



# Wales, Watching

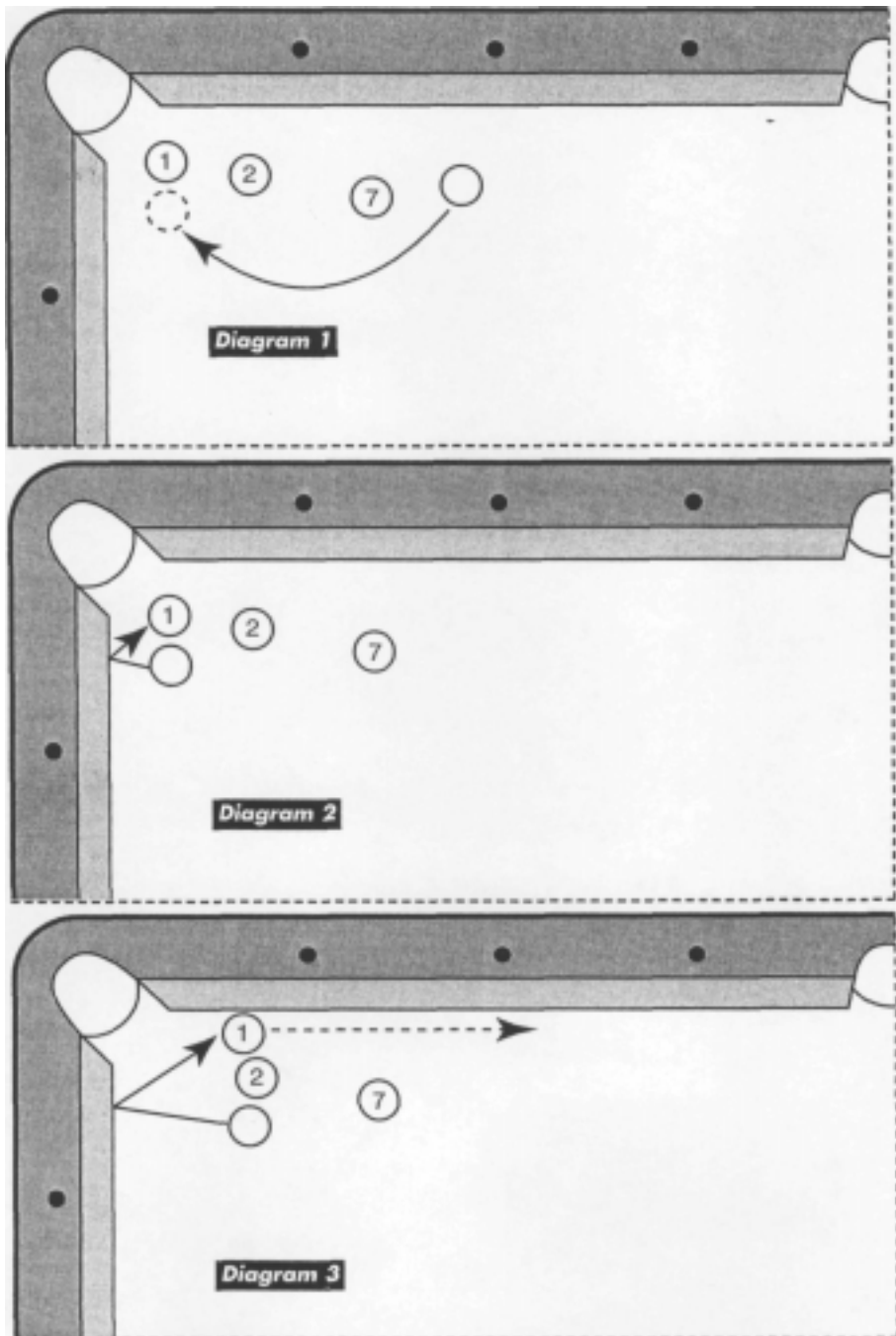
A potpourri from Cardiff.

**Your education** as a pool player can't be complete until you have attended a world-class championship. There is nothing like seeing the top players up-close and in — person, playing in a series of must-win matches. You will see a variety of techniques in action, and will be able to compare them side-by-side. My first pilgrimage to a pool Mecca was for the 1969 U.S. Open in Las Vegas. My latest was to the Victor Chandler World 9-Ball Championships in Cardiff, Wales, July 1-9. There is always something new to learn, old acquaintances to greet, and entertaining pool to watch. Here are some semi-random observations from the CIA — the Cardiff International Arena.

