

Action Billiards Returns August 24/25, 2002 Shootout

Once again Hazelwood Missouri was the scheduled stop for the Midwest 9-Ball Tour. It would be the second time that Action Billiards held the event since Bob and Kathy re-invented the place almost a year and a half ago. 53 players signed up for the 'open' division while 15 ladies made it for the women's comp.

Watertown Terry Huelsman hosted the event from The Break in Cahokia, Illinois last week. Jimmy Barracks took out the 'open' and Jumpin' Julia Gabriel shot her way through the women's division for her third consecutive Midwest 9-Ball championship.

Question of the Month: Who was going to be the 'headliner' for Action Billiards?

For those of you who are old enough to remember the radio comedy program "My Friend Irma" (there were also two movies then later went to TV and was a smash hit), Marie Wilson played Irma Peterson. For those of you who are too young you missed a great sitcom. Anyway, Irma's boyfriend was Al, played by John Brown. Whenever Al was faced with a problem he couldn't solve or in a predicament that warranted a second opinion he would make a phone call. The call was made to a shadowy-type individual known only as Joe. Joe's voice was never heard, only Al's was. And Al's voice was about one small notch above a whisper.

Given the present situation the semi-quiet and somewhat cryptic conversation might go along these lines: "Hello Joe, got... a... problem. At the last Action Billiards Midwest 9-Ball gig our star-attraction was Buddy Hall. Yeah, that's him, Buddy Hall the Rifleman. You ain't just whistling Dixie brother... he can play. Yes, the turnout was a great success... thanks for asking. Joe, here's my dilemma... how do we top that? Yeah... uh huh... uh huh... uh huh. New York who? That would be a great idea Joe, except he will be dead five years as of the next full moon. We can't dig him up just to put in an appearance. We need a live body, one that can participate, compete, make some balls, run some racks.

"Any other ideas? Uh huh... uh huh... no Joe, he doesn't play pool, he swims in a pool. I'll tell you what Joe, if we don't come up with something I'll call you back. Thank you... noble friend." Once in a while Joe came through in the clutch and other times he missed the call about as badly as that first base umpire missed in the '85 World Series. (Yes, I remember his name; I just refuse to give him any publicity.) But there was always a chance that out of their conversations some expectation would come forth.

And this thought was that one legend could replace another. I'm not sure whether it was by luck or design but the new 'headliner' for the August gig would be the gentleman that most top-notch cuemeisters point their finger at and readily admit as being the greatest bar-box player this side of the Big Dipper. And, for whatever it's worth, I concur.

Dave Matlock is his name and playing brilliant 9-ball is his game. I have witnessed Dave in classic form many times over the years and he is indeed worth the price of admission, if admission was charged. A few months back many locals tried their luck when Buddy Hall was in town. There was no question that many die-hards would show up vying for a chance to take on Master Matlock. Knock this guy off, what a feather in their cap that would be.

No Dog and Pony Show

The previous Midwest 9-Ball ‘open’ champ from Action Billiards was Kevin Gabriel. Remember him? And from the women’s side it was Julia (still no relation) Gabriel. They and other top performers would be here adding their skills to this competition. Tony Fargo made another appearance, as did Chuck Ralston. Local hitters like Richie Cunningham, Andy Quinn, Iron Mike Borgmeyer, California Bob, and Runout Rich Sager added to the star-studded field.

In addition to Jumpin’ Julia (Granite City, Illinois), there were several ladies from out of town. Juanita Hase (Springfield, Mo.), Jennifer Combs (Kansas City, Mo.), Amanda Lee (Poplar Bluff, Mo.), and Pam Bell (Milwaukee, Wisconsin).

Round up the usual suspects, forget it. One great thing about the Midwest 9-Ball Tour is that not much advertising is needed. Players are honed in like radar. It’s tantamount to say, like when you were a kid and smelled mom’s home cooking. Get outta my way and where’s my plate! Once the word filters out there’s action at Action Billiards they’ll burn rubber getting here. Word got out to Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Kansas, and Minnesota as other locals.

Auction action went like this: Evelyn gave the latecomers an extra half-hour before starting the auction. As usual there were some surprises. It was very conservative bidding this day. Dave Matlock went for the most money followed by Tony Fargo. Those were the only two that went \$200 or higher. Lee Heuwagen and Handy Andy Quinn each went for a yard and a half, and Runout Rich Sager for a C. No other players broke the \$100 mark.

