

June 2003

Purpose

Although it's easy to envision complete and splashy coverage of the recent BCA Finals throughout this issue, I cannot resist throwing my two cents in. First, we in Denver have a lot to be proud of with Jackie "Action Jackson" Broadhurst's march through a field of 497 players to win the Women's Open Division, The Greenfield Ladies' second-place finish in the Women's Team Open Division, and *Cue Times'* commanders in chief, Bob and Deb Winter taking ninth place in the Scotch-Doubles event—in the *Masters* division. We should also note that Jackie took the Women's Artistic crown as well, quite an achievement for someone who is not known for her trick shots. Congratulations to all of you for your victories and a big salute to your mettle in such harsh tournaments. It's hard to imagine anything more brutal than a large-field, bar-table, eight-ball tournament under the lights in front of the crowds. And sincere thanks for your contribution to the elevation of our sport here in Denver. Winners always inspire more winning so we should have even greater success to look forward to next year.

From this group of stars I know Jackie most closely and would like to share some of her story as possible inspiration to those of you who want to go to the top. Just over a year ago Jackie turned up at my Thursday-night free clinic to enroll in an upcoming workshop with The Monk and work a little on her pool game that night. Within a couple of weeks she wound up with me and Tim Miller, The Monk, zeroing in on her and her game. What I saw was a woman with a lot of talent and desire, a dream student in that respect, but Tim spotted something else—what might be called the heart of a champion—and made a declaration. Now, in a world that's littered with humdrum mission statements turning up in places like the paper that wraps our burritos, we must take a moment to distinguish those from the pure declaration. Unlike the mission statement, which results from careful, strained thinking and invariably says nothing in a lot of trendy mumbo jumbo, a declaration bursts out of a person in simple, direct and powerful language. And so in a flash, it was declared that Jackie would win the 2003 BCA Tournament. In the next moment the three of us made an agreement to cause it.

Here is where it becomes very tempting to pump up and tell a big story about me and how I coached Jackie Broadhurst to a national title. But that would be like the Pope in Rome trying to take credit for the decades of Mother Teresa's hard work in India. It just ain't right. A story like that might imply that I hold the secret to success in pool like the wizard with the magic potion. And that ain't right either. What I've learned from my experience with thousands of students is that in every case, it's the student, not the teacher, who holds the key. From those thousands of students, about a quarter of them quit right away after learning that pool is a lot harder than they thought; about half of them gained some of the improvement they sought after a few changes and a little work; and the remaining quarter improved considerably after learning and practicing the subtle aspects of the game that manage to hide from us despite years of playing. And from those thousands I can name fewer than five with the honest desire to become champions.

That brings us to Jackie. For Jackie pool is not recreation or something to do while her husband is golfing. Great pool is her purpose and the object of an unwavering commitment. Hanging around a truly committed person can be very daunting because most of us dwell below that pinnacle of risk. In the realm of commitment, there are few decisions and little if any consideration for what happens around the commitment because every moment of every day is full steam ahead. To recall a committed person think of Martin Luther King who, as they say in a certain educational program, never once woke up and thought, “I don’t feel like standing for racial equality today.”

Last fall Jackie and her husband, Jon, moved from an apartment to a new house and the pool table arrived shortly later. When you go into Jackie’s basement you enter another world where you see a pool table—of course—surrounded by an array of mirrors, a pile of pool books and notebooks, and a camcorder with a large monitor. My favorite accessory is the small refrigerator that eliminates wasting time to walk upstairs when she gets hungry. The first time I visited we watched a long tape of her shooting, filmed from behind, as she explained to me that if she could get her elbow to move about three centimeters to the left, she figured that her stroke would improve. On another visit she showed me a game she invented for position work, a game that compares to Target Pool as a racing engine would compare to the one from a lawnmower. I once set up a simple shot for her and asked her to play it over and over to find perfection with it and then forgot to call her for two weeks. When I did call she said, “I’m getting there.” I tell that as a joke but it’s only slight exaggeration.

Shortly after she began her focused work, her game started to suffer noticeably. On a few occasions several observers scoffed at her play and then asked me with a smirk, “What the hell are you teaching her?” Not really knowing but always believing, I answered, “She’ll be okay.” Here is the stage where most students give up and revert to what they already know since it works to some degree. Learning and performing are distinct from each other and, in the early stages, the former always hinders the latter. Not long after he exploded onto the PGA tour with his record Masters victory, Tiger Woods went into a slump that he attributed to a change he was making with his swing, one that he knew would improve his game after the change took hold. Naturally, to many people it sounded like an excuse from a flash-in-the-pan youngster. Then we watched as he broke through to exert an unprecedented domination on his sport. One of the committed person’s great strengths is the courage to look bad now to stay on course toward a vision that lives in the future.

When Jackie realized that she knew her purpose I was lucky to be standing in her way. If she lived somewhere else she would have found another person to walk the path with her. And I feel a little guilty about blowing her horn because I know that her recent title does not mean a whole lot but occurs to her as a mere step just past the beginning of a long road. When she returned from Vegas and we spoke, her first question was, “When can we get back to work?” Right away Jackson, it is a long road and I’m thrilled that you invited me to join you for the ride.