

## **Does every Pool Room in the World have a player named “Blackie”?**

By  
*Jay L. Carlton*

Burbank, California  
Kelly's Pool Room

I lived in Burbank California many years ago. The first pool room I walked into was called Kelly's, on San Fernando Blvd. Some of the best players I have ever had the pleasure of watching play pool could be seen in Kelly's every night.

Kelly's is where I was introduced to the game of 'Golf', which is played on a 5x10-foot snooker table. Greatest game ever invented; personal opinion of course. One object ball per player and one cue ball to be used by the entire field. And this was the house game. In fact, the first table had a sign hanging from the over head light which read 'OPEN TABLE'. That meant that anyone at any time could invite themselves in on the action. And believe me that 'open' table got a lot of comers. If, however, a player had a 'fish' on the line, naturally he would take said fish to another table where they wouldn't be disturbed.

That's also the first time I saw Ronnie Allen. He was just a kid maybe 18 or 20 making the rounds looking for a nine-ball game. No one would play Ronnie nine-ball at Kelly's, but I don't ever remember Ronnie challenging those guys to play golf.

The house pro was a guy named Frank Thompson. Although he never considered himself the house pro you could tell by the way other players respected him that he was the 'man'. He could do things and make shots on that snooker table that most people could not do or make on a 7-foot Valley, or any other size table. He served in the Second World War under General Patton and described more than once those two pearl handled .45's Patton wore. There was John Armstrong, a guy named Lynn, and another player named Tom which was basically the best of the bunch.

One night a big guy walked through the back door and put his name on the board to get in the next match. There would be six players for this round. They shook the pill bottle for order of rotation and each took their turn at the table to open. Unless otherwise noted the stakes were always the same, five-dollars for the game, 25-cents per foul, and 50-cents for a bad hit. This was 1959 and that was a good wager at that time.

The big guy opens with a one rail bank to the first hole which was the left corner pocket where he stood. He spotted the ball and banked it into the right corner pocket. He spots the ball and banks it into the third hole, which was the right side pocket. Somebody spots his ball and he pops it into the top right corner; then the top left corner. That's five down and only one to go. For the finale he three rails his ball into the left side pocket for the win. A 6-hole run and out.

Since there were no fouls or bad hits from the other players he collected his 25-dollars (\$5 from each opponent) for the win. He hangs up his stick and heads for the back door.

On his way out a couple players shouted, "Nice shootin', Blackie."

## St. Louis, Mo. Grand and Olive

There probably aren't a lot of people around today who played or visited the pool room on the famous corner of Grand and Olive back in the 40's, 50's, or 60's. That was the hot spot for many of the top local players and stopping off point for some well known shooters of that era when passing through St. Louis seeking a little action. Anybody who was anybody played at Grand and Olive at one time or another. A. E. Schmidt owned it when I first walked up those stairs to the second floor. It was eventually sold, I heard, for \$ 75,000. Big bucks in those days.

My first visit was more of curiosity than anything else. I reached the top of the stairs and just kinda looked around. There was an older gentleman in a phone booth-type cage handing out the balls and making change while keeping tabs on all the tables in use.

Upon entry, the first table was of the billiard variety and naturally a match was in progress. A lot of attention was on the shooter. He was putting on quite a show. I don't know how many billiards he made before I got there but I witnessed a dozen or so.

When he announced "one more would do it", a lot of people began reaching into their pockets. He made the last billiard and received a round of applause. After collecting his winnings he hung up his stick and headed for the door. On his way out someone shouted, "Nice shootin', Blackie."

## Florissant, Mo. Grandview Plaza

Later, a couple of hot spots for great pool playing could be found in the north county area. The Cue and Cushion Club in Florissant was one of the earliest. A lot of top local talent came out of there and many well known cue masters from around the country paid visits over the years. Their pictures were there on the walls and autographed to prove it.

The first time I went in was on a Saturday night. It didn't take long to find the table with the action. There was a heavy nine-ball match taking place. I pulled up a chair with the other spectators for a better look. If memory serves, it was 10-games ahead... 1000-dollar freeze out.

The player at the table finished out the rack for a four game lead then broke and ran out six straight games. Outstanding! He received a standing "O" and a few pats on the back. As he broke down his stick and collected his winnings I headed for the door.

On my way out I heard someone yell, "Nice shootin', Blackie". I couldn't believe it. This can't be for real. Either this guy gets around or every pool room in the world has a player named "Blackie."

## Ardell 'Blackie' LeSieur

I got to know this last 'Blackie' fairly well. We talked many times at his billiard supply business over the years. Later, after he retired, we would run into each other at a tournament about once a year. He didn't go anywhere without Jewell, his lovely wife of 52 years. They had been retired since 1987 and decided they had had enough of the fast paced big city life and settled down to retirement at their rural Farmington, Missouri residence. Even in the more peaceful surroundings Blackie couldn't escape what was in his blood, the call of the pool table. He and Jewell joined Vic Jenkerson's teams out of Cuzzins and played until he couldn't see very well and finally had to call it quits.