The Kathy Arens Show

The ladies were auctioned off first. Kathy positioned herself right up front. There were close to 100 persons in the room but when Evelyn called out the first name, Pam Bell, Kathy couldn’t contain herself. “10-dollars, 20-dollars, 30-dollars,” she began. Someone mentioned to her that she was the only bidder. Kathy was bidding against herself. “Don’t stop me now, I’m on a roll, 40-dollars, 50-dollars, 60-dollars.” Kathy wanted Pam Bell and by golly she was going to have her. To say that Kathy Arens gets excited about the calcutta would be an understatement. It’s like playing the lotto and having the winning numbers every game. “Who’s next?” she yells. Is there any wonder that Christi’s Auction House in New York City has barred Ms Arens from their premises?

Next on her ‘to get’ list was the previous 3-time ladies champ, Julia Gabriel. More determined than ever, Kathy took aim and fired. “20, 40, 60, 80-dollars, and don’t anyone say a word.” The place got quite. No one dared a counter offer. Kathy wins again. “Who’s next?”

When it got to the ‘open’ division Kathy was on her Harley and riding. Sager went for \$100. But Kathy had to split with Jim Lee. He was just as tenacious about getting Rich as Kathy was. Perhaps he got wind of what had happened at The Break the previous week? It was either split or they would probably still be bidding. Kathy had a very good reason for going after Sager. At The Break Rich pulled a first. He was 2-bong and gone. As badly as he may have felt, Kathy was more appalled.

According to reliable sources Kathy took Rich by the ear and led him out back to the woodshed. There she (spoke) to him like a Dutch Uncle (or Aunt as in this case) and let it be known that under no certain terms was she a happy camper. He had better straighten up his act, what little act he may have left. And never ever, ever play so lethargic or be so indolent in future performances. "You are better than this," she wailed. "Walking around in a cataleptic state has got to go pal." Kathy made her point.

In case you haven't heard, Pam Bell finished first, Julia Gabriel took second, and Runout Rich came in third from their respective divisions. Suddenly Hazelwood Kathy Arens was the new Queen of the Bandits. In all the years Belle Starr road the outlaw trail she never had a gang this successful.

Player Results

		Bid	Won	Cal		Bid	Won	Cal
1.	Dave Matlock	\$220	\$1,000	\$605	1.	Pam Bell	\$60	\$400 \$135
2.	Chuck Ralston	90	700	430	2.	Julia Gabriel	80	300 80
3.	Rich Sager	100	405	260	3.	Juanita Hase	10	150 55
4.	Lee Heuwagen	150	300	175	4.	Jennifer Combs	10	75 0
5/6.	Darryl Smith	20	160	130				
5/6.	Jerry Coleman	10	160	130				
7/8.	Shane Kellerman	60	125					
7/8.	Rich Cunningham	40	125					
9/12.	Paul Hopfer	40	75					
9/12.	Bill Hamilton	10	75					
9/12.	Brian Moskop	10	75					
9/12.	Jerry Reardon	10	75					

Tournament Action

The race to the 'hill' had plenty of surprises. It was a good solid bet that everyone in the house picked Matlock to be one of the final two. Can hardly go wrong with the best bar-box player around. But it almost didn't happen. Dave's first match was against a very tenacious gentleman who can hold his own anytime anywhere. Jerry Terbrock played about as well as anyone can play. He applied pressure from the get-go taking the match to double hill. But Dave got the 9-8 squeaker and was on his way. That was only one of two 9-8 matches played by the first four finishers.

If Dave was snoozing that close call jarred him loose. His next three matches were 9-2, 9-3, and 9-4. Matlock then edged out Jerry Coleman, 9-7. A short wait was in order as Runout Rich Sager was coming up from the other end of the board to meet him.

Sager's first match was against the sharpshooting lefty, Kevin Gabriel. It would go down as another classic matchup as both of these champions have faced each other many times over the years. And both were more than capable of ripping off this contest. When Rich got to the table he stayed there long enough to take a 9-4 decision. The follow-up match was against another champion, Tough Tony Fargo. Fargo just came off a 9-1 walkover. Sager must have been watching from the sidelines. He didn't give Tony much of a chance, also 9-4.

Sager's third match was against the seasoned Lee Heuwagen. It went back and forth until the very end. Lee pulled all the tricks he knew but finally went down 9-7. Lee would fight his way through the one-loss side to finish 4th.

