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The Life and Times of Paul Lucchesi

A Special Tribute to Our Founder and Patriarch

This is an electronic reproduction and transcript of the text and a photo from a sports article in the Ainsworth Valley Advocate newspaper published on February 8, 1984. It features an interview and historical look of founder Paul Lucchesi Sr. by columnist Chip Ainsworth. The original full-sized newspaper framed article is on display for viewing at Eastern Billiards.

The Life and Times of Paul Lucchesi

Sports Article by Chip Ainsworth Valley Advocate, February 8, 1984

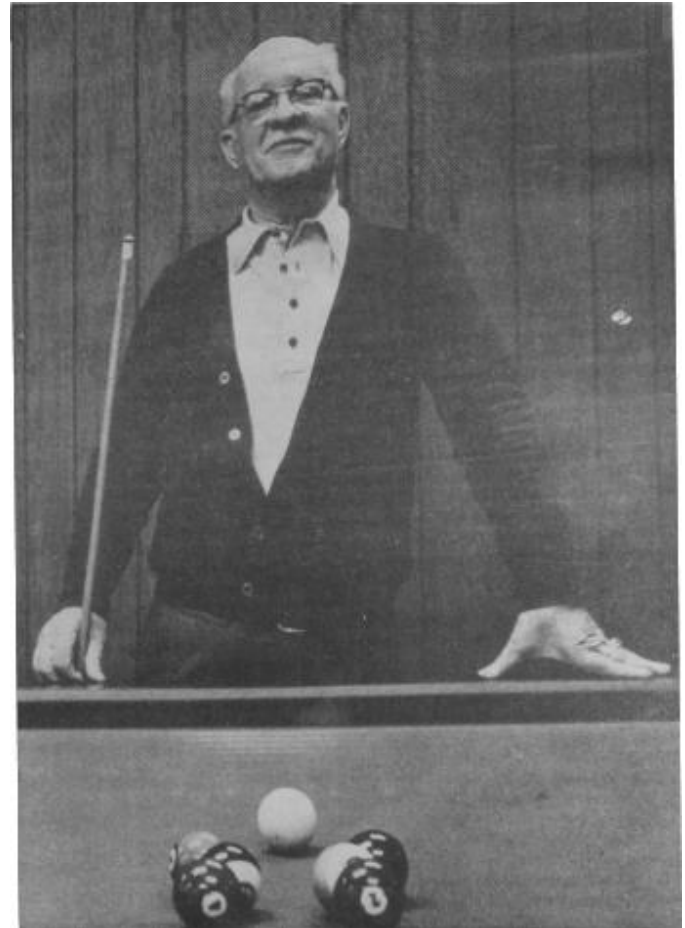
Paul Lucchesi sits in the office corner of his Holyoke pool hall and reaches for another Kent. He is diabetic, and at age 70 the nerve endings in his fingers have become frayed. The outside air leaves a chilly residue, so he wears a floppy sweater and keeps a wool hat pulled over his brow. As he sucks in a pull of smoke and stares into space through wire-rimmed glasses, he says in a deep, raspy voice, "Geometric triangulation of the diamond system is very important in pool."

With that, Paul Lucchesi quickly dispels any impression that he is simply a two-bit hustler who happens to own his own pool room. Indeed, not only does he own the Ivory Billiards on Chestnut St., he also owns a slate mine in Italy, and a warehouse in Boston.

His titles, past and present, include the presidency of both the Billiards and Bowling Institute of America and the Billiards Congress of America. He has been named the chairman of the Billiards Hall of Fame in Chicago, he has been awarded the key to the city of Owensboro, Ky., and in 1978 he was named the recipient of the Industry Service Award Plaque by the BBIA.

Born in Lucca, Italy on October 13, 1913 Paul John Francis Lucchesi arrived in America with his family in 1922 after his father, a stone mason, found work in Lewistown, Pa. The family settled in an apartment across from a bowling alley and

pool hall. "One day," says Lucchesi, "the pool hall burned down. I went over and came back with a bucket of balls."



Lucchesi fashioned cardboard cushions around his mother's ironing board and used a broomstick for a cue. "I fell in love with pool," he says.

He developed his skills at the local YMCA, setting pins in a bowling alley to afford his habit. "I became what they call a horse," he says. "a person with no money but better than average ability who needs a backer."

At 16, he left home to, in his words, "become a bum, but being a bum in those days was a craft in itself. I remember riding through Indiana in an empty coal car one time. The cinders from the engine were getting in my hair, so I made a bandana out of my sock. Suddenly the train stopped and there were pistol shots. Railroad detectives. All the bums jumped off the train and started running into the cornfields. There must have been 100 of us."

Hello, Uncle Sam

When he grew tired of hopping trains, doing odd jobs, and hustling for a living, Lucchesi decided to join the army. "Why not?" he asks. "It was free clothing, free medical attention and a free bunk."

He spent three years with the 41st Coast Artillery at Fort Kameahameha in Honolulu. "My rank was private. I never got further than that. I was too much of a foul ball."

He re-enlisted in 1937 and was assigned to Fort Amador in Panama. "Back then," he says, "if you had served for four years you were allowed to buy out and still receive an honorable discharge. At this time, Mussolini was in Ethiopia and Hitler was in Poland. I figured, 'uh-uh,' and purchased out."

Lucchesi returned to Lewistown, but finding no work he visited a relative in Holyoke. There, he met Yvette Quenneville, and the two were married in 1939. "My wife is my partner," he says today. "Without her, I couldn't have done it."

