

What are the billiards history essay



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Billiards is a fascinating and exciting game, no matter what kind you have chosen. Almost all outstanding people of our time and world history liked playing billiards. And not without reason – billiards develops strategic and tactical thinking, reactions and good eye, the ability to control emotions and to use opponent's momentary weakness. Michael Phelan writes about billiards in his book:

This game peculiarly in harmony with the mechanical genius of our people; it combines science with gymnastics, teaching the eye to judge distances, the mind to calculate forces, and the arm to execute with rapidity and skill whatever the mind and eye combine to dictate for its execution; it expands the chest while giving grace and elegance to the form, and affords even to the illiterate mind a practical basis for the appreciation of mathematic and geometric truth. (p. 18)

The common term “billiard” combines several varieties of this sport. Yes, sport, today billiard is not only a kind of club entertainment. Every year hundreds of tournaments take place around the world, and champions' fees exceed the prize payments in many other sports.

The most popular kinds of billiard are:

- Pool (present in different disciplines: “ Eight,” “ Nine”, “ 14 +1”) is popular around the world. Pool is played in the U. S., Europe and actively developing in Asia.

- Russian billiards (“ Russian Pyramid”, “ Moscow pyramid”, “ Chicago pool”, etc.) is popular, especially in the countries of the former Soviet Union. That is why, at the World Championships in this type of billiard it is difficult to meet the players from the U. S.

- Snooker is rapidly gaining worldwide popularity. Previously, snooker has been the game for the aristocracy of Great Britain, now it marches through Europe and Asia, conquering the hearts of players by its demands to the spatial and tactical thinking.

- Carom is popular only in a few countries of Europe, for example, the Netherlands. Its billiard table has no pockets that confuses the players.

But when, when and mainly how did this brilliant game appear?

Exact time of billiard’s appearance is impossible to point. We only know that it is of a very ancient origin, the same as chess, and its birthplace is Asia, according to some other data – India, according to others – China.

It is supposed that the first “ Chinese” billiards appeared in XV-XVI centuries. However, the games with the principle of modern billiards have been known much earlier. For example, popular German game “ Ballespiel” in the Middle Ages and outdoor game “ Pall-Mall” in England. In the middle of the 15th century, many of these games turned from “ garden” into “ indoor” games.

At the beginning of the 17th century billiards became fashionable among British middle and upper strata of society, both men and women.

In France under the King Louis XIV billiard among the nobility, as well as in England, was very fashionable. Good skills in billiards can open the doors of royal court. Some publications contain the images of billiard party between Louis XIV and Chamillart.

In the XVII century billiard becomes very popular in Germany and other European countries.

Billiard tables were quadrangular. Later it was asserted that a table should be proportional: the length of the table is always twice its width. The experience has also shown that larger tables make the game more interesting. Moreover the tables should be made of special materials.

Michael Phelan writes:

The Billiard tables commonly in use are twelve feet long by six across. The length may vary, but the proportions must remain the same; that is to say, the table must be twice as long as it is broad. The frame of the ordinary table is made of rosewood, oak, mahogany, or other woods, at the opinion of the purchaser. The bed or surface of the table is of timber, marble, or slate, and should stand

at an elevation of some two and thirty inches from the floor. (p. 29)

Generally, the first billiard tables were imperfect: the cushions were not flexible and, therefore, the balls could not reflect; rough cues could not give the ball sideways rotation; the board, on which rolled the balls was not enough solid and smooth.

Later on at the end of the 16th century, billiard considerably improves. Holes-pockets in the cushions were equipped with fishnet pockets, and their number consistently decreased. The table's cushions were lined with wool, and later with rubber for a better reflection of balls. In this regard, it was considered to have only six pockets in a table. Table producers began to manufacture them more carefully, covering both cushions and boards with cloth. Gradually, short stick-hammer gave way to a long cue.

The process of making cloth for billiard tables changed a little over the past century. Sheep wool should be cleaned in hot water with soap, and then softened with water and butter. That is how yarn for cloth appears, which then transforms into thick felt in a special machine under the influence of high temperatures, humidity and pressure. Then it passes the stage of carbonation in order to improve the appearance of cloth, as well as to improve the quality of the game. And only after that the cloth can be colored. Today we can see many colors of tables: not only green, but red, blue, brown, yellow.

Earlier the process of making billiard cloth could last more than six months. Today it takes less time, but quality requirements remain as high as before.

During several centuries billiard balls were made from elephants' tusks. Before becoming a ball, a bone dried up for a minimum of one year, because the balls should be elastic and durable. Only 4 or 5 balls could be produced from one tusk. Moreover, in the 18th century tusks were also used for the handmade manufacture of cues. These antique balls can be found in our time, but they remain a piece of history.

With the development of science, increasing popularity of billiards and mass demand for balls and cues, balls are made of special resins and plastics, which, as it has turned out, do not concede, but a number of characteristics are even ahead among their bone ancestors. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia cites:

Billiard balls have been made from many different materials ... including clay, bakelite, celluloid, crystallite, ivory, plastic, steel and wood. The dominant material from 1627 until the early 20th century was ivory.

