

Bytes & Billiards

by BOB JEWETT



COMPUTERS ARE EVERYWHERE these days. They started their invasion of pool halls as fancy cash registers, a position they have strengthened by evolving into indispensable accountants with graphical dis-

plays, programmable rate schedules, and more features than we old-time card stampers can understand. They are now advancing on the pool world on several other fronts.

The Information Super Highway has been much in the news, usually in the future tense. For more than 30,000 pool, snooker and billiard fans, it is already a main source of information about cue sports. A sort of electronic bulletin board going by the name "alt.sport.pool" flashes billiard news, questions and answers around the world at the speed of light.

Access to this paper-less magazine is free for many people with computer accounts at schools or at companies that connect to the "Internet." There are also commercial services which provide a connection to anyone with a suitable home computer. For a few dollars a month, you can exchange messages not only with billiard nuts, but also with aficionados of scuba diving, cactus raising, and several thousand other interests.

The pool discussion group has far more readers than writers. In the past month, 80 authors have put fingers to keyboard to generate 300 messages on such diverse topics as Earl Strickland's break shot, the proposed rewrite of snooker rules by the WPBSA, "Willie Hoppe" cue sticks and Panamanian 10-ball. Rules and playing techniques spark very fervent discussions, and the intensity with which some people expound their beliefs can be startling to the uninitiated. While most contributors are from the United States, you will also see comments from Belgium, India, Poland, South Africa, and over a dozen other countries.

Not only is pool being discussed across the network, it is being played! Sven Davies of the United States and Jari Kokko of Finland have organized a team

competition called Internet Equal Offense. At a designated time, each of several five-player teams, perhaps from different continents, goes to their home pool hall and connects to a local computer center by modem. A connection is made through the Internet to a computer in Finland that runs a Scoreboard program. As each member of each team plays an inning of equal offense, the score is forwarded to Finland and immediately appears on the screens at all the tournament sites.

(Equal offense is played like straight pool and scored like bowling, so face-to-face competition is not necessary. The maximum score in an inning is 20 points, and each player gets ten innings. See the BCA rule book for the details.)

To date there have been four tournaments, at about four-month intervals. The most recent competition was in May with teams entered from Finland, Utah and California. The Californians were victorious in their IEO debut with a combined score of 542 out of a maximum of 1000. The September tourney will include a team from Iowa City that is rumored to be very strong.

If you are interested in participating in a future IEO event, send electronic mail to:

jari.kokko@hut.fi or
stdavies@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu.

If you don't have e-mail yet, send me a note and I'll forward you some more information on that old-fashioned medium, paper.

If you are already connected to the Internet, and know about the interactive information-grabbing program Mosaic, you should try connecting to the computer tky.hut.fi in Finland. The connection point is <http://www.tky.hut.fi/~sbo/>. It has several documents on line including a round-by-round commentary on the 1994 Embassy World Professional Snooker Championships.

Next time, I'll compare several pool and billiard simulator programs. Some of them have developed beyond mere toys and are realistic enough to be valuable learning aids.

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