

In 2003 Chicago Top Master Charles "Pecan" Thompson started [-An E-Mail Newsletter-](#) featuring Current Events from the Homan Square Community Center Chess & Checkers Club where Charles was its president, but also wonderful stories of the older days, with great insights, characteristics, and depiction of events that became legends ...

But the emails only reach a few people and then they are lost. I contacted Pecan with an offer to save and organize his stories on my website. On this page you will find the original newsletters but also the stories edited (and expanded) into the [Legends of Buster](#) book, and yet another book [20 Greatest](#) written specifically for the website over two years - with indexes, links, diagrams, photos and

commentaries. Enjoy!

[20 Greatest](#)

[Legends of Buster](#)

[Pool Checkers News](#)

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## The Legends of "Buster"

Charles "Pecan" Thompson, one of the great Chicago Pool players, started a series of remembrances of the America's best known player, Carl "Buster" Smith, who for half a century ruled the land on both Pool and International Checkers boards.

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**The Legend  
Carl "Buster" Smith  
Chicago, IL  
The American Champion  
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**From 1965 - 1992, Mr. Smith competed in 22 APCA National Tournaments-winning 11 and finishing 2nd or 3rd, 8 times. Such was his impact on the game.**

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Thanks again for your interest and attention. "Pecan"

## Pecan's - 20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players of All Times

### The Elite Ten

#1	<u>Iser Kuperman</u>	
#2	<u>Vladimir Kaplan</u>	
#3	<u>Carl "Buster" Smith</u>	
#4	<u>Ion Dosca</u>	
#5	<u>Al "Eastpoint" Barnett</u>	
#6	<u>Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe</u>	
#7	<u>Momodou Faals</u>	
#8	<u>Elton "Little David" Williams</u>	
#9	<u>George "Lil George" Ramsey</u>	
#10	<u>Freddie "The Hawk" Owens</u>	

	<u>A Moment of Reflection</u>	
#11	<u>Andrew Frazier</u>	
#12	<u>William "Bill" Langley</u>	
#13	<u>Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard</u>	
#14	<u>Victor "Vic" Krafft</u>	
#15	<u>Charlie Brown</u>	
#16	<u>Moses Lightfoot</u>	
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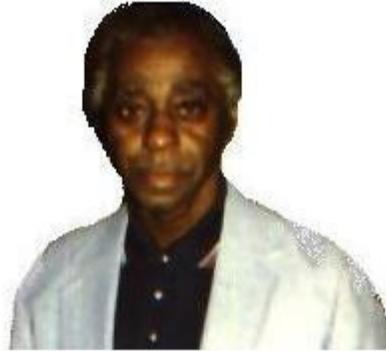
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American Pool Checkers-Chicago  
-An E-Mail Newsletter-  
for Pool Checkers enthusiasts  
Written by: Charles Thompson ('Pecan')

9/1/03 (Issue- #1) - Monthly

The Homan Sq. Community Center experience have been a wonderful thing for the Chicago Area Pool Checker players. Already we have had visits from our fellow brothers in Indianapolis IN, and a couple of visits from our friends in South Bend.

We just recently had a visit from a young man from as far away as Mississippi. Just as importantly, we have introduced the game to as many local players in 6 months, as I can recall us during in 25 years prior to it. The Wednesday's games have been very spirited and very competitive. New players are learning; (or improving-They claim that they already new how to play, but just never bother to. Our thanks are extended to our own Mr. Eddie Smith for for making the contact to securing the site .

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### International Checker Festival

I am personally inviting all my checker playing friends to come to Mr. Blaine's Checker Festival on Sept. 13 & 14, 2003. Since I am the defending & (3 times champion), I am taking a personal interest in it. We would like to have the strongest field possible for the event. I am sure Mr. Blaine will contact all about the details.

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### Washington D.C. Pool Checker Fest a Great Success

Our own Fred D. Shurn has reported that the Washington D.C. Pool Checker Club had a very successful Checker's Fest in the early part of August of 03. Congratulations are offered to two of the players very much responsible for this venture- Pres. Talbert, and Mr John Curtis.

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## **The Legend of "Buster"**

### The "Pecan Man"

When Pool checker players in Chicago talk about 'greats' of the game, its starts and ends with "Buster". We say, (it may be disputed by others), that he was the greatest African American Pool Checker player of all times. We realize that's a tall statement, but we are prepared to defend it with some facts and some "legend."

I first met "Buster, " a small and quiet man, in the late 60s. It was at a barber shop- called 'Gus' Barbershop.'

A friend of mine, and my first Pool Checker mentor, Clarence Dew-a very good player in his own right, at the time, had secretly brought "Buster" into the shop without my knowledge.

At the time, I was being considered as the next great player in the area. I was rising fast. I was young, (by Pool Checker Player's standards) brash , and 'full of it.' After Mr. Dew had convinced Buster to throw a game or two to him, unbeknownst to me, (which he later said was very hard to do), I said to Mr. Dew, Who is this "Scrub"? "Where did he come from? Mr. Dew said to me, "Would you like to play him?. I said, to no one in particular, "If he doesn't bet, I don't want to be bother with the "Ham".

"Buster" sat quietly, saying nothing. As I pulled my seat up to the table, (Dew had brought in about 10 or 12 other players from the area). I said to "Buster," "Do you bet, "Scrub" ? Buster said, "No", I don't bet." Then Mr. Dew said to me, I will bet on him; How much do you want to bet? I said \$5.00! Mr. Dew then said, No!, that's to much, I will bet you \$2.00. (He and the rest new what I was getting into). They could have cleaned up if they had wanted to.....

TO BE CONTINUED in the next issue.

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A look at a selected week of Rated Play Games-

Homan Sq. Community Center's  
Pool Checkers weekly Rated Play Results  
For (Wed. 8/13/03)

Rank Players W L D Pts. P/N W/%

CLASS-A (MASTERS) - (1400 & ABOVE)

1	Thompson, C.	13	0	7	66	13	.83
1	Lambert, A.	13	0	7	66	13	.83
3	Williams, O.	8	2	10	52	6	.65
4	Shurn, F.	7	5	8	44	2	.55
5	Smith, E.	5	7	8	36	-2	.45
5	Earnest, T.	6	8	6	36	-2	.45
5	Loggins, W.	6	8	6	36	-2	.45
8	Humphreys, L.	4	7	9	34	-3	.43
9	Lillard, J.	4	8	8	32	-4	.40
10	Davis, F.	4	13	5	22	-9	.28
11	Baynes, L.	2	13	5	18	-11	.23

CLASS-B (EXPERTS) - (BELOW 1400)

1	Deadmon	16	4	4	72	12	.75
1	Sample, G.	16	4	4	72	12	.75
1	* Voss, W.	15	3	6	72	12	.75
4	Young, A.	12	1	11	70	11	.73
5	Sykes, L.	7	5	12	52	2	.54
5	Lee, E.	8	6	10	52	2	.54
7	Johnson, S.	5	8	11	42	-3	.44
7	Joiner, H.	4	7	13	42	-3	.44
9	Polk, R.	2	6	16	40	-4	.42
10	Polk, S.	6	11	7	38	-5	.40
11	Myrick, C.	3	9	12	36	-6	.38
12	Jamison,	0	10	14	28	-10	.29
13	Hall, W.	2	18	7	22	-13	.23

\* Our Mississippi visitor

Dir. C. Thompson

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Comments are always encouraged.

Additional e-mail addresses for others interested in receiving this e-mail can be sent to me.

Edition # 12 - 07 /01/04 - Editor: C. Thompson  
POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
(A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)  
-Produced by the 1st-week - monthly

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The Homan Sq. Pool Checkers and Chess Club  
of Chicago-  
[Homan Sq. Community Center](#)  
3559 W. Arthington St.  
Chicago, IL.  
Hours: Mon., Wed., Fri. - 2:30 - 9:00 P.M.  
Phone - 312-746-6650  
Pres. Charles Thompson

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## **Chess Corner**

### **Man vs. Machine**

#### ***The Machine Mauls Man***

And finally the chess machine (Chessmaster 4000) received a challenge. After observing my musing about the machine being unable to get a challenge, recently joined member, Fabian Ramos e-mailed the editor and emphatically stated, "I will beat any machine." "Nobody has, yet, seen my real power on the chess board," Mr. Ramos continued. After my inquiry about whether he was really serious, the match was on. Opting for a couple of warm-up exhibition games before the match, Mr. Ramos tried what he said was a new line of play. He was 'mated' on move # 9. Trying the same line in a second game, Mr. Ramos was able to stay through a full 19 moves before he was 'mated' again; The match, itself, was put on hold. Another new member, Mr. Ron Goins, took up the challenge and was soundly trounced (3-0). The Machine, which is now (8-0), is still looking for an opponent.

But, we offer our congrats to the two challengers for their bravery, because the games were saved, and now can be studied. The Machine will never get away with wining those games, that way, again. In effect, we learned something-even in losing.

With that victory, Chessmaster 4000 has done it's job. It is now being retired. A new and more powerful program has been introduced as the Center's own super instructor-coach, Mr. Brown has provided the Club with the use of his desktop computer and an even stronger program (Chessmaster 5000). Even some members are threatening to bring in more powerful programs. Windpool and Sage, in Pool Checkers, and up through Chessmaster 9000, in Chess, is being contemplated. More about that later.

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### **Legends of "Buster"**

#### **"Buster" vs. Owens**

"A Match Made in Heaven," as the late-great Mayor Harold Washington, of Chicago, Illinois often-timed said.

For five years running, (1972-1976), Freddie Owens had finished in 2nd place behind "Buster at the APCA Tournaments." And for the most part, it was by the narrowest of margins-2 points. One could, perhaps, sense the frustration building up in Mr. Owens as the finally tally was computed, and he would come up short time and time again. I was one of those officials who had the responsibility of staying up half the night to help make sure the tally was correct. And each time, Mr. Owens' (zero loss) performance would not be enough.

Out east, he was called the "Hawk," perhaps for his aggressive play. But, many of us, here in the Midwest, had never heard of him, and his precise play, until he burst upon the tournament scene, I think, in 1972. Even in losing to "Buster," in those five consecutive years, Mr. Owens would oftentimes go undefeated in the whole tournament. That was considered remarkable, when you keep in mind, the eventual winner would usually have lost, at least, one game.

And so on a date, lost in my memory, the gentlemen from the East invited "Buster" to come to Baltimore, Maryland,

Freddie's hometown, for a showdown match. It was, by some accounts, a Pool Checkers Match for the Ages. Playing his signature game called the "Pitch and Squeeze," it's said that Mr. Owens tied up, our own Carl "Buster" Smith, game after game, until such time as "Buster" had to stop making the 'Hit," as we in the Pool Checker's world would call it. Many say "Buster" was lucky to escape with a 3-2 loss after 14 games.

Of course, the kibitzers of Chicago, was not about to accept that "Buster" had lost to Freddie. And so the spin was on. Van "Vansky" Penn said, It didn't happen, it couldn't happen, and it would not have happened had it not been for the weather. "I took 'Buster" to the airport, and the snow was three feet deep," he deadpanned. "Yea, chipped in, James 'Variation James" Adams, "and when he arrived at the airport in Baltimore, it was even deeper than that." "Buster" was simply too fatigued to play," my good friend Mr. Penn would end up.

But, Freddie Owens did defeat Carl "Buster" Smith in that historical match. And it was no fluke. I know because our own, Mr. Fred D. Shurn has shown me the games (especially the pitch and squeeze games many times). And so the cry went out, "Bring Freddie to Chicago." But, it never happened.

We were ready to declare Mr. Owens the king of the American Pool Checkers' universe-notwithstanding "Buster's" five straight APCA Championship wins. But, Freddie then made his ill-fated trip to Detroit, Michigan to play Mr. George "Lil George" Ramsey a 20 game match. This was another battle of the titans (more about that match later). Mr. Owens lost that match, and we were now back to square #1. Who was the best Pool Checkers player in American?

Eventually, the Russians would change the whole equation. And the questions about Freddie and "Buster" would become mute. Who was the very best, would then become abundantly clear -- as the Legend continues... "Buster" meets the Grandmaster, as his woes grow. But eventually, he would bow out in a 'blaze of glory.'

Edition #2 - 10/3/03- Editor: C. Thompson  
POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
(A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)  
-Produced by the 1st-Week. monthly-

### LAMBERT WINS THE INDIANA STATE CHECKER TOURNEY FESTIVAL

Al "Action Man" Lambert, Perhaps Illinois best Pool Checker player, won the state of Indiana's Pool Checker Tournament on September 13, 2003. Playing until nearly 3:00 A.M. into the night, Mr. Lambert did what he had to do (win his final two games) to secure the State Championship

Charles "Pecan" Thompson had put Mr. Lambert in this dire predicament by winning one of their two head-to-head games in the 12th round. Having finished ahead of the other two chief combatants, which included Orlando "Panama" Williams, Mr. Thompson could only wait to see how both fared in the final, 13th round. "Panama" had two draws and had to settle for 3rd place. The final score was; Lambert 38, Thompson 37, and Williams 36 points in a (w=2, D=1) format. Other Chicago participants were, Mr. Eddie Smith-who received a consolation prize, and Mr. Thurman Earnest

Mr. Roger Blaine, the organizer of this annual event, said he was very happy with the turnout. There was some disappointment that Indiana's favorite son- Clorius, "Mongoose-Iodine" Lay -of Gary; and (Vog's internet 4th ranked player was a No Show.

### WILLIAMS TAKES BIG BOARD TITLE AGAIN

Orlando Williams ran away from the field on the 10 X 10 Board. It was no contest as "Panama" didn't lose a game and out-distanced the field by as much as 3 games. "Panama" has won this title for three straight years and says he wonders if there are any Big Board players out there who is willing to challenge him. I might add, if there is, I would like to be contacted.

### FREDDIE OWENS IN MATCH WITH MR. KATZ

We have been informed by our friend, Mr. Talbert. President of the Washington D.C. Pool Checker club that a match between Freddie Owens and Alexander Katz is all but finalized. Contact Mr. Talbert for the final details. We wish them both well, and complement Mr. Talbert for his great efforts in promoting the game of Pool Checkers.

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## "The Legend of Buster"

### [The "Pecan Man", Part 2](#)

And so it was, "Pecan," (I will tell you about how the name, "Pecan" came about later). The brash young upstart to the world of Pool Checkers, was to meet the wily veteran of the game-Carl "Buster" Smith, that had often been talked about, and who was already a legend in his own time. It was just that I didn't know it.

An old checker player, Shirley Huckaby, was later to say to me, "Buster", he became champion at 16 years old; "Today more that 40 years have passed, and he still Rules." "It must be the longest reign in history." I had to remind my friend, Mr. Huckaby, that a little research that I had done had revealed to me that, Julius Ceasear, Octavianus (Octavian)- Augustus, the mighty Emperor of Rome ruled from 27 B.C. until 14 A.D. (41 years). But then "Buster" was still ruling. From that comes legends!!

The first game was a classic "alley game," that I had studied and thought I new well. I quietly maneuvered "Buster" into what I thought was my 'hammer' game. When "Buster" left a two for one hit for me, I grabbed at it like a hungry dog! And it was my demise. It was a trick play; he allowed me to make a two man hit, and then he pitched even a third man, before taking a king shot. The crowd, and Mr. Dew died with laughter. To me, of course I was embarrassed; and it wasn't funny. I still didn't know I was playing the 'Great' "Buster."

Game two was a 'quiet' game; there was nothing spectacular but just some hard playing. I can recall "Buster" saying to me at one point, "Young man you play a nice game." This was rare for "Buster"-for he hardly ever said anything when he was playing-and not very much afterwards. Little did I know when he made that statement, he was preparing the final moves

for my demise again. As we say in the "hood," he was 'tightening the screws.'  
-----TOO BE CONTINUED in the next issue.

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## CHESS CORNER

The chess program is going well. On Fridays, when we emphasize the chess aspect of our program, the young chess players have been very spirited in their play. We have a MAN vs. MACHINE setup whereby a human opponent competes against the computer program. Needless to say, no one has beaten the computer -in chess-yet!

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## SHURN PREVAILS IN RATED PLAY GAMES

Fred D. "The Shark" Shurn, a Chicago APCA Master upset some of the areas best Pool Checkers Players in winning the weekly Rated Play Games Tournament. Playing with the determination of a player possessed, Mr. Shurn knocked of C. "Pecan" Thompson one game, in their two encounters and had two draws with Al "Action Man" Lambert. He then expressed regret that Chicago area's two other premier players-tough talking Clorius"Iodine" Lay- and Orlando "Panama" Williams didn't show up.

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A selected week of RATED PLAY GAMES... Results of Ratings Play on Posted weekly- Wed (9/17/03  
APCA

PLAYERS	W	L	D	P/N#	SCORE	TG
1 Shurn, F.	5	0	7	5	34	12
2 Thompson, C.	5	1	6	4	32	12
3 Green, A.	5	2	5	3	30	12
4 Lambert, A.	2	0	10	2	28	12
5 Thurman. E.	3	3	6	0	24	12
6 Deadmon, H.	1	7	4	-6	12	12
7 Loggins, W.	0	8	4	-8	8	12

## Class-B (Experts)

1 Lillard, J.	12	2	4	10	56	18
1 Smith, E.	11	1	6	10	56	18
3 Lee, E.	6	4	8	2	40	18
4 Burke, S.	5	5	8	0	36	18
5 Johnson, S.	5	6	7	-1	34	18
6 Davis, F.	5	7	6	-2	32	18
7 Sykes, L	6	9	3	-3	30	18
8 Joiner, H.	4	9	5	-5	26	18
9 Polk, S.	3	10	5	-7	22	18
10 Mitchell, M.	Incomplete					

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Pres. Charles Thompson

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### Club Members Attend APCA Tournament in Memphis

At the APCA Tournament, in Memphis, Tennessee, (July 11-16), Al "Action" Lambert put on a wonderful performance by finishing in a 3-way tie for 4th place in the Top Masters Division, and Fred D. Shurn showed fine skills as he finished 5th in the Masters Division. Both players won large beautiful trophies and other amenities for their fine performances. The Club is rightfully proud of them.

The other club members, who attended, were non-factors. Top Masters: Orlando "Panama" Williams was 13th, Clorius "Mongoose" Lay was 15th, and Charles "Pecan" Thompson was a dismal 17th. Masters: Thurman "Chicken George" Earnest was 9th; Gold Bar: Eddie Smith was 20th; General Owens was 19th; Blue Ribbon: Andrew "Twin" Young was 12th; Stoney Burke, the Club's, secretary was an official and didn't play. All members agreed that they had a great time at the well-ran tournament. The tournament was won by Calvin Monroe, of the Atlanta Club.

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### The Tottens of Memphis. The First Family in Pool Checkers

My hat is off to Mr. And Mrs. Othell Totten of Memphis, Tennessee and also the daughter Sharon Totten (and others) for their tireless work in helping to host the 2004 APCA Tournament. While they certainly got help from the other Club members (Mr. Otha Bibbs, Joe Wilson, Leon Burgess, Henry Stokes) and others, it was, I think, the Totten Family that was most instrumental in providing such a fine tournament.

I first met Othell, I think, in 1998, at the Tournament in Houston, Texas. From our conversation then, I have never ceased to be impressed with his desire to improve on the game that we all love so much. Since that time, he has always been in the forefront of making the tournaments in his city the best.

Since our first meeting, with his family always working diligently alongside of him, Mr. Totten and others have hosted two or three National Tournaments, at least one City Tournament, and a number of private matches Each and all have been tremendous affairs.

I know I join with others in saying Thanks to the Totten Family.

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### Chess Corner

Chess Rated-Play games to begin on Mondays (2:30 P.M.- \*9:00P.M.): weekly

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### Legends of "Buster"

#### ["Buster" Plays Kaplan](#)

In the late seventies or early eighties, Vladimir Kaplan, International Grandmaster, former champion of Europe and the USSR, and author of many books, was brought to Chicago, by our Pool Checker's community. We wanted to see him up-close against "Buster."

Even though he had won three APCA championships in succession, there were those of us who still clamored for a showdown match between him and "Buster"- in Chicago. Never mind that he had already 'mugged' "Buster" (5 straight wins) in a 14 game match in New York, we still wanted to see for ourselves.

I was in the forefront of that movement to bring Mr. Kaplan to this City. We just had to see for ourselves. And so, we sent for him. We were so concerned with the importance of this match, that we even flew in Mr. Henry Johnson of Inkster, Michigan to be the referee. We knew that Mr. Johnson had been a no-nonsense military man and that he would be the perfect person to referee this very important match. Additionally, Mr. Johnson had some unique experience in directing this kind of match. He had been the Tournament director for the AICS (100 Sq. Board) tournament for many years. But, because of his unique talents, Mr. Johnson just might have performed his job too well. For nearly 4 hours of play (with a 30 min. intermission), one could barely hear a pin drop as the two combatants played in almost perfect silence. And the games they played were replayed by our top players many time, but no noticeable mistakes could be found.

To this day, we have been able to find only one miscue in the entire match and that was the one that "Buster" made when he lost. The final score was Kaplan 1 and "Buster" 0. While "Buster" lost that match to the International Grandmaster, he would leave with his head unbowed.

A personal note about Mr. Kaplan. In the year of 1978 at the APCA Tournament in Atlanta, Georgia, Mr. Kaplan's first APCA tournament after his arrival in America, (He had emigrated from Russia and had been in this country for only a few months), I had been his very first opponent. At the time, I was recording my games with a tape recorder (If you don't believe me, just ask Eastpoint), and he was doing his recording in the regular manner, on a pad. We were, perhaps, the only ones in the whole tournament who were recording our games. One of my club members walked up to me and said, "Who are you playing, "Pecan." And whispered to him Just another 'white man' who doesn't have a suit and tie on.' That statement, by me, was not intended to be malicious, it was intended as a joke. And we laughed it off. But, It did show my ignorance of my opponent. And I would pay dearly. The fact is, I had never heard of Mr. Kaplan.

You see, Vladimir Kaplan was no laughing matter and I would ruefully find that out. I lost both games. As I arose from the table after my two losses, I had (I thought) the satisfaction of knowing that I had recorded the games and could study them for future references, and use them for surprises on my coming opponents because only I would know.

In 1980, Mr. Kaplan published his very first book in America-Tournament Checkers. And to my chagrin, there on page 160, Game #27, and page 171, Game #33 were the two games he had won against me. And now the 'cat was out of the bag,' and all of my potential opponents and victims could profit from the information. But, then it might not have been so bad after all. Mr. Kaplan, who was without a doubt one of the greatest player that ever lived, used my two defeats to demonstrate to others what moves NOT to make when playing the game of American Pool Checkers. And so, I said to myself, at least, the games had been immortalized.

Oh, back to the match, I can recall talking to "Buster" about the extraordinary slow play as I was taking him home (He never owned a car and had never driven one, he would often relate to me). In offering suggestions as to how we could speed up the game and make it more exciting, he would always agree, by saying, "Yes I know." "But you just don't want to lose any of those games." I had heard this reply many times. I then, knew it was time to drop that issue.

After his 1 - 0 defeat at the hands of Mr. Kaplan, "Buster" would admit that the Grandmaster was the better player. But again, the gap was closing.

The "Buster" ship would rise again as he bows out in a 'blaze of glory'- as the Legends wind down in the next issue...

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Friends, Observe My  
20 Greatest Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times-  
on the 1st and 15th of each month

Log on to: <http://www.checkersusa.com/>  
Click, Enter Pool Room  
Click, Charles Thompson™'s Page  
(Choose, from a menu of topics)

Thanks,  
"Pecan"



Editor's Note: The Attachment idea has been discarded. Many of you made the point that it was not a very good idea.

"I felt your pain" -Bill Clinton (smile). Thanks again for your input.

Edition #3 - 11/03/03 - Editor: C. Thompson

POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO

(A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)

-Produced by the 1st-week - monthly-

## THE OWENS-KATZ MATCH

The match between Freddie Owens and Alexander Katz is expected to be very interesting. While I am not familiar with Mr. Katz's game, I can truly say that Freddie Owens has been a giant in Pool Checkers for a very long time. For many years, he has played the top Pool Checker players in this country and has held his own.

He was one of the few players, that I can recall, to beat "Buster" in a match. And many, including myself, declared him the greatest Pool Checker player in America. Only his subsequent loss to George, "Lil-Geo" Ramsey quieted our echoes somewhat. My good friend Tip Baldwin, of Detroit, maintained to the end that Freddie was the best player. Tip had his own spin on what happened in that match. I will share comments by several players with you in some of my later newsletters.

Freddie came to Chicago in 1975 to play in the APCA National tournament and played as fine a tournament as many of us had seen anywhere. While he finished 2nd behind "Buster," (if my memory serves me correctly) he didn't lose a game. I had the opportunity to play him two games; (I was the Tournament Director). Memory does not reveal to me what happened, but one thing is for certain, I didn't win any games from him.

I don't think, I've seen Mr. Owens, since that tournament, 28 years ago and consequently I don't know what his skills are today, but I will say this, he will not embarrass himself.

Finally, congratulations are offered to Mr. Rogers, Mr. Roberts, and others for their efforts in organizing this great event. The most important thing here is not who wins or loses, but that the match was made and the participant put on a show for their public.

We Say Best Wishes To Both!!

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## Legends of "Buster"

### [The "Pecan Man". Part 3](#)

And so it was, after having lost the first two games, I had a sense that something was up. The guys in the back of the room was abuzz. As I finally conceded game three, someone walked in and asked "What is the score?" A player in the back could conceal his anxiety no longer and blustered out, "Buster is killing him." With that statement, all of my confidence, arrogance, and hope went south. I then realized I was playing "The Great Buster."

Games four and five, I lost, without seemingly putting up much of a fight. Five games played; five games lost was my way of assessing the outcome. It was not only a "mug", it was the most embarrassing of "mugs. As we will see in the coming issues, it's not what "Buster" did to me. But what he did to others, as well, that made him a legend.

Finally, as I paid my \$5.00 to my Dew, and walked out, the owner of the barber shop, Gus Hawkins, said to me, "What happened back there Mr. Thompson?" I replied, "Gus, I couldn't get a "Pecan"- meaning not only could I not win, I couldn't even draw. From that day on, I became, not Mr. Thompson, but "PECAN" Each day as I would return to the shop, Gus would hollow out to the guys in the back, "Here comes the "Pecan Man." .....To be continued

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## MR. KACHER'S WEB PAGE

Mr. Jake Kacher, a very good, Little Board and Big Board player, has produced a web page on checkers, that is not only

entertaining but very educational. If you have not visited it, I would encourage all to do so. The address is CHECKERS.JKACHER.COM. And he says he's going to improve on it. It will be interesting, Mr. Kacher. I say it's a job that is well done.

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#### MR. POPE TAKES CLASS-B IN RATED PLAY GAMES

New player Mr. Pope, taught the "young bloods" in the club a Pool Checker lesson as he fought his way to the top of week #3 games. Having played with or alongside of some of Chicago's old-time greats, ies "The Great Gilliam", Professor Jr.", "Rubarb", "Old man Earl ", Vic Krafft, and even "Buster" himself, Mr. Pope survived a devastating 3 for 5 shot-lost to Old Pro. Leon Baynes, to return and win the 2nd game and then to win the division for the week. Well done Mr. Pope.

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**Indianapolis Come Calling Again**

Master Player, Eugene "Hamp" Hampton brought his usual delegation of four players to the Club's Wednesday Rated-Play Games for Pool Checkers. While Mr. Hampton was the only Class-A player from the group (he finished in a tie for 5th out of a group of ten), his other friends dominated the Class-B group. They took spots 1, 3, and 4 out of a field of eleven. Mr. R. Addair was the player who finished first and was heard telling some of our players he wanted a 'piece' of the Class-A players. He will definitely be accommodated upon his return. Mr. Hampton phoned upon their return home to say they had a great time.

**Chess Corner**

**Weekly Rated-Play Games for Chess Kicks Off**

Mondays has been designated as the days for the weekly Rated-Play Games for chess just as Wednesdays are the days for Pool Checkers.

The times are: 2:30 - 8:30 P.M. The spirited play for the month of August 2004 produced the following results.

FOR AUGUST - 2004								
Rated-Play games for CHESS								
Chess Pts; W=1, L=0, D=.5)								
	W	L	D	Chess Pts.	TG	TPP	W%	Rated
Ramos, F.	6	0	7	9.5	13	13	0.73	1
Lee, E.	16	6	14	23	36	36	0.64	2
Myrick, C.	14	7	9	18.5	30	30	0.62	3
Goins, R.	13	9	10	18	32	32	0.56	4
Jamerson, J.	2	2	2	3	6	6	0.5	5
Man, W.	2	2	4	4	8	8	0.5	5
Ricks, R.	2	2	4	4	8	8	0.5	5
Thompson, C.	6	9	7	9.5	22	22	0.43	8
Burnett, J	1	2	3	2.5	6	6	0.42	9
Browley, M.	4	11	4	6	19	19	0.32	10
Polk, S.	0	4	4	2	8	8	0.25	11
Joiner, H.	0	5	3	1.5	8	8	0.19	12
Thomas,		Incomplete		0	0	0	ERR	
Owens, G.		Incomplete		0	0	0	ERR	

The year is 1991. The scene is the site of the 1991 APCA tournament in Los Angeles, California. One of the participants is Iser Kuperman-Russian Grandmaster, seven times APCA champion, and arguably the greatest Pool Checkers player to ever live. Mr. Kuperman, who has dominated American Pool Checkers since his arrival in this country as an immigrant from the former USSR is poised to win his 8th straight tournament.

For seven straight years, he has all but destroyed the field of American players. All the American players, including myself, had been (for all practical purposes) reduced to also-rans in what we used to think of as 'our game.' Some say he had lost only two tournament games during that seven year span. At the same time, he was packing in tons of wins.

