

# A PERFECT ENDING

By Mason King

How else do you cap the biggest, richest event in history but with a hill-hill final for \$350,000? And who else would win it but **THORSTEN HOHMANN**, who has made perfect pool his lifelong mission.





**T**HORSTEN HOHMANN slumped in his chair in a posh Las Vegas restaurant, his eyes tired and dull, looking like his pet Chihuahua, named “8-ball,” had just died. This was the same Thorsten Hohmann who, four hours earlier, had won the biggest prize in pool history — \$350,000 — in the biggest pool tournament in history. The same Thorsten Hohmann who said this was “the happiest day of my life,” in a sweetly eloquent speech broadcast live to millions throughout Europe, including his home country of Germany. The same Thorsten Hohmann — impressively fit and Teutonically handsome — who could stroll into the adjacent casino, collect a harem of willing honeys, get blotto on free booze, and blow \$30,000 on craps before having some *real* fun. Who would blame him? He deserved it. This was *his moment*.

Yet, there he was, almost deathly silent and barely making eye contact with his three dinner companions in this dim and subdued back room. He was replaying something in the back of his mind, flickering across the insides of his grayish-blue eyes. Something nagging at him.

Great speech when you won, a companion said. Very elegant.

“You thought so?” Hohmann retorted. “Half the things I planned to say, I forgot. I forgot to thank my friends who came all the way from Germany to support me. And I forgot to thank my best friend, who came from Germany but had to leave early. ... Next time ...”

On the one night of his life that 27-year-old Hohmann should have reveled in his success, he was cataloging his errors. Not only that, he expected to correct them the *next time* he trounced 200 of the best pool players in the world.

Saying Thorsten Hohmann has a perfectionist streak is like saying Donald Trump has a healthy sense of self-esteem.

To be fair, Hohmann earned his evident exhaustion. The International Pool Tour’s first event of its premiere season — the North American Open 8-Ball Championship, held July 22-30 at The Venetian Hotel Resort Casino in Las Vegas — ranked as the most demanding event in pool history.

It kicked off with an international field of 200 players and then kicked them to the curb in waves through six stages of round-robin play. It rewarded the competitors who managed to advance with still more grueling, 12-hour days of matches on tight tables and sluggish cloth.

Hohmann topped them all, to no one’s surprise. IPT founder Kevin Trudeau designed the tour’s events to reward players with physical stamina and mental toughness, and no one in this field struck that balance as well as Hohmann.

That was no accident. Hohmann’s level of commitment to his sport rivals that of Tiger Woods. In the weeks before the IPT Open, Hohmann hit the gym every day. He honed his stroke, break and pattern play as many as 10 hours per day, every day. He consulted coaches and sparred with fellow pros.

## NUMBERS GAME

### ■ 7

**Number of seconds Thorsten Hohmann took to shoot the \$350,000 8 ball, from sinking the previous ball.**

What does this guy think he is — a professional athlete?

“He doesn’t drink. He doesn’t smoke. He doesn’t gamble. He doesn’t play golf. He doesn’t chase women; they chase him,” said fellow pro John Schmidt, who stayed with Hohmann at his home base in Jacksonville, Fla., for several weeks recently. “He doesn’t do anything but pool and work out.”

That’s not changing any time soon. That Hohmann now has a life-changing \$350,000 in his bank account (minus taxes, of course) is almost beside the point. Rather, he sees it as a means to further improve his game.

He was put on this Earth to play pool, he says. He could always be better. He could always do more. He will settle for nothing less than perfection.

In doing so, he has become the model for what it will take to succeed on the richest, most rigorous tour in pool history.

**T**HE IPT’S masterminds geared the tour to be the most punishing test of pool-playing ability ever devised. Players at the Open faced stingy pockets with 4.5-inch mouths, cloth as slow and unpredictable as gravel, the knees-buck-



**Hohmann kept his emotions in check playing on the final’s well-lit TV set.**



MASON KING

**Playing 10 to 12 hours a day made the Open feel like an uphill climb for players. Maybe more spectators would help.**

ling \$2 million purse, and a round-robin format that saddled each player with four or five race-to-8 matches per day.

The Open was so imposing that it sharked some players before they poked their first ball.

## NUMBERS GAME

### ■ 14-46

**Combined record of the IPT's 15 female members in first round.**

"I was excited — very, very excited — and I couldn't calm down enough to play," said Chicago's Ike Runnels, who posted a 1-3 record and failed to advance to the second round's field of 120 players. "I was thinking more about winning than executing my skills."

There had never been a billiard event like it. It brought together the tour's 150 members for the 2006 season, most hand-picked by Trudeau from 2,000 applications, and another 50 who had won arduous qualifying tournaments for this single event.

