

THE CHICAGO TOURNAMENT

REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE BILLIARD PLAYERS.

POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF VIGNAUX'S DEFEAT—ATTEMPTS TO EQUALIZE PLAYERS—CUSHION CAROMS AGAIN TO THE FRONT.

The Chicago tournament, which was brought to a close on the night of April 6, will long be memorable. In two respects it was the most remarkable one of modern times. There were no ties, and in but two games out of the entire twenty-one played were the favorites beaten. The absence of ties was due in large part to the fact that there were but seven contestants. The usual number is from eight to ten, and even eight in this case would have necessitated one or more ties. The players who were the favorites in the betting when the games began in which they were defeated were Dion and Sexton, respectively vanquished by Morris and Daly; but the odds were slight, and the betting was not active. Vignaux had for many days been the favorite over Schaefer for the deciding game; but when the hour of contest arrived, Schaefer, thanks as much to Daly and Dion as to himself, had shown such speed as not alone to dispel the betting odds against him, but also to make ten to nine in his favor.

The triumph of Schaefer, while it is decisive of the tournament, is not determinative of any question of skill as between him and Vignaux. The blame of this lies with the game chosen. It was a two-edged sword, and could cut either way. Vignaux was not consulted as to the style of game, had no voice as to it in any way, and did not demand it. Had he proved victor his success would have stood forth as a reproach to Americans, who, for the mere sake of novelty, had introduced a method of caroming that everybody would have thought, had he won, pre-eminently suited to the Frenchman's style of stroke. There would have been some excuse for introducing a new method of playing had Vignaux demanded it, but there could be no satisfactory one for Americans turning aside from a game they had originated, which Vignaux himself had adopted by playing two international matches at it and proposing to play a third, and at which it had been demonstrated that he could be beaten by an American. They should have adhered to the game at which Slosson had proved that Vignaux was not invincible even on his own battle-field, rather than have instituted one at which, before its true character became known, it was supposed that a foreign player would have a marked advantage over Americans. Even the plea of novelty could not justify this unnational proceeding on the part of Americans, for the tournament was to be held in Chicago, where the champion's game has never been played, and where it is consequently as much of a novelty as any other that could be devised. Fortunately for American players, the new game was proved to be unlike what its projectors claimed it would be, but precisely what a few predicted it would be—a nursing game from first to last, with Vignaux deprived of his greatest advantage, which lies in his power to bring the balls together elsewhere than in the corners of the table. This rare gift of his is most conspicuous at the champion's game, as it enables him to promptly gather the balls on the rail at any point beyond the balk-lines, while American players rely mainly upon the old feature of bringing the balls together in the corner and working them into position on the rail within the next two or three shots. They can bring the balls together into a corner as well as he, because it is the easiest thing in position play to do, and at the game played in Chicago it was only necessary to gather the balls in a corner in order to start on a nursing run, made either by straddling the short lines that conveniently intersect, or by what in the new order of billiard literature is dignified by the title of "the cushion-kiss nurse," which is the shallowest euphemism for our old friend "the rail," accomplished as the latter is by the "cushion-kiss nurse," whether the line is 8 inches or 10 from the cushion, or whether there is no line at all or one 12 inches from the cushion.

Now that Vignaux has been beaten, the other side of this dangerous sword cuts in this way. The game is undeniably new to Vignaux. He had never heard of it while in France. He did not see it until he arrived here three weeks before the tournament. He was not consulted as to it in any feature, and he had but two weeks' time in which to practice for it, while all the American players had two months, and one or two of them had practiced it last year, as well on a 6-inch line as on an 8-inch. One of these was Schaefer. At the meeting of players held in this city on Jan. 6 last it was Schaefer who advocated not only the form of intersections, but also that the line be put only 8 inches from the cushion, while other experts advocated a line variously placed at from 9 to 12 inches away. The idea of the intersecting lines in the corners of an 8-inch "main line" is Schaefer's, or it is nobody's, for nobody has stepped forth to claim it. Had the players adhered to the game that Vignaux had been playing for nearly three years, and Schaefer had vanquished him at it, the French expert could have had no such excuse for his defeat as he now can urge with much force of reasoning, and Schaefer's laurels would be absolutely lustrous. As it is, Vignaux can go back to France with the plausible recital that he had come here under contract to play for so many dollars a day any game and in any place his employers should demand of him, and he was defeated at a game into which he was hurried a few days after his arrival, and with which his strongest opponent had had ample time to become familiar. It was really to play the champion's game that he was cabled and negotiated with to come here, no other game having been named.