Privately, there might have been a feeling of "Break up the Yankees," on the part of some players. That, of course was the old baseball cry against the New York Yankees when they were winning all those baseball championships in the late twenties, early thirties, and the fifties and sixties. But "Buster" wasn't a part of that thinking. On a number of occasions, he would be heard saying that it was good that the Russian Grandmasters were playing in the tournaments because they would raise the level of play.

But with Mr. Kuperman, even the Grandmaster Vladimir Kaplan, also a former USSR immigrant, himself, had curiously retired during the period of his arrival on the scene. Not only were Iser Kuperman destroying all of his opponents in tournaments, he was doing much the same thing when private matches was arranged for him. One match that was particularly noteworthy was his complete destruction of former APCA champion Momodou Faals who had been one of the few players, it was reported, to have won a game from him in tournament play. The score was, I think, 7 - 1, in a fourteen game match, in favor of Mr. Kuperman.

And so with the dominance of the Russian Grandmasters, (Vladimir Kaplan - 1977-79) and (Iser Kuperman - 1984-90). And with a couple of 'young lions' (Momodou Faals and Elton Williams) contesting his dominance (80-83), "Buster" seemed to be fighting for his legacy as much as anything else. According to one observer, I think it was our own APCA President, Dr. Ervin Smith (to a newspaper reporter) and I quote, "In the 1991 tournament, for some reason, "Buster" seemed to be playing like a man possessed." "Never had I seen him play this way before," -unquote.

Keep in mind, at this point, "Buster" is approaching age 64-a time when most players are ready to 'pack it in.' It is said, that he not only drew Mr. Kuperman the two games they played, he also amassed more points than any other Top Master player-and enough to outdistance even the great Mr. Kuperman and wrest the championship away from him. Furthermore, it's reported that, Mr. Kuperman was so shocked and disgruntled that he 'Refused to Shake "Buster's" hand 'upon the declaration that he ("Buster") was the new champion. And finally, the record will show, that Mr. Kuperman exited the stage of the APCA tournaments-never to appear again. "Buster" had Returned!

Although "Buster" is now 64 years old, and while we didn't know it at the time, he would make one final stab at greatness before bowing out - as the Legend continues in the next Issue.

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Lay and Lambert ties for top honors. APCA Top Masters, C. "Mongoose" Lay and Al "Action" Lambert finished in a tie in the weekly "Rated Play" games. Both had identical 11-1 records, with 5 draws in the 16 round Class A tournament. C. "Pecan" Thompson was a distant 3rd with a record of 7-2 and 7 draws.

Al "Mr. Green" Green mauls the Class B players Going 14-0, with just 4 draws, Mr. Green was just too much for the Class B players. His outstanding performance has earned him the opportunity to return to the Class A division for the month of December.

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## CHESS CORNER

Our MAN VS. MICHINE computer games are providing much interest. Both the Chess and Pool Checker programs have provided the players with some very interesting games. The chess program. Although somewhat weak (CM 4000) approximately 1800, it is good enough to perhaps play. At least 50 games before losing. It is 2-0 for now. The Pool Checker program, is strong enough to keep the players interested. It has lost only one game but has held many of the top players to draws. It's record is 4-1 with 3 draws. Many of the weaker players are benefiting quite a bit from the recorded games. The top players spend quality time pointing out errors that were made.

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## Legends of "Buster"

### The Local Dude

The year was 1977; a contingent of Chicago Pool Checkers players descended upon Atlanta, Georgia for the annual APCA tournament. It was one, we felt, brought together the best players in America. We were about 12 to 15 in total; we were there to stake our claim.

As we settled into our rooms with our wives, girl friends, and/or significant others, I received a frantic phone call from my good friend, Van "Vansky" Penn- 'Busters' roommate and confidante. "Pecan," "Pecan," he cried. Some 'unknown' local dude has drawn of "Buster." (Drawn on is a euphemism for a high-stakes-in-your-face wager. I, or course, quickly gathered my things (with my wife inquiring, "What is going on?" while shaking her head and rolling her eyes). I rushed to the room-arriving with about 15 or 20 other players. As we entered the room, "Buster" and the local dude was already locked in battle. As I watched and took notes, the battle raged far into the night-with "Buster" taking an extremely long time to move, as he usually does.

To me a Pool Checker match had always been about, who won, what was the score, and are there any recording of the games? After watching for about two hours, I returned to my room to prepare for the next day's tournament.

In arising the next morning, I called Mr. Penn to inquire "what was the score." "They are still playing," he responded. "But," he whispered, "it won't be long now." "What do you mean?" I asked. "I think "Buster" has just 'busted him; "I see he is searching in his pockets for something to bet with."

As I went to register for the tournament, I ran into "Buster" who was coming to register too. "How did you come out," I inquired. "Oh I won," was his always modest reply. We will never know how badly "Buster" beat him because he never talked in specifics about that match.

Scores like, 17-2, 18-3, or some other astronomical figure was banded about as the final score. Carl "Buster" Smith finished third behind Vladimir Kaplan and Elton Williams in that tournament. But, there are those swore that if he hadn't got involved in that all-night battle with the 'unknown local dude' he would have won that tournament.

Postscript, the 'unknown local dude' was local alright; he was from Atlanta, Georgia, but he was not unknown. He had finished 7th in an earlier APCA tournament in Flint, Michigan. He was Ben Bady.

And so, 'the legend lives'..... to be continued.

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### Homan Sq. Club goes to South Bend

A contingent of the Club's players traveled to South Bend, Indiana for the annual Pool Checkers Festival of Mr. Roger Blaine, the APCA Treasurer. The Club's Big Four of Lambert, Williams, Thompson, and Lay plus it's new superstar Fred D. Shurn had knockdown drag-out matches as they competed for the top prize. This time the order was Williams, Thompson, Shurn, Lambert, and Lay. The new superstar, Mr. Shurn defeated Lay and Thompson one game each, in the two games matches he played them. Additionally he claims he should have defeated Mr. Thompson in both games but for an oversight on his part. Mr. Thompson retorts. "Sorry, but close is only good in horseshoes."

Other Club entries, Mr. Thurman Earnest and Mr. Stoney Burke finished 7th and 11th respectively. The hospitality of the hosts Mr. Blaine and South Bend resident, Mr. Arthur "Sonny" Bell, was excellent. As expected, Mr. Blaine has already given the official scores for the tournament. Log on to [checkersusa.com](http://checkersusa.com) for the final results. Thanks is offered to Mr. Blaine for a very nice tournament.

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### Belated Chicago-News Newsletter Anniversary

It was September 1, 2003, that I embarked on a venture to share Pool Checkers news in the Chicago area. The response from the contacts has been fantastic and heartwarming. I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to all for the interest and support. Hopefully we can continue to provide provocative and interesting information in the future. The site, <http://www.checkersusa.com/>, has provided a numerical listing of the Newsletters along with my '20 Greatest.' Feel free to log on if you have missed some issues.

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### The Regional Pool Checkers Tournament Idea - Has its time come?

In the coming months, I will be discussing with various players locally and nationally about the idea of having Regional Tournaments. I expect to use the [checkersusa.com](http://checkersusa.com) [Bulletin Board](#) (BB) along with individual e-mails to discuss this subject. If there is any input, you can e-mail me or use the BB to express your feelings.

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### Chess Corner

**Man vs. Machine** The machine is idle!

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### Legends of "Buster"

By the summer of 1992 Carl "Buster" Smith seemed to have been at the top of his game. He had come full circle. After his triumph over Mr. Kuperman, he returned to Chicago for a hero's welcome.

Considering his easy trouncing of a brash and outclassed "Pecan" in the late sixties, and throughout his frequent trips to Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe to compete (and hold his own) with some of the great grandmasters, and along with his defeats of Ramsey, Langley, Black, and others-and notwithstanding his disappointments with "Grocery Store Bob"

and the "Lady." and then after his greatest triumph (the dethroning of the great Mr. Kuperman), one would have said that he had done it all.

Conventional wisdom would have dictated that he now rest on his accomplishments and live the life of an elder statesman. But that would not be the case for this champion who, like Alexander The Great, needed new worlds to conquer. At this time, after having ruled Chicago Pool Checkers for nearly a half century, he did in July 1992, head of the The Bahamas in search of new glories. He was to compete in the 27th APCA National Tournament being held there.

With the absence of the grandmasters Mr. Kaplan and Mr. Kuperman, Carl "Buster" Smith was now in control again. And again, one would fine his name at the 'top of the pack' in the final standings. While he had to share the 1992 title with the Bahamas' young Andrew Frazier, there was little argument that he had etched his name for all times as a great American Champion.

In October of 1992, Carl "Buster" Smith passed away. At his funeral was a host of his Pool Checkers friends. I think I can recall seeing Mr. William Langley along with his friend Mr. Rudy Poe of Detroit, Michigan. Most of the local players were there also. The arrangements were simple; and those of us who knew him well, conversed quietly among ourselves. My final recollection of the service was that they played 'jazz music,' perhaps by Gene Ammons, Art Blakley, and/or Ronnie Laws, Stanley Turntine as the final bell tolled.

And so, we all left that service with the feeling that a Giant had been take from our midst.

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Editor's Note: Friends this was the last in a series of my remembrances- [The Legends of "Buster,"](#) I only hope that you have enjoyed reading them as much as I have enjoyed sharing them with you.

Thanks again for your interest and attention. "Pecan"

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## New Club Makes it Official

The Homan Sq. Pool Checkers & Chess Club of Chicago (HSPCCC)

The members made it official at a meeting held on 12/17/03. Starting with an initial membership of about 30 players, we will, hopefully, be holding additional tournaments, matches in both pool checkers and chess. Our current hours are: Mon., Wed., Fri. - 2:30 - 9:00 P.M. All are invited. The address is 3559 W. Arthington St. Chicago, IL. (Phone- 312-748-6650)

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## "Pecan" prevails in Class -A; Lee dominates in Class-B

Even though C. "Pecan" Thompson beat out some tough competitors in Class-A, the real story was the fantastic play of Ernst Lee-one of our newest member to the pool checkers scene. Having been listening intently to some of our teaching instructions, Mr. Lee put it all together in massing a +6 score in our selected 2nd week of Rated Play Games. Mr. Lee is also our chess champion.

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## Chess Corner

The Man vs. Machine series continues to attract opponents. No player has been able to beat the Machine in chess-and probably won't. We haven't even been able to draw it. In pool checkers, the Machine has lost once and has three draws and 4 wins. The Pool Checker program is not nearly as strong as the Chess program.

---

## Legends of "Buster"

### "Buster" Meets the "Headchopper"

Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot was one of the most dazzling fast-moving, top, Pool Checker player, perhaps in the country at the time. He was witty, talkative, and very, very good. He hailed from Macon, Georgia-I think the home of soul singer James Brown and many other greats in the fields of entertainment, sports, and even politics.

Such that it was, we here in the City had already heard fantastic stories about his quality of play. We had been forewarned by a great pool checker player who had just recently moved to Chicago from Macon. His name was Frank Bivins. We called him the "Slingshot" or the "Flamethrower" because of his ability to throw fantastic shots.

Mr. Bivins had let it be known, in no uncertain terms, that he thought Mr. Lightfoot could beat "Buster" To make matters more interesting, I had received a personal letter from Mr. Lightfoot, announcing that he had declared himself the best Pool Checker player in America. He cited as his evidence-his defeat of Detroit's, William Langley in a series of matches in Detroit. It was true; we had heard of those matches. "And as a result", said Mr. Lightfoot, "I am now preparing to tour the Union of The Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia." (He just said, 'Russia') in search of competition."

We here in Chicago, wondered why he wrote me. Perhaps it was because I was the 2nd Vice President of the APCA and already been a part of promoting several high-profile matches here-which included the Ollie Howard- Victor Krafft ("World Championship" match-Ollie would have you believe that).

And so it was, with much anticipation, we watched in Detroit, Michigan in the early seventies as the two squared off in a pre-APCA tournament exhibition. As was his practice, Mr. Lightfoot was moving with lightning speed. "Buster," as usual, moving slowly and cautiously.. And there was some grumbling in the crowd about his slow pace.

And then, to our astonishment, "Buster" began to match Mr. Lightfoot's move-for-move. Never before had we seen "Buster" move at this pace. It was now a draw-for-draw, game-after-game scenario. "What was it?" someone asked. "I don't know" was a reply. "Perhaps it was something somebody said."

The games continued to be played, at a pace comparable to 5-minute blitz, in chess. The games were still all draws. And then it happened- "Buster" threw a SHOT. We dubbed it the back-up-king shot (even though the piece does not even end up in the king's row; but it's blocks the opponent's piece that is already there).

Perhaps, it's the most beautiful SHOT in all of pool checkers. And then, in a rare display of raw emotion, "Buster" slammed the checker on the spot, stood up, and... "LEFT THE ROOM."

The roar from the crowd ( over a hundred-fifty players, by one estimate) was deafening, as they scrambled to replay the game or set up the position.

Footnote: "Buster" won that tournament; Mr. Lightfoot finished 6th.

The game with the SHOT, from my database, is given below. I am hopeful that Mr. Kacher will show it on his Web Site so that all can share in it's beauty.

(1) 11-15 22-17 (2) 15-19 23-16 (3) 12-19 24-15 (4) 10-19 17-14 (5) 9-18 27-24 (6) 19-23 26-19  
(7) 5-9 19-16 (8) 9-14 30-26 (9) 8-11 24-20 (10) 6-10 28-24 (11) 1-6 25-22 (12) 18-25 21-30  
(13) 10-15 16-12 (14) 4-8 24-19 (15) 15-24 20-27 (16) 11-15 29-25 (17) 6-9 25-22 (18) 7-11 22-18  
(19) 15-22 26-10 (20) 2-7 27-23 (21) 7-14 23-19 (22) 9-13 32-27 (23) 13-17 31-26 (24) 17-21 27-23  
(25) 14-17 23-18 (26) 3-7 12-10 (27) 11-15 18-11 (28) 17-22 26-17 (29) 21-23

And then...,HE LEFT THE ROOM ... and the Legend grows. ... To be continued.

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### The Club Began Preparation for its 2005 City Tournament

At its quarterly meeting of October 2004, the Club's membership authorized its president to begin preparation for the city's first Pool Checkers tournament since 1983. With that authorization, the president said that he would attempt to offer as fine a tournament as the City has had in a long time. The following flyer gives much of the specifics; there will be more in the coming weeks and months.

The Chicago Open  
-A-  
Pool Checkers Tournament  
(Where a Champion will be Crowned)  
April 15, 16 (2005)  
Fri, 9:30A.M - 8:30 P.M. & Sat. 9:30A.M. 4:00 P.M.  
-At-  
The Homan Sq. Community Center  
3559 W. Arthington St.  
Chicago, IL.  
(Phone 312-746-6650)  
4 Classes (A, B, C, & Youth)  
(You play only the players at your level!)  
Cash Prizes and Trophies for winners in first three Places of each  
Class (A, B, C)  
Certificates/Plaques/Awards for the Youth-  
Entry Fee: Class A, \$25; Class B, \$22.50; Class C, \$20  
Class-Youth; Free  
(Projected Winning Amounts)  
Class A; 1st - \$150.00; 2nd - \$125.00; 3rd - 110.00  
Class B; 1st - \$115.00; 2nd - \$110.00; 3rd - 100.00  
Class C; 1st - \$100.00; 2nd - \$90.00; 3rd - \$80.00  
Class-Youth - Certificates/Plaques/Awards  
Parings: Class-A: (APCA -Top Masters & Masters  
(and others designated by committee.)  
Class-B: (APCA -Jr. Masters & Gold Bars  
(and others designated by committee.)  
  
Class-C: (APCA - Blue Ribbons, local players with ratings below 1200 (10/1/04)  
(and others designated by committee.)  
Class- Youth: (Young people below age 16) - Certificates/Plaques/Awards for all participants

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Also. The Club's Fundraising Raffle will be conducted on Fri. 4/15/05 at 6:30 P.M.  
(More details later.)

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For more info, contact;  
C. Thompson - e-mail; [chas8171@aol.com](mailto:chas8171@aol.com) or  
Homan Sq. Community Center (Leave message for me).  
ALL POOL CHECKERS PLAYERS ARE INVITED!!

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### The Pitt Bulls of Macon, Georgia

Some interesting reading on Pool Checkers players is offered by our friend Mr. Bumpous (filippov) on the Internet. One can go to the Bulletin Board (BB) on the <http://www.checkersusa.com/> and view his writings about the activities in Macon, Georgia.

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### The Regional Tournament Concept

Readers, you can log on to the Bulletin Board (BB) of <http://www.checkersusa.com/> to read and/or discuss my ideas with respect to Regional Tournaments. I will offer, what I think, could be some valuable ideas about this previously mentioned item.

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### Chess Corner

The Chess players are playing, go-as-you-please, and biding their time-as they await their big tournament. The president has assured them that theirs will be on the agenda next.

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### The World Championship in Brazil

The 18th World Championship in Brazil was concluded on October 5, 2004. The final standings:

1. Yuriy Anikeev - (Ukraine)
2. Sergey Belosheev (Ukraine)
3. Ion Dosca (Moldova) - Mr. Dosca won the 2000 APCA Championship
7. \* Iser Kuperman (USA) - Mr. Kuperman was seven times APCA Champion.

Log on to <http://www.checkersusa.com> to view the games and comments.

Edition # 6 - 02/01/04 - Editor: C. Thompson  
POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
(A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)  
-Produced by the 1st-week - monthly-

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## **Homan Sq. Pool Checkers and Chess Club News**

"Pecan" Tops All, in Ratings Derby

C. "Pecan" Thompson closed out the year of 2003 at the top of the Ratings List. Having held the top spot for 8 out of the 12 months of 2003, Mr. Thompson held off a fast rising AI "Action Man" Lambert for the number one position. The Top Five Ratings are as follows:

### PLAYERS RATING

1.C. "Pecan" Thompson	2043
2.A. Lambert	2028
3.C. Lay	1953
4.O. Williams	1814
5.F. Shurn	1519

Using a rating system based on a player's winning percentage and a Factor of 2800, the Rated Play Games of Classes A and B have a built in mechanism to generate maximum interest. By permitting the Class B players to amass a large number of winning points in the B division, it allows them to move up and compete against the Class A players. While in Class A, this group of players will take their beatings from the stronger players, and be driven back to the lower Class B. They are 'transient' players because they are continually bouncing from the B class to the A class and then back to the B class.

The 'transient' player loves this kind of activity because he gets a chance to get the experience of playing against the stronger players. The stronger player, also loves it, because he gets a chance to 'feast on some easy pickings.' And everyone has a great time.

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### Chess Corner

The Machine is Idle

The greatest teaching tool of our day, the computer, sits idle because few are eager to challenge it. Two relatively modest programs (Dynamo Pro, for pool checkers and CM4000, for chess), gather dust as they are unable to generate much activity because players gingerly step around them, as they (the programs) wait for opponents. We don't know if it's a case of players trying to protect the secrets of their games, or just a case of 'benign neglect.' But whatever the reason, knowledge is being denied, and we humans deny ourselves a great chance to improve.

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## **Legends of "Buster"**

### [Detroit's Big Guns Rides into Chicago](#)

At one time, in the 60's and 70's, and perhaps even the 80's, Detroit, Michigan had perhaps the finest group of Pool Checker players in America (That distinction would probably go to Atlanta now). Sporting a cast of George "Lil George" Ramsey, William "Bullet Hole Bill" Langley, William Richardson, Carl Thomas, Hank Jenkins, George Sykes, and a host of other top players, it was a hotbed of Pool Checkers activity.

As if to consolidate and verify its dominance, in the early seventies, a contingent of that group, notably Ramsey, Langley, Richardson, and several others, came calling on the Chicagoans for some high-stakes matches. Since I was very young at the game and was vaguely familiar with the significance of these matches, much of what is given here is what was related to me. Although I witnessed many these matches, I didn't stay for some of the all night battles and their final conclusions. They battled all-night, all day, and then back into the night again.

It was said that "Buster" was 'killing' (beating him badly) Langley. Some estimates were that at one time "Buster" was

beating Langley 55-5. It's not clear whether this all happened at this particular setting. But, what is clear, "Buster" was putting and awful hurting (beating him decisively) on Langley. At the same time, "Lil George" was soundly beating Chicago's second top player, Victor "Vic" Krafft. Additionally, William Richardson was outclassing our own 3rd ranked player, "Madcap" Milton Miskel.

It is said that "Lil George" (who was generally conceded the 2nd best player in America) at the time, and was preparing to make his push for the number one spot, looked over at the games between "Buster" and Langley, and said, "Bill let me have that 'ham' (poor player). At that point, Langley turned "Buster" over to "Lil George" and the battle began. They played all night-52 games all total; and they were all draws!! What was significant about these games, they were all the same. They played the same games over and over-both refusing to change. That's right!, 26 games with the black pieces and 26 games with the white pieces-same games-same results-same draw. They "stunk up the place" is how one observer characterized it.

Finally, in the 53rd game, "Lil George" made a 'blunder' (a terribly poor move-in chess). And, it 's said, "Buster pounced on him like a 'dog in heat' (very aggressively). From that point on, it was all 'down hill' for "Lil George" several observers agreed. The saying is that in the very next game, "Buster" got "Lil George" in a position where he (George) got up and left his side of the board, went around to his opponent's side and studied the move for an hour and a half (an obvious exaggeration). "But", opined Van Penn ( of local dude infamy), "When "Lil George" returned to his side of the board, the game was still out" (meaning "Buster still had the winning position). There is no reported score of the "Buster" vs. "Lil George" encounter, but one Chicago player commented, "As long as we have "Buster" here, we will never again have to worry about the 'barracudas' coming into Chicago and feasting on our blood." The legend continues....

...But, there are warning signs on the horizon. There would be some setbacks, down the road, for the "Buster Steamroller." Read some of the coming issues.

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Friends, starting February 15th I will be writing two articles a month-on *Pecan's All-time American Pool Checkers 20 greatest players*. They will be featured on Mr. Jake Kacher's Web Site. More information later.

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Pres. Charles Thompson

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### THE CHICAGO OPEN Foremost on Member's Minds

With the launching of the Raffle Drive and the posting of the effort on the checkersusa.com Bulletin Board, the members are eagerly performing their financial responsibilities, and preparing their games for the big event. We are hopeful that many will log on to the BB at <http://www.checkersusa.com> to be kept updated.

### The Regional Tournament Idea to be discussed more on the BB

Readers/Friends, I am hopeful that you will log on to the BB at the site indicated above to discuss ideas about the previously mentioned Regional Tournaments.

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Observe, excerpts from the past...

This article was written by the reporter. Adam Langer of The Reader, a weekly, Chicago, newspaper at the time. The date was Friday, February 12, 1993.

Thanks are offered to Mr. Fred D. Shurn, who made this article available to me, (after all these many years), and Mr. Al Lambert, who invited the reporter over to our club, and escorted him around, for a series of interviews, shortly after "Buster's death. Also, thanks are offered to my wife Linda who retyped this long and lengthy article.

(This is a continuation from Part 1 of 11/15/04)

### The Legend of Buster Smith

American pool checkers differ from garden variety checkers in a couple of ways. First, whereas in straight checkers you can only jump an opponent's piece by moving forward, in pool checkers you can eliminate pieces by jumping either forward or backward. And second, in straight checkers, kings-the double pieces that have been crowned by reaching the opponent's home row, can only move one space at a time, but in pool checkers they can move as far as they can go on a diagonal. Pool checker players call that piece "the flying king." Variations on pool checkers are played in Europe, Brazil, and the former Soviet Union among other places.

Every year in the United States there are national checker championships with matches that can last as long as marathon chess games. The game looks deceptively easy. The rules are not complicated and anyone can learn how to play in a few minutes. But mastery is something that can take a lifetime.

There are tons of books on the subject and plenty of well-known opening moves, but trying to beat a grand master is next to impossible. Pool checker players say that an amateur coming in and beating a grand master would be like someone coming off the street and defeating Boris Spassky: it just doesn't happen.

How pool checkers got to African American communities in Chicago, Detroit, Saint Louis, and other American cities is something upon which checker historians don't always agree. But it may have traveled from France to Louisiana during the days of French colonial rule and grown popular there among black slaves.

It certainly came north during the great migration of the early 20th century. The game's popularity in America appears to have peaked during the Depression, when many would have had time on their hands to play. Checker clubs sprouted up in city parks, community centers, and barbershops.

Today in Chicago the number of clubs is dwindling, but a few players remain. They play every afternoon in the basement on Warren called Buster's Place. They play in the back room of a shoe repair shop at 47th and Indiana, and in barbershops at Ogden and Homan and in Evanston. They play at the headquarters of the Chicago American Pool Checker Club at 74th and Vincennes. And in the summer, when the weather's nice, you can find the "tree players" under the tree in the park across from Gladys' Luncheonette, at 45th and Indiana.

They call Mose Johnson the "mayor of the Tree" because in the summer you can almost always find him playing checkers across from Gladys'. Like many other members of the Chicago pool checker community, he still hasn't gotten over the death of Buster Smith.

"I'll never forget Buster," he says. "His name will be around for years and years." They'll know him all over. We play out under the tree and we talk about Buster. We tell little bitty kids about him, and when they play, they want to play like Buster. He was a genius. He hardly ever missed a move. He'll be known for centuries."

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3559 West Arthington St.  
Chgo., IL. 60624  
Ph. 312-746-6650  
Meets; M.-W.-F. -2:30-9:00 P.M.

To my readers; since 1971, (33 years to be exact), I have been involved in American Pool Checkers in one form or another-either as a player, or as an official, and now as a writer. As a player, I started at the top. In 1972, without ever having played a game in the lower divisions, I asked for and was granted permission to play as a Top Master. I simply wanted the best-from the beginning.

I have never won an APCA tournament; consequently, my success was modest at best. Two, fourth place finishes, and a number of Top 10 finishes in American Pool Checkers Association's (APCA) Tournaments have been the extent of my accomplishments at that level. What I achieved on an individual basis however, might have been more gratifying to me. In 1979, in Winston-Salem North Carolina, I defeated-in succession Victor Krafft (2 games), Carl "Buster" Smith (1 game), and Ollie "Shotgun" Howard (1 game), without losing to any of them. That might have been, I thought, my 'finest hour.' I was at the 'Top of My Game.'- like Muhammad Ali was when he knocked out "Big Cat" Williams or like Michael Jordan, when he threw down that 'double nickel' (55 points) against the Knicks, or even like the "Old Mongoose," Archie Moore said he felt after having floored Rocky Marciano, with a sneak right, in that memorable heavyweight championship fight, years ago. Mr. Moore said, in his book, years later, that the 'Brockton Blockbuster' simply wouldn't cooperate with him the rest of the way. I probably could say the same thing about the APCA Sub-Top Ten ("Scrubs") players. They in turn, denied me my place in the sun; they then beat me four straight games. I finished 9th that year. Even though, I thought, that might have been my year.

That's how my assessment will be with the players that I am preparing to select. It will be on their abilities when they were at The Top of their Games. But the venture I am about to embark on is not about me; it might be about my credentials though, if I am bold enough to try to make such serious SELECTIONS. The point I would make, in my defense, is that in every case, with the possible exception of one, I have played these players, at the highest level. As I embark on this perilous journey of naming The 20 Greatest American Pool Checker Players of All Time, I would expect some regional or sectional disagreements, as players and fans around the country will claim, 'I' or 'My Guy' didn't get my/his proper respect.

As an official, I was the 2nd Vice President for the APCA a number of years. One of the official duties as the 2nd Vice President was to conduct the APCA Tournaments. Because I was so involved in playing, I asked Mr. Nathaniel Leach to do the job for me. And as everyone knows, he performed that job with great distinction for over 30 years. Additionally, I along with George "Lil George" Ramsey, attempted to get started the ill-fated, APCA Top Ten Tournament, where the top ten players in the APCA tournament would square off in a playoff, after the regular tournament had been completed. Even though the event was well funded by the adherents to this idea, the attempt failed for a number of reasons-even though we were prepared and ready to go in Akron, Ohio in 1984.

As a writer, my only venture has been in writing the stories of "The Legends of Buster", and now this venture. Comments are accepted, even encouraged; criticisms are tolerated, but the selections are 'etched in stone.'

In making my selections, there will be, several criteria used. Some are:

- 1.How did the selected player perform in APCA Tournaments. (most importantly)
  - 2.How did the selected player perform in head-to-head matches (that I am aware of)
  - 3.How did the selected player perform in outside non-formal matches that can be verified by corroborating witnesses.
  - 4.What was my personal assessment of the player's game when I played or watched them play.
- (Some of these criteria will be enumerated in each commentary I will make about the selections).

...."LET THE DEBATE BEGIN"....

We will begin the countdown from #20. For the next 10 months, on the 1st and 15th, I will give my selections. After that time has expired, I will spend the next two months summarizing, and commenting on other commentaries about my selections. On February 15, 2005, I expect to conclude my stories about these selections. These selections will also be placed on Mr. Jake Kacher's web-site, <http://www.checkersusa.com>

Thanks, "Pecan"

#20 - Clyde "King Row" Black - Mr. Black, of New York City, New York was the premier Pool Checker Player in America in the 50s, 60s, and even the 70s from what I have read of his history. He was the player I consider the forerunner and the bedrock of the American Game as we play it today.

His two Books, Secrets of Spanish Pool Checkers (#1 & 2) are the ones that turned American Pool Checkers playing into an art form. They were certainly the vehicles in which I used to raise my game to the next level. Some of his ideas, (Joe Louis leading wit his left and using his right for the knockout punch; strong-side/weak-side theories) are just as relevant today as they were over 50 years ago when he wrote them.

By the time Mr. Black arrived on the scene to compete in the APCA Tournaments, it was obvious, he was way past his prime. Nevertheless, he finished 9th on the two occasions he did play (1978-79). I had the occasion to compete against Mr. Black in both of those tournaments and found his game to be as tough and tenacious as any of the next nine players I will select. Consequently, he could have easily been selected much higher were it not for his limited number of appearance in APCA Tournaments. And, perhaps, he was born 25 years too soon. The game and its players simply had moved to a higher level. Consequently, on my selection tree, Mr. Black's name will be placed at #20.

