

“The Story of ‘8-Ball Burner’ Wayne Turner” OR...
“What is Lou Sauerwein spiking the water with at Classics?”

As you may recall, the previous two Missouri 8 Ball seasons, Mary Stillwell and running teammate Julia Gabriel took Top Player honors from team Classic’s. Mary from the 65th session and Julia followed from the 66th. As the 67th season began other teams from this tough and competitive division saw an opportunity that maybe, just maybe, a locale other than Lou Sauerwein’s fine establishment would have a chance. Actually two chances. One: For team ‘first past the post’ to eliminate the two-week playoffs, and Two: Someone other than a Classic’s member winning the Top Player Trophy. I guess it’s from that personal emotion ‘hope springs eternal’ thing. Because in theory, before the first rack of 8-ball is broke open everything and everyone is on an even keel; a level playing field so to speak. (Pardon the grin.)

So what began as optimism soon crashed into reality followed by everything going straight to hell, to the point that opponents were staring at each other in disbelief wondering what curse had been cast upon them this time? Seems every trip down West Florissant Road to Classic’s is like a trip through lion country. Teams from this division are reminded of it every season as they are being clawed and mauled. Case in point: The first thing Classic sharpshooter Wayne Turner did right out of the chute was burn 19 straight ‘8’ balls. And the majority of them were break and runs. At this stage Team Classic was 6-0. Even though they were only one game in front other teams began whining, ‘oh no, not again’.

Another problem for opponents was the lag or toss for the break. If you failed to ‘win’ the toss for the break... you were forced to sit and ‘take’ a break... from the sidelines. And then try to figure your next move. (Memo to guy sitting on the sideline: Don’t waste the neurons. Time would be better invested figuring out pi (π), and easier. Because there will be no second chance.) Which once again leads us to the burning question: “What *is* Lou Sauerwein spiking the water with at Classic’s?”

Mary Stillwell’s gang controlled matches the way Manager Kid Gleason’s White Sox controlled Cincinnati in 1919. The difference being that Kid Gleason had no prior knowledge of what his players were doing. Let’em win a game or two, get their hopes built up then hit’em hard where it hurts with an over-whelming display of power that leaves opponents scratching their heads muttering incoherently.

There were times Classic Nation decided to take an intermission, get a bucket of beer, use the personal facilities, return from whatever they might be doing behind the building, get back to form and once again take control of the match. (You gotta be awfully good to have that kind of control over this game.) But unlike Kid Gleason, Captain Mary Stillwell had no such problem with Arnold Rothstein lurking in the background offering up ‘throw’ money at her players. Although rumor circulated that three competitors tried to initiate a fund to bring in a Detroit squad... to... but that was only a rumor.

As mentioned, another fine season turned in by Wayne Turner keeps the Classic Top Player Award streak going. (He ran second to Julia Gabriel last season.) After beginning 19-0, there was one setback and then ‘8-ball burner’ Turner burned another 19 straight. At this point Wayne was 38-1 and Classic Nation was waltzing melliflently with a 13-1 record that was 4-games in front. And this time it was Julia pushing Wayne as she was hot on his heels in second place at 38-9. Talk about a great one-two punch.

At season’s end Turner had knocked off 40 wins against only three defeats. And two 19-game winning streaks. TWO. Most players don’t have one medium-sized winning streak a session and Turner fires two great streaks and was beginning a third when the season closed. Turner ran over the opposition like Stormin’ Norman ran over the Iraqi Army. Remember the old joke: “Iraqi rifle for sale... never fired and dropped only once!” The same could be applied to enemy cue sticks. If you lose the flip... break down your stick... put it back in your case... and hang a ‘for sale’ sign on it that reads: “Cheap, seldom used, chalked only once.” Get over it, pal. Doesn’t do you any good to sing the blues because if you play in this division you’re just another guy in the chorus.

Do the math: Turner's last three seasons produced 120 wins as opposed to only 30 losses. That's an .800 W/L percentage verifying that Turner is a solid 4 to 1 odds on favorite. And for three sessions was the greatest mismatch since Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. If he isn't the first pick on your Fantasy 8-ball pool team you're missing the boat. And you know what they say about being up the creek without a paddle.

Turner needs no more plot than to show up, get a beer and throw his stick on the table. The beer is optional. But the rules of Missouri 8 Ball dictate that all games must be played; and from some points of view - at least watched. And that's what most opponents were doing. Watching. Watching from dark corners doing their best to maintain anonymity. They look like spies. Peering motionless through dark sunglasses... peeking over a menu unaware it was turned upside-down... trying to look disinterested as if nothing important was taking place and no big deal if it were; but feeling the stomach churn as they witnessed another game slip, slip go slipping away faster than a bad marriage.

And one more thing: As mentioned, Wayne's Top Player Award makes it a 'hat trick' for this murderous row gang stationed on West Florissant. If one more member from this unique and powerful lineup walks off with the Top Player Trophy, there's a good chance other teams will be screaming, 'break up Classic's'.

It would be tantamount to hearing shouts to break up the 1927 Yankees, or the 1940's Gas House Gangs, or the 1960's Big Red Machine or the 1990's Chicago Bulls. If there's a moral to this story, it could be: 'Mamas, if you let your babies grow up to be pool players, show'em the way to Florissant; and Classic's in particular'.

Maybe by then we'll know what Lou Sauerwein is putting in the water?