Ardell LeSieur acquired the sobriquet 'Blackie' from New York Fats, later to be known as the more famous Minnesota Fats. Once, when he found himself in what seemed to be an inescapable situation, he studied the table for a moment then executed the shot with minimal amount of effort. Fats yelled "Blackstone-Blackstone", in reference to Blackstone the great magician. It was shortened to 'Blackie' from then on.

In pool parlance Blackie LeSieur was considered a lamb. But there is a very fine line in the pool world between a lion and a lamb. For those who are unaware of the difference, a lion is a player who travels most of the year and does quite a bit of gambling. Could be deemed 'road player', 'hustler', or any of the alike terminology.

The lamb is also a top of the line player but prefers not to travel for many and various reasons. Usually they are the same, family man, business to run, a tournament player, just plays socially, etc. They may wager on occasion but usually it is in their own back yard. Just because Blackie LeSieur did not go on the road doesn't mean there was a future trying to hustle him. More than one aspiring young 'wannabe' discovered that.

Although originally a snooker player, Blackie had only one 9-foot snooker table when he opened the Cue and Cushion Club in 1962. There were seven 9-foot pool tables and four 8-footers in the back. Seven-foot bar-boxes weren't big in pool rooms in the early '60's.

He was open from 10am to midnight seven days a week. The youngest age that was allowed inside was 16, but only with parents' permission. Blackie use to boast that they never had a fight in his room all the years they were opened. They were the first pool room west of the Mississippi to open in a shopping center. Blackie became an agent for Brunswick Billiards and Supplies in 1964. A few years later he did away with the pool room and concentrated on retail sales.

Daughter Pat Brannan and grandson Bob kept the business into the second and then third generations. They were in the Florissant area for 43 years. When visiting St. Louis any and all of the top flight cueist took time to stop by the Cue and Cushion Club in Florissant to rekindle old friendships with Blackie. Not to do so would be considered a major social faux-pas. He was the 'man' to see. Verification could be seen by the 'Wall of Fame'.

Pictured with Blackie in individual photos are many of the legends of pool from the 'Straight Pool' champions to the '9-ball' greats. The 'Three Cushion' experts and the methodical 'One pocket' proponents. The 'Trick Shot' artists, too. In general, the all around 'Who's Who' of pocket and non-pocket billiards. There is Willie Mosconi and 'Minnesota Fats', U.J. Pucket and Dallas West, Joe Balsis and Jimmy Caras, Ronnie Allen and Luther 'Wimpy' Lassiter, John Ervolino, Joe Procita, and on it goes.

Speaking of 'Who's Who' in pool, there is a very large picture that was taken in Las Vegas sometime back in the 1960's. Eight of the heavy hitters from that era are in it. There is Bill 'Wennie Beenie' Staton, Ronnie 'Fast Eddie' Allen, Eddie 'Knoxville Bear' Taylor, Marshall 'Squirrel' Carpenter, Joe 'The Butcher' Balsis, Danny Gardner, Irving 'Deacon' Crane, and Jack 'Red Raider' Breit.

Pat Brannan, Blackie's daughter, says, "Everybody who has seen this picture has offered us a lot of money, but it has been in the family for so many years I think we will hang on to it awhile longer." Another picture that she treasures is the one taken in 1967 after her dad won the Missouri State championships, just one of many. In this particular photo is Mayor Alfonso Cervantes along with the women's state champ, Kathy Bruton. James Gordon Guy, the St. Louis metro champion that year, and the one and only, Minnesota Fats.

Blackie had met them all and played them all. If it wasn't when they passed through to visit, it was usually at the world famous Jansco's Tournaments in Johnson City, Illinois, or BCA opens. At one time, in order to qualify for Johnson City and the BCA championships, a player first had to win a state championship that year, Blackie made it eight times.

Blackie said he never hustled or been out of St. Louis to hustle. He went on to say that he might have been a better billiards player had he done some hustling, but just never did.

I asked Blackie a long time ago what makes a good pool player? He said several ingredients. He firmly believed that one of the most important was to have good temperament. Don't dwell on a shot missed or a game lost. It's behind you and there's nothing that can be done about it. Just go ahead to the next shot and next game.

As well known as Blackie LeSieur was he never let it go to his head. The soft spoken gentleman possessed the talent to compete with the best, but yet with all his ability with a cue stick it took a back seat to family and business.

Ardell "Blackie" LeSieur  
March 1919 to May 1992  
HALL-OF-FAMER