#### Pecan's - 20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players of All Times

- #1. ?
- #2. ?
- #3. ?
- #4. ?
- #5. ?
- #6. ?
- #7. ?
- #8. ?
- #9. ?
- #10. ?
- #11. ?
- #12. ?
- #13. ?
- #14. ?
- #15. ?
- #16. ?
- #17. ?
- #18. ?
- #19. ?
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black

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POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
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### **Chicago Open Dominate the Minds of Members**

The Clubs' activities are in high gear as members enthusiastically get involved in the different fundraising activities - the Raffle Drive, the Coffee Fund, the Gold Membership, and others. Several members were heard stating "We will double our awards next year"-06.

The first Chicago Open, the first Regional, as we have dubbed it, will be, what we expect, a most enjoyable tournament. We are asking our friends, especially in our Region, (Columbus, Oh., Indianapolis, In., and St. Louis, Mo. to consider attending and to help kick-start the effort. We are also hopeful that others around the country will began preparing for their tournaments in the very near future.

### **Chicago Open's Officials**

With the Club's president trying to position himself to play, by freeing up some of his official responsibilities, two of his able assistants have agreed to serve as Tournament officials. Club Secretary, Mr. Stoney Burke has agreed to serve as the Tournament Director. Mr. Herman Joiner has agreed to serve as the director of the Youth Division and to assist Mr. Burke in his duties.

### **Regional Tournament Concept**

'An idea whose time has come,' is how I describe my urging of the Family of Pool Checkers players to try to implement this goal. I have yet to communicate with some of the different regional players and officers, but I do intend to do so in the very near future. Memphis is of a particular interest of mine (smile). I have yet to talk to Mr. Totten about it, but I will be getting in touch with him in the very near future.

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### **Come To Chicago!! is the Theme**

For those players, families, and/or just plan observers, we say 'Come to Chicago.' The Tournament Director, Mr. Stoney Burke has informed me that he is looking into several possibilities for those who are considering attending. That would include hotel rates, a night on the town, and a possible tour arrangement if a sufficient number of visitors are interested.

More in the coming newsletters...

Friends,  
Observe my  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
of All Times-  
on the 1st and 15th of each month  
Log on to: <http://www.checkersusa.com>  
Click, Enter Pool Room (upper right-hand corner)  
Click, Charles Thompson's Page (upper left-hand corner)  
(Choose, from a menu of topics)  
Also, view my Honorable Mention List

"Pecan"

HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON TO ALL !!

Edition 8 - 03/01/04 - Editor: C. Thompson  
POOL CHECKER NEWS  
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Legends of "Buster"

**"Buster" Slips In To New York....Embarrasses Clyde "Kingrow" Black, And Then Slips Out-Without Even Saying Good-bye.**

This story was told to me by an old friend, Janus "Detroit" Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead has passed on now, but his story still resonates in the Chicago Pool Checkers community. According to Mr. Whitehead, who lived in Detroit, (hence "Detroit"), New York, and then Chicago, one summer day, some times in the late fifties or early sixties, perhaps in a New York park, Clyde "Kingrow" Black was giving a simul. For those who might not know what a simul is, it's a chess/checkers demonstration usually played by a master or grandmaster player who plays against a large number of players (usually 20 to 30) to demonstrate his/her playing acumen ship. Often times he/she wins all the games, or a very large percentage of them.

During that simul, Mr. Whitehead claims, a 'young man' came in and took a seat at a checkerboard. Unbeknownst to anyone, untested, unassuming, and uninvited, this young man began playing. As was the case with Mr. Black (who had been known to play up to a 100 players at once), he would usually complement the different players as he went from one board to the next - "good move," "very good move," or "You should have moved there." Mr. Whitehead said that every time Mr. Black would come to this 'young man's table he was saying "Very good move" more than he was saying, "Good move," or "You should have moved there." Additionally, Mr. Black was spending more time at this young man's table each time he came around.

Since most of the young players had been defeated after about the twelfth move and had gone on to other things, the older players were left to try to really win a game. But, because this one 'young man,' who was a stranger to all of them, was still playing, and given the fact that Mr. Black had giving him so much of his (and their) time, the other players began to get restless.

After a while, he and the other players stopped playing and went over to see what was taking Mr. Black so long with this unknown 'young man.' What he saw was a shocker, says Mr. Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead's own words, "The young man had Clyde Black's men tied up in so many knots, it would have taken an act of Congress to untie them."

Mr. Whitehead said that he then had to leave. Later on when he inquired with some of the other players about the outcome of that game, he was told by, one player, the 'young man' not only won that game, he won all the others they played as well.

Given the quality of player that Clyde Black is said to have been in those days, (He was said to have been the very best) it's difficult for me to believe that any player would have beaten him all of the games. But the point was made, Mr. Black had been 'humbled' Who was that 'young man'? You guessed it! It was Carl "Buster." Smith.

Mr. Whitehead, said he never saw the 'young man' again until many, many years later after he had moved to Chicago. And only after bringing up the subject with him, did "Buster" confirm it was he. "Buster" said he had heard about Clyde Black giving a simul, and he took a train there to play him. After it was over, he simply took the train and returned to Chicago.

And, continued Mr. Whitehead, "Buster" might have still been a teenager." NOW THAT'S SCARY! ... And The Legend Grows...

But! There will be some bumps in the road for the "Buster" steamroller... To be continued.

Editor's note: Mr. Whitehead does have some history. On page 158 of Clyde Black's Book, The Secrets of Spanish Pool

Checkers (Book II), Mr. Whitehead's name is mentioned with reference to the New Special.

(Observe my 20 Greatest Pool Checkers Players)- on the 1st & 15th of each month.

Log on to: [LINK](#)

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### **TOURNAMENT SUPPORT GROWS**

Several members of the longtime Pool Checkers community have come forward to show support for the upcoming Regional Tournament-The Chicago Open of April 15 and 16, 2005.

Mr. Clarence "Dude" Dew, my original Pool Checkers mentor and longtime friend has called to express his support with the purchase of \$100.00 worth of raffle tickets. Mr. Dew, who was the one, you may recall, in my, Legends of "Buster," (sneaked him into the barber shop where I was annihilated), is now retired but has stated his intentions of attending the tournament as an observer.

Mr. J C Wills, a longtime 100 Sq. Board player, who once won more games than "Buster," in tying him for second place, in a long ago AICS Tournament has called to 'PLEDGE' his financial support.

Mr. Junior "June Bug" Guy, who has now launched into his second career as a shoe repair entrepreneur-after his retirement from General Motors, has also shown his support with the purchase of \$25.00 worth of raffle tickets.

Additional, Mr. Guy, went head-to-head with, "The Thang," (of Macon Georgia's 'Pitt Bulls' fame), in a long ago APCA Tournament. He could have become a Master player had he wanted to, after his second place finish in an APCA Tournament several years ago. But, he chose not to, saying "I want to win it all before advancing."

To these former players (all have retired from the game), the Club offer it's heartfelt thanks for your general support.

### **George Graham of Memphis Passes**

Top Master, and Vice President of the Memphis Pool Checkers Assn., Mr. Otha Bibbs has informed us that one of the cities all time great players has passed on. I remember Mr. Graham as one of Memphis finest players; I visited the city many times in the seventies and eighties to play him and other top players there.

I used to call him the 'reluctant warrior' because of his hesitance in playing when he was challenged to a game. But when he did play, his game was huge. To this day, I don't know how we came out against each other overall. I suspect it was about even.

To the family, I offer my heartfelt condolences.

### **New Players Raises it up a Notch in Preparation for the 'Big Dance.'**

New players to the world of Pool Checkers; Stanley Polk, Cardwell Myrick, Rodney Polk, Ernst Lee, Herman Joiner, Sly Johnson, James Jamison, Mr. West, Kevin Gordon. Mr. Coleman, and others are all engaged in a hot-bed of activity as they, prepare to go after the Class C prizes in the upcoming Chicago Open. All are being observed by the Club's more experienced players, and helpful tips are offered wherever applicable.' Old timer Eddie Smith has been very active in pointing out errors and inaccuracies.

### **Raffle Tickets Purchase is Easy**

For those who might want to show support for the tournament with the purchase of raffle tickets, *NO PROBLEM!* You simply call, write, or e-mail me to indicate the amount you want to purchase. I will then pull the tickets, fill out the stubs, and put them in the raffle basket (You are relieved of the bothersome TASK of filling out the stubs). You will be billed in a 'Thank You Letter!'; that will be sent. Your numbers will be indicated.

We will, of course, notify you if you win. Additionally, all winning numbers will be posted publicly as well as in my May 2005 Newsletter.

\*Make all checks payable to me. In the Reference section indicate, The Community Bank of Lawndale.

Charles Thompson  
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*Edition # 9 - 04/01/04 - Editor: C. Thompson  
POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
(A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)  
-Produced by the 1st-week - monthly-*

**Homan Sq. Pool Checkers and Chess Club  
of Chicago  
3559 W. Arthington St.  
Chicago, Il.  
Pres.: C. Thompson**

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## "Hamp" Wins Battle of Masters

Eugene "Hamp" Hampton, of Indianapolis, Indiana, who was accompanied by his good friend and playing partner, Mr. Jimmy "Houdini" Footman, engaged our own Thurman "Chicken George" Earnest in a ten game match and came out victorious. He thereby served notice to all Master players that he will be a force to be reckoned with at the National Tournament in July.

Mr. Hampton had requested a match with one of Chicago's Master players so he could try to prepare for the 2004 APCA National Tournament in Memphis, Tennessee. Mr. Earnest answered the call; and although Mr. Earnest put up a gallant fight, Mr. Hampton was simply too strong. The score was 4-1 in Mr. Hampton's favor; the match was terminated after the 8th game because of the elimination rule.

Chicago's other Masters players, either did not show, or watched from the sidelines as Mr. Hampton put on as fine a display of pool checkers as seen in these parts in a long time. With Top Masters C. "Pecan" Thompson, and Al "Action Man" Lambert serving as game recorders, and Orlando "Panama" Williams observing from the sidelines, (Clorous "Iodine" Lay was conspicuously absent), Mr. Hampton also serve notice to them that even they might have some future worries if he wins the Masters this year.

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## Chess Corner

The Chess activity is becoming more spirited as new players are coming on board. Fabian Ramos has become the new chess leader with a better than 85% winning percentage-thereby replacing our original leader. Earnst Lee. Additionally, new players Willie Man and. Mr. Marshall will surely take up two of the first four spots when the new ratings come out next week.

Even Top Master Al "Action Man" Lambert has entered the fray. He frustrated current leader Fabian Ramos by drawing him with some deliberate and precise play-thereby serving notice to all that he is not just a top Pool Checkers player.

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## Legends of "Buster"

### **"Buster," Jerry of Memphis, and the Advent of the Kibitzer**

During the seventies and eighties, Pool Checkers in Chicago, was perhaps at its zenith. There were all of the great players of the day- The " Great" Gilliam; "Old man Earl; "Rubarb;" "Normal;" Allen and Chaney of Gary; "Madcap" Milton Miskel; "Professor" Junior; "Ohio the Great Mule" Mitchell; "Little" Detroit; Tanner "Woodencheckers" Perry; Frank "Slingshot" Bivins; Clarence "Dude" Dew; "Ace"; (Notice the nick names- more about them later). We even had an up and coming Clorious "Mongoose," "Iodine," Tasmanian Devil," "Kingrow," Lay- (Those are names of his own choosing). Additionally, there were wily old Victor "Vic" Krafft, along with and up-and coming Al "Action Man" Lambert. And, of course I was there along with many others that the space here does not allow me to comment on. And finally there was "Buster."

The story we are about to enumeration on, is about the treks that a player name Jerry, from Memphis, Tennessee would make to Chicago, on and annual basis, just to "Play Buster."

His name was Jerry; we called him "Jerry of Memphis." There were disagreements about just how good Jerry was; some said he was pretty good, others said he was fair, yet others said he was a "scrub" (poor player). "Buster" simply said, "He could play."

Additionally, we will talk about the great kibitzers of the time also. During that time, we in Chicago, used to on a weekly basis, gather in a small barbershop called Winrows Barber Shop. As would be expected, 20 to 25 of us would be involved in a hotbed of activity as we attempted to establish our dominance, in pool checkers, over each other. In addition to the players, there was the great kibitzers of the day. "What is a kibitzer?" you might ask. A kibitzer, according to Webster, is a "Meddlesome Onlooker." The term is used quite extensively on the Internet, nowadays, with reference to players in chess, checkers, and other games.

The Kibitzer can be found in every city, but in Chicago, these guys took on an additional task; they made kibitzing an art. They not only gave unsolicited advice-often times unwanted, and unappreciated; they told stories about a whole wide range of subjects-be it politics, sports, race, religion, or any other subject. Like, as seen in the movie Barber Shop, with "Cedric The Entertainer," much of what is said is embellished, or outright not true. But, oftentimes there is some validity to what they have to say. They were, some would say, players who didn't play, wouldn't play, and/or as Mr. Victor Krafft often times said, couldn't play. But that last part was not altogether true; some of these guys could play. Because of the reputation of these guys with respect to the truth, one will have to decide for ones self the validity of some of their claims. Some players, outright loathe and scorned the kibitzer, because he would oftentimes 'wake a player up' (make him aware of some unsuspected trap that had been set up, or some gross error he was about to make).

With respect to, Jerry of Memphis, they had some tall tales to tell. Fact-Jerry did travel, every year, for a number of years, to Chicago, just to play "Buster." He didn't bother to visit any Pool Checkers Clubs, or visit anyone else in the city as far as I could determine. He had one purpose in his visits, and that was to 'play "Buster." And play "Buster" he did.

Each year, "Buster" used to announce to us at one of the assemblages, "Jerry" of Memphis, will be coming in next week; I won't be here." Sure enough the next week, "Jerry" of Memphis, would arrive; he stayed at "Buster's" home. And sure enough the kibitzers would be there, in-mass to watch (and to talk). The stories they told about some of these matches were about atrocious scores. Sores like 'twenty-one to zip' (21-0), nineteen-nothing (19-0), or simply 17-1, in favor of "Buster" were common. One kibitzer said "Buster" hit "Jerry" with a shot, and it upset him so, that he spilled the coffee he was drinking all over the place. Another kibitzer said. "He didn't spill coffee, he slobbered all over the place." The stories were awful. Why, we would ask "Buster" "why do you continue to play Jerry, if the scores are what these guys are saying they are?" "Buster's," simple reply was "If he wants to play me, I will play him." My good friend, Van "Vansky" Penn, perhaps the greatest of all the kibitzers, said it was more to it then that. They, he said, was playing for some 'serious bread' (high stakes). Incredibly, I never bother to go over to "Buster's" house to watch-(there could be as many as 15 to 20 players watching, at one time-in "Buster's" living/dining room).

And so, like the gospels of the Bible, (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) would report on the exploits of Jesus, the kibitzer of Chicago, (Van "Vansky" Penn, James "Variation James" Adams, "The Mighty Muck, and Shirley Huckaby, would report on the exploits of "Buster." Their stories while, might not be totally true, were compelling. It only added to the mystique of "Buster."

Finally, I never did meet "Jerry" of Memphis, nor did I ever know his last name. Maybe my friends in Memphis - Gunslinger2, Big-O, Blackknight2, Crazy Joe, or others (those are their Vog Internet names) can help me with that. For he did provide some great food for fodder when he came.  
To be continued....."Buster's" days are numbered!!

Observe my (20 Greatest Pool Checkers Players)- on the 1st & 15th of each month  
Log on to: [20GreatestPlayers/index.htm](http://20GreatestPlayers/index.htm)

03/01/05 - Editor: C. Thompson  
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Pres. Charles Thompson

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The Chicago Open  
April 15, 16 2005  
(Address above)

### **Is the Center Safe?**

That question has been posed by several of our potential participants. The President and Tournament Director 's answer is an emphatic YES!

The Homan Square community Center is a modern multi-complex building that is less than three years old. The building, which is run by the Chicago Park District, houses a technology center (24 computers), a medical center, a snack shop, a gymnasium (with basketball court), a swimming pool, a fitness center, and multiple rooms for other activities and recreations. The staff, Ms. Portis, and Ms. Tyler (the Center's Directors) has been excellent in providing accomodations for this affair. And, we say thanks!

Being located and surrounded by modern newly built \$300,000 town homes and condos, the area could easily be considered the 'jewel' of Chicago's West Side-which was devastated by the riots of the 1960s,

The parking lot, which is free, is located to the immediate east and is shared with a newly built YMCA which is also a part of the Homan Square Community complex.

A personal note - I lived, grew up, (less than three blocks from the Center) and worked in this community, perhaps fifty years ago. I viewed the destruction, of the area, first hand and up-front. I can truly say that the recovery has been dramatic and long overdue.

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### **Chicago's Regional Tournament Awaits You!**

The president and the tournament director has gather the following information for our visiting guests.

For overnight stay, we offer the following information:

(For Internet User log on to [HOTELS.COM](http://HOTELS.COM) for more choices)

Room rates are nightly

- Red Roof Inn Chicago-(Downtown)- \$80.00: 162 E. Ontario  
Ph. 1-800-246-8357(25 min drive).
- Best western Inn of Chicago (Downtown) \$72 00-:160 E. Ohio St.  
Ph. 1-800-246-8357 (25 min. drive)
- Lenox Suites Hotel - 610 N. Rush St. (Downtown) \$80.  
Ph. 1-800-664-6835 (25 min drive)
- Holiday Inn (in Hillside, Illinois) (25 minutes drive). \$99.00 plus tax for two beds (\$10 extra for one rollaway bed).  
Ph. 1-800-HOLIDAY (1-800-4564329)

Holiday Inn (506 W. Harrison St. - [Downtown Chicago]- \$159.00 plus tax for two beds. (15 minutes drive).  
Ph. 1-800-HOLIDAY (1-800-465-4329)

Call Early!!

*Bring the Family!! See the Sights, Before, During, and After the Tournament!*

**A Bevy of Activity at Club In Prep for Tournament**

Indianapolis, Indiana had a contingent of there players to visit during the month. A series of 10 games matches were arranged for the visitors. Results:

Fred Shurn (Chgo)	APCA - Master	4	(The match was cut short to nine games because of time constraints).
Eugene Hampton (Indpls.)	APCA - Master	3	

Thurman "Chicken George" Earnest (Chgo)	APCA - Master	7
Rush "West Virginia" Addair (Indpls.)	unrated	1

Mel Mitchell (Chgo)	unrated	5
Fred Carter (Indpls.)	unrated	5

In the two 14 games matches played,

Chas "Pecan" Thompson	APCA - Top Master	4
Clorius "Mongoose" Lay	APCA - Top Master	2

Al Lambert	APCA - Top Master	2	(The match was cut short after 13 games because of time constraints).
Chas Thompson	APCA - Top Master	0	

For contact purposes:

My e-mail address: [Chas8171@aol.com](mailto:Chas8171@aol.com) (is being discontinued as 3/9/05)

New Address: [Chas8171@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Chas8171@sbcglobal.net)

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## "HAMP" RETURNS TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME... AND COMMITS ANOTHER ONE!

Perhaps buoyed by his victory over our Master player Thurman Earnest, Eugene Hampton of Indianapolis, Indiana, asked for, and received another match with one of our top players. This time it was our own Top Master, Orlando "Panama" Williams. And to our surprise, Mr. Hampton, who is supposed to be just a Master player, walked away with another victory.

The score was 2-1 in his favor. The match was cut short to 8 games, by mutual agreement, because of time constraints. And now, the rest of Chicago's Top Masters, Al Lambert, Charles Thompson, and Clorius Lay (in that order) have a problem, (and are on pins and needles) as they ponder, which one of them will Mr. Hampton ask for next.

Additionally, I am told by a reliable source, even Mr. Hampton's sidekick, Jimmy "Houdini" Footman is making some noise about he would like to have a piece of one of Chicago's top four. Stay tuned.

## *Chess Corner*

### MR. LEE CLIMBS BACK TO THE TOP

E. Lee, our original chess leader, for many months, regained his top position in the chess battle. With some fine play and his eventual defeat of new and former leader Fabian Ramos, Mr. Lee served notice to all that he takes his number 1 status very seriously.

Chess Coordinator, Mr. Caldwell Myrick, who is responsible for the great infusion of chess players in the Club, is currently in fourth place and is preparing to make his move for an even loftier position. He's eyeing Mr. Lee's #1 spot.

### Man vs. Machine

The Machine is idle! Man's greatest teaching tool can't find a foe.

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## Legends of "Buster"

### [Finally!!... "Buster" Falls...to a Lowly Club Player](#)

It came by the way of a quiet statement, "You Win!" -that sent shock waves throughout the tournament playing room. With that statement, Robert "Grocery Store Bob" Daniels, gained everlasting infamy within the Chicago Pool Checkers community.

He was Mr. Robert Daniels, a quiet, unassuming, soft spoken gentleman who would never raised his voice at anyone. He was the business manager for the Chicago Westside Pool Checkers Club. I liked to call him, 'my business manager.' His playing lever was Gold Bar (APCA) or class D in alphabetical system (A-E).

In a long since forgotten tournament, the Westside Pool Checkers Club of Chicago hosted, at a local YMCA, in the early seventies, Mr. Daniels did something that Chicago Pool Checkers players still talk about-even today. He defeated "Buster" in a tournament game. And with that stroke of genius, Mr. Daniels acquired a unique honor in our Pool Checkers

community. He is the only Chicago area player to hold an edge over "Buster"-even to this day! The score is 1-0. You see... Mr. Daniels NEVER PLAYED ANOTHER GAME after his victory over "Buster." That's right, Not Ever! That is at least what veteran players around here will swear to. Many of those who would swear to this have now passed on, but talk to old-timer Eddie Smith; I, for one, can truthfully say, I never saw Mr. Daniels play another game after his win over "Buster"-even though he lived for perhaps another 10 or 15 years afterwards.

That is the awe that many players held for "Buster" in those days. Clarence "Dude" Dew, who could have been an APCA Top Master, had he kept playing, says he played "Buster" for a lifetime and never won a game. That's why he stopped playing, he said. James "Pontiac Jr" Sharp, an APCA player, who became a Master in 1975 and who played in the same barber shop where "Buster" played -- on a weekly basis for over 20 years says he never even played him a game. Even today, Mr. Sharp, who is still robust and still playing will again make that claim.

The details of the story is this. In 1971, I think it was, The Westside Pool Checkers Club of Chicago, of which I was the president, hosted a city tournament. It was, as far as we could determine, the first City tournament in the city's history. In it's determination to popularize the game and increase activity in the city, the Club decided to invite the best players in the City and throughout the Midwest. William "Bill" Langley, of Detroit, Michigan was there. George Cobbs, Top Master from St. Louis, Missouri was there, and I think Mr. Sam Walters and a delegation from Cleveland, Ohio, was there. We even had a lady who came all the way from Peoria, Illinois to play in the tournament, and to play "Buster." She said she had heard about "Buster" from her uncle many years earlier.

It was a round-robin tournament-where everyone plays everyone else. And as usual "Buster" was killing his opponents. He might have won 16 or 17 straight games. The field had been devastated. Even Bill Langley, the Top Master from Detroit was hopelessly behind.

I was seated at the next table and fully concerned with my opponent, when I heard the quiet voice, that was unmistakable "Buster's" say, "You win it." As I looked around to inquire, "What was that?" several of the other players had stopped and began to rise to their feet. "What was that?" Someone else inquired. Again "Buster" said, "He won it." By this time, one of the great kibitzers of our time, James "Variation James" Adams was up and heading toward the table. At the same time "Grocery Store Bob", as we called him, was backing away from the table as if in a trance. Accordingly, the word had begin to get out-"Grocery Store Bob" beat "Buster" y'all."

When asked, "What did you beat him in, Bob?" He would simply say, "I just got him in my game, that's all." We could never get "Buster" to reveal to us the game he lost. And so the game that "Bob" won (or "Buster" lost) is gone for eternity.

Nobody took "Buster" loss (or Bob's win) harder than "Variation James." Years afterwards he would just be sitting at the club watching us play and he would lament "Pec" (slang for "Pecan"), I will never understand it;" he would continue, "Grocery Store Bob", beat "Buster." I will never understand it for as long as I live." I can give Bob 10 'straights' (win 10 consecutive games) any day of the week," and yet I've played "Buster" for a lifetime and never could get a game." I simply will never understand it." And so, my friend, Mr. Adams passed away many years ago, still unable to come to grips the fact that "Grocery Bob" had beaten "Buster"

And the Legend continues... Next Issue, "Buster plays the Lady! ...and his problems loom even bigger down the road.

Friends, observe my  
20 Greatest Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
Log on to: <http://www.checkersusa.com>  
The 1st and 15th of each month  
"Pecan"

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**Honorary Members:**

Clarence Dew - Raffle Contribution  
J.C. Wills - Contribution  
Guy, J. - Raffle Contribution  
Wall, G. (Ms.)  
Williams, G. (Ms.)  
Davis, B. (Ms.)  
Frazier, M. (Detroit, MI,) - Raffle Contribution  
Voss, W. (Cleveland, MS.)- Raffle Contribution

**Honorary Members are a Part of the Club**

All Honorary Members listed have become a part of the Club, thereby giving them the rights and privileges of all regular club members.

The Chicago Open  
April 15, 16 - 2005  
Fri. 9:30 A.M. - 8:30 P.M.  
Sat. 9:30 A.M. - 3:30 P.M.

**Pre Registration is Brisk**

As the Big Tournament approaches, club members are registering at a brisk pace after the President and Tournament Director made the pre registration process available. Over half of the Club's over 40 members have already signed up or have assured us they will be signing up shortly. Others have assured us that they will be doing likewise in the very near future.

Out of town guests from Memphis, Detroit, South Bend, Indianapolis, Toledo, and possibly Dayton, Ohio are expected to attend. We say, "You are Welcome."

An interesting sidelight to pre registration, is that several Class B members are taking advantage of our liberal policy of allowing each Class player to 'Play up, one Class A,' if they so desire. Disregarding the higher entry fee, these members say they want the challenge of stronger competition. Several say they will be better prepared for the National Tournament in Atlanta, Georgia this year. Whatever the reason, the established Class A players are 'licking their chops.'

**The Club is Contemplating Adding an Additional Class**

With keen interest in the Tournament being shown by several ladies, the Club is considering adding an additional Class. It's to be called Class (G)uest. The idea will be to allow ladies and other interested persons to play and become a part of the tournament. The idea of, perhaps a couple of \$25.00 Gift Certificate, along a Certificates of Appreciation is being considered. Three ladies have already become Honorary Members.

**The Big Shootout in Memphis is a Success**

Our man on the move, APCA Master player, Fred D. Shurn, has reported to the Club that the match between All Time Great Elton Williams and his two Memphis rivals Henry Stokes, and Joe Wilson was very exciting.

He commented, "Although Mr. Stokes and Mr. Wilson, put up gallant fights, "Elton did what he had to do." I took that to mean he stayed on the draw line at all times. With the possible exception of his loss to Mr. Wilson, he was perfect, according to Mr. Shurn.

The Finals scores were: Match 1, Elton and Henry (10 games) 2-0, Elton; Match 2 (10 Games) 3-1, Elton. We say congratulations to all who had a hand in the event.

#### **Bull City Pool Checkers Tournament**

Mr. Clarence "Shotgun" Gooche has indicated to us that his city is having a Pool Checkers Tournament in May 2005. More details later.

#### **A CORRECTION!!!**

It has been brought to my attention that The Extended StayAmerica Hotel (that I recommended) is NOT located on I-90. The correct location is on I-290 (the Eisenhower X-Way In Chicago). Exit 16 Wolf Road (going west) is the proper exit.

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06/01/2004

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### A Large Turnout For Rated Play- Week 3

With Al "Action Man" Lambert dominating the week 3's play with a (14-0-4) record, a large turnout of over 30 players and onlookers were on hand for the week's Rated Play games. With the addition of a delegation of four players, from Indianapolis, Indiana also participating, there was some very spirited play. While Mr. Eugene Hampton didn't play (he didn't feel well), his other associates, Mr. Footman, Mr. Oliver Griffin and Mr. Fred Carter did quite well as they had some eye-opening surprises for the locals.

Additionally, we had two fourteen year old eight-graders, playing and learning. Steve Heard, who attends nearby Hertz Elementary School, and Shyleyna Brown, who attends Frazier Elementary School was active participants in the spirited play. Club members, Herman Joiner and Sly Johnson was observed giving them pointers on how to play the game. We say continue the good work fellows.

---

### The Club Institutes its Gold Membership Drive

The Club members agreed to the Gold Membership idea, whereby they will to pay an additional \$5.00 monthly dues and receives a Gold Membership Card; twenty-three members are now proud carriers of the impressive looking card, designed by our own Mr. Caldwell Myrick who is also our chess coordinator. More on the Gold Card Membership Drive later.

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### Legends of "Buster"

#### ["Buster" Plays the Lady!](#)

Remember that lady from Peoria Illinois (in our last issue), who came to play in the tournament, and to play "Buster?" Well, she's still there; she's still playing; and she is still losing. Every weak player, and his brother, is jumping at the opportunity to play her and to build up his point totals. (Remember, this is tournament to attract Pool Checker players, and not for a championship-although we say it's for the City Championship)-hence the round-robin.

At one point in the tournament, I think, "Buster" and the lady had identical scores; he was (16-0), and she was (0-16)-(at least there was a "16" on both of their cards and there was a "0" on both of their cards). And then Top Master, The Rev. William "Bullet Hole Bill" Langley, (He said that's what the Russians called him when he went there to support/watch "Buster" and play some to its Gransmasters in the late sixties) performed an act of mercy. He displayed one of the great humanitarian acts of our time. He 'threw' (allowed her to win) a game to the lady. And she was happy! At that point her score was now (1-16), and when "Buster" lost to "Grocery Store Bob," his score was (16-1). So their scores were still identical. Yet, the lady hadn't played "Buster." And as fate would have it, the stage was now set for this mammoth showdown.

