

One for the Home Team(s)

Because no good deed should go unmentioned, or maybe because I get this page every month to use as I please—within reason I suppose—we're going to depart from our normal, educational experience for some deserved acknowledgement and then perhaps a little shameless gloating. So, if you somehow worked your way around the rest of the paper's content to find your way here, please allow me to be the first to tell you about Denver's success last month at the BCA National 8-Ball Finals in Las Vegas, where Denver teams, Slightly Competitive and Strateagery, won the Women's Masters and the Men's Open team titles respectively. And, as one of Strateagery's members, I'd like to share some thoughts from the event.

First, with no bar-table or league experience in my background, the mere fact that I was invited to join such a talented team is remarkable enough. But my lack of exposure to the bar-table game goes back to my youth when my father, an old-time straight-pool and snooker champ, advised me early on to avoid bar tables, which he felt made the game too easy for second-rate players and therefore evened things up too much. Since he rarely meddled in my affairs and made so few rules, I had no problem obeying that one through the years, right up until last fall when the team talk started with Chisolm Woodson and Emilio DeSimone, whom I credit for drawing me into my first league experience.

Because pool is an individual sport we might logically expect the team game to feel the same in competition as our solo outings. After all, regardless of the numbers cheering from the sidelines, we are out there shooting alone, as we would in any tournament, right? Well, while I expected that to be true and cannot argue against it technically, in reality the team experience and dynamics are so entirely different from individual competition that, at times, it feels like a different game. And the proof of that argument is in our success. While Strateagery no doubt possesses talent throughout the lineup, we saw several teams with equal or perhaps greater measures of talent along our path to the title, yet we never felt daunted for even a moment. Beyond the talent lay the real key to our success, a certain glue that bound us into a single unit, with a total strength that well exceeded the sum of its parts. That cohesion, which was readily apparent to observers, was just as clearly weaker if not altogether absent among the members of every team we encountered. My teammate Bob Keller describes this ethereal quality as a freedom we generated throughout our ranks to inspire one another to play without fear. And even though we all blundered from time to time, each mistake evaporated instantly into the moment while everyone's individual greatness snowballed among the others to bolster everyone's confidence and performance. That phenomenon alone has opened my eyes to the magic of team pool.



Meanwhile, and to make the whole week perfectly delicious, our Women's Masters, Slightly Competitive, dominated their tournament in a very similar fashion. Here's a team truly rich in talent—I keep losing count of their total national titles. But more important, they also manifest a quintessential team spirit and unity. While competitors from elsewhere in their division could be overheard loudly complaining about their own teammates, Slightly Competitive displayed a support and respect for one another profound enough to reach the last row. For the Hollywood screenwriters, we must note that both teams competed in their respective finals simultaneously and only a few tables apart from one another. And to complete the fairy-tale ending, team captains, Samm Diep and Chisolm Woodson are engaged to each other. Can anyone recall two fiancées winning separate, national billiard titles on the same floor at the same time?

I used to look at a map of the U.S., with its various regional tours, count the cities that offer convenient major tournaments every weekend and then wonder how poor, isolated Denver could ever stand a chance on the national stage. I know the answer now as I've seen it in the courage and unity among a handful of the many fine players we have in a thriving scene that gets better every year. Winning begets more of the same and so our best years must lie ahead. Now, I realize I've broken my father's second major rule—NO BRAGGING. But I'm going to call it “sharing” and hope for clemency. Then it's time to start preparing for next year.

In another point of local pride, we find WPBA star, Megan Minerich, who has been invited to compete in the Men's World Straight-Pool Championship from May 30 to June 4. She joins Jeanette Lee and European phenom, Jasmine Ouschan, as one of only three women in the most elite, international field of male players yet assembled in this century for a straight-pool tournament. Megan, we salute you and cheer for you.