The following two matches would wow the crowd, and rightly so. First of all, if there were doubts about Chuck Ralston's playing ability this would not be a fair match to prejudge. Runout Rich lived up to his reputation. Sager put together a 6-pack and looked downright invincible. Chuck didn't get to the table until the middle of the 7th game, and then all he had was a kick shot. Rich got back to the table and ran out the set for an incredible 9-0 victory.

Darryl Smith was holding his own against Sager (4-3) before the roof caved in on him. Runout Rich changed gears and sped away from Darryl faster than Captain Hook sailed away from the Crocodile. After Rich dropped the '9' to tie the score (4-4) he ordered up another 6-pack to go. The contest ended with a walk-off '9' ball. It was the only one of the weekend. Mr. Smith came through the one-loss side finishing in a tie for 5/6.

The time had come for a Dave Matlock – Rich Sager showdown. Whatever waiting time had elapsed, it certainly didn't hamper or interrupt Dave's train of thought. He slam-dunked a convincing 9-2 decision and took his place at the top of the hill. At this point Mr. Sager could do no worse than third.

Meanwhile Chuck Ralston was coming up the other side. Chuck came to town a very determined young man. How young? He is 17 and a senior in high school. How determined? Check this out. No one had a rougher challenge this weekend than Chuck Ralston had. His first three encounters went 9-3, 9-3, and 9-4, the latter over Walt 'Fastlane' Crane. Putting up those kinds of scores is very impressive indeed. But then he runs into a steamroller known as Runout Rich Sager. We have covered the 9-0 shellacking. If you don't get a shot there's not much that can be done. Been there, done that. Actually, it's been there, had that done to me.

Chuck kind-a took it all in stride. Or could be that he is young and doesn't know enough to be intimidated. He simply calmed himself and went about business at hand. He began to run over some pretty rough customers, Brian Moskop (9-3), Richie Cunningham (9-3), and Jerry Coleman (9-4). And it didn't stop there. Lee Heuwagen was next (9-3) followed by a rematch with Sager. Only this time Chuck came out on top, 9-4. Who'd da-thunk it? Didn't let a little thing like a 9-0-drill job slow down his progress.

It was a Dave Matlock – Chuck Ralston final. Chuck would have to defeat Dave twice to take the honors. It is kind-a hard to pick the best match of the tournament. There were many notable confrontations. Usually it is the finals that are most memorable. Neither player gave an inch in the first round. It went back and forth. With the score tied 8-8, Matlock had to go to the rail first to make a good hit on the '1' ball. With all nine balls scattered around the table was it a fluke or was it ordained that the '1' come off the rail, make one carom and marry up with the '9' ball? It couldn't have landed in a worst spot for Matlock. The '1'-'9' was wired for the corner pocket. Chuck looked it over carefully then popped it in for a 9-8 first round victory.

The second round was as exciting. Although Dave made it look easier than it actually was he did not allow Chuck many opportunities to get to the table. Once he pulled ahead Dave maintained control of the match and pulled off a great 9-6 win.

And what can you say or write about Dave Matlock that hasn't already been recorded? Congratulations is a start. The guy is an artist on the bar-box. Pecaso couldn't paint a better portrait; Frank Lloyd Wright couldn't draw a better blueprint. No one works a bar-box better than Matlock. Dave Matlock won this Midwest Showdown and did an outstanding job of replacing Buddy Hall. He was a real crowd-pleaser. And remember Hall finished second. The question now: For the next Action Billiards classic who can replace Dave Matlock?

Ladies Results

The drive down from Milwaukee, Wisconsin paid off for Pam Bell. This woman was in dead stroke. She opened up with a 7-1 victory over Allison Hardwick and followed that little ditty with a 7-1 win over Julia Gabriel. Rhonda Bartram was next. She went down 7-4. To get to the 'hill', Pam fought her toughest match with Juanita Hase. It was a 7-6 slugfest and Pam stood alone. Juanita would shoot her way through the one-loss side to finish third.

Runner-up, Julia Gabriel. Julia began the day with a 7-0 whitewash before going down to Pam Bell. After that setback, Jumpin' Julia ran off five matches, 7-1, 7-3, 7-4, 7-1 (over the tough Kansas City girl Jennifer Combs) then 7-3 against Juanita Hase. This brought a rematch with Pam Bell. The Milwaukee lass was still in stroke. She knocked off Julia 7-3 for the championship. It was sweet revenge for Pam. She was runner up to Julia the last time they met.