Prior to the game, we (Mr. Langley, Mr. Cobbs, and myself) pulled "Buster" aside and pleaded with him to 'throw' another game to the lady. We talked about how it would make her feel good, how it could be good for the image of Pool Checkers, how she could tell her uncle that she had beaten the "Great Buster," and how it might make her feel that her trip had been a success. But, "Buster" was having none of it-saying simply, "I just don't like losing those games." Keep in mind that he had already won the tournament. Mr. Langley, who was second, was far behind. The prize for first place was only a large

trophy and a modest amount of cash. But, it didn't matter.

As the two faced off, the great kibitzers of the time had taken up residence. Van "Vansky" Penn was seated just to "Buster's" right. A couple of seats away was James "Variation James" Adams; seated just a couple of seats away from him, was Shirley Huckaby, and over in the corner, watching from afar were, the "Mighty" Muck and the "Greater Ace."

The lady had the first move, and she led with 9-13! It was now "Buster" turn to move. He looked,... he looked,... he looked,... and then he looked for one last time,,,, and finally he looked some more. We don't know how long it took him to make his first move. But one kibitzer swore it took him forty minutes. It didn't take him quite that long, but it did take him an awful long time.

Every schoolboy knows that the proper response to 9-13, in a Pool Checkers game, is 22-18. Van "Vansky" Penn, a "Buster" sidekick, loyalist, and sweet joggers for many, many years, simply couldn't stand it any longer, and cried out, "What is "Buster" looking at? " When "Buster" finally moved, where did he move? You guessed it, 22-18.

Many times after that game, we would ask "Buster," "What was you looking at?" His simple answer, as always, was "You never know what a person knows," and "I didn't want to take any chances."

Oh yea, back to the game. The lady's second move was 6-9; "Buster" then, 'hit the spot.' In Pool Checkers parlance, that is considered taking control of a critical pivot spot. We then, knew that the 'lights were out,' for the lady. You see, for a fleeting second, we had thought, just perhaps, "he was having second thoughts, and might just also 'throw' the lady another game. But when he took control of the 'spot' we knew that she would never see the 'light of day' again. And we looked at each other; and we turned and walked away, shaking our heads, and muttering, "WHAT SORT OF MAN IS THIS?"

"Buster" won that game, the tournament, its trophy and modest amount of cash. But for some of us, in our minds and hearts, he had lost for a second time that day because he refused to 'throw' the game to the lady.

Finally, as the lady prepared to leave, she thanked us all for the hospitality, shook all of our hands, talked of the great time she had, and 'walked off into the sunset'-out our lives forever. To this day, close to 35 years and counting, none of us, as far as can be determined, has ever seen or heard of her again.

But "Buster" will pay for his transgressions (sins), as... The legend continues - Next Issue.

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A Special Edition 4/09/05

The Chicago Open  
April 15, 16, 2005  
Homan Sq. Community Center

**A Final Look!**

The Club will be open Thursday, April 14, 2005, from 2:30 -8:30 P.M. for those visitors/guests who just want to come in early and warm up for the Big Dance.

Members will be available to entertain, give directions, give transportation, to offer tid bits of info, or to just hob-knob with those who want to join us. There will be free refreshments for all.

For those coming in from the North, East, South (I-90, I-94, I-57, I-65), and other points in that direction, enter the Dan Ryan X-way, and continue toward downtown Chicago, but exit onto I-290 (Eisenhower X-Way) for the Center. It's approximately 8 minutes away. Exit at Homan Ave. and go south, to Arthington Ave. (about 4 blocks). Turn right onto Arthington Ave. for the Center.

For those using I-55, you should exit onto the Tri-State (I-294) and go north. You must use the I-290 exit for your destination, if it's the Extended StayAmerica Hotel. Caution! Be very careful at this Exit. Be sure you get in to the far right hand lane so you can make the proper exit. If you miss it, you will end up at O'Hare Airport, some 20 miles out of the way.

If you are staying at the Extended StayAmerica Hotel (recommended), and you are coming in on Thursday, and if there is time, you can stop by the Center first. The Hotel is only about 15 to 20 minutes away.

For those using I-290 west, remember, you would use Exit 16 (Wolf Rd.) as you continued west on I-290 for the Hotel.

DO HAVE A SAFE TRIP! We will see you then.

PS All new communications with me via E-mail: [Chas8171@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Chas8171@sbcglobal.net)

**A SPECIAL EDITION !!!** - 06 /16 /04 - Editor: C. Thompson  
POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
(A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)  
-Produced by the 1st-week - monthly-

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The Homan Sq. Pool Checkers and Chess Club  
of Chicago  
3559 W. Arthington St.  
Chicago, IL.  
Hours: Mon., Wed., Fri. 2:30 - 9:00 P.M.  
Phone - 312-746-6650  
Pres. Charles Thompson

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**Leon Baynes - Gold Bar  
A threat to all Jr Masters**

(1975)

### ***Tribute to a Fallen Soldier***

Leon Baynes, my friend, an avid and loyal Pool Checkers player, and a priceless companion for nearly four decades, has passed on. His death brings to an end a storied chapter for those of us who walked and talked with him everyday. While our path took different directions, for long stretches of time, we remained steadfast friends until the very end.

I met Leon back in the late sixties. Together, we formed Chicago's first organized Pool Checkers Club-the Westside Pool Checkers Club. He was its business manager; I was its president. Today, nearly forty years later, we found ourselves during somewhat the same thing together, for the Homan Sq. Pool Checkers and Chess Club. Again, we found ourselves in the same capacity. He was, again, the business manager and I was, again, the president. Pool Checkers was his passion, Pool Checkers was his love, and to a great extent, Pool Checkers was his life. And, he played the game well-attaining the level of Jr. Master on the national scene and a Class A player on the local scene.

In his final visit to the Club, we knew his health was failing, but even so, he made a gesture that will always remain with me; he tried to 'pay his dues'-saying, "Here are my dues." Of course, I along with the other club members said, "No Leon, don't worry about your dues, just try to work and get your health better." In my final conversation with him, just days before his passing, I said to him "How are you doing?" And he said, "Well, I guess I will be all right, but I won't be coming to the club for a while." That was the kind of person he was; that was the kind of commitment he showed.

For me, his presence will always be missed.

The Arrangements are as follows:

Saturday, June 19, 2004  
The Wake; 10:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

The Funeral: 11:00 A.M. - 12.00 Noon

Location:

Douglas Park Baptist Church

1838 S. Kedzie Ave.

Chicago, Illinois

Charles Thompson

04/19/05 - Editor: C. Thompson  
 POOL CHECKER NEWS-CHICAGO  
 (A monthly e-mail newsletter-pertaining to activities in the area)  
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Pres. Charles Thompson

**The Chicago Open American Pool Checkers Tournament-2005 (The 1st Reunion) To read about**

(for Regional concept, log onto the website: <http://www.checkersusa.com> (Bulletin Board))

#	Class - A	Player	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	Tot	Cpt	W-L-D
1	Lambert, Al		2 2	2 2	2 2	2 2	4 2	4 4	2 2	2 4	2 4	4 2	4 4	4 4	68	12	10-0-14	
2	Rogers, Emmanuel		2 2		2 2	4 0	4 4	2 2	2 2	2 4	2 2	4 2	4 4	4 4	66	12	10-1-13	
3	Robinson, George		2 2	2 2		4 2	0 0	0 2	2 2	2 4	2 4	4 4	4 2	4 4	60	12	9-3-12	
4	Wilson, Joseph		2 2	0 4	0 2		2 2	2 4	2 2	0 0	4 4	4 4	2 2	4 4	60	12	10-4-10	
5	Williams, Orlando		2 2	0 0	4 4	2 2		4 4	2 2	2 2	4 2	4 2	2 2	4 2	60	12	8-2-14	
6	Shuri, Fred D		0 2	2 2	4 2	2 0	0 0		2 2	2 2	2 4	2 2	4 0	4 2	50	12	6-5-13	
7	Hampton, Eugene		0 0	2 2	2 2	2 2	2 2	2 2		2 2	0 2	2 2	2 2	4 4	46	12	2-3-19	
8	Lay, Clorius		2 2	2 0	2 0	4 4	2 2	2 2	2 2		2 2	0 0	4 2	2 2	46	12	4-5-15	
9	Sharp, James		2 0	2 2	2 0	0 0	0 2	2 0	4 2	2 2		4 2	4 0	4 4	42	12	6-5-11	
10	Davidson, Lonnie		2 0	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 2	2 2	2 2	4 4	0 2		2 2	4 0	4 4	40	12	5-8-10
11	Earnest, Thomas		0 2	0 0	0 2	2 2	2 2	0 4	2 2	0 2	0 4	2 2		0 2	4 0	38	12	3-0-12
12	Green, Al		0 0	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 2	0 0	2 2	2 2	0 0	0 4	4 2		2 2	26	12	2-13-5
13	Lillard, Jimmy		0 0	0 0	2 0	0 0	2 0	0 2	0 0	4 0	4 2	0 0	0 4	2 2		24	12	3-15-6

#	Class - B	Player	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	Tot	Cpt	W-L-D
1	Miller, Lonnie			4 2	4 2	0 4	4 4	4 2	4 4	4 2	4 4	4 2	2 2	4 2	4 4	70	12	15-1-8
2	Addair, Rush		0 2		4 2	2 2	4 0	2 2	4 2	0 4	4 4	4 2	2 4	4 4	4 4	66	12	12-3-6
3	Lockheart, Wayne		0 2	0 2		4 2	4 0	4 4	0 4	4 2	4 0	4 2	4 2	4 4	2 2	60	12	11-6-5
4	Carter, Fred		4 0	2 2	0 2		0 2	4 4	2 4	4 0	4 2	4 4	0 2	0 4	4 4	58	12	11-0-7
5	Smith, Eddie		0 0	0 4	0 4	4 2		0 0	4 4	4 4	0 2	4 2	4 4	4 4	2 2	58	12	12-7-5
6	Bell, Arthur T		0 2	2 2	0 0	0 0	4 4		4 2	4 2	4 4	4 2	4 0	4 4	2 2	58	12	10-5-8
7	Jones, L C		0 0	0 2	4 0	2 0	0 0	0 2		2 2	4 2	4 2	4 2	4 2	2 2	42	12	5-8-11
8	Jones, John		0 2	4 0	0 2	0 4	0 0	0 2	2 2		0 4	2 2	4 2	2 2	2 2	40	12	4-8-12
9	Mitchell, Mel		0 0	0 0	0 4	0 2	4 2	0 0	0 2	4 0		0 2	4 2	4 0	4 4	38	12	7-12-5
10	Johnson, Robert		0 2	0 2	0 2	0 0	0 2	0 2	0 2	2 2	4 2		4 2	2 0	4 4	38	12	4-3-11
11	Pope, James		2 2	2 0	0 2	4 2	0 0	0 4	0 2	0 2	0 2	0 2		2 4	2 4	38	12	4-5-11
12	Young, Andrew		0 2	0 0	0 0	4 0	0 0	0 0	0 2	2 2	0 4	2 4	2 0		4 4	32	12	5-13-5
13	Gilbert, John		0 0	0 0	2 2	0 0	2 2	2 2	2 2	2 2	0 0	0 0	2 0	0 0		22	12	0-13-11

#	Class - C	Player	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Tot	Cpt	W-L-D
1	Totten, Othell			2 2	2 4	4 2	2 2	4 4	4 2	4 2	4 4	4 4	4 4	2 4	70	11	13-0-9
2	Williams, James		2 2		2 0	0 4	4 4	0 4	2 0	4 2	0 2	4 4	4 2	4 4	64	11	10-6-7
3	Polk, Stan		2 0	2 4		2 2	2 2	4 4	4 2	2 2	0 4	4 0	2 2	2 2	60	11	6-3-15
4	Lee, Ernest		0 2	4 0	2 2		4 2	0 4	2 2	0 2	0 2	2 4	4 4	4 4	50	11	8-5-9
5	Jenkins, Kenneth		2 2	0 0	2 2	0 2		2 0	2 2	4 2	2 2	4 4	4 2	2 2	46	11	4-4-14
6	Lipcomb, Aubry		0 0	4 0	0 0	4 0	2 4		2 2	4 2	2 2	4 0	4 0	4 4	44	11	6-8-5
7	Sykes, Lon		0 2	2 4	0 2	2 2	2 2	2 2		2 2	2 4	2 2	2 2	2 2	44	11	2-2-18
8	Lusborough, Eddie		0 2	0 2	2 2	4 2	0 2	0 2	2 2		2 2	4 2	2 2	4 4	44	11	4-4-14
9	Griffin, Eddie		0 0	4 2	4 0	4 2	2 2	2 2	2 0	2 2		0 2	2 2	0 0	56	11	3-7-12
10	Joiner, Herman		0 0	0 0	0 4	2 0	0 0	0 4	2 2	0 2	4 2		4 2	2 4	34	11	5-10-7
11	Dougherty, Jack		0 0	0 2	2 2	0 0	0 2	0 4	2 2	2 2	2 2	0 2		4 2	32	11	2-8-12
12	Blaino, Roger		2 0	0 0	2 2	0 0	2 2	0 0	2 2	0 0	4 4	2 0	0 2		26	11	2-11-8



## The "Pecan Man"

When Pool checker players in Chicago talk about 'greats' of the game, its starts and ends with "Buster". We say, (it may be disputed by others), that he was the greatest African American Pool Checker player of all times. We realize that's a tall statement, but we are prepared to defend it with some facts and some "legend".

I first met "Buster", a small and quiet man, in the late 60s. It was at a barber shop- called 'Gus' Barbershop.' A friend of mine, and my first Pool Checker mentor, Clarence Dew - a very good player in his own right, at the time, had secretly brought "Buster" into the shop without my knowledge.

At the time, I was being considered as the next great player in the area. I was rising fast. I was young (by Pool Checker Player's standards), brash, and 'full of it.'

After Mr. Dew had convinced Buster to throw a game or two to him, unbeknownst to me, (which he later said was very hard to do), I said to Mr. Dew: "Who is this "Scrub"? Where did he come from?"

Mr. Dew said to me, "Would you like to play him?"

I said, to no one in particular, "If he doesn't bet, I don't want to be bother with the "Ham" ".

"Buster" sat quietly, saying nothing. As I pulled my seat up to the table, (Dew had brought in about 10 or 12 other players from the area), I said to "Buster"

"Do you bet, "Scrub"?"

Buster said, "No", I don't bet."

Then Mr. Dew said to me, "I will bet on him; How much do you want to bet?"

I said \$5.00! Mr. Dew then said, "No!, that's too much, I will bet you \$2.00". (He and the rest knew what I was getting into). They could have cleaned up if they had wanted to.....

TO BE CONTINUED in the next issue.

And so it was, "Pecan," (I will tell you about how the name, "Pecan" came about later). The brash young upstart to the world of Pool Checkers, was to meet the wily veteran of the game - Carl "Buster" Smith, that had often been talked about, and who was already a legend in his own time. It was just that I didn't know it.

An old checker player, Shirley Huckaby, was later to say to me, "Buster", he became champion at 16 years old; "Today more that 40 years have passed, and he still Rules." "It must be the longest reign in history."

I had to remind my friend, Mr. Huckaby, that a little research that I had done had revealed to me that, Julius Caesar, Octavinous (Octavian)- Augustus, the mighty Emperor of Rome ruled from 27 B.C. until 14 A.D. (41 years). But then "Buster" was still ruling. From that comes legends!!

The first game was a classic "alley game," that I had studied and thought I new well.

I quietly maneuvered "Buster" into what I thought was my 'hammer' game. When "Buster" left a two for one hit for me, I grabbed at it like a hungry dog! And it was my demise. It was a trick play; he allowed me

to make a two man hit, and then he pitched even a third man, before taking a king shot. The crowd, and Mr. Dew died with laughter. To me, of course I was embarrassed; and it wasn't funny. I still didn't know I was playing the 'Great' "Buster."

Game two was a 'quiet' game; there was nothing spectacular but just some hard playing. I can recall "Buster" saying to me at one point, "Young man you play a nice game." This was rare for "Buster"- for he hardly ever said anything when he was playing - and not very much afterwards. Little did I know when he made that statement, he was preparing the final moves for my demise again. As we say in the "hood," he was 'tightening the screws.'

-----TO BE CONTINUED in the next issue.

Legends of "Buster"

10/30/2003

And so it was, after having lost the first two games, I had a sense that something was up. The guys in the back of the room were abuzz. As I finally conceded game three, someone walked in and asked "What is the score?"

A player in the back could conceal his anxiety no longer and blustered out, "Buster is killing him." With that statement, all of my confidence, arrogance, and hope went south. I then realized I was playing 'The Great Buster.'

Games four and five, I lost, without seemingly putting up much of a fight. Five games played; five games lost was my way of assessing the outcome. It was not only a "mug", it was the most embarrassing of "mugs". As we will see in the coming issues, it's not what "Buster" did to me. But what he did to others, as well, that made him a legend.

Finally, as I paid my \$5.00 to my Dew, and walked out, the owner of the barber shop, Gus Hawkins, said to me, "What happened back there Mr. Thompson?" I replied, "Gus, I couldn't get a "Pecan"- meaning not only could I not win, I couldn't even draw.

From that day on, I became, not Mr. Thompson, but "PECAN" Each day as I would return to the shop, Gus would hollow out to the guys in the back, "Here comes the "Pecan Man." .....To be continued

## **The Legend of Buster Smith**

### ***Observe, Excerpts from the past...***

This article was written by the reporter, Adam Langer, of [The Reader](#), a weekly Chicago newspaper at the time. Take note of the date Friday, February 12, 1993.

Thanks are offered to Mr. Fred D. Shurn, who made this article available to me, (after all these many years), and Mr. Al Lambert, who invited the reporter over to our Club, and escorted him around, for a series of interviews, shortly after Buster's death. Also, thanks to my wife Linda, who retyped this long and lengthy article.

This article consists of about 20 pages. I will offer the rest of it, in increments of two pages, in the coming issues.

Editor's Note: Mr. Thompson started publishing the article in the "20 Greatest" book on the Carl Smith' [page](#) on November 15, 2004 and later continued in the December 1, 2004 [issue](#) of the "Chicago Pool Checkers News".

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 1 - November 15, 2004

From the outside, the green-and-white house on Warren Boulevard near Ashland doesn't look much different from any of the other buildings in the neighborhood. The paint has started to peel and the windows are gray and sooty. The only thing a little unusual about it is the dusty checkerboard propped in one of the downstairs windows.

You go down the cement stairs at the front and open the creaky wooden door that leads into the basement. Orange flames rumble in an electric fireplace. A faded American flag hangs on the wall. In the center of the room checkerboards lie atop six tables. Two men sit across from each other at one of them, looking silently down at their board. The only sounds are the rain outside, the O'Jays on the radio, and the occasional clacking of checker pieces.

On the wall a bathroom rug hangs with its underside facing out. On the rug in Magic Marker someone has written "Buster's Place."

Buster Smith used to come here in the afternoons, before his shift at the post office. He would sit down at one of the tables and wait for someone to challenge him to a game. He didn't like to play for money; he played because he loved the game. And when newcomers sat across the table from the quiet, unassuming Buster, they were dumb enough to think they could beat him. The old-timers knew better; they knew that Buster Smith was without a doubt the greatest checker player in Chicago.

The greatest American-born checker player that ever drew a breath, some say, and without a doubt the greatest Chicago ever had. An international grand master who played in tournaments in Italy, the Netherlands, and the Soviet Union, Smith won at least a dozen American national championships. In 1938, when he was 17, Buster Smith became the checker champion of Chicago. On the day he died, October 8, 1992, Buster was still the undisputed champion.

Most people give up the game of checkers when they get out of grade school. Some graduate to playing chess; others stop playing games altogether. But checkers isn't always such a simple game. Historians trace its origins all the way back to ancient Egypt; checker players were painted on the walls of King Tut's tomb. Homer spoke of checker players in The Odyssey and Peter the Great is said to have been an avid player. Legend has it that Napoleon used to carry a checkerboard around with him to amuse himself when he grew tired of waging actual battles. In the former Soviet Union, the game is held in an esteem equal to chess.

There are a great number of variations on the game, and rules differ from country to country. The game Buster Smith usually played is called American pool checkers or Spanish checkers and it is common in this country among older African American and Eastern European men.

(To be continued...)

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 2 - December 1, 2004

American pool checkers differ from garden variety checkers in a couple of ways. First, whereas in straight checkers you can only jump an opponent's piece by moving forward, in pool checkers you can eliminate pieces by jumping either forward or backward. And second, in straight checkers, kings-the double pieces that have been crowned by reaching the opponent's home row, can only move one space at a time, but in pool checkers they can move as far as they can go on a diagonal. Pool checker players call that piece "the flying king." Variations on pool checkers are played in Europe, Brazil, and the former Soviet Union among other places.

Every year in the United States there are national checker championships with matches that can last as long as marathon chess games. The game looks deceptively easy. The rules are not complicated and anyone can learn how to play in a few minutes. But mastery is something that can take a lifetime.

There are tons of books on the subject and plenty of well-known opening moves, but trying to beat a grand master is next to impossible. Pool checker players say that an amateur coming in and beating a grand master would be like someone coming off the street and defeating Boris Spassky: it just doesn't happen.

How pool checkers got to African American communities in Chicago, Detroit, Saint Louis, and other American cities is something upon which checker historians don't always agree. But it may have traveled from France to Louisiana during the days of French colonial rule and grown popular there among black slaves.

It certainly came north during the great migration of the early 20th century. The game's popularity in America appears to have peaked during the Depression, when many would have had time on their hands to play. Checker clubs sprouted up in city parks, community centers, and barbershops.

Today in Chicago the number of clubs is dwindling, but a few players remain. They play every afternoon in the basement on Warren called Buster's Place. They play in the back room of a shoe repair shop at 47th and Indiana, and in barbershops at Ogden and Homan and in Evanston. They play at the headquarters of the Chicago American Pool Checker Club at 74th and Vincennes. And in the summer, when the weather's nice, you can find the "tree players" under the tree in the park across from Gladys' Luncheonette, at 45th and Indiana.

They call Mose Johnson the "mayor of the Tree" because in the summer you can almost always find him playing checkers across from Gladys'. Like many other members of the Chicago pool checker community, he still hasn't gotten over the death of Buster Smith.

"I'll never forget Buster," he says. "His name will be around for years and years." They'll know him all over. We play out under the tree and we talk about Buster. We tell little bitty kids about him, and when they play, they want to play like Buster. He was a genius. He hardly ever missed a move. He'll be known for centuries."

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 3 - December 15, 2004

Carl Sylvester Smith was born in Chicago on January 26, 1921. He grew up on the south side and learned checkers from his father, who gave him the nickname Buster. Smith wrote in his scrapbook that when he was 11, he was hounded by a checker-playing prodigy named Thomas, who kept challenging him to checker matches and then beating him soundly.

"He beat me and beat me until I began to see a little light. He aroused my curiosity for becoming a player," Smith wrote. And soon Buster wasn't losing to anybody.

In the 30's, when Buster was attending Wendell Phillips High School, he became more serious about the game and began to collect books on the subject. He entered city tournaments in 64-square pool checkers and the so-called "big board," 100-square pool checkers, a more-difficult game that is still quite popular in Russia. Buster played in his first two Chicago tournaments without distinguishing himself, but in 1938, he defeated champion Major McGill and acquired the checkers crown. He never relinquished it.

William Langley, a member of the Detroit American Pool Checker Club, came to Chicago more than 50 years ago to play Buster. "I came north from Columbia, South Carolina," Langley recalls. "Back in South Carolina, my dad had a junk shop that sold old wood and iron, and these guys used to hang around there and play checkers. I started watching these guys beating up on each other, and pretty soon, I put a few games together and these guys couldn't even draw me.

"I moved to Detroit and I played all the top players there, so I came to Chicago looking for Buster. I couldn't find him so he came to Detroit looking for me. I came into my house and my wife said, 'There's a little man upstairs who wants to play some checkers.' We wrestled for four or five hours and I couldn't win. We played all day and all night, and I don't think I defeated him once. I quit playing him."

"The best I got from him was a string of draws," says Lorenzo "Oldsmobile Junior" Pickens who started playing against Smith in the 40's. During the summer, Pickens plays outside under the tree across from Gladys'; and in the winter, you can find him in the back of the shoe repair shop at 47th and Indiana. His nickname distinguishes him from other well-known Chicago players like Pontiac Junior, Cadillac Junior, and Junior Guy.

"He was a boy wonder," said Pickens. "He was a beast, the meanest thing you ever saw on a checkerboard. Everybody who ever beat him talked about it for a long time. Some players would take lucky games from him and they'd be talking about it forever. All the checker players knew who Buster was, and if they didn't know, they soon found out."

"His name was bandied about in the South," says Dr. Ervin Smith, of the Saint Louis American Pool Checker Club. "From as early as I can remember, his name was legendary. I remember hearing about him when I was back in Augusta, Georgia. The word was out."

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 4 - January 1, 2005

Buster Smith served in Okinawa during World War II and won a couple of Victory medals. He came back to Chicago and took a job at the main post office as a night mail clerk. It was the job he held until he retired in 1986.

One of the best-known players of the 1940's was Clyde "Kingrow" Black of New York, also a renowned historian of the game.

Black beat Smith in the first match they played. But when Buster Smith returned to New York City in 1947, he defeated Black 14 games to 4. In his scrapbook, Smith called it one of the most memorable matches of his life.

"Black beat Buster, and he put out a book on checkers," says Oldsmobile Junior Pickens. "When Buster came back, he had to write Book two."

Buster Smith claimed that between 1954 and 1963, he didn't lose a single match. In 1965, when the first championship of the American Pool Checker Association was held in Detroit, Smith became the national champ. And it was about this time that he started receiving international attention.

Smith was invited to take part, all expenses paid, in tournaments in Italy and the Netherlands. Stories in Amsterdam newspapers from the time indicate that Smith was regarded as something of a curiosity: the only American participating in these tournaments, and with no formal training, Smith was able to beat international grand masters.

One reporter, who followed him to his hotel room, described in detail Smith's fascination with Agatha Christie, cops-and-robbers movies, and Coca-Cola. Another wrote that "The U.S., which is still seen through the eyes of checker players as an undeveloped country, will soon have its fight for the top in the near future. The play of Carl Smith has left no doubt about this."

Although Smith never won an international tournament, he finished in the top five on several occasions. He also played well against Iser Kuperman and Vladimir Kaplan, two of the greatest Soviet players of all time, both of whom were trained practically from birth to do nothing but play checkers. Both have since moved to the United States.

In the 60's, Smith received a plaque from Charles de Gaulle honoring him as an international grand master.

In 1968, Smith accepted the first of several invitations he would receive to play in the Soviet Union. During trips to Moscow and Samarkand, newspapers compared him to American chess master Bobby Fisher though he was certainly less eccentric and far more polite. He talked little about his travels to his friends. He did remark that he felt better treated abroad than he did in his own country and that his talents were better appreciated there.

To be continued...

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 5 - January 15, 2005

When Kaplan and Kuperman came to America, a rivalry developed between the Soviets and Smith. He and Kaplan, who is now retired and living in Brooklyn, played a number of two-man tournaments. Smith could not beat Kaplan in a match until 1981, when he defeated him twice in a 14-game match in New York. The rest of the games were draws. The last time they played was in Chicago in 1988. In this 14-game match, Smith won 1-0.

"Even though we played against each other, he was my very good friend for 20 years," says Kaplan, the author of several books about checkers. "We played matches in New York and he stayed at my home, and when we played in Chicago, I stayed at his home. He was very hard to defeat because he was such a strong defensive player. He knew a lot of methods to defend difficult positions. He was a real gentleman and a wonderful player. He probably had more Russian checker books than I did. Nobody can say a bad word about Carl Smith."

"When you talk about someone from America going to Russia and being able to compete with a Kaplan, It's like someone coming from Russia and being able to compete with Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan," says Fred Shurn, a systems analyst and a member of the Chicago American Pool Checkers Association.

"A lot of people talk about Michael being the best basketball player," says Carl Prince, a Chicago attorney and an avid checker player. But then there's Bird you have to take into consideration. You don't have those types of people in the American Pool checker world that can touch a Buster. You have to talk about Buster, and then you have to talk about the others in a different light altogether. He was so far ahead of everybody else."

In 1991, Smith finished ahead of Iser Kuperman in the National tournament. Kuperman disputed the title, reportedly storming out without even shaking Buster's hand. He did not return to the tournament in 1992, when Buster finished first again.

"I played all the guys in the tournaments and I didn't fear any of them," remarked Al Lambert, an administrator with the Department of Children and Family Services and an up-and-coming checker star. "I feared Buster though. I truly feared him."

It's been said that chess and checker players lose some of their abilities, as they grow older. But talking to those that knew him best, it appears that if anything, Smith got better with age. Once he retired from the post office, he studied constantly, and he became virtually unbeatable.

...To be continued

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 6 - February 1, 2005

"Last year I got to watch Buster play," says Ervin Smith. "And he was playing with more aggressiveness than I had ever seen. When Buster beat Kuperman in L.A., it was like watching Schwarzkopf against Hussein. He was like a forward-marching machine. He was going with abandon, playing the whole game on the opponent's side of the board.

"You get people talking spiritually about how he was playing. I never saw him playing with that aggressiveness before. You talk about premonitions of death. He was just overpowering guys over the last two years. You think people start losing their mental ability when they get older. Nobody got a chance to say that about Buster. Buster, to the very end, seemed to be playing better than he had in 20 years".

"I think before he died, Buster discovered the science of checkers," says Smith. "There must have been a science to it. I don't know if he left any secret papers, but I think that maybe Buster, without writing anything down, came close to mastering the science of the game. That's what I like to think anyway."

"Buster's game may have dropped, but we wouldn't have known it," says Fred Schurn. "We wouldn't know it because he was so damned far ahead of us anyway."

