthwait's being 113.

That was Kavanagh's last contest for the cue, and his last at that style of billiards. Louis Fox was his next challenger, and play was set for May 16 following in the Everett Rooms, adjoining where now is Sexton's place of business. Although not confined to his house, yet Kavanagh was too ill, in the judgment of himself and friends, to undergo the fatigue of a contest, and he forfeited the champion cue and $250. No actor in those times can care to revive all the memories of them, and so, without entering into the physiology of the situation on the night of May 16, it will perhaps suffice to declare that had there been no "billiard war" there would have been no forfeiture.

This did not end Dudley Kavanagh's professional career, but it was much too brief. He retired that year, but not formally then or at any other time. If he took counsel upon so vital a matter as his retirement he was ill advised. Challenged for a heavy stake by both John McDevitt and Joseph Dion, he should have hurried to lift the gage of battle. He must almost certainly have vanquished the former, who was then a spasmodically tremendous player, but not well equipped in temperament and schooling, and too utterly lacking in experience to enable him to make effective use of his "nursing" specialty by retaining his self-command. Dion was at that time a much riper and better general player than McDevitt, but Kavanagh ought to have beaten even him. There was the foundation of a fortune at his command had he been discreetly counseled not to turn away from the promise that opened before him when younger players were brought forward as his opponents, and at the same time as the representatives of high stakes truly worth the winning. Kavanagh could well have afforded to defer for the nonce any business project of his in order to have permitted himself the pleasure of attending to the cases of these youngsters, with others almost certain to follow. It was not skill he lacked, and he was worshipped amply in being the idol of the times; but among the friends he was fated to make or retain were clearly not all whose judgment made them worth having as friends. There was more billiards in him when he stopped than at any other time, notwithstanding that a great deal had been got out of him. Without the short, quick, light step, in so heavy a man as Phelan denoting marked nervous energy, lacking the rapid and thorough comprehension of the situation as soon as the balls came to a rest, perhaps not needing the readiness of resource and certainly not having the magnetism of stroke and style conspicuous in Phelan, and possibly not half of Phelan's judgment in purely defensive measures on the billiard table, Kavanagh's general methods, like his carriage, were grateful to the eye. There was much more system in his playing than in Phelan's, "safety" apart; there was the charm of quiet grace in his leisurely stride and movement; there was even the idea of perfect self-command in the jaunty air of the cue as, suspended in his right hand, it swayed forward and backward while he walked about the table surveying for the stroke he had next to play; there was richness and there was flexibility in his style, even when his method was by no means changed; his conceptions were usually impressive to the beholder, even if he himself were sometimes tardy in reaching or unfolding them; and his stroke, swinging, firm, elastic, vivid, was a delight to the non-partisan spectator, and under all circumstances an encouragement to his backers. Altogether, he was far too superb a player for billiards to lose; and yet he lasted but five years after having been declared an undoubted victor, and but three years after his successes began to be uniform. There was still a wealth of possibility in a cue that was unbeaten in a match from April 3, 1862, to Oct. 5, 1865, when Pierre Carme defeated him by 250 to 224 at the three-ball game for $1,000 a side; and yet, content with one more triumph, (achieved on the following Nov. 4 in defeating the same Carme for the same stake by 1,500 to 1,339 at the four-ball game, with push and crotch barred, averaging 25 on a 5½ by 11 carrom table,) he laid that almost invincible cue aside forever.

