

## ARE CHAMPIONS BORN OR MADE?

by Greg Kuhl, September 1, 2009



In my pool playing career, I've had the pleasure of playing some of the great champions of the game. A few legends include Efren Reyes, Earl Strickland, Ed Kelly, Jose Parica, Johnny Archer, Keith McCready, Mike Siegel and Buddy Hall. They all have 2 things in common: they are Hall of Fame players and they all kicked my butt! So as I address the question, I'm looking for the common denominator. What makes them play so well? But even more important, what makes them win? There is a difference between playing well and winning.

First of all, you must have the physical talent. Pool takes great hand and eye coordination and it requires a great touch and feel. This is talent. Does everyone have this? No. So where does this come from? There is no question, this part of the game you are born with. That answers part of the question, but talent is only what you start with. I've seen many players with a talent for the game. I know players who can shoot straight as an arrow, cut balls backwards or have great strokes that allow them to do great things with the cue ball, but yet they are not champions. I guess talent isn't all you need.

Assuming you have the physical talent, let's look into the mental game. Is this where the secret lies? My only answer to this is, "Yes". First, you must have a strong work ethic. To be great takes a lot of time and practice. Finding the time and energy for this comes from within. You must be driven to be great. Maybe your parents forced you to do your homework, but once you're on your own, you must have the discipline to get it done yourself. And where does this come from? I've seen players practice till they have blisters and sacrifice many other things in life to put the time in. They have a great work ethic, but still never become great. That tells me there must be something more than talent and discipline!

A couple of years ago I had the greatest tournament win of my life. Since then I've been asked by many, what is it that allowed me to win? My answer is always the same, "I'm not sure". But I can tell you a couple of things for sure. I was confident and focused which I feel are the two most important things that all champions have. I had success because I knew at that tournament I was as good a player that was in the tournament. Of course, to keep this in perspective, it was an amateur 8-ball event. But I believe that my 8-ball skills are exceptional, and I can win at an amateur level. Could I have won that day if I would have had to play against professionals? I think not. There lies the difference. Champions are confident they can win, no matter whom they play. Additionally, I had found a focus level that I cannot explain. Maybe the planets in my horoscope were lined up that day. I don't know where it came from, but it was there that day!

So, let's put it all together... talent, work ethic, discipline, confidence and focus. I believe that all these attributes put into use at the same time is what makes winners. How many people have that? Or more importantly, how many people have that all the time? I think some people are born with these gifts.