This is one result of the new game. Another is that it has spoiled the balk-line system. The continuous balk-line, brought forward first in 1873, and again in 1875, was so palpably a foe to nursing that the players of those days were reluctant to adopt it. Now, when nursing has advanced fully 30 per cent., and needs more than ever to be checked, the players, while professing to place obstacles in the way of it, stultify the balk-line system, and contradict their own professions by attaching to the continuous or trunk line eight short or branch lines that contribute to make nursing easier and more frequent than it has been at any other time since 1873. One of the pleas advanced in support of the intersecting-line system was that it would make contests closer, and bring to the front other players than those whom the faculty of adroit nursing has made prominent, which players have been Schaefer, Sexton, Daly, Slosson, and Vignaux during the past nine years, every one of them having at some time enjoyed the honor of having made the longest run on record. It is instructive to compare the results of this tournament with those of that held in the early part of 1879, which was the last one in which the old or unlimited-rail game was played. There is no appreciable difference between the worst defeats administered in Chicago and those incurred in the rail tournament of 1879. Sexton was beaten by 600 to 87 by Slosson then, and he has now been beaten by 600 to 87 by Vignaux. There were but four or five games in 1879 in which the defeated player ever got as far as his last string, or into his fifth hundred, and there were but five such games in Chicago. This disposes of the theory that the intersecting system would make contests closer. The winners of the chief prizes in 1879 were Schaefer, Slosson, Sexton, and Daly, and now the winners are Schaefer, Vignaux, Daly and Sexton. The nurses are still at the front, save that Vignaux is in the place of Slosson, and Daly and Sexton have exchanged third and fourth places. Instead of progressing in billiards, our players have gone back to 1879. Compare the grand averages of 1879 with those of 1883, and it is discoverable that the present is almost as much of a nursing game as the old one of unlimited rail. These were the averages in 1879:

Slosson.....	37	183-214	Garnier.....	14	150-210
Schaefer.....	23	28-149	Gallagher.....	13	103-229
Daly.....	18	125-156	Rudolphe.....	10	144-276
Sexton.....	14	123-214	Heiser.....	8	107-242

Vignaux is in the place of Slosson now, but upon the whole the field of to-day is not more skillful than was that of 1879, as Garnier and Rudolphe quite made up for the presence now of Dion, Wallace, and Morris. It may be urged that there has been great improvement since 1879 in playing around the table, but the record of cushion caroms, which is essentially open-table play save in rare instances, does not sustain this view. There cannot surely have been much improvement in any kind of billiards since Vignaux was beaten in Paris by Slosson; and yet in Chicago Vignaux and Schaefer have made as many runs of triple figures as Vignaux and Slosson made in their long match in Paris last year. It is true that in Chicago Vignaux and Schaefer have played a total of 3,600 points; but, on the other hand, they have had to stop five times oftener, and string for lead five times oftener, than Vignaux and Slosson had to do in their 3,000-point game in Paris, which was continuous, so far as run-making was concerned. Besides, it has been claimed that the balk-line system of intersections makes long runs less numerous than any other system, and enforces more open-table play. It is our experience that it does actually make the high runs a trifle less lengthy than the champion's game on a 14 by 28 inch line; but it more than makes up for this by increasing the number of runs made by nursing chiefly. In Chicago Vignaux and Schaefer have made more than twice as many runs between 20 and 99 as Vignaux and Slosson made in Paris. The difference between the two games seems to be that in one the player has to use the length of the table to make a long run at long intervals, while in the other he uses the corners and one end of the table to make runs of from 70 to 240 every four or five innings. The result is the same as affecting the other players; Schaefer and Vignaux are great nurses, whether they play one system or the other. The chief objection to the new system is that the pretense is made that it is not nursing. The disparity between the scores made by Vignaux and Schaefer and those made by their opponents proves that this pretense has no solid basis. Were it otherwise, Daly, Sexton, Dion, Wallace, and Morris would have come near beating them at all times, and occasionally would have beaten them as surely as that Wallace and Morris tied for third, fourth, and fifth prizes in the tournament at cushion caroms, which game is an open-table one carried to a disheartening extreme.