The search for a substitute for ivory use was not for environmental concerns but based on economic motivation and fear of danger for elephant hunters.

In order to have a game of a high level, the ball should follow its trajectory and lie down into the pocket. That is why the balls must be free of scratches, carefully polished. They should be taken care daily, during the game – after every party they should be wiped with woolen cloth, after the game – kept on the shelves, because even a small crack of a ball can damage other ones and expensive green baize of a table.

Whatever may be different in different types of billiards, balls remain unchanged – white balls mean a game in Russian billiards, and colored, if snooker or American pool is played at that moment. Each type of billiards has a characteristic size of balls and their number in a game may vary. In Russian billiards the table rolling balls has diameters from 57 to 68 mm (all depends on the size of tables for Russian billiards). If you play snooker, then use the balls with a diameter 52.4 mm, and for Chicago pool – 57, 2 mm. At the same time for Chicago pool and Russian billiard the necessary number of balls is 16 with numeration on them, and for snooker – 22 balls without numbers.

Good and high quality billiard balls can give a lot of positive emotions and feelings during a game of billiards. Ways of manufacturing of ideal balls for a game and for the achievement of maximum results changed over the time, but the demands for the quality of balls remained constant: billiard balls should be of certain weight, density, and solidity in order to move with the right trajectory. Billiard balls should be resistant to high temperatures not to have burn spots of friction on the surface. The ball after the hit gains the speed of 30 km/h in a second and because of friction between the cloth of a table and the ball, the temperature can reach 250 degrees! Therefore,

temperature resistance of material preserves not only the ball, but also expensive table cloth.

In the middle of the 18th century in connection with the increasing popularity of billiards number of countries introduced restrictive laws according to which part of the profits from the gambling clubs should increase the revenue of the state. To some extent these taxes inhibit the development of billiard sport.

France for a long time effectively held a monopoly on the production of billiards. The French were ahead among other Europeans both in the production of billiard equipment, and technology improvement of the game.

France was the first country where a special type non-pocket billiards was mastered. In the 70-80s of the 18th century in the homeland of Voltaire and Rousseau three-balls game carom became the custom for the first time, the essence of which was consistent collision of 1 ball with two others. In this case the winner was the man who first performed previously stipulated or rules prescribed number of caroms. The French, who had created carom rapidly developed this game and introduced the first billiard terms for different types of attacks: “ follow”, “ stop shot”, “ nip draw”, “ running English” “ kiss shot”, etc.

The first rules of billiards were published in 1674 in the city of Lyon by a Frenchman Etienne Liason. The interpretation of various gaming moments was complex and sometimes not clear. But in those first rules, the author emphasizes that billiard game is not only good for brain, but also useful for health.

There are several opinions about the name of the game. English author John Wilk, for example, noted that the original billiard game had a name “ bal-yerds”, composed of two ancient Saxon words: bal (ball) and yerds (stick).

Up until the late 20s of the 19th century cue movements were not complicated. Its range was only the limited simple blow into the center of the ball, by which it was impossible to give a cue-ball arbitrary direction. The reason for that was filled with plaster hole in the thin end of the cue. When you try to hit a ball with such a bump, except the center, there was a crash or so called “ MISCUE”. In addition, every player had several cues that were regularly dipped into liquid plaster. Tables were sticky and had unpleasant appearance. Gypsum cues often tore the cloth.

In 1827 the French billiard virtuoso Mengo invented the round leather label for the cue. This seemingly simple innovation made some kind of revolution. With leather labels, the player could perform more complex beats: the ball rotated and moved along a curved trajectory, suddenly stopped and rolled back, etc.

Another turning point in the development of billiard was the emergence of new American rubber cushions. The balls reflected nicely from the cushions that immediately affected popularity of this game.

In 1873 in New York the first global sporting tournament in carom was conducted, which was won by the Frenchman Garnier. At the beginning of the last century billiard “ horizon” had a large number of “ stars” playing carom – professional players of many nationalities.

With the outbreak of World War I there was a natural decline in the development of international billiard. The next two decades, the 20-30s billiards not only revived, but grew together with its popularity. New games appeared in this sphere that allowed to introduce into the practice of national and international competitions carom all-round events.

In Russia, billiards appeared at the beginning of the 18th century, under Peter I. Being abroad, in Holland, he got acquainted with this game and soon ordered to make billiards for him, which became his favorite pastime.

After the example of the King his entourage started buying billiard tables. After a while the game quickly spread to the manorial estates, clubs and palaces of the nobility.

The games of traditional Russian billiards also included some carom blows. That is how appeared interesting and beloved by many players party “ Five balls with carom” in which French carom successfully combines with laying the balls into the pockets.

In Russia from a very beginning the development of billiard passed offline. It is in Moscow and St. Petersburg, appeared not only strict tables on which balls could be moved only by accurate blows, but also new games.

In the 30s of the 19th century “ Small Russian pyramid” was invented in Russia and it immediately became popular. This game is still the classics of billiards.

In the late XIX-early XX century billiard game increasingly assumes the character of sport. In some countries organized national and international

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competitions. Maybe once this kind of sports will become the part of the Olympic program.