

WHO ARE THE BEST PLAYERS IN VEGAS? - PART 2

by Greg Kuhl, December 18, 2009



I concluded my last article with my top 5 picks, regardless of active or retired. I must now go back to my list and insert a player into my # 2 spot. I had not realized that Lou Butera still lived in Las Vegas. His Hall of Fame status speaks for itself. Nicknamed "Machine Gun Lou" for his fast play, he is an exceptional talent. He validates some of my teaching theories of playing with a good rhythm and pace, not to slow way down under pressure. Allow your trained instincts to take over and trust them. His speed was extreme, but it makes my point. And he saves a lot in pool time...LOL.

So whom do I think the next best players are in Vegas?

7.... Here's another player that I didn't think still lived here, but I just happened to run into him last night. Paul "Doc" Brienza. Another player who peaked in the 70's. He did return to play a while back when he became a chosen member of the IPT. A smooth player with a great grasp on cue ball control.

8.... I actually have 2 players who can fill this spot, but this particular player's time on the professional tour a few years ago gives him the spot. It goes to Teddy Garahan. We don't see much of Ted on a regular basis. He works and plays poker now more than pool. But if he finds a game, he won't turn it down.

9.... I will finally acknowledge a player that is out there playing all the time. That's Justin Whitehead. Many of you have played him in tournaments lately. I think you see why he's a top pick. He has a ton of natural talent, and plays well under pressure. He plays both regulation & bar tables well. If you don't believe me, jump up there and ask him to play, he'll oblige you.

10.... Instead of going on & on, I'll just give you a group whom all could be in the next choices. A few are out and about and some are rarely seen. I rate players by all around skills. Some players are specific to one game or size of the tables they excel on. So it's not an exact science, and I'm not sure (with the older players) who even still lives here: In no special order... Bobby Herchick, Vince Tedesco, Joe Alvarez, Ronnie Allen, Jim Blakeman, Mike McAndrews, Jeff Schilder, Al Lawrence, Gary Onomura, Mark Estes and Trick Sixty.

Of course, the longer I sit here thinking about players, the longer the list will get. If you look at the Las Vegas rating list, you can assume that all the 10's can make the list.

Just remember, being on the top of the list isn't a sure win. Many time the unknowns are the next great players. The first major tournament I attended, as a spectator, reminds me of that. It was 1978 in Dayton, Ohio. At that time, Mike Sigel was considered the world's best player. And deservedly so, he could really play. Anyhow, he had a 2:00 p.m. match with some kid from California who had been making a name for himself in the pool world. There was a large group of players waiting to watch this match. Mike was there in his 3-piece suit warming up. Of course talking to the fans, mostly about how well he was playing. At 2:00 p.m. his opponent hadn't yet appeared. Mike was complaining to the referee about him being late. The Ref said he had a 15-minute grace period until a forfeit would be called.

Well at about 2:12 p.m., this skinny kid comes walking over to the table. A cigarette in his mouth, beer in his hand and wearing flip flops (this was in November). He looked like he'd been up for 3 days! He said to Mike, "They told me I have to play you." Mike says, "Yeah, your late". The kid looks up into the crowd and says, "Anyone have a cue I can borrow?". Some guy gets out his cue and gives it to him. He walks over to the table and grabs a couple of balls to practice. Mike tells him, "Your late, you don't have time to practice". The kid looks at him and says, "That's ok, I don't need practice to beat you." Sigel says arrogantly, "Kid, have you ever even played a player as good as me?" The kid gives no response. Mike has his coin out and says, "Call it for the break". The kid says, "Go ahead, you can break first." Mike

breaks and runs the first 2 racks. As was his style he was strutting around the table. He breaks the 3rd game and comes up dry. The kid then proceeds to run 7 racks! You can see the look on Sigel's face and the steam coming from his ears. The kid misses, Mike runs out, breaks, misses a ball straight in. The kid runs the next 2 racks and wins the match 9-3. Sigel is livid, starts screaming to the tournament directors that this idiot has no class and shouldn't even be allowed in the tournament...yadda, yadda, yadda. It was great. Of course, the kid was Keith McCready, an unranked player.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all...

Greg