There is one surprising feature of the Chicago tournament, and that is that where so many runs of triple figures were made—almost as many, in fact, as eight players, calling for seven more games than were necessary in Chicago, made in the unlimited-rail tournament of 1879—a run of

300 was not reached. Schaefer played no game in which he did not reach triple figures, and in three or four of his games he made two such runs. Vignaux failed in but one game to run 100 or more, and in several he made two such runs. It is not easy to account for the lack of a run of 300, more especially as in five of the games each of these two experts played he had the field wholly to himself, and could do as much with the balls as if he were merely practicing or playing an exhibition game with an amateur. There is one player, who has never experimented with the 8-inch line, who for weeks has stood ready to wager that he will play three games of 600 points on that 8-inch line and run 300 in the first one and 400 in at least one of the three; and judging by the fact that, while not having had the stimulus of either a match or a tournament to urge him on, he has in purely voluntary practice made runs of 309, 295, and 295 on a 9 1/4-inch line, and not played more than a dozen games at that, he ought certainly to run 300 or more on the much shorter line, which largely facilitates the rail-nurse, as well as the riding of the "pony." It is only a question of a brief time, if the game continues to be practiced, when runs of 100 will be made at it in matches. Considering the character of the game, not even the "averages" in Chicago have been remarkable. While Vignaux and Schaefer both surpassed what was accomplished in the deciding game, the one having made upward of 31 against Lon Morris and the other exactly 40 against Daly, yet the 28 1/2 with which Schaefer defeated Vignaux is, on the score of merit, much the best in the tournament; for neither contestant, so far as has yet been made public, had then a picnic, every stroke having to be played for all that ivory is worth.

After the contract of Vignaux shall have expired it is not likely that the new game will be heard of. While in this country Vignaux may be put forward as the challenger of Schaefer, because both experts are virtually under one management; but no American will, as matter of choice, enter into a match at this game with Schaefer. Slosson is the only American who would stand a ghost of a chance of beating Schaefer at it, and he, like Schaefer and Vignaux and others, is prevented by business engagements from making such a match on the same principle that, were it possible to institute another tournament to-morrow and have Slosson win it, Schaefer, Vignaux, Sexton, and others are prevented by business engagements from challenging him. The weight of artillery is against Slosson, and there is an attempt to make him alone figure as the one who dare not play; but the same principle and the same business policy regulate the other experts that control him, the difference being in degree rather than in kind, as he will toss any of them for choice of table, or will play any of them one game on one table and another on a different table, while they will neither toss nor make an exchange of tables. There is a general impression that Vignaux is under contract for but six months, and that when that time is up he will be at liberty to play Slosson of his own motion. That time will scarcely come. It is probable that already he is under contract for a longer term; and it is even more probable that, even were he not, a new contract would be made in his case. This is foreshadowed in the championship just instituted by the Chicago tournament. Among the cities named as places of contest are Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Dublin, and London. Nowhere in Europe is there any one to play for this championship when Vignaux is not in Paris, and therefore the only meaning of this novel rule of championships is that one of the contract players, presumptively Schaefer, is to be sent from here to play a series of ostensible match games with Vignaux in the foreign cities named, after Vignaux's managers shall no longer have use for him in this country. Meanwhile, it need surprise no one to see Vignaux stay here longer than six months, and it need not surprise any one to see him established here as the proprietor of a billiard-room. His defeat by Schaefer may have a bearing upon his future here. It has taught those controlling him, no less than the public at large, that, as THE TIMES has urged in this series of articles, his skill has been largely exaggerated. He is man, born of woman; he has not simply to *win* in order to make caroms without number, and has not merely to "let go" of his cue in order to have it run the game out when it is necessary for him to win; he is a great player, but there have for years been players as great as he: he has been defeated in this country before, and is likely to be again; he has achieved victories that have drawn the attention of the world upon him, but the world seldom cares to look below the surface, being content to regard the simple fact that there has been a victory, and it has not given due weight to the fact that Vignaux has achieved these victories on his own chosen ground, and by dictating terms to antagonists who, having made the long journey to cross cues with him, were powerless in his presence, and had to submit to whatever he demanded. It is of less consequence now than it was whether he plays Slosson or not. It is of no consequence at all to have them meet in a tournament. There is but one test of skill in billiards, and that is for two men to play a match. When a man of marked skill engages in a tournament nowadays, he is peculiarly apt to have to first play every one of the other entries individually, and then have to play them in a double sense by having them toward the finish play with one another against him. Vignaux experienced this in this country in 1875, and he was fortunate indeed if he did not experience it again last week in Chicago, although, from the nature of the game, chosen opposition of this covert sort could not have made so much difference to him as in 1875, when the contests were nearly all of a close character.