The setup for TV was awesome. Of course, if you're going to produce over 60 hours of live broadcast from an event, with plenty of sponsors, you can afford to do things right. I counted at least 13 cameras in operation simultaneously. There were two in the interview booth, one directly over the table to give the most accurate positions of the balls, two mounted at the top of the booth to give an angled overhead view, two on dollies that wheeled around the foot end of the table, two pocket-cams that must have been mounted to look through holes in the foot pocket liners, two on shoulders for close-up crowd and player shots, one on a long boom to give you that "swooping down like an eagle" view, and a last one with a view of the tables that were used for the non-broadcast matches. Whenever there was a question of whether one ball could pass another to a pocket, you could be sure that a camera would be in the perfect line for the answer.

The lights above the table held 56 four-foot fluorescent bulbs. There were lights in the floor below the table shining up, to give interesting lighting effects on the players. Rotating colored spotlights high up in the arena added sparkle to the wide-angle views. There was also a smoke machine under the table, which was turned on from time to time between matches. It seems that a little smoke gives a feeling of depth to a TV image. Spotlights were ready to light up the stars as they entered the arena. The table was surrounded on the three audience sides by a futuristic railing that emitted blue light.

The players were kept relatively comfortable with individual ice-buckets of bottled



water, large padded chairs, and even personal fans, presumably to keep cool and dry under the hot lights.

The seating was comfortable theater-style. The price was right too — free for the first seven days, and then only about \$40

for all of the last two days of play. A pleasant surprise was the large number of 10- to 16-year-old kids in the audience. One day, a whole grade-school class came in uniform. The game surely picked up a lot of new, young fans.

The food concessionaire was busy pumping out beer, sodas, meat pies — a warm, tasty source of serious cholesterol — hot dogs, muffins, crisps and sandwiches at prices that were reasonable but not quite as nice as the ticket prices. A request for next time, though: please get the French to make the sandwiches and see if the Germans will handle the hot dogs.

The balls had special colors for TV, with the four ball being pink and the seven ball a light brown. The broadcast had a cheat-sheet for those viewers who were unfamiliar with 9-ball. On the bottom of the screen was a display of colored circles for the balls still on the table with the numbers in order. The two commentators made frequent use of the telestrator to plot out expected shots for the viewers.

The referees on each table were in the traditional striped shirts. On the TV table, Michaela Tabb and Alan Chamberlain officiated in alternate matches. Besides racking and calling fouls, they had to pause and restart the match to allow commercials to fit in. Breaks between racks were the only times the spectators were allowed to go for refreshments.

The scores at each table were entered into portable computer consoles, and the results went instantly to a central system which in

turn broadcast the results out to five or six monitors in the milling — around areas in the arena. The display would cycle through all parts of the 64-man chart as well as the day's schedule, so you could get complete up-to-the-minute info in a few seconds.

Near the refreshment areas were a dozen tables of various kinds for the spectators to use between matches and whenever they were bored, as some of the youngsters got after watching a few racks of play. The tournament management had arranged free clinics, challenge matches and trick-shot demonstrations on a regulation pool table. One table was an English 8-ball table in the shape of an hour glass. The "side" pockets were at the narrow waist of the hour glass.

The tournament play itself was interesting for the very wide range of styles of the players. Of the four semi-finalists, the player with the best style for a beginner to emulate was definitely Corey Deuel. As you watch him prepare to shoot, you will see what he plans to do, and then he nearly always does it in the simplest possible way. If you get to watch him, note how consistently he goes through his shooting sequence on each shot.

Steve Davis, the world champion at snooker for many years, also bears watching. He still has some things to learn about

9-ball strategy, but if he gets a makeable shot with the balls spread, expect him to run out with pin-point control of the cue ball. There are still people who claim snooker players don't spin the cue ball; Davis puts the lie to that myth. He also banks well; a long bank on the 6 ball from a safety by Efen Reyes was part of his comeback from 8-2 to a 9-8 win against Reyes.

An interesting safety sequence took place between Oliver Ortmann and Fong-Pang Chao. Ortmann had made a combination and left the 1 ball near the pocket, as shown in **Diagram 1**. Unfortunately, the cue ball had rolled behind the 7. His solution was to shoot a full masse shot softly to leave the result shown in **Diagram 2**. I expected Chao to play a kiss-back from the 1 ball to put distance between the two balls, but instead he played a very nice finesse kick shot to leave the cue ball and the 1 on opposite sides of the 2 ball. Ortmann then kicked the 1 ball into the other corner pocket. The next shot had the 2 ball slightly blocked by the 7, but Ortmann made the kick-shot shown in **Diagram 3** look easy.

I hope you can arrange to further your pool education by attending a major tournament. If you get to Cardiff next year, the tickets are on me — for the first five days. See you there.