Sidebar #1: Add Look-alikes. This is not going to be a regular feature, but amazingly there were several players in the tournament that resembled or at least looked a bit like famous or somewhat familiar persons.

- #5 A couple of former champions were trying desperately to look like their old selves. They went 2 and out.
- #4 It was brought to my attention that one of our out of town visitors looked exactly like the Pillsbury Dough Boy. That's all I'm saying.
- #3 California Bob Strachan, with his sandy-ish goat-tee, greatly resembles Professor Heinrich Von Laysen. He was a scientist that worked with Einstein on the Atom Bomb gig. Wait a minute. Wait... just... a... dang... minute. It has just occurred to me; I have never seen California Bob and Heinrich Von Laysen in the same room together. You... don't... suppose...?
- #2 Juanita Hase reminded some of Julia Roberts - complete with cigar.
- #1 There's no question that the #1 look-alike was Amanda Lee. I asked for her autograph the moment she walked through the doors. She's a dead ringer for Natalie Maines; could be her twin sister. Anyone who isn't up on The Dixie Chicks should pay closer attention. She's the lead singer. The one in the middle. The shorter of the two blondes. She plays the guitar, has a great voice, and a very lovely down-home Texas (and Poplar Bluff) smile. Need any more help?

Addendum: A few paragraphs back I told you (1) about Kathy picking the top three placings, (2) about how she had to split with Jim Lee on the Rich Sager finish, (3) about making off like a bandit queen. Turns out she may not have gotten the best deal after all. Not only did Jim Lee get half of Sager; Jim Lee left town with the foxy 22-year-old Natalie Maines look-alike. Kathy, on the other hand, was left stuck here with that 487-year-old Rich Sager. Question: So who came out ahead on this one?

Sidebar #2 Speaking of Rich Sager: Most of the time (99.9%) when players say they got nothing but cold rolls you could take that with a grain of sodium chloride. And there is one rule that I strictly adhere to and that is I never alibi or defend another player, especially Rich Sager. He still owes me 3-dollars from five years back. If Mr. Greenspan can be believed I figure I got about 80-cents interest coming back for a total of \$3.80.

But I'm here to tell you that I saw every game of both matches Sager lost. It's one of those - you got to see it to believe it routines. Rich got more cold rolls in his last two matches than Nanook of the North got all last year.

After seeing him run off two 6-packs in the two previous matches one would think that he was the man to beat. But everything turned bad. What was precise position play then rolled two inches long now. What came off the rail landing within a dime's circumference then was now two inches short and a hook job. It was as if the pool-gods absolutely were not going to allow it. But that's the way it goes. You pays yo'money and you takes yo'chances.

Sidebar #3 Julia Gabriel: Earlier it was mentioned that Jumpin' Julia won three of her last four tournaments and finished second in the one she didn't win. Forget it. The results are in from Sharkeys. Our girl has done it again. She knocked off Pam Bell, the lady that beat her at Action, for her fourth title out of her last five Midwest 9-Ball gigs. I think it's safe to say that Julia's stock will gain more altitude than a Poodle Skirt in high wind. Congratulations once again Julia. See you at the next one.

Sidebar #4 Rhonda Bartram: It has been a few years since Rhonda participated in a Midwest tournament. She may have seemed a little rusty at this meeting (5/6) but if she is serious about getting back into competition there won't be many times that Rhonda will finish out of the money.

Sidebar #5 Rusty Brandmeyer: When was the last time anyone saw Rusty with a stick in his hands? I know for a fact it has been two years for me. Some say longer. I bring this up because there was a mini-tournament prior to the start of the Midwest showdown. It was a single elimination 'bank' contest. Rusty beat out Rich Sager for bragging rights. Rusty was a little rusty (pardon the pun). He rattled and jawed a few balls in the corner pockets. Even so, once he got his eye and stroke back they went in clean as if he hadn't been away at all. Not bad for someone who hasn't played in over two years. Could we have found our star attraction for the next Action Billiards Midwest 9-Ball gig?

Stay tuned. As soon as we know the dates when the next Midwest 9-Ball Tour comes to town, we'll pass them along. Hope to see you at Action Billiards or one of the other action spots around the area.

Kathy and Bob thank you for your patronage and participation. Hope you enjoy the facilities and action at Action Café and Billiards.

Yours truly, Jay L. Carlton

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