The forfeiture transferred the battle ground from the metropolis to Rochester, to which city Deery, then a resident of Washington, D. C., went and defeated Fox by the narrowest margin yet for the championship—1,500 to 1,465. The averages were 16 60-90 and 16 41-89, and the best runs 166 for Deery and 276 for Fox. The new champion was 326 behind when that run came to him. It was made at the lower end of the table. It was a wonder that he came anywhere near it. The contest took place in Washington Hall, which that night held probably 1,000 persons. Perhaps not a score of that number believed before the game began that Deery could win it. Betting was so much in favor of Fox, as expressive rather of choice than of odds, that the writer heard not a solitary proffer to wager. His being behind was naturally a keen disappointment to the Rochestrians, notwithstanding that they had no wealth in jeopardy, for it was their city, not Fox, that was endangered. They managed to make about as noisy a night of it as billiards has ever experienced, and Deery was the target for good-natured jibes unnumbered. Once he showed his teeth. Fox had Deery's ball and a red in a "jaw." Deery had worked this feature of old billiards in the tournament of 1863, and he knew its value. He rose to watch Fox, as was his privilege. From different quarters of the hall came the command: "Sit down!" Deery uttered his defiance: "You'd better come and make me sit down!" All this annoyed Fox. After a few shots he lost Deery's ball, which tumbled into the pocket, and after a time the run closed for 63, although the same two balls in the same situation once yielded McDevitt just 1,500 in Cooper Institute, with the ivories still in prison when he stopped. Fox was ruined in the house of his friends, who really had so little feeling against Deery that, when at last he won, they gave him the ringing cheers they had meant to bestow upon his antagonist. Once they made it so hot for Deery that Fox, laying his cue down, refused to play unless more considerateness were shown the Washington expert. The Rochester player was clearly upset, but that alone did not suffice to vanquish him. It was the best game that Deery ever played on that kind of table and under those terms, and yet he could not have won it but for the sheering of a red ball while Fox was nursing, or rather driving to nurse. It was a great night for flies, and the gaslight above the table singed them without number; but their corpses managed to get in the way of Louis rather than to prove a hindrance to John. Twice a dead insect was noticeably a bar to Fox, but the second occasion was so near the close of the game that the Rochester man might well have reasoned that fate was against him. He seemed so to have thought 15 months later, as there is too much reason to believe that he threw himself into the Genesee River, rather than fell.

A more modest man as to his own merits than poor Fox has seldom been seen in the professional ranks. He was utterly devoid of swagger. Oppressive volubility about his own greatness was not in him. He altogether lacked self-assertion unless some rival spoke disparagingly of his skill, and then his attempts at vindication were so unskillful as to prove him wholly unused to "blowing his own horn." He was an ungainly player for one of power so marked. Nature had not endowed him richly for work with the cue. Whatever of billiards there was in him had come by dint of patient toil and thoughtful experiment long pursued. There was a great deal of originality about him, which explains why he was one of the most labored players that ever rubbed chalk; and he used much of that carbonate, not simply on his cue-tip, but also between his left thumb and forefinger, upon his palms, and along his cue. Like Tieman, Fox was essentially a nurser, but of greater strength, which he owed to deliberation. Their processes were different, because Tieman was so much more of a natural player than Fox. Out of the latter's deliberation sprang all that was so distasteful to the spectator—the halting stroke, the indecision as betrayed in the protruding tongue, the peculiar play of the facial muscles, the awkward lifting of the right leg, even when there was scarcely need to reach at all, and the sawing of left thumb and index finger with cue, always three saws before he let go his stroke. A harder worker never stood up to table, whether in match or practice game. He was the earliest to make of professional billiard playing in America a downright task. It is a singular coincidence that Fox's first and last public matches were with Deery. The first was for $250 a side at the three-ball game, 250 points up. It was to have been determined in Buffalo, N. Y., but Deery declared forfeit.

It is not generally known that the first challenger of the champion who was brought to light by the Rochester game was Pierre Carme. The match was to have been decided in Washington, but the French expert refused finally to play that style of game, as on Dec. 4, 1865, he had refused to play it with Kavanagh, to whom was then forfeited $500 of Phelan's money as the outcome of the match of three games, of which, as already recorded, Carme had won the first and Kavanagh the second. On Jan. 6, 1866, forfeit was declared to Deery also. These forfeitures were strategic moves in the "billiard war." The Frenchman was secretly counseled not to play the matches, or rather not to practice for them, on the ground that the American game was unworthy of the skill of so great an artist. It is better known to the writer than it was to anybody else then living but Carme and McDevitt that the Frenchman did for a time practice for the match with Kavanagh that was forfeited. The practicing was done on the top floor of 185 Sixth-avenue, and Carme had McDevitt to assist him. For a few days the Frenchman went at it with zeal, and showed surprising capacity for progress. It was not he who stopped. It was McDevitt, who, quick to see that a change had come over Carme, refused to waste his time in the vain attempt to further the interests of one who was now trifling, although perfunctorily carrying out his contract with Phelan in respect of the two matches yet to be played with Kavanagh and Deery. It was then that Phelan, inditing a caustic but polite note to the stakeholder in explanation of the reason for the abandonment of the Carme-Kavanagh match, announced forfeiture on the part of the Frenchman and in favor of the American. Phelan long afterward established Carme in a billiard room on the southwest corner of Broadway and Twenty-second-street. He is now in Mexico—for many years past too fat for billiards, but still at it.

