



You'd never pick me as a ringer and you sure wouldn't bet on me. I'm not a good game player and although not always picked last, I wasn't ever picked first. I do like group fun, however, so indoor games are appealing during winter months. Video games are wildly popular but non-computerized physical games like bowling, table tennis and billiards might be a fresher bad weather option, something different to try while on a trip.

Lately, I've become reacquainted with billiards but I'm not going to pretend I'm knowledgeable about the game. Or is it a sport? Good grief, right there is an argument, a heated one between professional billiards and snooker associations and those who rule the Olympic--well--Games. It has to be ruled a sport to be in the Games. Got it? Doesn't look good for inclusion in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, but there's always 2024.

In the meantime, I'm going to use the more familiar name for the game I like—pool. And here I'm in trouble again because the term is really pocket billiards (billiards is played on a table without pockets), but I'm still going with pool, which Professor Harold Hill said was a “sign of corruption.” That's OK by me—kind of too late for pool to ruin my reputation. “Trouble” the professor says, “. . . with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for Pool.” If you don't know why The Music Man equated pool with “trouble and bums” and billiards with “brains and gentlemen,” you'll find out when your teenager or someone else's stars in a

high school revival. Believe me, it'll happen because there are multiple singing roles. Or watch the movie, which is family friendly.

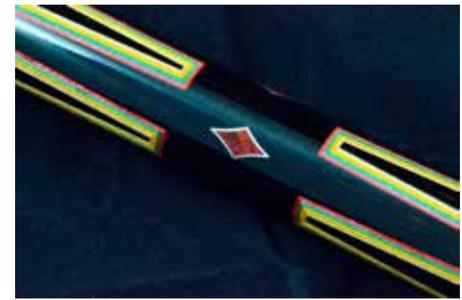
Everyone is familiar with “dirty pool,” a colorful phrase calling out cheaters. Scenes from old movies like *The Hustler* and *The Color of Money* come to mind: grungy bars, guys after your life savings, stale beer. For background music, there's Texan Stevie Ray Vaughan's 1983 album, *Dirty Pool*, although I warn you that the lyrics may be about more than just cheating. Of course the most famous Texas “dirty pool” player was J.R. Ewing, who once explained that “After you give up integrity, everything else is a piece of cake.” Cheating in actual pool playing is difficult, however, since it's all on the table so to speak.

No matter your past impressions, I'm willing to bet that if you found a family friendly venue with a pool table (okay, pocket billiards), you'd have some fun. Young children to senior adults can play. In fact pool has become quite popular recently. Despite predictions that the advent of non-smoking bars would kill it out, the reverse happened; pool “halls” became family friendly. But don't be deceived because whether defined as a game or a sport, pool takes not only skill and strategy but also physical adeptness. Just keep it lighthearted when you're with all ages; it'll be a good break from computerized gadgets.

My only experience with pool was about forty-five years ago when I'd occasionally attempt to play during college. My neighbor Larry Vigus reacquainted me with poker, which was fun, so I asked him to talk me through a game of pool. I learned how complex the rules are and that muscle memory and hand-eye coordination are vital. It's not easy to hit the cue ball so that it strikes the other balls in just the right way. If right-handed, you hold the cue in the right hand, arrange your fingers to encircle it lightly, move your elbow back and forth twice, take a deep breath, and send the cue smoothly into the ball. Whew. When planning strategy—where you want to send a ball(s)—you stand up first and sight, then you lean over. Children, I was told, often catch on to this more rapidly than adults!

It's not possible to relay all that Larry tried to teach me in a few hours—I was not a star pupil. I did learn that this game can range from attempting something different for fun to a lifelong pursuit built on increasingly sophisticated strategy. It deepened my appreciation for pool while reading *To Be Where You Are* by Jan Karon. Character Sammy Barlowe is a champion pool player who heals his rift with his mother through a game of pool. “Grab a stick,” he says in an angry tone. “Let's lag.” Well, did he let her win the lag and thus the game, or not? Who wins the lag, or the first shot, determines who plays first. But strategy involves whether the winner will take the lag or not. Complicated? Don't get me started, I'll never finish. Give it a try and see what you think.

Another thing I learned is that Larry Vigus creates one of a kind pool cues, a limited number each year, that are works of art. His designs are his own, not based on what someone wants but on what he envisions. People buy them because they value artistic cues or because they think the cues eventually will be worth more. His cues are signed in pencil under the finish on the black



butt cap of the cue. Larry wants people to know it's his cue from across the room not because they can see his signature but because of the design. Right now he has no website but he does have Facebook. Everything Larry builds for the next year and a half has a buyer. Neither Larry nor the buyer know what design they'll get or how much it will cost. I think the real value, however, is creating art for a sport that deserves to be in the Olympic Games.

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