Buster Smith successfully fought colon cancer in the 80's, but he missed a couple of tournaments because of it. On the day he died in October, Smith was taking a friend to the hospital for her radiation treatment. On the bus ride over, he complained of headaches. Later that day, he passed away in his apartment on West Fulton Street in a room filled with books about checkers and dozens of trophies.

Everyone who talks about Smith says pretty much the same thing. He was the quietest guy they ever knew, the most unassuming. He didn't need to brag about his accomplishments; everyone knew he was the best. He never smoked, never took a drink, never drove a car. He lived alone because, he said, he liked his peace of mind. He was seldom angry and he was gifted with extraordinary patience. He never got married and, though he won tons of tournaments, he said he never made more than \$5,000 from checkers in his whole life.

"He was just so quiet," says Ervin Smith. "If you went into the checker hall, he was the last person you'd think to go and play. Lots of players are loudmouths. They say, "You can't whup me!" Buster was the opposite of that."

"He worked at the post office, and it has been said that he would sit at his little cubicle and he would work there for eight hours and never open his mouth," says Carl Prince. "He was an extremely humble person. He didn't talk a lot. You had to solicit information from him. If Buster were a politician and you rated him on a scale from one to ten, he would rate a minus five, because he was not a vain person. He was not a braggadocio person. If I could have played the kind of checkers he played, you'd be lucky if I let you walk on the same street as me. I would make you get out of my way."

To be continued.....

## The Legend of Buster Smith

by Adam Langer, Chicago "Reader", February 12, 1993  
Part 7 - February 15, 2005

"He said nothing when you were playing him," says Mose Johnson. "When you were through, he'd always shake your hand, but he never said nothing but smile."

"Buster's uniqueness was that even when he was playing a person like me, Buster would sit at the table with you and an outsider would come around and the outsider would think you were a top checker player because he took the same amount of time with you as he did with everybody else," says Prince.

He gave you the same amount of respect he gave every player," says Schurn. "There's a joke going around that Buster was playing a little boy and the little boy was like five years old. Now Buster was playing in Russia and everywhere else and he's playing this little boy and the little boy made a move and Buster was looking at it for like five minutes."

"Everyone was saying, 'Buster, he's just a little bitty boy. What are you doing?' And he said, 'Yeah, but you don't know what he knows.' He respected everybody and that's true and that's why I liked to play him even though there was no way in the world I could ever beat him. He played me the same as he'd play anyone else. And that's where you can learn. Sometimes I'd make a move and he'd say, 'Well, you could have done this and this and this.' And I wouldn't have seen any of it. He gave everybody the same amount of respect and then he'd beat you."

"Last time I played him was on a train," says Charles "Pecan" Thompson, a long-time member of the Chicago American Pool Checker Club. "We were taking the City of New Orleans and we played all night on it. We pulled out of the station in Jackson, Mississippi, and when we stopped playing, we were pulling into Union Station. The train takes about 14 hours, but we were so into the game that we didn't realize the time. I finally wound up winning a couple, but the score was 18-2."

"There were games I thought I'd won and he'd pull a draw out of it. Then, he'd set it up and show me how he did it. He'd show me all the finer points. He didn't try to hold anything back. He was the type who would share his knowledge with you if you had the patience or the time to sit and listen to what he had to say. Most people didn't."

"Everybody who played him learned a lot," said Lorenzo Pickens. "You never heard Buster doing a whole lot of talking. Once in a while, he'd chide you for making a bad move, tell you what you could have done but you couldn't anymore. He could sit at a table for hours and not get tired. He'd get so bad that you'd be scared to play him."

Among the letters and newspaper clippings Smith collected over the years, there is a letter from a well-known checker player named Little George Ramsey written in 1962.

"Tell me," the letter says, "don't you have any serious matches anymore? Doesn't any top player from other cities come over to give you a serious workout? Am I the only one? How can you play so long without eating? I was so hungry I was almost sick to my stomach when I quit playing you. You guys act like mechanical men. The next time I play you, I am quitting after 6 hours and eat."

At the bottom of the letter, Smith has written simply, "Smith-4 Ramsey-0."

"I recall he played Ohio Mitchell once, and Buster beat him five-nothing," says Schurn. "Ohio was a boisterous bully-type guy. After he lost, he went across the street, got something to eat, and came back. He knew Buster was better, but he said 'You beat me 5-0, but put some money down, goddamn it. You can't beat me then. I can't play no fun checkers.' Buster was a very mild guy. He said 'I'll play you,' real quiet.

"They had been playing before and he had beaten this guy and they'd play a couple and then they'd draw a couple, but when they put that money down, Buster wouldn't let him draw one. He didn't let him draw one when they put that money down. Buster didn't like the fact that Ohio had gotten loud and boisterous with him. He beat him every game. That's the way Buster was. I never saw checkers like that. Buster beat him with a game and I begged him for two weeks to show me. He never did. Later I found it in a book of Russian games. It was a vicious shot, the same shot he shot Ohio with-vicious."

"Buster was not a fighter. He did all his fighting on the board," says William Langley. "When I traveled with him to Italy in 1967 to see him play, he had one of the Russians beat, but the Russian asked Smith to give him a draw and Smith said, 'All right, I'll give you a draw' even though he had the game won. The Russian knew it. That's why he was begging for a draw. I practically cried, 'Buster you could've beaten this guy.'"

Some say Smith had a photographic memory. Others say he had mastered a sort of mental telepathy. Most say that it was an indefatigable ability to analyze and memorize that gave him such success. And, though he didn't show it, he hated to lose, and he'd replay games he had lost until he figured out a way to win.

"I can sit down and figure out my moves one or two moves ahead," says Eddie Smith, a retired electrician and member of the pool checker club here in Chicago. "He could see 20 moves ahead. He remembered games he played 20 years ago. How are you going to beat someone with a memory like that?"

(The Final Series)

Thanks to all, for your attention.

"Pecan"

## The Local Dude

The year was 1977; a contingent of Chicago Pool Checkers players descended upon Atlanta, Georgia for the annual APCA tournament. It was one, we felt, that brought together the best payers in America. We were about 12 to 15 in total; we were there to stake our claim.

As we settled into our rooms with our wives, girl friends, and/or significant others, I received a frantic phone call from my good friend, Van "Vansky" Penn - 'Busters' roommate and confidante.

"Pecan," "Pecan," he cried. Some 'unknown' local dude has drawn of "Buster." (Drawn on is a euphemism for a high-stakes-in-your-face wager.

I, of course, quickly gathered my things (with my wife inquiring, "What is going on?" while shaking her head and rolling her eyes). I rushed to the room-arriving with about 15 or 20 other players. As we entered the room, "Buster" and the local dude was already locked in battle. As I watched and took notes, the battle raged far into the night-with "Buster" taking an extremely long time to move, as he usually did.

To me a Pool Checker match had always been about, who won, what was the score, and are there any recording of the games? After watching for about two hours, I returned to my room to prepare for the next day's tournament.

In arising the next morning, I called Mr. Penn to inquire "what was the score."

"They are still playing," he responded. "But," he whispered, "it won't be long now."

"What do you mean"? I asked.

"I think "Buster" has just 'busted him; I see he is searching in his pockets for something to bet with."

As I went to register for the tournament, I ran into "Buster" who was coming to register too. "How did you come out," I inquired. "Oh I won," was his always modest reply. We will never know how badly "Buster" beat him because he never talked in specifics about that match.

Scores like, 17-2, 18-3, or some other astronomical figure was banded about as the final score. Carl "Buster" Smith finished third behind Vladimir Kaplan and Elton Williams in that tournament. But, there are those who swore that if he hadn't got involved in that all-night battle with the 'unknown local dude' he would have won that tournament.

Postscript, the 'unknown local dude' was local alright; he was from Atlanta, Georgia, but he was not unknown. He had finished 7th in an earlier APCA tournament in Flint, Michigan. He was Ben Bady.

And so, 'the legend lives'..... to be continued.

## "Buster" Meets the "Headchopper"

Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot was one of the most dazzling fast-moving, top, Pool Checker player, perhaps in the country at the time. He was witty, talkative, and very, very good. He hailed from Macon, Georgia-I think the home of soul singer James Brown and many other greats in the fields of entertainment, sports, and even politics.

Such that it was, we here in the City had already heard fantastic stories about his quality of play. We had been forewarned by a great pool checker player who had just recently moved to Chicago from Macon. His name was Frank Bivins. We called him the "Slingshot" or the "Flamethrower" because of his ability to throw fantastic shots.

Mr. Bivins had let it be known, in no uncertain terms, that he thought Mr. Lightfoot could beat "Buster" To make matters more interesting, I had received a personal letter from Mr. Lightfoot, announcing that he had declared himself the best Pool Checker player in America.

He cited as his evidence-his defeat of Detroit's, William Langley in a series of matches in Detroit. It was true; we had heard of those matches. "And as a result", said Mr. Lightfoot, " I am now preparing to tour the Union of The Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia." (He just said, 'Russia') in search of competition."

We here in Chicago, wondered why he wrote me. Perhaps it was because I was the 2nd Vice President of the APCA and already been a part of promoting several high-profile matches here-which included the Ollie Howard- Victor Krafft ("World Championship" match-Ollie would have you believe that).

And so it was, with much anticipation, we watched in Detroit, Michigan in the early seventies as the two squared off in a pre-APCA tournament exhibition. As was his practice, Mr. Lightfoot was moving with lightning speed. "Buster," as usual, moving slowly and cautiously.. And there was some grumbling in the crowd about his slow pace.

And then, to our astonishment, "Buster" began to match Mr. Lightfoot's move-for-move. Never before had we seen "Buster" move at this pace. It was now a draw-for-draw, game-after-game scenario.

"What was it?" someone asked. "I don't know" was a reply. "Perhaps it was something somebody said." The games continued to be played, at a pace comparable to 5-minute blitz, in chess. The games were still all draws.

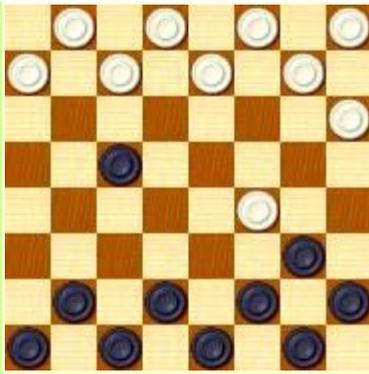
And then it happened- "Buster" threw a SHOT. We dubbed it the back-up-king shot (even though the piece does not even end up in the king's row; but it's blocks the opponent's piece that is already there). Perhaps, it's the most beautiful SHOT in all of pool checkers.

And then, in a rare display of raw emotion, "Buster" slammed the checker on the spot, stood up, and...  
"LEFT THE ROOM."

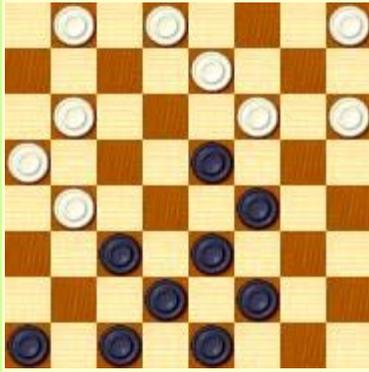
The roar from the crowd ( over a hundred-fifty players, by one estimate) was deafening, as they scrambled to replay the game or set up the position.

Footnote: "Buster" won that tournament; Mr. Lightfoot finished 6th.

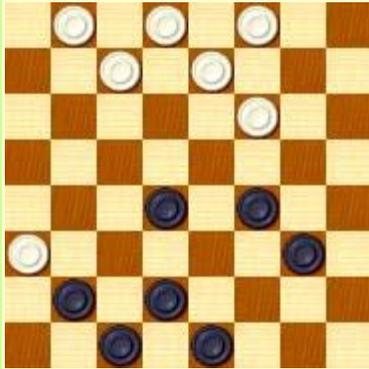
1.11-15 22-17  
2.15-19 23:16  
3.12:19 24:15  
4.10:19 17-14  
Pitch and Squeeze



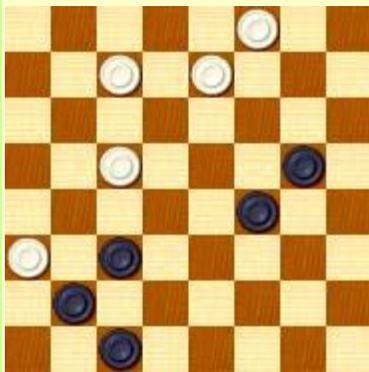
5.09:18 27-24  
6.19-23 26:19  
7.05-09 19-16  
8.09-14 30-26  
9.08-11 24-20  
10.06-10 28-24  
11.01-06 25-22  
A plan to get extra moves.



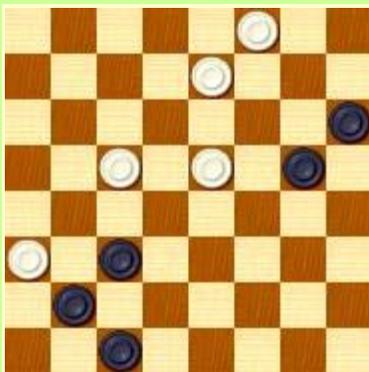
12.18:25 21:30  
13.10-15 16-12  
14.04-08 24-19  
15.15:24 20:27  
16.11-15 29-25  
17.06-09 25-22  
Buster better break out of this game



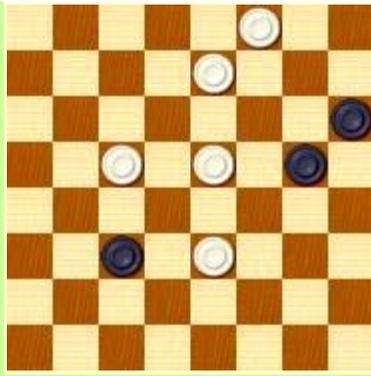
He did.  
18.07-11! 22-18  
19.15:22 26:10  
20.02-07 27-23  
21.07:14 23-19  
22.09-13 32-27  
23.13-17 31-26  
Anyone and everyone would step back with 11-15 - but not Buster!



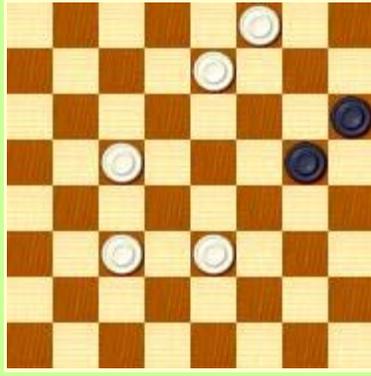
24.17-21 27-23  
25.14-17 23-18  
(see diagram)  
26.03-07!! Sweet Jesus - where this came from?  
26.... 12:10



The next move is so exquisite - to pull the most restrictive checker into the chain - to make an ally out of a foe:  
27.11-15 18:11



Every piece is now in place  
28.17-22 26:17  
29.21:23x



game comments by the web site editor

And then...,HE LEFT THE ROOM ... and the Legend grows. ... To be continued.

## Detroit's Big Guns Rides into Chicago

At one time, in the 60's and 70's, and perhaps even the 80's, Detroit, Michigan had perhaps the finest group of Pool Checker players in America (That distinction would probably go to Atlanta now).

Sporting a cast of George "Lil George" Ramsey, William "Bullet Hole Bill" Langley, William Richardson, Carl Thomas, Hank Jenkins, George Sykes, and a host of other top players, it was a hotbed of Pool Checkers activity.

As if to consolidate and verify its dominance, in the early seventies, a contingent of that group, notably Ramsey, Langley, Richardson, and several others, came calling on the Chicagoans for some high-stakes matches.

Since I was very young at the game and was vaguely familiar with the significance of these matches, much of what is given here is what was related to me. Although I witnessed many these matches, I didn't stay for some of the all night battles and their final conclusions. They battled all-night, all day, and then back into the night again.

It was said that "Buster" was 'killing' (beating him badly) Langley. Some estimates were that at one time "Buster" was beating Langley 55-5. It's not clear whether this all happened at this particular setting.

But, what is clear, "Buster" was putting and awful hurting (beating him decisively) on Langley. At the same time, "Lil George" was soundly beating Chicago's second top player, Victor "Vic" Krafft. Additionally, William Richardson was outclassing our own 3rd ranked player, "Madcap" Milton Miskel.

It is said that "Lil George" (who was generally conceded the 2nd best player in America) at the time, and was preparing to make his push for the number one spot, looked over at the games between "Buster" and Langley, and said, "Bill let me have that 'ham' (poor player).

At that point, Langley turned "Buster" over to "Lil George" and the battle began. They played all night-52 games all total; and they were all draws!! What was significant about these games, they were all the same.

They played the same games over and over-both refusing to change. That's right!, 26 games with the black pieces and 26 games with the white pieces-same games-same results-same draw. They "stunk up the place" is how one observer characterized it.

Finally, in the 53rd game, "Lil George" made a 'blunder' (a terribly poor move-in chess). And, it 's said, "Buster pounced on him like a 'dog in heat' (very aggressively). From that point on, it was all 'down hill' for "Lil George" several observers agreed.

The saying is that in the very next game, "Buster" got "Lil George" in a position where he (George) got up and left his side of the board, went around to his opponent's side and studied the move for an hour and a half (an obvious exaggeration).

"But", opined Van Penn ( of local dude infamy), "When "Lil George" returned to his side of the board, the game was still out" (meaning "Buster still had the winning position).

There is no reported score of the "Buster" vs. "Lil George" encounter, but one Chicago player commented,

"As long as we have "Buster" here, we will never again have to worry about the 'barracudas' coming into Chicago and feasting on our blood." The legend continues....

...But, there are warning signs on the horizon. There would be some setbacks, down the road, for the "Buster Steamroller." Read some of the coming issues.

## Legends of "Buster"

### *"Buster" Slips In To New York....Embarrasses Clyde "Kingrow" Black, And Then Slips Out-Without Even Saying Good-bye.*

This story was told to me by an old friend, Janus "Detroit" Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead has passed on now, but his story still resonates in the Chicago Pool Checkers community. According to Mr. Whitehead, who lived in Detroit, (hence "Detroit"), New York, and then Chicago, one summer day, some times in the late fifties or early sixties, perhaps in a New York park, Clyde "Kingrow" Black was giving a simul.

For those who might not know what a simul is, it's a chess/checkers demonstration usually played by a master or grandmaster player who plays against a large number of players (usually 20 to 30) to demonstrate his/her playing acumen ship. Often times he/she wins all the games, or a very large percentage of them.

During that simul, Mr. Whitehead claims, a 'young man' came in and took a seat at a checkerboard. Unbeknownst to anyone, untested, unassuming, and uninvited, this young man began playing. As was the case with Mr. Black (who had been known to play up to a 100 players at once), he would usually complement the different players as he went from one board to the next - "good move," "very good move," or "You should have moved there."

Mr. Whitehead said that every time Mr. Black would come to this 'young man's table he was saying "Very good move" more than he was saying, "Good move," or "You should have moved there." Additionally, Mr. Black was spending more time at this young man's table each time he came around.

Since most of the young players had been defeated after about the twelfth move and had gone on to other things, the older players were left to try to really win a game. But, because this one 'young man,' who was a stranger to all of them, was still playing, and given the fact that Mr. Black had giving him so much of his (and their) time, the other players began to get restless.

After a while, he and the other players stopped playing and went over to see what was taking Mr. Black so long with this unknown 'young man.' What he saw was a shocker, says Mr. Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead's own words, "The young man had Clyde Black's men tied up in so many knots, it would have taken an act of Congress to untie them."

Mr. Whitehead said that he then had to leave. Later on when he inquired with some of the other players about the outcome of that game, he was told by, one player, the 'young man' not only won that game, he won all the others they played as well.

Given the quality of player that Clyde Black is said to have been in those days, (He was said to have been the very best) it's difficult for me to believe that any player would have beaten him all of the games. But the point was made, Mr. Black had been 'humbled' Who was that 'young man'? You guessed it! It was Carl "Buster." Smith.

Mr. Whitehead, said he never saw the 'young man' again until many, many years later after he had moved to Chicago. And only after bringing up the subject with him, did "Buster" confirm it was he. "Buster" said he had heard about Clyde Black giving a simul, and he took a train there to play him. After it was over, he simply took the train and returned to Chicago.

And, continued Mr. Whitehead, "Buster" might have still been a teenager." NOW THAT'S

SCARY! ...

And The Legend Grows...

But! There will be some bumps in the road for the "Buster" steamroller... To be continued.

Editor's note: Mr. Whitehead does have some history. On page 158 of Clyde Black's Book, The Secrets of Spanish Pool Checkers (Book II), Mr. Whitehead's name is mentioned with reference to the New Special.

## Legends of "Buster"

### "Buster", Jerry of Memphis, and the Advent of the Kibitzer

During the seventies and eighties, Pool Checkers in Chicago, was perhaps at its zenith. There were all of the great players of the day- The "Great" Gilliam; "Old man Earl"; "Rubarb;" "Normal;" Allen and Chaney of Gary; "Madcap" Milton Miskel; "Professor" Junior; "Ohio the Great Mule" Mitchell; "Little" Detroit; Tanner "Woodencheckers" Perry; Frank "Slingshot" Bivins; Clarence "Dude" Dew; "Ace"; (Notice the nick names- more about them later).

We even had an up and coming Clorious "Mongoose," "Iodine," Tasmanian Devil," "Kingrow," Lay- (Those are names of his own choosing). Additionally, there were wily old Victor "Vic" Krafft, along with an up-and coming Al "Action Man" Lambert. And, of course I was there along with many others that the space here does not allow me to comment on. And finally there was "Buster."

The story we are about to enumeration on, is about the treks that a player name Jerry, from Memphis, Tennessee would make to Chicago, on an annual basis, just to "Play Buster." His name was Jerry; we called him "Jerry of Memphis." There were disagreements about just how good Jerry was; some said he was pretty good, others said he was fair, yet others said he was a "scrub" (poor player). "Buster" simply said, "He could play."

Additionally, we will talk about the great kibitzers of the time also. During that time, we in Chicago, used to-on a weekly basis, gather in a small barbershop called Winrows Barber Shop. As would be expected, 20 to 25 of us would be involved in a hotbed of activity as we attempted to establish our dominance, in pool checkers, over each other.

In addition to the players, there was the great kibitzers of the day. "What is a kibitzer?" you might ask. A kibitzer, according to Webster, is a "Meddlesome Onlooker." The term is used quite extensively on the Internet, nowadays, with reference to players in chess, checkers, and other games.

The Kibitzer can be found in every city, but in Chicago, these guys took on an additional task; they made kibitzing an art. They not only gave unsolicited advice-often times unwanted, and unappreciated; they told stories about a whole wide range of subjects-be it politics, sports, race, religion, or any other subject.

Like, as seen in the movie Barber Shop, with "Cedric The Entertainer," much of what is said is embellished, or outright not true. But, oftentimes there is some validity to what they have to say. They were, some would say, players who didn't play, wouldn't play, and/or as Mr. Victor Krafft often times said, couldn't play. But that last part was not altogether true; some of these guys could play.

Because of the reputation of these guys with respect to the truth, one will have to decide for ones self the validity of some of their claims. Some players, outright loathe and scorned the kibitzer, because he would oftentimes 'wake a player up' (make him aware of some unsuspected trap that had been set up, or some gross error he was about to make).

With respect to, Jerry of Memphis, they had some tall tales to tell. Fact-Jerry did travel, every year, for a number of years, to Chicago, just to play "Buster." He didn't bother to visit any Pool Checkers Clubs, or visit anyone else in the city as far as I could determine. He had one purpose in his visits, and that was to 'play "Buster." And play "Buster" he did.

Each year, "Buster" used to announce to us at one of the assemblages, "Jerry" of Memphis, will be

coming in next week; I won't be here." Sure enough the next week, "Jerry" of Memphis, would arrive; he stayed at "Buster's" home. And sure enough the kibitzers would be there, in-mass to watch (and to talk).

The stories they told about some of these matches were about atrocious scores. Scores like 'twenty-one to zip' (21-0), nineteen-nothing (19-0), or simply 17-1, in favor of "Buster" were common. One kibitzer said "Buster" hit "Jerry" with a shot, and it upset him so, that he spilled the coffee he was drinking all over the place.

Another kibitzer said. "He didn't spill coffee, he slobbered all over the place." The stories were awful. Why, we would ask "Buster" "why do you continue to play Jerry, if the scores are what these guys are saying they are?" "Buster's," simple reply was "If he wants to play me, I will play him."

My good friend, Van "Vansky" Penn, perhaps the greatest of all the kibitzers, said it was more to it then that. They, he said, was playing for some 'serious bread' (high stakes). Incredibly, I never bother to go over to "Buster's" house to watch-(there could be as many as 15 to 20 players watching, at one time-in "Buster's living/dining room).

And so, like the gospels of the Bible, (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) would report on the exploits of Jesus, the kibitzer of Chicago, (Van "Vansky" Penn, James "Variation James" Adams, "The Mighty Muck, and Shirley Huckaby, would report on the exploits of "Buster." Their stories while, might not be totally true, were compelling. It only added to the mystique of "Buster."

Finally, I never did meet "Jerry" of Memphis, nor did I ever know his last name. Maybe my friends in Memphis -Gunslinger2, Big-O, Blackknight2, Crazy Joe, or others (those are their Vog Internet names) can help me with that. For he did provide some great food for fodder when he came.

To be continued....."Buster's" days are numbered!!

## Legends of "Buster"

### Finally!!... "Buster" Falls...to a Lowly Club Player

It came by the way of a quiet statement, "You Win!" -that sent shock waves throughout the tournament playing room. With that statement, Robert "Grocery Store Bob" Daniels, gained everlasting infamy within the Chicago Pool Checkers community.

He was Mr. Robert Daniels, a quiet, unassuming, soft spoken gentleman who would never raised his voice at anyone. He was the business manager for the Chicago Westside Pool Checkers Club. I liked to call him, 'my business manager.' His playing lever was Gold Bar (APCA) or class D in alphabetical system (A-E).

In a long since forgotten tournament, the Westside Pool Checkers Club of Chicago hosted, at a local YMCA, in the early seventies, Mr. Daniels did something that Chicago Pool Checkers players still talk about-even today. He defeated "Buster" in a tournament game. And with that stroke of genius, Mr. Daniels acquired a unique honor in our Pool Checkers community.

He is the only Chicago area player to hold an edge over "Buster"-even to this day! The score is 1-0. You see...Mr. Daniels NEVER PLAYED ANOTHER GAME after his victory over "Buster." That's right, Not Ever! That is at least what veteran players around here will swear to. Many of those who would swear to this have now passed on, but talk to old-timer Eddie Smith; I, for one, can truthfully say, I never saw Mr. Daniels play another game after his win over "Buster"-even though he lived for perhaps another 10 or 15 years afterwards.

That is the awe that many players held for "Buster" in those days. Clarence "Dude" Dew, who could have been an APCA Top Master, had he kept playing, says he played "Buster" for a lifetime and never won a game. That's why he stopped playing, he said. James "Pontiac Jr" Sharp, an APCA player, who became a Master in 1975 and who played in the same barber shop where "Buster" played -- on a weekly basis for over 20 years says he never even played him a game. Even today, Mr. Sharp, who is still robust and still playing will again make that claim.

The details of the story is this. In 1971, I think it was, The Westside Pool Checkers Club of Chicago, of which I was the president, hosted a city tournament. It was, as far as we could determine, the first City tournament in the city's history. In it's determination to popularize the game and increase activity in the city, the Club decided to invite the best players in the City and throughout the Midwest. William "Bill" Langley, of Detroit, Michigan was there. George Cobbs, Top Master from St. Louis, Missouri was there, and I think Mr. Sam Walters and a delegation from Cleveland, Ohio, was there. We even had a lady who came all the way from Peoria, Illinois to play in the tournament, and to play "Buster." She said she had heard about "Buster" from her uncle many years earlier.

It was a round-robin tournament-where everyone plays everyone else. And as usual "Buster" was killing his opponents. He might have won 16 or 17 straight games. The field had been devastated. Even Bill Langley, the Top Master from Detroit was hopelessly behind.

I was seated at the next table and fully concerned with my opponent, when I heard the quiet voice, that was unmistakable "Buster's" say, "You win it." As I looked around to inquire, "What was that?" several of the other players had stopped and began to rise to their feet. "What was that?" Someone else inquired. Again "Buster" said, "He won it." By this time, one of the great kibitzers of our time, James "Variation

James" Adams was up and heading toward the table. At the same time "Grocery Store Bob", as we called him, was backing away from the table as if in a trance. Accordingly, the word had begin to get out- "Grocery Store Bob" beat "Buster" y'all."

When asked, "What did you beat him in, Bob?" He would simply say, "I just got him in my game, that's all." We could never get "Buster" to reveal to us the game he lost. And so the game that "Bob" won (or "Buster" lost) is gone for eternity.

Nobody took "Buster" loss (or Bob's win) harder than "Variation James." Years afterwards he would just be sitting at the club watching us play and he would lament "Pec" (slang for "Pecan"), I will never understand it;" he would continue, "Grocery Store Bob", beat "Buster." I will never understand it for as long as I live." I can give Bob 10 'straights' (win 10 consecutive games) any day of the week," and yet I've played "Buster" for a lifetime and never could get a game." I simply will never understand it." And so, my friend, Mr. Adams passed away many years ago, still unable to come to grips the fact that "Grocery Bob" had beaten "Buster".

And the Legend continues... Next Issue, "Buster plays the Lady! ...and his problems loom even bigger down the road.

## Legends of "Buster"

### "Buster" Plays the Lady!

Remember that lady from Peoria Illinois (in our last issue), who came to play in the tournament, and to play "Buster?" Well, she's still there; she's still playing; and she is still losing. Every weak player, and his brother, is jumping at the opportunity to play her and to build up his point totals. (Remember, this is tournament to attract Pool Checker players, and not for a championship-although we say it's for the City Championship)-hence the round-robin.