It was originally the intention to hold a tournament here at the champion's game. This may not be carried out. It is as yet a matter of doubt, notwithstanding that the programme has been officially promulgated and a list of entries announced. It is quite as reasonable to assume that the tournament will be at cushion caroms. Ten days ago some of the players then assembled in Chicago conceived the notion that Slosson would be among the competitors in the tournament at the champion's game, and thereupon a move was made to exclude him by utilizing his well-known opposition to cushion caroms as a game that is positively repressive of progress in billiards, his theory being that from the nature of the game a player who practices it daily for months can make no more noticeable headway at it than one who practices it only for a week and then does not take cue in hand again for months. The fear that Slosson would be in the New-York tournament was really groundless, as he had no intention of taking part in it. Nevertheless, the cushion carom project will have several advocates among players who, unlike Vignaux, Slosson, and Schaefer, are not constantly aiming to improve themselves and develop billiards in the only thing in which it is susceptible of noticeable development, viz., position-playing. Now that Vignaux is here, it perhaps would be far from absolutely unwise to give cushion caroms another trial. The attempt in 1881 to establish it by instituting a tournament was so dire a financial failure that most managers would hesitate about repeating the experiment; but Vignaux himself will be an attraction, no matter what the game. The gambling interest are almost to a unit in favor of cushion caroms, since it admits of so many surprises akin to that of Dion's winning the first prize in 1881 over Schaefer, who had for six years practiced the game for two hours to any other expert's 15 minutes, and akin to those by which Heiser beat both Sexton and Slosson, and Dion was beaten by both Daly and Gallagher, neither of whom won a prize, although there were five prizes to be won. The public took no interest in the game of cushion caroms itself and were not in sympathy with the surprises, and hence the gross receipts were not far from \$3,000 below the expenses. There is magnetism in Vignaux's cue, and he may be able to put new life into cushion caroms, although its chief peculiarity remains to-day what it was when, in Boston in 1867, Joseph Dion and John McDavit played it. Asked why it was that players of their speed could not average more than 4 with four balls on the table and counting in twos and threes, Michael Phelan, who was present and who was among the best cushion-caromers of his time, replied: "Because with the player it is half the time 'shut your eyes and trust to luck' for the next shot." It has been so ever since; and Heiser, when he surprised everybody by beating Sexton and Slosson, found the balls rolling so well his way that he averaged 3 1/2 and 3 1/2, and ordinarily no one can play more speedily. When the balls rolled against Heiser, he got down to an average of 1 1/2; and when they rolled well for Schaefer and Slosson, the former averaged 6 1/2 once and the latter 5 1/2 twice. Thus it went all through the tournament, and it might be a good scheme to have another just like it.

