

2009 DOC HILL CHAMPION: A CHAT WITH BENNY SCHAPERO

February 23, 2010 ~ for immediate release by **vbb**



How long have you been playing?

I started playing in '97 in the UNLV pool room, but I didn't start taking it seriously until about '99, which is when I started going to Pool Sharks.

How do you practice? How long?

When I first started, I would play for 4 or 5 hours a day, but I stopped doing that a long time ago. I can't say that I really practice. I just go out and play in tournaments and for money. I started playing in the bar scene about 6 years ago in race-to-1 tournaments and it helped to season me to play through pressure situations. A lot of guys can't play cold without warming up, but because of the seasoning that these tournaments gave me, I am able to. I always tell people that they should play these tournaments. You play 1 game which lasts about 5 minutes, and then you sit for about an hour before you play again. I think it's great mental practice. Also, it helps your mental game when you're playing in a money situation, whether it be in a tournament or live action, and you have to win. When you need the money, or at least make yourself think that you need the money, it can change your mental game. This can be very stressful, but you have to suck it up and play through it.

I really started playing a lot once again last year around November. I started playing in a lot of the weekly bar tournaments and I joined Rum Runner #8 in the diamond division of SN9B. Playing on a supportive team with skilled players can also be great practice. Positive feedback is great for a strong mental game.

How did you prepare for the Doc Hill?

The best preparation that I did for the Doc Hill was playing in the diamond division of SN9B, and also playing in as many bar tournaments as possible. I was lucky enough to get on a supportive team with a lot of good players, and the former Doc Hill champ, Ray Skenandore, so I got a lot of positive support from them. The diamond division was great practice because I got to play a lot of A players and I HAD to win for my team. I played hard and consistently for about 4 months which led right up to the Doc Hill.

Life after winning the Doc Hill?

Winning the Doc Hill was definitely a cool feeling. I thought it was crazy that even people who I didn't know found out immediately that I won. I think everyone in the city knew the next day. I had people coming up to me all the time congratulating me on the win, which was pretty gratifying. It was also cool that I was the second person on my SN9B team to win and in a consecutive year. The year before Ray Skenandore won, so we kept it in the family so to speak. One of the most gratifying things about winning for me, was that I felt like I graduated into the big leagues and became an A-player, not just on the SN9B standing, but I also gained the respect of a lot of players in town. For a while right after the Doc, I had clarity in my game. I got to a point where I felt I couldn't miss and had no doubt in my mind that I would make every shot that I took. That's a great feeling.



Best advice you've received?

In the years I've been playing, I have gotten a lot of good advice from a number of good players. The one

that sticks out in my head is "don't miss." lol. On a serious note, the best advice that I have heard when dealing with a pressure situation like a tournament or live action is that... "it's too late to be scared." This really went a long way with me because I played in cash tournaments almost daily. To expand what it means to me: either you're going to make the shot and win, or miss the shot and lose. Either way, tomorrow is another day. We can't win every time. Believe me... I've tried. lol. I played in the Doc Hill twice. I came in 13-16 my first time because my nerves got the best of me and I didn't perform the way that I should have. The second time I played in the Doc Hill, I won. I know we are in hard times with the economy being in a terrible state, and winning \$6,000 would definitely help out, but **DON'T THINK ABOUT THE MONEY!!!!**

Anything you want to add?

I was scared every match that I played except the final. I'm sure a lot of people didn't notice, but I was trembling some of the time. If you're scared, it's not a bad thing, but you just have to play through it. There's a lot at stake, but it's important to take it one match at a time. Don't get cocky and think that you're going to sail through. It doesn't matter how good you play, it's hard to run out if you're kicking at balls. Because it's 9-ball, there is a fair amount of luck involved. Ray Skenandore made a good point a while back, which is that in order to win a tournament, you have to not only be good, but you have to be lucky also. I may have won the tournament this past year, but I had a good amount of luck on my side. I pushed out almost every break. I still think it's amazing that I won based on that fact alone. I had to get lucky enough to make it back to the table every game and have a shot that I could see.

One more thing... To the person who wins this year... Right after you win, you'll probably have guys asking you to gamble every week for at least a few months. If you're a gambler, have fun playing as many people as you can.

Benny