At one point in the tournament, I think, "Buster" and the lady had identical scores; he was (16-0), and she was (0-16)-(at least there was a "16" on both of their cards and there was a "0" on both of their cards). And then Top Master, The Rev. William "Bullet Hole Bill" Langley, (He said that's what the Russians called him when he went there to support/watch "Buster" and play some to its Gransmasters in the late sixties) performed an act of mercy. He displayed one of the great humanitarian acts of our time. He 'threw' (allowed her to win) a game to the lady. And she was happy! At that point her score was now (1-16), and when "Buster" lost to "Grocery Store Bob," his score was (16-1). So their scores were still identical. Yet, the lady hadn't played "Buster." And as fate would have it, the stage was now set for this mammoth showdown.

Prior to the game, we (Mr. Langley, Mr. Cobbs, and myself) pulled "Buster" aside and pleaded with him to 'throw' another game to the lady. We talked about how it would make her feel good, how it could be good for the image of Pool Checkers, how she could tell her uncle that she had beaten the "Great Buster," and how it might make her feel that her trip had been a success. But, "Buster was having none of it-saying simply, "I just don't like losing those games." Keep in mind that he had already won the tournament. Mr. Langley, who was second, was far behind. The prize for first place was only a large trophy and a modest amount of cash. But, it didn't matter.

As the two faced off, the great kibitzers of the time had taken up residence. Van "Vansky" Penn was seated just to "Buster's" right. A couple of seats away was James "Variation James" Adams; seated just a couple of seats away from him, was Shirley Huckaby, and over in the corner, watching from afar were, the "Mighty" Muck and the "Greater Ace."

The lady had the first move, and she led with 9-13! It was now "Buster" turn to move. He looked,... he looked,... he looked,... and then he looked for one last time,,,,, and finally he looked some more. We don't know how long it took him to make his first move. But one kibitzer swore it took him forty minutes. It didn't take him quite that long, but it did take him an awful long time.

Every schoolboy knows that the proper response to 9-13, in a Pool Checkers game, is 22-18. Van "Vansky" Penn, a "Buster" sidekick, loyalist, and sweet joggers for many, many years, simply couldn't stand it any longer, and cried out, "What is "Buster" looking at?" When "Buster" finally moved, where did he move? You guessed it, 22-18.

Many times after that game, we would ask "Buster," "What was you looking at?" His simple answer, as always, was "You never know what a person knows," and "I didn't want to take any chances."

Oh yea, back to the game. The lady's second move was 6-9; "Buster" then, 'hit the spot.' In Pool Checkers parlance, that is considered taking control of a critical pivot spot. We then, knew that the 'lights were out,' for the lady. You see, for a fleeting second, we had thought, just perhaps, "he was having

second thoughts, and might just also 'throw' the lady another game. But when he took control of the 'spot' we knew that she would never see the 'light of day' again. And we looked at each other; and we turned and walked away, shaking our heads, and muttering, "WHAT SORT OF MAN IS THIS?"

"Buster" won that game, the tournament, its trophy and modest amount of cash. But for some of us, in our minds and hearts, he had lost for a second time that day because he refused to 'throw' the game to the lady.

Finally, as the lady prepared to leave, she thanked us all for the hospitality, shook all of our hands, talked of the great time she had, and 'walked off into the sunset'-out our lives forever. To this day, close to 35 years and counting, none of us, as far as can be determined, has ever seen or heard of her again.

But "Buster" will pay for his transgressions (sins), as... The legend continues - Next Issue.

## Legends of "Buster"

"Buster" vs. Owens

"A Match Made in Heaven," as the late-great Mayor Harold Washington, of Chicago, Illinois often-timed said.

For five years running, (1972-1976), Freddie Owens had finished in 2nd place behind "Buster at the APCA Tournaments." And for the most part, it was by the narrowest of margins-2 points. One could, perhaps, sense the frustration building up in Mr. Owens as the finally tally was computed, and he would come up short time and time again. I was one of those officials who had the responsibility of staying up half the night to help make sure the tally was correct. And each time, Mr. Owens' (zero loss) performance would not be enough.

Out east, he was called the "Hawk," perhaps for his aggressive play. But, many of us, here in the Midwest, had never heard of him, and his precise play, until he burst upon the tournament scene, I think, in 1972. Even in losing to "Buster," in those five consecutive years, Mr. Owens would oftentimes go undefeated in the whole tournament. That was considered remarkable, when you keep in mind, the eventual winner would usually have lost, at least, one game.

And so on a date, lost in my memory, the gentlemen from the East invited "Buster" to come to Baltimore, Maryland, Freddie's hometown, for a showdown match. It was, by some accounts, a Pool Checkers Match for the Ages. Playing his signature game called the "Pitch and Squeeze," it's said that Mr. Owens tied up, our own Carl "Buster" Smith, game after game, until such time as "Buster" had to stop making the 'Hit," as we in the Pool Checker's world would call it. Many say "Buster" was lucky to escape with a 3-2 loss after 14 games.

Of course, the kibitzers of Chicago, was not about to accept that "Buster" had lost to Freddie. And so the spin was on. Van "Vansky" Penn said, It didn't happen, it couldn't happen, and it would not have happened had it not been for the weather. "I took 'Buster" to the airport, and the snow was three feet deep," he deadpanned. "Yea, chipped in, James 'Variation James" Adams, "and when he arrived at the airport in Baltimore, it was even deeper than that." "Buster" was simply too fatigued to play," my good friend Mr. Penn would end up.

But, Freddie Owens did defeat Carl "Buster" Smith in that historical match. And it was no fluke. I know because our own, Mr. Fred D. Shurn has shown me the games (especially the pitch and squeeze games many times). And so the cry went out, "Bring Freddie to Chicago." But, it never happened.

We were ready to declare Mr. Owens the king of the American Pool Checkers' universe-notwithstanding "Buster's" five straight APCA Championship wins. But, Freddie then made his ill-fated trip to Detroit, Michigan to play Mr. George "Lil George" Ramsey a 20 game match. This was another battle of the titans (more about that match later). Mr. Owens lost that match, and we were now back to square #1. Who was the best Pool Checkers player in American?

Eventually, the Russians would change the whole equation. And the questions about Freddie and "Buster" would become mute. Who was the very best, would then become abundantly clear -- as the Legend continues... "Buster" meets the Grandmaster, as his woes grow. But eventually, he would bow out in a 'blaze of glory.'

## Legends of "Buster"

### "Buster" Plays Kaplan

In the late seventies or early eighties, Vladimir Kaplan, International Grandmaster, former champion of Europe and the USSR, and author of many books, was brought to Chicago, by our Pool Checker's community. We wanted to see him up-close against "Buster."

Even though he had won three APCA championships in succession, there were those of us who still clamored for a showdown match between him and "Buster"- in Chicago. Never mind that he had already 'mugged' "Buster" (5 straight wins) in a 14 game match in New York, we still wanted to see for ourselves.

I was in the forefront of that movement to bring Mr. Kaplan to this City. We just had to see for ourselves. And so, we sent for him. We were so concerned with the importance of this match, that we even flew in Mr. Henry Johnson of Inkster, Michigan to be the referee. We knew that Mr. Johnson had been a no-nonsense military man and that he would be the perfect person to referee this very important match. Additionally, Mr. Johnson had some unique experience in directing this kind of match. He had been the Tournament director for the AICS (100 Sq. Board) tournament for many years. But, because of his unique talents, Mr. Johnson just might have performed his job too well. For nearly 4 hours of play (with a 30 min. intermission), one could barely hear a pin drop as the two combatants played in almost perfect silence. And the games they played were replayed by our top players many time, but no noticeable mistakes could be found.

To this day, we have been able to find only one miscue in the entire match and that was the one that "Buster" made when he lost. The final score was Kaplan 1 and "Buster" 0. While "Buster" lost that match to the International Grandmaster, he would leave with his head unbowed.

A personal note about Mr. Kaplan. In the year of 1978 at the APCA Tournament in Atlanta, Georgia, Mr. Kaplan's first APCA tournament after his arrival in America, (He had emigrated from Russia and had been in this country for only a few months), I had been his very first opponent. At the time, I was recording my games with a tape recorder (If you don't believe me, just ask Eastpoint), and he was doing his recording in the regular manner, on a pad. We were, perhaps, the only ones in the whole tournament who were recording our games. One of my club members walked up to me and said, "Who are you playing, "Pecan." And whispered to him Just another 'white man' who doesn't have a suit and tie on.' That statement, by me, was not intended to be malicious, it was intended as a joke. And we laughed it off. But, It did show my ignorance of my opponent. And I would pay dearly. The fact is, I had never heard of Mr. Kaplan.

You see, Vladimir Kaplan was no laughing matter and I would ruefully find that out. I lost both games. As I arose from the table after my two losses, I had (I thought) the satisfaction of knowing that I had recorded the games and could study them for future references, and use them for surprises on my coming opponents because only I would know.

In 1980, Mr. Kaplan published his very first book in America-Tournament Checkers. And to my chagrin, there on page 160, Game #27, and page 171, Game #33 were the two games he had won against me. And now the 'cat was out of the bag,' and all of my potential opponents and victims could profit from the information. But, then it might not have been so bad after all. Mr. Kaplan, who was without a doubt one of the greatest player that ever lived, used my two defeats to demonstrate to others what moves NOT to make when playing the game of American Pool Checkers. And so, I said to myself, at least, the games had been immortalized.

Oh, back to the match, I can recall talking to "Buster" about the extraordinary slow play as I was taking him home (He never owned a car and had never driven one, he would often relate to me). In offering suggestions as to how we could speed up the game and make it more exciting, he would always agree, by saying, "Yes I know." "But you just don't want to lose any of those games." I had heard this reply many times. I then, knew it was time to drop that issue.

After his 1 - 0 defeat at the hands of Mr. Kaplan, "Buster" would admit that the Grandmaster was the better player. But again, the gap was closing.

The "Buster" ship would rise again as he bows out in a 'blaze of glory'- as the Legends wind down in the next issue...

## Legends of "Buster"

### "Buster" is Back

The year is 1991. The scene is the site of the 1991 APCA tournament in Los Angeles, California. One of the participants is Iser Kuperman-Russian Grandmaster, seven times APCA champion, and arguably the greatest Pool Checkers player to ever live. Mr. Kuperman, who has dominated American Pool Checkers since his arrival in this country as an immigrant from the former USSR is poised to win his 8th straight tournament.

For seven straight years, he has all but destroyed the field of American players. All the American players, including myself, had been (for all practical purposes) reduced to also-rans in what we used to think of as 'our game.' Some say he had lost only two tournament games during that seven year span. At the same time, he was packing in tons of wins.

Privately, there might have been a feeling of "Break up the Yankees," on the part of some players. That, of course was the old baseball cry against the New York Yankees when they were winning all those baseball championships in the late twenties, early thirties, and the fifties and sixties. But "Buster" wasn't a part of that thinking. On a number of occasions, he would be heard saying that it was good that the Russian Grandmasters were playing in the tournaments because they would raise the level of play.

But with Mr. Kuperman, even the Grandmaster Vladimir Kaplan, also a former USSR immigrant, himself, had curiously retired during the period of his arrival on the scene. Not only were Iser Kuperman destroying all of his opponents in tournaments, he was doing much the same thing when private matches was arranged for him. One match that was particularly noteworthy was his complete destruction of former APCA champion Momodou Faals who had been one of the few players, it was reported, to have won a game from him in tournament play. The score was, I think, 7 - 1, in a fourteen game match, in favor of Mr. Kuperman.

And so with the dominance of the Russian Grandmasters, (Vladimir Kaplan - 1977-79) and (Iser Kuperman - 1984-90). And with a couple of 'young lions' (Momodou Faals and Elton Williams) contesting his dominance (80-83), "Buster" seemed to be fighting for his legacy as much as anything else. According to one observer, I think it was our own APCA President, Dr. Ervin Smith (to a newspaper reporter) and I quote, "In the 1991 tournament, for some reason, "Buster" seemed to be playing like a man possessed." "Never had I seen him play this way before," -unquote.

Keep in mind, at this point, "Buster" is approaching age 64-a time when most players are ready to 'pack it in.' It is said, that he not only drew Mr. Kuperman the two games they played, he also amassed more points than any other Top Master player-and enough to outdistance even the great Mr. Kuperman and wrest the championship away from him. Furthermore, it's reported that, Mr. Kuperman was so shocked and disgruntled that he 'Refused to Shake "Buster's" hand 'upon the declaration that he ("Buster") was the new champion. And finally, the record will show, that Mr. Kuperman exited the stage of the APCA tournaments-never to appear again. "Buster" had Returned!

Although "Buster" is now 64 years old, and while we didn't know it at the time, he would make one final stab at greatness before bowing out - as the Legend continues in the next Issue.

## Legends of "Buster"

### The Last Legend

By the summer of 1992 Carl "Buster" Smith seemed to have been at the top of his game. He had come full circle. After his triumph over Mr. Kuperman, he returned to Chicago for a hero's welcome.

Considering his easy trouncing of a brash and outclassed "Pecan" in the late sixties, and throughout his frequent trips to Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe to compete (and hold his own) with some of the great grandmasters, and along with his defeats of Ramsey, Langley, Black, and others-and notwithstanding his disappointments with "Grocery Store Bob" and the "Lady." and then after his greatest triumph (the dethroning of the great Mr. Kuperman), one would have said that he had done it all.

Conventional wisdom would have dictated that he now rest on his accomplishments and live the life of an elder statesman. But that would not be the case for this champion who, like Alexander The Great, needed new worlds to conquer. At this time, after having ruled Chicago Pool Checkers for nearly a half century, he did in July 1992, head of the The Bahamas in search of new glories. He was to compete in the 27th APCA National Tournament being held there.

With the absence of the grandmasters Mr. Kaplan and Mr. Kuperman, Carl "Buster" Smith was now in control again. And again, one would fine his name at the 'top of the pack' in the final standings. While he had to share the 1992 title with the Bahamas' young Andrew Frazier, there was little argument that he had etched his name for all times as a great American Champion.

In October of 1992, Carl "Buster" Smith passed away. At his funeral was a host of his Pool Checkers friends. I think I can recall seeing Mr. William Langley along with his friend Mr. Rudy Poe of Detroit, Michigan. Most of the local players were there also. The arrangements were simple; and those of us who knew him well, conversed quietly among ourselves. My final recollection of the service was that they played 'jazz music,' perhaps by Gene Ammons, Art Blakley, and/or Ronnie Laws, Stanley Turntine as the final bell tolled.

And so, we all left that service with the feeling that a Giant had been take from our midst.

## Introduction

By Charles Thompson  
February 15, 2004

To my readers; since 1971, (33 years to be exact), I have been involved in American Pool Checkers in one form or another-either as a player, or as an official, and now as a writer. As a player, I started at the top. In 1972, without ever having played a game in the lower divisions, I asked for and was granted permission to play as a Top Master. I simply wanted the best-from the beginning.

I have never won an APCA tournament; consequently, my success was modest at best. Two, fourth place finishes, and a number of Top 10 finishes in American Pool Checkers Association's (APCA) Tournaments have been the extent of my accomplishments at that level.

What I achieved on an individual basis however, might have been more gratifying to me. In 1979, in Winston-Salem North Carolina, I defeated-in succession Victor Krafft (2 games), Carl "Buster" Smith (1 game), and Ollie "Shotgun" Howard (1 game), without losing to any of them. That might have been, I thought, my 'finest hour.'

I was at the 'Top of My Game.'- like Muhammad Ali was when he knocked out "Big Cat" Williams or like Michael Jordan, when he threw down that 'double nickel' (55 points) against the Knicks, or even like the "Old Mongoose," Archie Moore said he felt after having floored Rocky Marciano, with a sneak right, in that memorable heavyweight championship fight, years ago.

Mr. Moore said, in his book, years later, that the 'Brockton Blockbuster' simply wouldn't cooperate with him the rest of the way. I probably could say the same thing about the APCA Sub-Top Ten ("Scrubs") players. They in turn, denied me my place in the sun; they then beat me four straight games. I finished 9th that year. Even though, I thought, that might have been my year.

That's how my assessment will be with the players that I am preparing to select. It will be on their abilities when they were at The Top of their Games. But the venture I am about to embark on is not about me; it might be about my credentials though, if I am bold enough to try to make such serious SELECTIONS.

The point I would make, in my defense, is that in every case, with the possible exception of one, I have played these players, at the highest level. As I embark on this perilous journey of naming The 20 Greatest American Pool Checker Players of All Time, I would expect some regional or sectional disagreements, as players and fans around the country will claim, 'I' or 'My Guy' didn't get my/his proper respect.

As an official, I was the 2nd Vice President for the APCA a number of years. One of the official duties as the 2nd Vice President was to conduct the APCA Tournaments. Because I was so involved in playing, I asked Mr. Nathaniel Leach to do the job for me. And as everyone knows, he performed that job with great distinction for over 30 years.

Additionally, I along with George "Lil George" Ramsey, attempted to get started the ill-fated, APCA Top Ten Tournament, where the top ten players in the APCA tournament would square off in a playoff, after the regular tournament had been completed. Even though the event was well funded by the adherents to this idea, the attempt failed for a number of reasons-even though we were prepared and ready to go in Akron, Ohio in 1984.

As a writer, my only venture has been in writing the stories of "The Legends of Buster", and now this venture. Comments are accepted, even encouraged; criticisms are tolerated, but the selections are 'etched in stone.'

In making my selections there will be several criteria used. Some are:

1. How did the selected player perform in APCA Tournaments. (most importantly)
2. How did the selected player perform in head-to-head matches (that I am aware of)
3. How did the selected player perform in outside non-formal matches that can be verified by corroborating witnesses.
4. What was my personal assessment of the player's game when I played or watched them play.

(Some of these criteria will be enumerated in each commentary I will make about the selections).

...."LET THE DEBATE BEGIN"....

We will begin the countdown from #20. For the next 10 months, on the 1st and 15th, I will give my selections. After that time has expired, I will spend the next two months summarizing, and commenting on other commentaries about my selections. On February 15, 2005, I expect to conclude my stories about these selections. These selections will also be placed on Mr. Jake Kacher's web-site, <http://www.checkersusa.com>

Thanks, "Pecan"

## Readers Opinion

Your Opinion	Nominees
Tal Roberts on 10/21/2003 offered these names:	"Eastpoint" Barnett "The Iron Claw" Al Lambert Elton Williams
We should obviously add "Buster" to the list.	Carl "Buster" Smith
My personal favorite is Reverend Bill Langley - both for the strength of play and personality.	Bill Langley
LenaSugar33@aol.com: 03/02/2004 Bobby Kennedy. He tied Kaplan 12 in a row before he died. He defeated Tony many times; he was New York finest. Thank you.	Bobby Kennedy

Send your pick (and any pictures of your selection you might have) to [Your Opinion](#)

## Conclusion

December 16, 2004

Friends/Readers,  
Observe My  
20 Greatest Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times-  
on the 1st and 15th of each month

Log on to: <http://www.checkersusa.com>  
Click, Enter Pool Room (upper right-hand corner)  
Click, Charles Thompson's Page (upper left-hand corner)  
(Choose, from a menu of topics)  
(Notice - Iser Kuperman #1)  
Thanks,  
"Pecan"

I have now concluded my series. For the next two months, I will offer some final comments on a multitude of items. Included will be players who didn't quite make it - for whatever reasons; On February 15, 2005, I will make final comments on suggestions that were offered and was not acted upon.

I welcome input from you. Comments, endorsements, observations, criticisms are all expected and will be discussed in a positive manner. Where requested, your comments can be printed, verbatim, at the Pool Checkers' Site on the BB. Otherwise, I will just acknowledge your comments by responding directly to you.

Thanks for your interest and time.... And have a very

**MERRY XMAS!!**

## Post 20 Greatest - Honorable Mention List

[Part 1](#) January 1, 2005

[Part 2](#) January 15, 2005

[Part 3](#) February 1, 2005

[Part 4](#) February 15, 2005

December 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-20th Selection-

#1 - Iser Kuperman (Grandmaster)

Mr. Kuperman, of the Soviet Union, and who was living in Boston, Massachusetts at the time of his APCA dominance, was simply, in my opinion, the greatest pool checkers player to ever play the Game - in America. I know that's a tall statement, but his accomplishments in the Game, in this country, simply has no parallel.

From his early years, (as far back as 1940 it is documented), Mr. Kuperman, as a 19 year old prodigy, was a champion. Over the years, in his native Russia, and later on, in this country, I have found in doing my research, that he has continued to be a champion. There is tons of information on the Internet documenting his exploits. Consequently, it's not necessary for me to elaborate on them here.

What I will tell you about is his activities while living in this country. His seven straight APCA Tournaments championships (1984-1990) has been well documented and need no further enumeration. For the record, practically all the great players I have mentioned previously, had the chance to compete against him at the tournament level. Few can be confirmed as having won a single game.

In 1990, in Atlanta, Georgia, that distinction went to Momodou Faals. But, Mr. Faals would pay dearly for that sin. In a private match arranged later, Momodou was humiliated by the score of 7-1. Kibitzers swore that Mr. Kuperman, had 'staged' his defeat, in the tournament, in order to set the stage for a high stakes private match. Of course, there was no hard evidence of that, and one had to dismiss the charges as, the musings of some know-it-all meddlesome onlookers.

Back to the tournaments-if there were other loses, I have not been able to uncover them. Whatever the matter is, in playing possibly over 300 games in an eight-year span, his record was remarkable.

What might be the most astonishing feat by him, was perhaps, this little known fact; during the years 1984 -1988, a span of five years, he won five successive championships on both the 100 Square Board and the 64 Square board. That, indeed, was awesome. Even his well-documented attempt at his eight successive championship, on the 64 Square Board, in Los Angeles, California, in 1991, did not record a loss.

What is most interesting about Mr. Kuperman, was that when he first arrived at the APCA Tournament, much had already been said and heard about him. "Buster" often said he was the greatest player in the Soviet Union during his visits there in the 60s. Consequently, when he began winning, here, it was not unexpected. But few were prepared for his kind of dominance.

But, as time went on, something began to go awry. Was it his winning or was there other factors creeping into the mix? I recall playing the Grandmaster, in a tournament, and in a year, that I don't remember anymore. I was 'knocked out, on my way to the fight.' (In boxing parlance, it means, 'I was defeated quickly'). He, of course, made short order of me-winning two straight games before I could even get settled at the table. The routine ness of his wins, and the regularity with which he was getting them, began to harbor some concern with many of the American players. The feeling of, "I don't have a chance," inevitable crept in.

I had the pleasure of observing him at the 1985 100 Square Board Tournament in Chicago. (I played in the Majors Division and won it 7-0-qualifying me for the 1986 Tournament in the Masters Division.) in Washington D.C.. I went, observed, but didn't play. Mr. Kuperman won both of those



tournaments.

Again, in 1987, in Jackson, Mississippi (my hometown) I was present and competed. It was at this tournament, where it was said "Not since Thomas Jefferson dined, alone, at the Whit House had that much talent been assembled under one roof." That was the tournament, I had indicated earlier, that had the all the great American players-Kaplan, Smith, Faals, along with Mr. Kuperman- and several Haitian players. Mr. Kuperman won that tournament as well.

Because of his dominance at the APCA Tournaments, on occasions, private matches were arranged for him. He simply came, destroyed the opposition, and moved on. It was obvious, no American player could compete. Consequently, the feeling began to be, he was like the marauding gunslinger who would come into your town, 'clean out the mess,' and then move on. Maybe, this was an erroneous perception, but it was there.

Consequently, when the report came from Los Angeles, that "Buster" had dethroned Mr. Kuperman, there was much rejoicing, not only back in Chicago, but also, I understand, that was the case at the Los Angeles Tournament as well. (I didn't attend that tournament). Of, course, this had as much to do with "Buster's" popularity as it had to do with Mr. Kuperman's previous dominance. Even then, many of us felt we knew who the best player, really, was.

Whatever the perception or misconception of Mr. Kuperman, there is little argument that he played the Game of American Pool Checkers better than it had ever been played before or since. And a remarkable characteristic about his play was 'how' he played 'the Game.' What I mean is, as I studied the games he played, there were no restricted openings. All openings were on the table and were to be used.

While other great players usually restricted themselves to a few choice openings, he shrewdly demonstrated that every possible opening had meaning; it and could and should be a part of one's arsenal, and was to be used whenever and wherever most appropriate. For that, I think the, bar was raised. The Game, itself has profited. And for that, we all have benefited. ***That was his contribution!!***

And so, at the #1 Spot, I will select Iser Kuperman - THE GREATEST POOL CHECKERS PLAYER OF ALL TIMES

#### The Elite Ten

- #1 Iser Kuperman (Grandmaster) - Boston, Massachusetts
- #2 Vladimir Kaplan (Grandmaster) - New York, New York
- #3. Carl "Buster" Smith - Chicago, Illinois
- #4. Ion Dosca - Moldova
- #5. Al "Eastpoint" Barnett - Eastpoint, Georgia
- #6. Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe - Decatur, Georgia
- #7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa
- #8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan
- #9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan
- #10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

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- #11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas
  - #12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan
  - #13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York
  - #14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois
  - #15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland
  - #16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia
  - #17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri
  - #18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York
  - #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
  - #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

December 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-19th Selection-

#2 - Vladimir Kaplan

Mr. Kaplan, of Soviet Russia, and living in New York City, at the time, simply revolutionized the game of American Pool Checkers in this country. Although his reign was brief as well as spectacular, his play was faultless-in the three years he did perform.



In one of his many books, he claims to have played a total of 178 games, in competitive play, and had only one lost. That, indeed, was remarkable. One thing is for certain, the three years he played at the APCA National Tournaments, he had no losses. While there was some competition, such as Elton William, Momodou Faals, and "Buster's" challenges, his faultless play over that span of time was unequal in the annals of Tournament play.

After his 1979 championship year, he retired. But in the ensuing years, he visited Chicago many times. He and "Buster" played many exhibitions. Since they had become good friends, they would stay at each others homes on their exchange visits. Those of us from Chicago shared our hotel rooms with him at the APCA National Tournaments on many occasions.

Often times, while in Chicago, he would play players on the street corners, in the parks, or wherever the game was being played. We got to know him, up close, and very well. While playing a ton of games against the 'street competition' he seldom lost. But on rare occasions he did lose; and when he did, the loss would become front page news through out the Pool Checkers community. There was the time "Ohio, the Great Mule" won a game from him, and there was the time Moses "Preacher" John won a game; and finally I won one, (after all those many losses), and the news spread, like wildfire, throughout the city. Other than a few losses, over a period of about fifteen years, the Grandmaster was flawless.

In his later years, we continued to be close to him as he attended the APCA National tournaments to 'Sell his Books.' In fact, the joke here is, that one of our members, General Owens, bought so many books from him, that he (Kaplan) invited 'The General' to New York and put him up, at his home, for a week only to see 'The General' return to the tournament and compete against him, in selling the very books he had purchased from Kaplan (at a reduced price). 'The General' never denied the charge. The fact is, of all the great players, Vladimir Kaplan was the most accessible. More than a few players have commented on how he would help them solve a particular complex problem.

With his health failing, the Grandmaster became a mentor to many of the American players who were trying to improve their games. We were inclined to believe that much of that failing health had to do with his wartime experience. He would often talk about the wound(s) he received fighting the Nazis during World War II. In one conversation he had at our Club, after we expressed our concern about him walking, by himself, through a really tough neighborhood, I can recall him saying, "I no afraid;" "I fought the Germans during the war." He would then proceeded to show us the wound(s) that he had received. We could only marvel at his bravery and honesty.

Notwithstanding the three APCA championships, or the matches he won against "Buster," Elton Williams, and other great players of the time, perhaps Mr. Kaplan's greatest contributions to the Game, was his literary one. In addition to the many books he published, ( by some reports, at least seven), his pamphlets, and other written commentaries will stand, for centuries, as a hallmark to his greatness. His books are accessible in many library in this area and, I suspect, in libraries around the country. In them lie a treasure trove of information on the Game.

And so, at the #2 spot, I will select the name of Vladimir Kaplan.

## The Elite Ten

#1 ?

#2 Vladimir Kaplan (Grandmaster) - New York, New York

#3. Carl "Buster" Smith - Chicago, Illinois

#4. Ion Dosca - Moldova

#5. Al "Eastpoint" Barnett - Eastpoint, Georgia

#6. Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe - Decatur, Georgia

#7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa

#8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan

#9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan

#10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

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#11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

November 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-18th Selection-

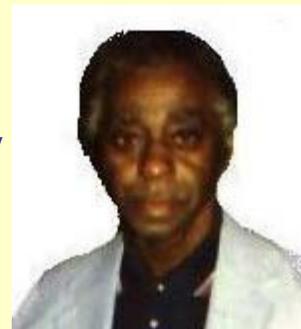
#3 - Carl "Buster" Smith

Observe the "Legends of Buster" at <http://www.checkersusa.com/>. They will speak for themselves.

Observe, also, excerpts from the past... (How others viewed him).

This article was written by the reporter, Adam Langer, of The Reader, a weekly Chicago newspaper at the time. Take note of the date Friday, February 12, 1993.

Thanks are offered to Mr. Fred D. Shurn, who made this article available to me, (after all these many years), and Mr. Al Lambert, who invited the reporter over to our Club, and escorted him around, for a series of interviews, shortly after Buster's death. Also, thanks to my wife Linda, who retyped this long and lengthy article.



This article consists of about 20 pages. I will offer the rest of it, in increments of two pages, in the coming issues.

### **The Legend of Buster Smith**

From the outside, the green-and-white house on Warren Boulevard near Ashland doesn't look much different from any of the other buildings in the neighborhood. The paint has started to peel and the windows are gray and sooty. The only thing a little unusual about it is the dusty checkerboard propped in one of the downstairs windows.