This, however, is not the only scheme that has been broached. One has been to hold the New-York tournament at the non-nursing game whose diagram was given in THE TIMES of March 25. In this game the line is placed 12 inches from the cushion, no two short lines intersect, there are no lines in the corners of the table, and the four short lines that are made use of to give "life" to a driven object ball are placed midway of the short rail at each end and midway of the long rail on either side. This makes the game at least 100 per cent. "slower" than the one in Chicago, as it is difficult to score as many as a dozen successive caroms without making a ball travel at least two feet; it makes "the rail" so extremely hazardous that it is not good policy to lie in wait for it; its nursing can be done scarcely more readily on the verge of the line than in the middle of the table; it shuts out no one shot in billiards save the old "rail;" it enforces more draw shots than any other game ever devised; it takes fully 20 minutes to run 100, (and no one has as yet succeeded in running 100 on a 12-inch line); it represents the very opposite features of the intersecting-line system, and—all who have witnessed it pronounce it too worthy a scheme to stand in likelihood of being adopted. The other scheme is to boldly recognize that there is, that there always has been, and that there always will be great disparity between any half-dozen players in any country at any system that admits of what is termed true billiards. It proposes to handicap the contestants on one of the principles that formed the basis of the champion's game when it was originally adopted—that was, for one expert to give odds to another by playing him on a longer line. It has been suggested to use three lines in the tournament if the champion's game, instead of cushion caroms, is to be played. Those contestants who graduate from the preliminary tournament could in the main tournament play on a line 14 by 23, another grade could play on one 17 by 34, and the highest on a line 20 by 43. Only players entered in the higher class would be eligible to the championship, but any player could win the money part of the first prize. This would tend to enhance the interest in the tourney by making the games closer and more exciting. The novelty of the plan would also add to the interest. To this extent it is superior to handicapping in points, which is an old feature, and one in which the handiapper can do no more accurate guessing than he can by using the lines as a means of imposing weight. The plan, it will be observed, leaves two grades of experts free to say which of two classes, first or second, they shall play in. The distances at which the lines are to be put from one another is a matter for adjustment on the part of those interested. The figures given in this article are used only to convey an

idea, which of the three plans—the open-shot or non-nursing game, the cushion-carom game, or the handicap champion's game—will be adopted will probably be known in a few days. If left to the players themselves, the decision must be in favor of cushion caroms, as that game would be handicapping Vignaux and Schaefer in the interest of Dion, Sexton, Daly, Carter, Wallace, and McLaughlin of Philadelphia.

The record of the runs, best single averages, and the grand averages made in the Chicago tournament is appended:

	Won.	Lost.	Average.	Best Average.	Grand Average.	Highest Run.
Schaefer.....	6	0	40	31-11-19	23-35-155	250
Vignaux.....	5	1	31-11-19	22-11-153	22-11-153	246
Daly.....	4	2	17-5-35	13-11-220	13-11-220	40
Sexton.....	3	3	12-12-49	10-22-254	10-22-254	170
Morris.....	2	4	15	10-23-254	10-23-254	101
Dion.....	1	5	8-32-71	10-20-247	10-20-247	101
Wallace.....	0	6	7-223-295	7-223-295	134

*Not having won a game, Wallace has no record as to single averages, which are of no significance when made in a score of fewer points than the game consists of; for otherwise it would be possible for the loser of a 600-point game to "average" technically 599 points, while his opponent, who had won the game, had "averaged" but 300. Through their opponents finishing the game much more quickly than they themselves could have done, Sexton and Dion, respectively, in 3 3/8 and 2 3/8 points, averaged 16 1/8-24 and 17 1/8-14, but in no game in which they scored the full 600 points did Sexton average more than 12 1/2-49 or Dion more than 8 3/2-71.