Faced with the responsibility of providing for a wife and six children, Lucchesi worked at various factories in the area. He was a night foreman at American Bosch in Springfield and worked the same position at Worthington

Pump and Machine in Holyoke. He was an electrician at Stevens Paper Mill in South Hadley and a machinist at Pratt and Whitney in Windsor, Conn.

"We never starved," says his wife.

And Lucchesi never lost his love for pool. He moonlighted in his spare time, fixing pool cues and recovering table surfaces. His greatest enjoyment of course, was playing. "I began to develop quite a reputation," he says.

The Legacy Begins

The Lucchesi legend began in the army, where he won the service championship in Hawaii, and had the longest run of his career - 179 consecutive balls - during a service tournament in Panama.

In 1949, he played Ralph Greenleaf at the Holyoke Bowl-A-Drome. Greenleaf was considered one of the greatest pool players in the world, and he toured the country doing exhibitions on behalf of a pool table manufacturer. Before a cheering audience, Lucchesi won the match, 100-89.

"To compete at the top," he says, "a pool player must shoot 70 to 80 racks a day. That amounts to punching in about 7,000 balls a week.

"I've played all those guys you see on (ESPN's) Legends of Billiards. Would you believe, the most inconsequential of all was Minnesota Fats? He's not a player. Never was. He was a good talker, and a helluva publicity agent for himself. His real name is Rudolfo Wanderone and he came from the Bronx. When The Hustler came out, he told everyone he was Minnesota Fats."

A few years after his encounter with Greenleaf, Lucchesi was approached by a Holyoke businessman named George Dulchinos. Dulchinos owned a bowling alley and pool hall, and he told Lucchesi, "I want to get out of the pool business. I'll sell to you, and I'll set you up."

"I've got the desire," he told Dulchinos, "but I don't have the money."

"I have 10 tables worth \$500 each," Dulchinos replied. "I want \$1,000 each, but I'll give you five years to pay."

The deal was made, and Lucchesi wheelbarrowed the 1,400-pound tables into an old building owned by the Knights of Columbus, where he opened his own pool hall.

While his wife helped operate the pool hall, Lucchesi took a job as a national sales rep, selling billiard cloth for the J.P. Stevens Company in New York. He earned \$100 a week. Soon, he was put on commission and in his first year earned the astounding sum of \$60,000.

Consequently, his contract was not renewed and he was offered an \$18,000-per-year position in the company's New York office, which he refused. "Furthermore," he says, "the bastards turned all my regular accounts into house accounts."

Off to the Mines

In 1963, Lucchesi's mother died, and the loss inspired him to return to Italy and visit his relatives. He had saved his commissions from the billiard cloth sales, and he used the earnings to buy partial interest in a slate mine in Northern Italy.

"Nothing works on a pool table like slate," says Lucchesi. "It's a piece of material that you can grind to a precise level and it will maintain that level. They've tried glass, aluminum, steel, even asbestos. Nothing works like slate."

Today, Lucchesi owns the mine outright, and he travels there regularly. "Last October marked my 52nd trip," he says.

Although pool predates even Anthony and Cleopatra, it wasn't until 1849 that John Brunswick of Cincinnati, Ohio developed the standard six pocket pool table. These tables, and others of comparable quality, have an almost infinite lifespan. Indeed, the tables that were sold to Lucchesi almost 30 years ago remain in use at the Ivory Billiards, as well as four newer tables and a billiards table.

There's also a workroom in the back, where there's wood (Georgia poplar and Missouri walnut), slate, cloth and other materials that are required for the 50 tables that Lucchesi, his sons and grandsons produce each year.

Lucchesi named his pool hall the Ivory Billiards because, "There was a time when the hallmark of a good pool room was to have ivory cue balls. That's because ivory has a nerve to it, particularly Zanzibar ivory."

Along the walls inside the Ivory Billiards are autographed photos of luminaries like Irving Crane: "My sincere best wishes to Paul and his family." There are various Arthur Sarnoff pictures of dogs shooting pool. There are reprints of Currier & Ives, and there are even photos of Lucchesi himself, decked out and dapper in a white tux, shoulder to shoulder with pool industry executives.

Lucchesi excels at trick shooting. He knows over 250 shots, and he invented a few himself.

He has received as much as \$3000 performing at exhibitions in London, Belgium and West Germany. He also gives demonstrations locally, and his fee depends on the customer's ability to pay.

These days, however, he spends most of his time at the pool hall. He is revered by those in the pool world, and that plus his Italian lineage prompts the nickname, Godfather. "I've been in it from beginning to end," he says, "that's why they call me that."

He is valued as a consultant, and pool manufacturers will send employees to him for

technical training. Pros often stop by for coaching and instruction. "They'll come in and take a rack and shoot for a while, and I'll look to see what they're doing wrong. I don't do it for money. I do it because I like to help.

"I've had a very rich life," he says. "I only had an eighth grade formal education, but I made up my mind years ago to get to the top of the industry I love so much. I used the teapot theory. To pour something out, you must pour something in. What poured in was energy, desire, and above all, ethics."

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2017 Footnote: The legend lives on through Ruth and Gary Lucchesi, the owners of Eastern Billiards.



Gary, far left, is shown with his dad Paul plus two older brothers Ray and Paul Jr. Readers may want to visit Eastern Billiards to view a framed version of this 1984 news article.



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