You go down the cement stairs at the front and open the creaky wooden door that leads into the basement. Orange flames rumble in an electric fireplace. A faded American flag hangs on the wall. In the center of the room checkerboards lie atop six tables. Two men sit across from each other at one of them, looking silently down at their board. The only sounds are the rain outside, the O'Jays on the radio, and the occasional clacking of checker pieces.

On the wall a bathroom rug hangs with its underside facing out. On the rug in Magic Marker someone has written "Buster's Place."

Buster Smith used to come here in the afternoons, before his shift at the post office. He would sit down at one of the tables and wait for someone to challenge him to a game. He didn't like to play for money; he played because he loved the game. And when newcomers sat across the table from the quiet, unassuming Buster, they were dumb enough to think they could beat him. The old-timers knew better; they knew that Buster Smith was without a doubt the greatest checker player in Chicago.

The greatest American-born checker player that ever drew a breath, some say, and without a doubt the greatest Chicago ever had. An international grand master who played in tournaments in Italy, the Netherlands, and the Soviet Union, Smith won at least a dozen American national championships. In 1938, when he was 17, Buster Smith became the checker champion of Chicago. On the day he died, October 8, 1992, Buster was still the undisputed champion.

Most people give up the game of checkers when they get out of grade school. Some graduate to playing chess; others stop playing games altogether. But checkers isn't always such a simple game. Historians trace its origins all the way back to ancient Egypt; checker players were painted on the walls of King Tut's tomb. Homer spoke of checker players in The Odyssey and Peter the Great is said to have been an avid player. Legend has it that Napoleon used to carry a checkerboard around with him to amuse himself when he grew tired of waging actual battles. In

the former Soviet Union, the game is held in an esteem equal to chess.

There are a great number of variations on the game, and rules differ from country to country. The game Buster Smith usually played is called American pool checkers or Spanish checkers and it is common in this country among older African American and Eastern European men.  
(To be continued...)

And so, at the #3 spot, I will select the name of Carl "Buster" Smith.

### The Elite Ten

#1 ?

#2 ?

#3. Carl "Buster" Smith - Chicago, Illinois

#4. Ion Dosca - Moldova

#5. Al "Eastpoint" Barnett - Eastpoint, Georgia

#6. Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe - Decatur, Georgia

#7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa

#8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan

#9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan

#10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

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#11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

November 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-17th Selection-

#4 - Ion Dosca

He was arrogant, self-assured, non communicative, and very, very good. In fact, Mr. Dosca seemed to be showing nothing but contempt for the Americans' games-as he methodically disposed of one player after another in his 2000 debut. It was his only appearance at the APCA Tournament. Many of us had never heard of him when he was played in that tournament. Afterwards, because of my inquiry, our APCA president, Dr. Smith indicated to me, that he had personally invited Mr. Dosca to play in the tournament.



Playing a meticulously slow game, Mr. Dosca infuriated many players as he, at times, seemed to deliberately hold up play. I was told, he disapproved of playing without the clock. While I don't know this as fact, I did notice, in the game he won from me, he could have easily won it in a matter of minutes-once he got the advantage. But for some inexplicable reason, he refused to end my torture.

I will never know what his motivations were, but it did come off to me as, kind of, not being very tactful (having a keen sense of what to do or say in order to maintain good relations with others or avoid offense). Consequently, my second game draw with him was very satisfying. Be that as it may, it was apparent from the very beginning, he was awfully good. There was no denying it.

Playing in a field that was, in my opinion, perhaps the weakest in many years, Mr. Dosca simply destroyed this field. If my memory serves me correctly, I think Mr. Elton Williams was the only player in a field of 19 to draw him both games. His 104 points (he didn't have a loss) with his nearest rival having only 92 points, (an equivalence of about 6 games) might have been the biggest difference that has been recorded in APCA Tournament history. Since I finished 4th, in that tournament, I might be in as good a position as anyone to make that assessment.

I recall having a discussion with Grandmaster Vladimir Kaplan, who was an observer, about the extraordinary slow play that Mr. Dosca was engaged in. It was the opinion of the Grandmaster that the tournament needed clocks. And if I recall correctly, our own webmaster, Mr. Jake Kacher was also listening in on the discussion.

I, of course disagreed with Mr. Kaplan about the need for clocks. I pointed out to him, that in our tournaments, we were more about enjoying ourselves, and the move-as-you-please format fitted our needs just fine. And, in almost all cases, the time we used was quite reasonable. Consequently, we didn't need, nor did we appreciate anyone else trying to making that determination for us.

Additionally, I reminded him that he, himself, had played in three tournaments and even the Grandmaster Iser Kuperman played in seven-and also our own webmaster, Mr. Kacher, had played in several. And at no time did we use clocks. What, then, I retorted was his problem? The Grandmaster, simply turned and walked away-as if to say, "You've made your point."

All of that notwithstanding, there was no denying the fact that we had an extraordinary Pool Checkers player in our midst.

And so, as my #4 selection, I will offer the name of Ion Dosca.

The Elite Ten

#1 ?

#2 ?

- #3. ?
  - #4. Ion Dosca - Moldova
  - #5. Al "Eastpoint" Barnett - Eastpoint, Georgia
  - #6. Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe - Decatur, Georgia
  - #7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa
  - #8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan
  - #9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan
  - #10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland
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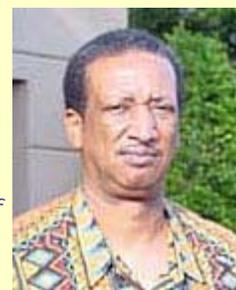
- #11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas
- #12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan
- #13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York
- #14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois
- #15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland
- #16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia
- #17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri
- #18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York
- #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

October 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-16th Selection-

#5 - Al Barnett

Mr. Barnett of Eastpoint, Georgia, is perhaps the most dynamic of all of the Elite Ten selections. With a risk-taking, riverboat gambler's-let-it-all hang out mindset, he has parlayed these talents into an extraordinary winning combination. It has at the same time allowed him to become one of the all-time great players in Pool Checkers.



His seven straight wins in APCA Tournaments, that he was involved in, and a ton of second and third place finishes cannot be denied nor refuted. His bold, aggressive, and imaginative play has produced tons of wins over the years in APCA tournament play-which is equivalent to 'medal play' in golf. One must distinguish between tournament (medal) play and match play.

To give an analogy, Tiger Woods has become a household name in golf because of his performance in medal play. As we all know, 'tournament play' (medal play) is where one competes against all the players in the bracket as opposed to 'match play' where one competes against a single opponent. Consequently, in today's society, a player's greatness is determined not by how he performs in match play but how he performs in tournament play. In that respect, Mr. Barnett has done very well. After all, winning the tournament is the final goal in both golf and Pool Checkers.

There had been some criticism of Mr. Barnett's game because he usually loses more games, while at the same time winning the tournament, than perhaps any other champion. If that is fact, perhaps that's why many kibitzers have wondered out loud, "How would he do in match play?" While that might be a question, we cannot deny the fact that he wins tournaments.

Over the years, I have played Mr. Barnett many games and have been on the losing end in far too many of them. While my losses have been many, there are times when I have had some success. One notable time, for me, was in a game the 1997 tournament in Flint, Michigan. In that game, I quietly maneuvered him into the trap of a game that I had studied intently. I had noticed that the game was a favorite of his, and I had observed him playing it and being successful with a number of players. As I quietly made the final moves for setting the trap, I notice some uneasiness in the back. Later I was to learn from my good friend, Mr. Michael Jordan, of Atlanta, Georgia that he had whispered to an onlooker that if Eastpoint made a certain move, "Pecan" was going to 'turn the lights out' on him. Sure enough, he did make that certain move, and sure enough, I did 'turn the lights out' on him. I must admit, few wins have given me more satisfaction.

All of that notwithstanding, the championships he has won, the games he has played, and the dynamism that he has brought to the game has made Mr. Barnett, without a doubt one of the all time great players and an honored member of my Elite Ten.

And so, at the # 5 spot, I will select the name of Al "Eastpoint" Barnett.

The Elite Ten

- #1 ?
- #2 ?
- #3. ?
- #4. ?
- #5. Al "Eastpoint" Barnett - Eastpoint, Georgia
- #6. Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe - Decatur, Georgia
- #7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa

- #8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan
  - #9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan
  - #10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland
- 

- #11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas
- #12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan
- #13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York
- #14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois
- #15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland
- #16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia
- #17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri
- #18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York
- #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

October 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-15th Selection-

#6 - Calvin Monroe

Perhaps as much as any player on my selections list, Mr. Monroe's stock has risen by his recent performances. In the last 10 years, his performances, more than anyone else has been one of extraordinary play.

In my initial return to competitive Pool Checkers in 1996, I first met and was shocked by Mr. Monroe's game. A good friend of mine, Mr. Fred D. Shurn, invited me to travel with him to Atlanta, Georgia in 1996 to compete in that city's City Tournament. Surprisingly, Mr. Shurn even purchased my plane ticket for me. And would you believe it, it was on (of all airlines) the now infamous 'Value Jet.' And what a flight it was! Had I known it was to be the Value Jet Airline, I have often chided Mr. Shurn, I might still be in retirement. For the record, I think, the airline went out of business perhaps just two weeks after our flight. But that's another story for another time.



While I had been away from competitive play, I was still active on the local scene and thought I could hold my own with any player in the country. I was to find out early that that would not be the case. Playing what I considered a tune-up for the up and coming APCA tournament, I was ambushed by Mr. Monroe. While I had heard about his strong play, I had no idea of what was in store for me. I lost two straight games to him. And although I finished in 3rd place behind, I think, "Eastpoint" and him (It might have been he and "Eastpoint"). I was totally surprised at the level of play he displayed.

His recent play at the 2004 APCA Tournament caused me to reconsider my selection list. Again, as in Atlanta in 1996 I was ambushed-losing two straight games for a second time. His winning the championship in that tournament caused me to be convinced that he is playing at a level that is as good as anyone in the country today. The performance he had there was nothing short of phenomenal. Without his ill-advised attempt to win a 'draw' game against one of his opponents, (A game in which he lost) he could have played the perfect tournament. As it was, he still prevailed and won the championship for 2004.

For the record, Mr. Monroe has won or finished in a tie for first place in the APCA tournaments at least 3 times. He has a host of 2nd and 3rd place finishes and has played as consistent as anyone I have played in the last eight years. I think, I still have not scored my first victory over him.

An interesting sidelight to Mr. Monroe's story, I had been warned that he had been a student of the late grandmaster Vladimir Kaplan. The story of which I dismissed with the musing of some talkative kibitzers. But, I have recently become aware of his own testimony that he was indeed one of Mr. Kaplan's students. With that being said, I must say the grandmaster did his job well.

And so, at the #6 spot, I will select the name of Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe.

The Elite Ten

- #1 ?
- #2 ?
- #3. ?
- #4. ?
- #5. ?
- #6. Calvin "Iron Claw" Monroe - Decatur, Georgia
- #7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa

- #8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan
  - #9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan
  - #10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland
- 

- #11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas
- #12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan
- #13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York
- #14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois
- #15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland
- #16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia
- #17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri
- #18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York
- #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

September 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-14th Selection-

#7 - Momodou Faal

Mr. Faal was the second of that dynamic duo who challenged Carl "Buster" Smith's dominance in the early eighties. About the same age as Elton Williams (both were about 30 years old at the time). The two mounted a serious challenge to the then accepted champion, after the surprise retirement of Vladimir Kaplan in 1979.

He came to America in the early or mid seventies as an exchange student from Africa. It seems he got bit by the 'Pool Checkers bug,' and as a result, his studies took the hit. Although he was from Gambia, Africa, he lived in several cities in America-New York, Atlanta, New Orleans, among others, after coming to this country.



Baba Sy - Faal, Suikertoernooi, December 20th 1972

My most impressionable remembrance of Mr. Faal was in Flint, Michigan in the mid eighties. He defeated Elton Williams by the score of 3-0 in a 14 games match. In that match, we saw as good a venue for showcasing the game of American Pool Checkers as I can recall seeing anywhere. Using a large demo board and with the contestants on stage (away from the onlookers) Mr. William "Bill" Langley and myself alternated in showing the games move-for-move to the viewers who was sitting in a theater-like setting and eating popcorn in the audience. I have not seen that scenario duplicated since. And Mr. Wardell "Champ" Moore, the Flint Club's president, can be thanked for the setup.

The thing with Momodou was, he was equally as good on the 100 square board (Big Board) as he was on the 64 square board (Little Board). This was a rare combination. The 1991 Big Board Tournament in Jackson, Mississippi was another sitting in which I had a chance to watch Mr. Faal, first hand, playing the 100 square board. The tournament, I think, might have produced the greatest conglomeration of Big Board-Little Board players to have ever set foot on America soil.

Among them were many mainstays of my 20 Greatest series. There were Iser Kuperman, Vladimir Kaplan, Carl Smith, and Momodou Faal. And also, there were two players from Haiti (both names were Pierre) who were at the time living in New York. I was told, they too, played a 'mean' game on the 64 square board. While Mr. Kuperman won the tournament, Momodou finished in a tie with Vladimir Kaplan for 2nd, and Carl "Buster" Smith finished 4th-a mere two points off the pace. The two Haitians players finished 5th and 6th and I finished 7th out of a field of thirteen.

Momodou had me to thank for his 2nd place tie with Mr. Kaplan. In the very last game of the tournament, (all others had finished), I was pared with the Grandmaster Vladimir Kaplan, who needed a win to finish in an undisputed 2nd place behind Mr. Kuperman. My Friend, Mr. J. C. Wills, a top 100 square board player in his own right, who was an onlooker at the time, reminded me just recently. He said "Pecan," did Momodou ever buy you that steak dinner he promised you if you would just draw Kaplan?" My answer was, "No Mr. Wills, he never did; that is one steak dinner that guess I will never get." You see, I did draw the Grandmaster even though I didn't even consider myself a Big Board player. I just happened to enter the tournament because it was hosted in my home city of Jackson, Mississippi and I had just won the Major's Division the previous year.

Momodou, of whom I indicated earlier had lived in several cities while in this country, was reported to have been traveling somewhere in Texas when he met his untimely death. One report was that he was heading to Houston, Texas when there was some incident with a bus (perhaps a Greyhound) that caused his fatality. The report was never made completely clear. Whatever the case, the game lost one of its greatest player ever.

For the record Mr. Faal won or tied for the APCA championship in at least 3 years. And he had multiple 2nd and 3rd place finishes in his approximate 15 years of tournament play.

And so, at the #7 spot, I will select the name of Momodou Faal.

## The Elite Ten

#1 ?

#2 ?

#3. ?

#4. ?

#5. ?

#6. ?

#7. Momodou Faal - Gambia, Africa

#8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan

#9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan

#10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

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#11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

September 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-13th Selection-

#8 - Elton "Little David" Williams

Perhaps, as much as any other Pool Checkers player, I might have been instrumental in the development of Elton's game.

You see, because I had family living in Flint, Michigan in the early seventies, I visited there often. In the ensuing years, Elton and I played many times and had several matches. He was perhaps 15 or 16 years old at the time. I recall beating him in a fourteen game match by the score of 4-3-in a sudden-death playoff. Elton actually had the match won but missed the "special" in regulation play. I was told that there was great sadness in Elton's heart because of that lost, and he vowed for revenge.



Here is an excerpt from one of the newsletters that I was writing at the time. It will pick up the story from there...(Notice the date).

CHICAGO WESTSIDE CHECKER CLUB, INC.  
4931 W. CHICAGO AVE.  
PHONE 378-9531

January 3, 1972

	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>BOARD OF DIRECTORS</u>
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C. THOMPSON:

EDITOR OF: N E W S L E T T E R

WESTSIDE CHECKER CLUB

(Chicago's first family in pool checkers)

"When checkers are played better, we will play them"

---

Berston Pool Checker Club - Flint, Michigan -

Vs.

Westside Checker Club - Chicago, Illinois

"LITTLE DAVID" COMES TO CHICAGO

They came down from the Northland through three states, braving rain, sleet and snow -- this horde of checker fanatics. They brought with them a 17 year old wonder boy who is destined to

become the greatest pool checker player of all times, and they sent ahead an 80 year old master craftsman-scout with a warning, "He is coming for 'Pecan.'"

The granddaddy of all checker players, old man "Chicago" Harris, had already warned the Westside Checker Club that the kid was coming for revenge. But what was built up as a classic turned out to be nothing more than a good workout for the kid, for he methodically cut up "Pecan." The score was 5-2 in the 14 game match. The match was actually over after the 12th game as Elton was leading by 3 games with only 2 games left to play. "Pecan" bowed out with a simple statement "He is too good today."

More importantly, as the kid was finishing off "Pecan," there was mumbling in the background of, "I told you so," "But he can't beat 'Ohio,'" "Go get "Ohio!" - (His real name was Mitchell). Yes, at times like this, the real checker fanatics take over. Those who can't play at all but pretend to know any and everything had begun to have their day. And so the calls began to go out as these self-proclaimed experts scrambled for telephones.

The word was out, "Get 'Ohio'". But it was unnecessary, for "Detroit" Boyd who had ducked out of his 14 game match with Delmus Harrington of Flint, Michigan was personally escorting his sweet jiggers and sidekick, "Ohio the Great Mule," to the Club.

Then he was there, and there he stood -in the doorway of the Club. In all of his belligerent and bellicose attitude, he huffed and he puffed, and made threatening statements of, "I will kill you," and "You can't beat me" as he faced this 17 year old kid who looked more like an altar boy than a giant killer.

For a fleeting second the kid seemed afraid, and there were misgivings on the part of his manager, Wardell Moore. The kid said "I don't want to play him now; I will play him tomorrow." But it was too late now; too many scrubs had assembled to watch. With 70 to 75 hams waiting to prove their point, there might have been a riot.

A hurried conference called by "Champ" Moore and "Pecan" Thompson (who started this whole mess in the first place) produced this result -- a flat statement by "Pecan" -- "The kid will beat the fool out of "Ohio."

The match was on. Making unnecessary gestures and distracting statements, "Ohio" strong-armed the first game and scrubs everywhere went wild with glee. The score was 1-0, "Ohio." Game 2 - "Ohio" made a fool's mistake and the kid decked him. The score, 1-1. Game 3 - the kid baited "Ohio" with a "piece." He bit and the kid drop-kicked him. The score now 2-1, the kid. Game 4 - the kid baited "Ohio" with still another piece but from a different angle and "Ohio" grabbed at it like a hungry bull. The kid spun him around and ja-raked him.

The score now 3-1, the kid. Game 5 - was beautifully executed as "Ohio" thought he had a win and began to talk, but the kid pitched him two pieces and then locked three men for his draw. At this point, wily old "Detroit" Boyd who was sitting just to the right of his master, whispered to an onlooker "The kid is good." Who was he telling? Where had he been?

It was getting late now, and this writer was preparing to go as the kid saved the best for the last. The "backup king shot," the most beautiful of all checker plays, was the thing that did it. It brought "the Great Mule" to his knees. It was masterfully concealed, and the most knowledgeable of checker players were unaware of it.

Then it was unleashed with all its fury and the great "Ohio" hit the floor like a wounded bore hog. It was finally over and the score was Elton Williams 4 and "Ohio the Great Mule" 1. The skeptics came, they saw, and they were conquered.

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For the record, Mr. Williams who was perhaps our youngest Top Master ever; has either won or shared the APCA Championship on, at least four occasions. He has had numerous 2nd and 3rd place finishes, and I don't think he has, finished out of the Top Ten any year he has played-since entering the Top Masters in 1974. For longevity, his record is probably more impressive than any other player with the possible exception of "Buster's."

Finally, over the years, I have played Elton many times; If I have any wins, they have been few or far in-between. By the same token, I can recall several of his wins, because he would say things like, "You know that's 'out,' don't you Mr. "Pecan"? (meaning he had the winning position). In just the last tournament of 2004 in Memphis, he won a game from me and then gently said "You know, Mr. "Pecan," you lost this same game to Mr. George Sykes in Detroit in 1971." What's amazing is, after all these years, I think, Elton still believes my name is Mr. "Pecan" rather than Mr. Thompson. But that is Elton!

And so, at # 8, I will select the name of Elton Williams.

## The Elite Ten

#1 ?

#2 ?

#3. ?

#4. ?

#5. ?

#6. ?

#7. ?

#8. Elton "Little David" Williams - Flint, Michigan

#9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan

#10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

-----  
#11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

August 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
12-th Selection

#9 -George "Lil George" Ramsey

Mr. Ramsey, prolific writer, artful orator, and Pool Checkers player extraordinary, perhaps more than any other player, changed the way that the game of Pool Checkers was played in this country. Author of several books, and numerous articles and commentaries, Mr. Ramsey, with his Book *The Amazing World of American Pool Checkers*, raised the level of play of more than a few of our current top players. They won't tell you; I just did! Some of his other writings (*American Pool Checkers*, one of the world's most fascinating games), (*Championship, American Pool Checkers*) were equally received by the community of players.

Like Phil Mickleson, of golf (until recently, the greatest player to never have won a major), Mr. Ramsey was possibly the greatest Pool Checkers player to never win an APCA title. In my opinion, he came closest in New York in 1973 when he finished in fourth place (only 4 points behind the eventual winner, Carl Smith). Kibitzers will tell you that a bad decision on his part (That story is for another time and another place) caused him to miss out on that most elusive championship). It was believed that a controversial decision by him to give a weaker player two draws because of time constraints and other factors was his undoing.

It was agreed by many, that for a brief period, he could have been considered the finest player in the land after his 20 game victory over Freddy Owens of Baltimore, Maryland in the late seventies or early eighties. But his fine play notwithstanding, Mr. Ramsey's finest contribution to the games was his writings and his demos. Like The Apostle Paul of the Holy Bible, Mr. Ramsey wrote incessantly. While others were playing the game, he related to me once, he was writing for future generations. That he did.

After he had written several books and articles, he would find that others would study his games and come back to defeat or give him trouble in them, he often said. He once related to me that after his loss to Charles Mc Duffie of St. Louis, Missouri, "The 'ham' was beating me in my own game." "And only after I went back to my Book, did I discover what he was beating me in."

His problem was, he once said, he might have given out too much to have received so little. I suspect he was talking about monetary compensation for his efforts. And that might have been the case. He once lamented to me that he didn't understand why "Buster" didn't write something? I recall saying to him, "George, "Buster" is a player, not a writer." That seemed to have ended that conversation. Because of his propensity to share his knowledge, he often times tried to emulate some of the top chess grandmasters. He would go to different cities to demonstrate (simuls) or give lectures. Of course, while he was engaged in these activities, others were playing the game and winning.

For the record, during his eleven years of competing in APCA Tournaments, his modest record of, one- 2nd, one-3rd, three-5ths, two-4ths, one-7th, one- 8th, and two-9th place finishes do not really begin to tell the whole story of this extraordinary player's playing ability. Often times, he was at odds with officials and others about variety of subjects; it was the cause, I think, of him not playing in more tournaments during his twenty to twenty-five years of prime playing career.

My last collaboration with Mr. Ramsey was, I think, at the 1985 tournament in Akron, Ohio. That



GEORGE "LITTLE GEO." RAMSEY  
Detroit, Michigan  
THE ANNOTATOR

was to be the site where we would launch our Top Masters Top Ten (Professional Players Tournament). Later it was amended to the Top 16. While well-funded (over \$3000.00 for prizes), it never happened. The most important reason, but not the only one, was player fatigue after the regular tournament.

The objective and purpose of the tournament was outlined by myself and Mr. Ramsey in the 1983 APCA Tournament Yearbook in Chicago. I thought he wrote eloquently about the need for such a venture in that article. After that time we drifted apart.

And so, for the #9 spot, I will select- George Ramsey.

## The Elite Ten

#1 ?

#2 ?

#3. ?

#4. ?

#5. ?

#6. ?

#7. ?

#8. ?

#9. George "Lil George" Ramsey - Detroit, Michigan

#10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

-----  
#11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers - Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

August 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)

### The Elite Ten

The next 10 players selected will be dubbed the Elite Ten; for they represent as fine a group of American Pool Checkers players as could be found anywhere. So for the 10th spot, I will select

#### #10 - Freddie "The Hawk" Owens

Mr. Owens, of whom I have talked about earlier, was considered to be the finest Pool Checkers player in America at one time. His two legendary matches with Carl "Buster" Smith, (which he won) and George "Lil George" Ramsey, (which he lost) are still talked about-even today-some 25 years later. Additionally, his four consecutive years of finishing second in APCA tournaments with almost perfect records were feats to behold.



But, in the ensuing years, time has not been kind to Mr. Owens. His prolonged absence from tournament play and professional matches have dimmed the memories of many who knew him in the early years. Additionally, the emergence of new and more skilled players who are studying the latest computer programs in addition to books, the advent of the Russian Grandmasters, the Internet, and even the improvement of older players, along with other factors have had the effect of pushing him further back in the 'pecking order.'

Perhaps, we will never know just how good Mr. Owens could have been because he withdrew, seemingly in his prime. With this extended absence from competitive play, (I can only find reference to his last year of APCA play in 1980, his stock has fallen somewhat. But, still the fine play he exhibited when he was playing competitively has earned him an honored niche in my selections.

As a player, I knew him to be very deliberate, very cautious, and very precise in his play. There were never any attempts at shots or exciting play. If you played the 'draw,' he would never try to force it and would readily accept it when you called for it-if it was there. But one had to be prepared to play the perfect game if he was to get that draw.

And so, for the player whose potential we might never know, I am selecting as number 10 Mr. Freddie Owens

### The Elite Ten

- #1 ?
- #2 ?
- #3. ?
- #4. ?
- #5. ?
- #6. ?
- #7. ?
- #8. ?
- #9. ?
- #10. Freddie "The Hawk" Owens - Baltimore, Maryland

- 
- #11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas
  - #12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

- #13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York
- #14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois
- #15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland
- #16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia
- #17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri
- #18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York
- #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

July 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)

A Moment of Reflection:

After 12 months of offering my selections of the 20 Greatest Pool Checkers Players of All-Times and the Chicago News on Pool Checkers, I want to, at this time, take this opportunity to pause and make some well-needed comments. When I started these projects, the idea was to use the e-mail route to communicate with my APCA friends around the country. Consequently, a limited number of people, perhaps less than a hundred, would be reading about the activities in American Pool Checkers here in the United States.

But, with the advent of the website <http://www.checkersusa.com/>, all of that has changed. Now, millions around the world, has access to the same information. For that, I think, we in the America Pool Checkers community, owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Jake Kacher, of Burbank, California for making this possible. With his efforts in establishing his site, the game, our game, is recognized in places unimaginable before.

I first met Mr. Kacher in a year that I have forgotten. On his first arrival in this country (He's from Russia), he lived in Chicago for a brief period prior to moving on to California. On that brief stay, I had the occasion to play him, at our Club, and found out early that he was no stranger to the 64 Square Board.

Mr. Kacher, as many of us already know, is one of the very best 100 Square Board players in this country. He has won the championship two times. Additionally, he is no slouch on the 64 Square Board either. I know of at least one occasion where he finished as high as 6th place in the APCA tournament. This is true even though he rarely plays in that Tournament, When we consider the time he takes away from the game he obviously loves, because of his Site, it's amazing that he continues to compete at the level he does. He finished in a tie for third place in the most recent AICS Tournament held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2004. That, I find, is phenomenal.

Having said that, I will take this opportunity to say THANKS JAKE!

Prior to your efforts, our game was mired in relative obscurity. Now it is known and respected World-Wide. By all means continue the great work! And to my readers and friends, I am hopeful you will take a few minutes to e-mail Mr. Kacher to express your appreciation as well.

Thanks,

'Pecan'

PS Again, I will be away for the APCA Tournament in Memphis, TN. on 7/11/04 -7/16/04. I can be reached there on my lap top if need be.

My 20 Greatest Issues will resume on August 1, 2004

July 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-10th Selection-

#11 - Andrew Frazier

Mr. Frazier, is the only player in my selections that I have not met or played. Consequently, my analysis will be on his record and some of the comments that have been made to me over the years. When he entered the APCA fray, I was in the process of taking a hiatus for about ten years. I had left the APCA scene, and tournament checkers, for some well-needed personal reflections.

During that time, Mr. Frazier burst upon the APCA scene. And he played with a rarely seen level of perfection. For a number of years running, I am told, he never lost a game. This was true, It was said, even with giants like Iser Kuperman, and Carl "Buster" Smith still playing. One kibitzer even claimed Mr. Frazier went three years running without losing a single game. While this fact could not be confirmed, it could easily have been the case. I have noted, during the years 1991-93 he finished 3rd once and was in a tie for 1st in the other two years. If that was the case, it indeed, was remarkable!

We do know that during the years from 1987 through 1992 he finished (or tied) for 1st place two times, and in addition, there were one, 3rd, two 5ths, and one 6th place finishes in those APCA tournaments. It seems, Mr. Frazier represented the very finest in Pool Checkers perfection. The standard he set, the bar he raised, seems to have been ones that only a select few players could compete with.

And so, for the player who might have come as close to perfection as we have seen in APCA tournaments, I will select the name of-

Mr. Andrew Frazier as my #11 selection.

#1 ?

#...

#10.

#11. Andrew Frazier - Nassau, Bahamas

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

June 15 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-9th Selection-

#12 - William "Bill" Langley

Mr. Langley, nicknamed "The Bullet hole" by the Russian Grandmasters he played in 1969, (according to him), was one of the most spectacular players as there was anywhere. Why the nickname "Bullet hole," one might ask? It had to do with the scoring system in Pool Checkers, (and other board games as well). A loss is recorded with a zero. And since a zero and a bullet hole look similar, we can easily say we put a 'bullet hole' in a player's card when we win a game from him, because he will receive a zero. That description was just for my readers who don't play Pool Checkers. It seems Mr. Langley was giving those Russian Grandmasters a lot of losses.



Mr. Langley's record back here in America was equally as impressive. From 1966, his first APCA tournament, thru 1994, (28 years), he had 21 top Ten finishes, with two-thirds being in the top five. From his 1969 championship win through 1978, he finished in the top five every year (ten years in succession).