Deery's next challenger was McDevitt. This match was to have been played in Washington; but once more Deery changed his residence to this city, and at the Cooper Institute, March 13, 1866, he defeated his challenger by 1,500 to 1,145, the best runs being 119 for Deery and 95 for McDevitt, and the averages but 10 110-139 for Deery and 8 41-138 for McDevitt. The lack of speed was the more noticeable because McDevitt, 10 months before, in beating Goldthwait, in Cincinnati, had made what was then the highest run on record, (267,) and the highest average, 22 48-66. Fox beat the run, but the average long remained at the top. It may be as well to explain that all the runs and averages spoken of here are those of matches for money or prizes. It was not often the case at that period that men in practice would make very much higher runs than in a match. Those who did were usually unsuccessful match players. McDevitt was the first player whose work in practice immeasurably eclipsed his doings in public. He had run as high as 681 without "jawing" the balls. His averages had ranged from 25 to 50. He was the favorite for this match at the odds of 2 to 1, and nobody sought the short end, at least until half the game was over, when it was seen that McDevitt could not play, and would not be able to do much that night, even should Deery set the balls up for him and tie them with a string. The game deserves to be studied scarcely less for what its high runs and averages fail to exhibit as for what they succeed in showing, which latter is that it was the worst played of all the championship series. The figures are deceptive. Deery prolonged the game unnecessarily. Up to near the first two-thirds, when it was clear that he had McDevitt beaten, he averaged 19 against his opponent's 12. Then he began to play safety when he could easily, by not crippling himself by such tactics, have won by not far from 600. It was really not safety that he played. He was merely obstructing himself in order to prove unnecessarily that all that McDevitt could do was to count off the intended safe shot, and he counted very often. If anybody ever saw feebler round-the-table play than McDevitt's, more marked inability to command the balls in nursing, or more injudicious strokes in the midst of so many attempts at safety, it has been his lot to see what has fallen to no one else. There was positively nothing meritorious on either side but the "banking" of Deery. McDevitt made him "bank" nine times, and he hit a ball every time and counted five times. The trouble with McDevitt that night was that he was young in match playing, and he carried too much weight not alone in the odds that were piled on him by the proffering bettors, but also in the circumstance that he had just come into possession of the fateful room at 185 Sixth-avenue, and he fancied that success there depended upon his winning his first public match in the East. Deery was making his headquarters at Chris O'Connor's. Thus the two rooms were still arrayed against each other, although one had changed hands. It was virtually Phelan & Collender's, and they had, by the way, held the lease of O'Connor's, which, as a pacificatory measure, they surrendered during the second or third year of the "war," by consenting to have the reissue made out in Mr. O'Copnor's name. This appeal to reason failed to bear fruit. It rather prolonged and heightened hostilities.

Deery and Joseph Dion were the next battlers for the cue. They played scarcely better than McDevitt and Deery, but there was immediate reason for their slowness of gait. The heat of the "Billiard War" had grown fiercer, not so much with the enrolling of new recruits as because of desertions or drumming out from one side into the other. Two weeks after the Deery-McDevitt contest a special and unmistakable indignity had been put upon this series of games, and upon all billiards as well. During the absence of its custodian, Deery, the champion cue had been disfigured by the removal of its gold-mounted hilt, containing the portraits of the eight original contestants. This act of vandalism was calculated to make the gulf between the warring factions so deep and wide that there could be no crossing over. It was kept out of the daily prints, and out of all others as far as possible, for it could not have been accurately described by the one word disfigurement. The hilt was recovered without digging quite as far as China for it, and the champion cue was intact again when Deery and Dion began for its possession a game that called into requisition Police Captain Cafferty and his reserves, marshaled on all sides of the table, with clubs drawn, and standing guard over the balls.

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