Mr. Langley had many outside matches of which there are too many to talk about here. But what is notable, while he lost often to Carl "Buster" Smith, he had a standoff with one of the best players in America-Freddie Owens in the 80s or 90s.

His penchant for shots produced some of the most fantastic games the APCA tournaments and private matches have produced down through the years. While his shots were ever present, he almost always kept the draw in sight.

I had the occasions to play Mr. Langley many times. I have had a number of losses to him which included some of his most spectacular shots. But, in his later years, his game had deteriorated a great deal; in his last visit to Chicago with his friend Mr. Rudy Poe, he was mugged (5 straight losses) by me. We agreed, he was not at the 'Top of his Game,' and it wasn't what it had once been. His record, would speak for itself.

And so, at the #12 spot, I will place the name of William "Bill" Langley.

#1 ?

#...

#11.

#12. William "Bill" Langley - Detroit, Michigan

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard - Bronx, New York

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

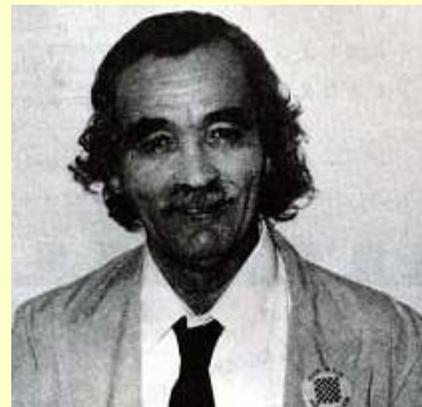
June 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-8th Selection-

#13 - Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard

Mr. Howard, of Bronx, New York, was perhaps the most flamboyant, and exciting Pool Checkers player of them all. At practically all the APCA tournaments he participated in, he would be heard making his signature shriek, "The shot gun is gonna go off." Players throughout the tournament room would stop to take notice.

That was his shout when he got Victor Krafft in that losing position in their sudden-death 20 game playoff match, in Chicago in 1971. With a Chicago Sun Times reporter standing by and watching, Mr. Howard made that declaration in the late evening of that 1971 match. "The shot gun has got him," he shouted. And all who was watching crowded a little closer to watch. And sure enough, Mr. Krafft would lose that game. "The shot gun has got him," was his way of saying. "I have a winning position, and I will win it." There was various ways he would say it, such as- "The shot gun is going off", or "The shot gun done gone off," or even, or "The shotgun got him",-translated ["I am getting ready to win," or "I have the winning position," or "I will absolutely win it.") Whatever the translation, we all knew that Mr. Howard had something special, and often times we would put our own games on hold to go over and see what kind of game he had.



No one was happier than Mr. Howard when Mr. Rubin and I presented him with that playoff trophy after his dramatic win. For years to come, he would oftentimes show up at the annual APCA National Tournament with that trophy and his checker board. His two statements were always the same, "I am the Champion of the World," and "The Shot gun is going to go off." He once related to me that on his plane ride back to New York, after his win, the passengers, and even the pilot, asked him about his trophy that he was proudly showing off. "Pecan," he would say, "I let them know that I was the "Champion of the World."

We must remember, at the APCA tournaments, his kind of pronouncements was allowed-unlike the silence that is demanded at a Chess tournament. In fact, many players, used the talking tool to pump themselves up, as well as to, hopefully, intimidate their opponents. It was, and is, about the fun.

Mr. Howard's record in APCA Tournaments was one to be envied. From 1969 through 1985, a total of 17 years, he had 15 Top Ten finishes. Out of that 15, he was in the top five more that half the time. That, we have to agree, was amazing.

I had the occasion to play Ollie, in the tournaments, many time; with the possible exception of that one win I had over him in Winston Salem in 1979, I don't recall any other. And as fate would have it, I was the object of one of his "shot gun" shrieks the very next year. I paid for my previous sin.

And so, at the #13 spot, I will place the name of Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard

#1 ?

#...

#12.

#13. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

May 15, 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-7th Selection-

#14 - Victor "Vic" Krafft

Mr. Krafft, of Chicago, Illinois was a player with whom I got to see really up-close. We played many times, and had many battles over the years-with him winning most of them. It was always about bragging rights (the #2 spot in the city). Nobody contested "Buster's" #1 spot.



For several years, notably the years around 1975, when we had the APCA National Tournament in Chicago, he was the president of the Chicago Club and I was the business manager. From that position, I assumed the directorship of the tournament for that year. Additionally, I was also the 2nd Vice President of the APCA-perhaps too many hats.

But, Mr. Krafft we would find, didn't have much stomach for being an official; he was a player. And so after a few years he resigned the presidency and devoted his time to playing exclusively. Playing "Buster" on a weekly basis, for years would only help his game' we would find. In fact, our former Club president, Carl Prince, used to like to say, "Vic" learned his checkers studying and playing at the 'knee' of "Buster." Since Mr. Krafft claimed he had never studied a book on Pool Checkers, Mr. Prince's claim might have had some validity.

His record will show how well he learned. From the years of 1969 thru the year of 1987, a total of 19, he finished in the Top Ten, 13 times. Taking into account, the fact that he didn't play in the tournament, for several years due to illness made it quite remarkable.

Also, we cannot forget the fact that he finished as CO-champions with Mr. Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard in Flint, Michigan in 1971. I attended that tournament, my first-as an observer, and was tremendously impressed with Mr. Krafft's quality of play. As most veteran APCA players know, Mr. Krafft would eventually lose his share of the CO-championship in a 14 game playoff with Mr. Howard. That match was arranged in Chicago by myself and the late Mr. Louis Rubin, of Cleveland, Ohio, who was at the time the Public Relations Director for the Organization. Even then, the match was forced into sudden-death as they were tied 3-3 at the end of regulation. We had to leave the local YMCA where the match was being played and go to our Clubhouse because the match carried over past the Y's closing time.

As a result of a News Release we sent out, The Chicago Sun Times, the second largest newspaper in the city, sent out a reporter who ran a picture of the two players-Mr. Krafft and Mr. Howard (and gave the results of the outcome) on it's front page. (I have been unable to retrieve that picture, but I am still trying.)

I, myself, was so ambitious that I challenged Mr. Krafft to a match sometimes in the late eighties or early nineties. Again it was for 'bragging rights' (2nd place). I lost that 14 game match to Mr. Krafft, 3-2. But what was more important, and would become abundantly clear to me in later years, was, it was not Mr. Krafft that I should have had my eyes on; I should have been focusing on an up-and-coming young player from East St. Louis, Missouri who had recently moved into the city. Al "Action Man" Lambert was making some noise from the rear, and I hadn't even noticed (more about that later).

And so, at the 14th spot, I will place the name Victor "Vic" Krafft.

#1 ?

#...

#13.?

#14. Victor "Vic" Krafft - Chicago, Illinois

#15. Charlie Brown - Baltimore, Maryland

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

May 1 , 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-6th Selection-

#15 - Charlie Brown

Mr. Brown of Baltimore, Maryland, was first noticed here in 1972 at the APCA Tournament in Detroit, Michigan - my first. In that tournament, he finished in a 7th place tie with Victor Krafft. The field was, I believe, among the finest ever assembled at an APCA event. From that field, you will find many of my All-time Greatest. Yet, Mr. Brown was able to distinguish himself in such an august group.

Since it was my first APCA Tournament, I was awed by the field and was perhaps intimidated by many of its players. While I don't recall our head-to-head encounter, I suspect I might have lost at least one game. I finished out of the loop-14th in a field of 28.

Again in 1975, my research has revealed to me that Mr. Brown finished 4th in a field that might have been equally as impressive as the 1972 group. The 1975 tournament was a Chicago tournament, of which I was the director; again, I had an up-close look at Mr. Brown's game both as an official and as a player. From both vantage points, it was impressive.

And finally, Mr. Brown, who I think is called "The Great" out East, might have put on his finest performance in 2002 in Washington D.C. where he finished in a three-way tie for first place. But the story that is not told is what he might have accomplished had there not been an absence from the APCA scene for what seems to me about 20 years. From 1980 until 2000, I couldn't find any documentation of his playing in the annual event.

And so his title, "The Great," is now most appropriate as I place him at the #15 spot of my All-time Greatest.

#1 ?

#2. ?

#... ?

#14.?

#15. Charlie Brown "The Great" - Baltimore, Maryland

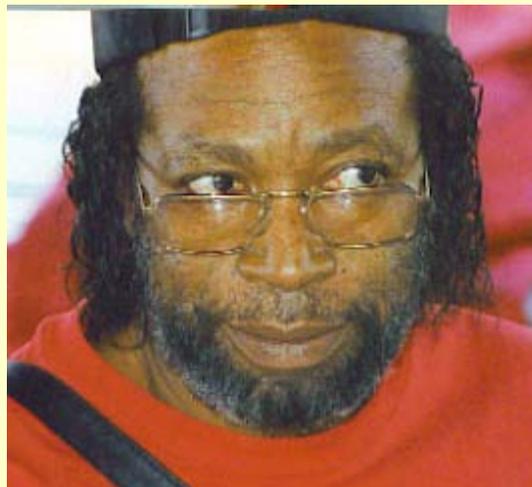
#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York



April 15, 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-5th Selection-

#16 - Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot

Mr. Lightfoot of Macon, Georgia, was probably the most exciting, and fast moving player of all the APCA Top Masters. His style of talking and keeping up a constant chatter with his opponent, while not being distractive, made him a favorite of the, meddlesome onlookers' (kibitzers).

In his five appearances in APCA tournaments-from 1968 - 1974, he finished 4th once, 5th once, and 6th three times. His marathon exhibition with "Buster" at the pre-APCA Tournament, in 1972, earned him undying respect from those of us who watched. We knew that "Buster" was trying desperately to win a game from him as Mr. Lightfoot kept up a constant, and witty chatter while seemingly drawing "Buster" with ease. There could have been perhaps, ten to fifteen draws before he ran into the "Shot." I happened to suspect that was the reason for "Buster's" rare show of emotions when he threw the "shot" and LEFT THE ROOM.

In my personal matches with Mr. Lightfoot, there was always a sense of caution that one had to take, or otherwise it would be over in a hurry. While I don't recall what our head-to-head score was when we played, I am positive I didn't win anything from him or I surely would have remembered it. His brief but fantastic career at the top level surely earned him the right to be honored as one of the greatest.

And so, at the number 16 spot, I will place the name of Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot.

#1 ?

#2. ?

#... ?

#15.?

#16. Moses "Headchopper" Lightfoot - Macon, Georgia

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

April 1, 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-4th Selection-

#17- Charles McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie, is one of my surprise picks. While his APCA record, that I have researched, shows only two appearances in the tournament-1981 winning the Masters, and 1982 finishing 6th in the Top Masters; he was tough.

A friend of mine, Clarence "Dude" Dew, and I used to make frequent trips to St. Louis, Missouri, to battle Mr. McDuffie, and another very good APCA Top Master, George Cobbs. And battle we did -- with the matches seesawing back-and-forth on many occasions. But in our final visit, I was 'mugged' (5 successive losses) by Mr. McDuffie. I haven't returned to St. Louis since-at least to play Mr. McDuffie.

What is even more impressive about Mr. McDuffie's game, is the fact that he defeated our own 2nd ranked player, Mr. Victor "Vic" Krafft, the 1971 APCA CO-champion, in a marathon match. (Mr. Krafft would eventually lose to Ollie "Shot Gun" Howard in a 14 games-playoff match in Chicago for the APCA title of 1971). Some swore that, at one point, "Little Charles" beat "Vic" eight straight games. But Victor said it was not so. However, "Vic" did admit that the 'straights' were substantial. Additionally, my good friend, Eugene "Hamp" Hampton of Indianapolis, Indiana-a Master in his own right, and a close friend of George Ramsey, told me that he personally drove "Little George" from Indianapolis to St. Louis to play Mr. McDuffie. According to Mr. Hampton, "Little George" was embarrassed after losing to Mr. McDuffie in some all night sessions.



While Mr. McDuffie's APCA tournament appearances were limited, his outside matches, and his ultimate defeat of some of the American Pool Checkers' highest rated players, along with my personal observation of his game, would merit my selecting him on my 20 All Time Greatest list.

And so the name of Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie will be placed at #17.

#1 ?

#2. ?

#... ?

#16.?

#17. Charles "Little Charles" McDuffie - St. Louis, Missouri

#18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York

#19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

March 15, 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-3rd Selection-

# 18 - Tony Rivers of Bronx, New York.

While very little, from here, is known about Mr. Rivers, his APCA record, that I have studied, and the games I have played against him would indicate, to me, that he has a rightful place in this select group.

He was, perhaps, the only player to beat "Buster" in two successive years, at the APCA tournament, if I recall correctly. (That's how we measured good players in those days.) That, in itself, would almost be enough to be selected. But, there were more to Mr. River's accomplishments. From my studies, he has finished in the Top Ten in every APCA Tournament he has played in. His highest finish was 2nd, in 1983 in Chicago.

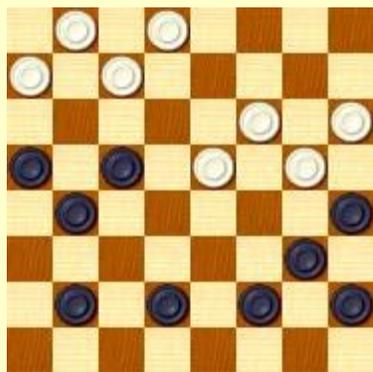
There has been several cases where Mr. Rivers has played in Chicago; he once defeated our own 3rd ranked player, Milton "Madcap" Miskel in a match. Additionally, in later years, Mr. Rivers defeated our number one ranked player, Al "Action Man" Lambert in a match that was arranged by our super matchmaker Mr. Fred D. Shurn. I think the score was 3-0.

I have had the occasion to play Mr. Rivers in several APCA Tournaments. While I don't know the overall outcome of those encounters, I can recall losing to him once. His game was always a challenge, and I found myself almost always on the defensive and looking for the draw 'save.'

For the record, during a 10 year period, from 1973 to 1983, in APCA tournaments, Mr. Rivers finished in the Top Ten six times. But for all of his accomplishments, what I most remember about Mr. Rivers was the shot (given below) he is reported to have thrown on Mr. Fletcher Samuels in the APCA tournament, in a year, I don't recall.

From My database- Mr. Samuels was playing Black, and Mr. Rivers was playing White.

1) 11-16 22-17; 2) 9-13 17-14; 3) 10x17 21x14; 4) 16-20 25-22; 5) 8-11 24-19;  
6) 11-16 29-25; 7) 4-8 25-21; 8) 6-9 23-18; 9) 16x23 26x19; 10) 7-10 14x7; 11) 3x10 19-15; 12) 10x19 21-17; 13) 2-7 30-25; 14) 1-6 25-21; 15) 12-16??.



THE SHOT, 27-23; 16) 19X26 18-14; 17) 9X25 21X23; 18) 13X22 31-26; 19) 22X31 32-27; 20) 31X24 28X1;

And, as Vladimir Kaplan would say, "There is no escape."

And so, at #18, I will place the name of Mr. Rivers.

- #1 ?
- #2. ?
- #... ?
- #17.?
- #18. Tony Rivers- Bronx, New York
- #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

March 1, 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-2nd Selection-

#19 - George Robinson

Mr. Robinson, of Toledo, Ohio is my pick for the 19th spot. In the years from 1988 - 1997, Mr. Robinson finished in the Top Ten at the APCA Tournaments 10 consecutive years. He, perhaps, finished in that select group more than any other player with the possible exception of Carl "Buster" Smith. All total he had 17 Top Ten finishes from 1971 through 1997.



While Mr. Robinson's performance in APCA Tournaments are impressive, some of his outside personal matches would also bring a measure of awe. As I recall, he had two memorable matches with three-times APCA champion, Elton Williams of Flint, Michigan. And there were splits in these two hard-fought matches.

I have had the opportunity to play Mr. Robinson on many occasions and I have always found his game to be very thought-provoking and interesting. What I found most striking was that never can I recall us playing the same game twice. Each time I would play him he had a new or different opening or reply. You must always be alert, least there would be a loss placed on your score card.

Additionally, just as impressive to me was the story told to me by the "Great" Gilliam of Chicago. Who, you might ask, is the "Great" Gilliam of Chicago? My answer to that would be - long before there was a "Buster," there was the "Great" Gilliam. In fact, old timers, even today, have sworn that at one time Mr. Gilliam was a better player than "Buster," and is, they claim, "the only Chicago area player to beat him in match. Only after "Buster" started reading those 'Russian Books' did he get better than Mr. Gilliam." -was the charge.

Mr. Gilliam told me about one of their trips to Toledo, Ohio, perhaps in the 60s to play Mr. Robinson and some of the other Toledo players. According to Mr. Gilliams, George Robinson was 'killing' (beating him badly), one of our top players - we called him "Professor" Junior. "I had to 'rescue' "Professor" from the clutches of George Robinson," recalled Mr. Gilliam. But when I talked to Mr. Robinson about the encounters, he recalled he had beaten both of them. Consequently, we will have to call the encounter between the two a standoff, since both camps are claiming victory. The point is made; Mr. Robinson has been a top Pool Checker Player for a very long time.

And, from this camp, I am placing the name of George Robinson on my selection tree at #19.

- #1 ?
- #2. ?
- #... ?
- #18.?
- #19. George Robinson - Toledo, Ohio
- #20. Clyde "King Row" Black - New York, New York

February 15, 2004

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
-1st Selection-

#20 - Clyde "King Row" Black

Mr. Black, of New York City, New York was the premier Pool Checker Player in America in the 50s, 60s, and even the 70s from what I have read of his history. He was the player I consider the forerunner and the bedrock of the American Game as we play it today.

His two Books, Secrets of Spanish Pool Checkers (#1 & 2) are the ones that turned American Pool Checkers playing into an art form. They were certainly the vehicles in which I used to raise my game to the next level.

Some of his ideas, (Joe Louis leading wit his left and using his right for the knockout punch; strong-side/weak-side theories) are just as relevant today as they were over 50 years ago when he wrote them.

By the time Mr. Black arrived on the scene to compete in the APCA Tournaments, it was obvious, he was way past his prime. Nevertheless, he finished 9th on the two occasions he did play (1978-79).

I had the occasion to compete against Mr. Black in both of those tournaments and found his game to be as tough and tenacious as any of the next nine players I will select.

Consequently, he could have easily been selected much higher were it not for his limited number of appearance in APCA Tournaments. And, perhaps, he was born 25 years too soon. The game and its players simply had moved to a higher level.

Consequently, on my selection tree, Mr. Black's name will be placed at #20.

#1 ?

#2. ?

# ... ?

#19.?

#20. Clyde "King Row" Black



Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)

January 1, 2005

During my ten months of Selections, there were many recommendations offered. There were players that I had never heard of; there were players who has long since passed on; and there were players who now reside in the U.S. who are now current Pool Checkers players but were not included. It was, probably, because of a lack of documentation of their exploits.

We realize that there are still a significant number of players-past and present, who was not included -- for a variety of reasons. Consequently, I am using this opportunity for those who made recommendations, to send some comments about the achievements of those they recommended or want to recommend. On this list, I will develop my Honorable Mention List.

In the coming issues, I will enumerate on those you suggested, and hopefully include them. I will start the process with a few recommendations of my own.

Igor Rybakov of, Minnetonka, Minnesota

Perhaps the best player recommended was the 2004, 100 Sq. Board Champion, Mr. Igor Rybakov. Because he does not have an APCA history, I had insufficient evidence with which to make a determination.

Perhaps, one measurement that could be used, would have been his performance at the International Checkers Festival in South Bend, Indiana the year of 2002. But, that alone, simply wasn't enough. For the record, he won both the 100 Sq. Board and the 64 Sq. Board Championships. Included in that tournament was Mr. George Robinson, of Toledo Ohio, Mr. Clorius Lay, of Gary Indiana, Mr. Orlando Williams, and myself of Chicago, Illinois (They are a group of well known APCA Top Masters). To excel, as he did, in that environment speaks volumes about his game.

It would very interesting to see him compete in our Chicago Open (April 15 and 16 of this year), or how he would compete against some of our premier players!

Maynard "Hamtramck" Pines, of Hamtramck, Michigan

Mr. Pines was my suggestion. And it was based on the many comments made by "Buster," himself. He often said, in our many conversations, "In the early years, "Hamtramck" was one of the toughest player I faced." While I never saw him compete, it was because he was so adamant about it, I am compelled to include him here.

George Sykes, of Detroit, Michigan - He was the first APCA Champion (1966) and one of the few players who could dominate Elton Williams in the early and mid seventies. In their many battles, in which he won most, (and I was privy to watch), they produced some really memorable games.

And so, on this List, I will place the names of the following...

MY 20 GREATEST -

MY HONORABLE MENTION LIST

- \* Igor Rybakov - Minneapolis, Minnesota
- \* Maynard "Hamtramck" Pines - Hamtramck, Michigan
- \* George Sykes - Detroit, Michigan

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)  
([Honorable Mention List](#))

January 15, 2005

After my initial three selections, I will offer an additional two that are perhaps worthy of recognition. They are:

[The Great Gilliam](#), (We never knew his full name) of Chicago, Illinois. In the late sixties, when I became really interested in the game of American Pool Checkers, much of the talk around the city, in the Pool Checkers world, was about Mr. Gilliam. Many say he was the original great player in the city. Long before Major McGill, who was the champion previous to "Buster," Mr. Gilliam 'ran the show.'

Never mind that he never appeared in any championship tournaments; never mind that there are no official records that document his exploits, those who knew him well, and I was one, recognized his talents when they saw the game being played at a level that was way beyond what they could comprehend.

I am personally making this recommendation because I can truthfully say: "I learned more from Mr. Gilliam than I did from any other player. " There were innumerable times that I would play him simply because I knew he was the best, and my opportunity to learn was infinite.

It didn't matter that we were playing for small stakes, (ten cent a game-king row I win). I lost a many dimes trying to get that king. But eventually, I would see some light, and the odds would be dropped to (draw, I win), and eventually to (5-1). Finally, the odds would disappear altogether. I then knew, I was making progress.

But only after I had recorded and studied, perhaps hundreds of our games, was I able to narrow this gap. For me, more importantly, the 'die had been cast' and, I thought, 'A monster had been created.' Only later, would I learn that it was not to be the case.

[Bobby Kennedy](#), of New York, New York, The suggestion of Mr. Kennedy came from [LenaSugar33@aol.com](mailto:LenaSugar33@aol.com). While I do not know Lenasugar33, (nor do I know Mr. Kennedy), I was struck by his passionate selection of Mr. Kennedy. It was convincing enough for me, to at least, give him some consideration here.

As is the case with practically all of my Honorable Mention selections, there are no official recordings of their exploits-that I am aware of. Consequently, one has to depend, to a large extent, on what is being said by the advocate. According to LenaSugar33, Mr. Kennedy was New York's finest. Additionally, he says that Mr. Kennedy was a better player than Tony Rivers, our #18 selection. Furthermore, he also says he had twelve straight draw games with grandmaster Vladimir Kaplan. If that's true, it's enough evidence in itself to give Mr. Kennedy this richly deserved recognition.

One final note on Mr. Kennedy. I had noticed in Mr. Kaplan's book, Tournament Checkers, Mr. Kennedy's name and the games they played each other were mentioned, no less than six times. If the grand master thought that much of him, then there is little else that can be added. I can categorically say, after viewing the games he played with Mr. Kaplan (all quality games even the ones he lost), gave me cause to believe that his talents were enormous.

MY HONORABLE MENTION LIST

Igor Rybakov - Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Maynard "Hamtramck" Pines - Hamtramck, Michigan  
George Sykes - Detroit, Michigan  
The Great Gilliam - Chicago, Illinois  
Bobby Kennedy - New York, New York

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)

(Honorable Mention List)

February 1 , 2005

As my final list of great players are being brought to a close, I will offer these comments. I have notice that several names that could have easily been recognized, but for one reason or another, were not included in my final assessment. To those players, I would like to offer this final thought. My list included only those that I knew, had played, or who had been recommended by others, or who had documented records that I could rely on.

Keep in mind, in my research, I relied heavily on the Pool Checker Masters Encyclopedia provided by Mr. Myrick Frazier of Detroit, Michigan. I must offer Mr. Frazier praise for his great literary work. I have found none other in our Pool Checkers community who has written so extensively. If there is ever to be a Pool Checkers Hall of Fame for literary work, he would surely be a charter member.

In addition to this reference, I drew from my personal experience of playing these players over a period of perhaps thirty-five years. And finally, I consulted with you, the players, for your recommendations. With all of that help, I will prepare to close out my selections with some final players. They are:

Alexander Katz - New York, New York.

I did not have the privilege to play Mr. Katz, since I was not present at the Tournament where he tied for first place in Washington D.C. in 2002. But to have a first place finish in the, one and only APCA Tournament he appeared in, certainly says something about his playing ability.

Unfortunately, that one appearance, and no further recommendations-and with the additional fact that I could not observe his play, perhaps was a cause for his not being selected higher.

Al Lambert - Chicago, Illinois

Mr. Lambert was recommended by my good friend, Washington D.C. Club president (and APCA vice president), Mr. Tal Roberts.

A home grown player, Mr. Lambert developed his game over time. After winning the APCA Masters division some times in the late eighties, he immediately became a top player in the Top Masters division. During my research, I found that he had finished in the APCA Top Ten at least ten times since 1989. What is remarkable is that he averaged perhaps a 5th place finish in those top ten finishes, over that 15 year span. That fact in itself will get him his due recognition here.

A recent setback against a certain player in North Carolina whose initials are (A.H.), will have to be rectified to give this selection more credence. But, as some of my friends have noticed, even Muhammad Ali and Joe Louis had their detractors -(Ken Norton and Billy Conn). We are confident that Mr. Lambert will take care of that little unfinished business sometime in the coming years.

MY HONORABLE MENTIONED LIST

Igor Rybakov - Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Maynard "Hamtramck" Pines - Hamtramck, Michigan  
George Sykes - Detroit, Michigan  
The Great Gilliam - Chicago, Illinois  
Bobby Kennedy - New York, New York  
Alexander Katz - New York, New York  
Al Lambert - Chicago, Illinois

Pecan's -  
20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players  
Of All Times  
(Written by Charles 'Pecan' Thompson)

Honorable Mention List

February 15 , 2005

And finally, we have it-The 20 Greatest American Pool Checkers Players of All Times. Additionally, we have Six Honorable Mentioned Players. With bittersweet memories, I will close out my commentaries on this journey that I gamely embarked on way back on February 15, 2004

In my final assessment, I would like to recognize those who worked tirelessly to help this process along. In this recognition, I would, at this time acknowledge some of the people who were so instrumental in helping to promote this process, and the game of American Pool Checkers.

While this list does not attempt to include all of those, out there, who have made contributions, (space here, does not allow for that), it was an effort, on my part, to mention a few of those who readily comes to mind.

First, our hats are off to:

Mr. Jake Kacher, of Burbank, California. We really don't know how good a player Mr. Kacher is, at the game of American Pool Checkers. What we do know is that he had a limited number of appearances at the APCA Tournaments and in, at least one of them, he finished as high as sixth place. Additionally, we also know that he has won two AISC (100 Sq. Board) championships. That says much about his game.

More importantly though, I think is perhaps, his greatest contribution might have been his creation of the web site [checkersusa.com](http://checkersusa.com). Many of us have obtained priceless knowledge about the Game and about ourselves in viewing and utilizing his masterpiece.

For that. We say thanks, Jake.

Another pioneer for the Game is Mr. Mryick Frizzer, of Detroit, Michigan. Long before many, if not most, of us were even concerned with game notation, Mr. Frazier was traveling the country, to tournaments, to record games (often times with a tape recorder) that are now being offered for posterity. The family of American Pool Checkers Players has a lot to be thankful for. And this is because Mr. Frazier was there.

It was Mr. Frazier's Encyclopedia of Pool Checkers that I drew much of my data from, as I was compiled my 20 Greatest series.

And, to you, Mr. Frazier, we, again say thanks.

There is also Mr. Clarence Gooche, of Durham, North Carolina. As president of the Internet Club of [checkersusa.com](http://checkersusa.com) , Mr. Gooche has been very diligent while working on the Internet-be it with VogClub.com on Pool Checkers, or in some other capacity on the Internet in trying to help players understand the intricate workings of Internet posting and surfing.

Your efforts has been recognized, Mr. Gooche. Thanks, and continue the good work.

Also, I would like to cite several other fine gentlemen for their contribution to the Game of American Pool Checkers. They are:

Dr. Ervin Smith, of Gahanna, Ohio. Dr. Smith, who has been the APCA president for the last 15+ years, I think, has given much to the Game, as he has presided, by far, over more APCA tournaments than any other APCA president. His ongoing effort to help promote the Game is to be applauded.

Mr. Othel Totten, of Memphis, Tennessee, the president of the Memphis Club along with his Vice President, Mr. Otha Bibbs, have in the last ten years, I think, promoted more tournaments and private Pool Checkers matches than perhaps all of the other clubs combined, are also to be acknowledged.

Mr. Tal Roberts, president of the Washington D.C. club, and 1st vice president of the APCA.has, over the years, shown much enthusiasm for the Game by helping to promote it at every opportunity, in his area on the East Coast.

And finally, I will offer myself, to this list - [Mr. Charles Thompson](#), of Carol Stream, Illinois. I will say I am due a small bit of congrats for completing this series. It has been a joy and a privilege to share my research and my memories with so many of you.

I must say there has been a surprisingly small amount controversy about my Selections. I don't know if there is general agreement or if I was so far off base that it didn't merit your comments Whatever the case, I am appreciative for your audience.

At any rate, I can now say, "It's OK Chas., the effort is complete, and has been brought to a final conclusion."

Thanks again, for your interest. "Pecan"







**GEORGE "LITTLE GEO." RAMSEY**  
Detroit, Michigan  
**THE ANNOTATOR**