They came from all over the world — the legends, like odds-on favorite Efren Reyes of the Philippines; the up-and-comers, like Hungarian juniors champ Vilmos Foldes; the pool-curious, like U.K. snooker ace Ronnie O'Sullivan;

and the back-room money players, like American Steve Moore, who figured this was a smart time to go legit.

Understandably, some entrants were star-struck.

"I think maybe I lost my focus a little bit because of all the great players there," said Sweden's Helena Thornfeldt, who went 0-4 in the first round. "It was a little bit overwhelming, I think. I knew it during the tournament too, but I couldn't acclimate to it."

Keith Bennett, an alternate from the qualifying tournaments who earned a spot in the Open when Hall-of-Famer Jim Rempe pulled out, shook off his awe and plowed undefeated through the first round. But the 27-year-old house pro from Wilmington, N.C., quickly felt the physical demands of the event and stalled in the second round.

"I'm still feeling it," he said. "Your legs, your feet. You're standing in dress shoes all day long. You have to play 10 to 12 hours a day no matter what. So it takes a toll. If you're not in shape, you're not going to last."

But it wasn't just about being buff. Niels Feijen, a chiseled health-club devotee and world-class pool talent from the Netherlands, lost his vigor and spent his last two matches "in a coma."

"I expected it to be more a health

thing," Feijen said after missing a spot in the final 18. "But it's mental strength. It's mental conditioning. Look at Efren Reyes, who's 51. He plays games all the time. If he isn't playing pool, he's playing chess, or mah-jong, or all those board games."

Hohmann, sitting at the same table as Feijen in the private players' lounge, piped up in his quiet and straightforward fashion: "I was a school chess champion."

The half-dozen players at the table shared a fleeting moment of recognition. Could you be any more perfect, Mr. Perfect?

**IT SEEMED** that Hohmann had been preparing himself for this tournament for most of his 27 years.

Born and raised in the quiet city of Fulda, Germany, Hohmann played chess, soccer, ping-pong and trumpet before discovering pool around age 12. Immediately obsessed with the game, he started spending as many as six hours a day at the local billiard club. He won his first juniors event within five months. He soon had the keys to the club, and all but forgot about soccer, trumpet, and even school.

"For four years, I hardly ever saw daylight," he said.

He joined the German military at 18 and stayed for five years, honing his pool skills as part of its sports support unit. With the government subsidizing his pool habit, he practiced at least eight hours per day.

See a pattern forming?

Within months of leaving the military, 23-year-old Hohmann won the 2003 World Pool Championship, collecting \$65,000. More major titles followed, including the 2005 BCA Open 9-Ball Championship, and, in early June, the World 14.1 Straight-Pool Championship in East Brunswick, N.J.

After collecting his medal on June 4, he spent most of his time enjoying the hospitality of straight-pool fanatic Randy Goldwater, a Manhattan millionaire who put Hohmann up in a midtown apartment with a membership to a swanky gym.

Happily establishing yet another routine, Hohmann split each day between the gym and the Amsterdam Billiard Club. As the Open approached, in order to stay hungry, he curtailed his table time to two-to-four hours per day.

In shape. In stroke. Filled to the gills with gut-check experience. Hohmann was ready to hit the IPT Open and ... almost get knocked out in nearly every round.

It seemed that each stage came down to the last match, a do-or-die race-to-8. And, often, Hohmann trailed early. But, more than once, an opponent would choke and let him back in the contest.

And then there was his ace in the hole. The IPT allowed each player to have a cornerman — a tableside ally to offer advice and a second set of eyes. Hohmann chose his manager, friend and IPT road roommate Charlie Williams, whose cruise through the Open capsized in the third round. Williams would often show up midway through Hohmann's matches, with his pal on the brink of elimination. And then, as if on cue, Hohmann would surge from behind for the win.

What sort of expert advice did Williams provide?

"There was one crucial match, where I come in, and it's 7-5, and Thorsten says, 'I haven't made a ball on the break all match.' And I say, 'Well, break 'em hard. Do it now. Break them *harder*,'" Williams recalled, laughing. "Then he ends up winning the match."

This pattern played out so often that Hohmann figured that his path to the \$350,000 title was fated.

"I think the guy upstairs is on my side," he said. Like he needed more help.

**MARLON** MANALO knew another man upstairs, but he said little about him.

His father, Claro, who first introduced Marlon to pool, had passed away shortly before the IPT Open. Marlon wanted to win the title for his dad and for his home country of the Philippines, but he kept it to himself. As 30-year-old Manalo blazed through the brackets, reporters would ask him about his parents' reaction to his success. He would simply say, in his gently pitched voice, that his mother was happy and praying for him.

Thought by many to be the obvious heir to Reyes' mantle of Best Filipino Player, Manalo needed no divine assistance in the early rounds. With staggering cue-ball control and rack-shattering breaks, he compiled a record of 16-2 through the first four stages, easily earning a spot among the final 18 players.

"I just play my game," said Manalo, whose Zen-like attitude all but forbids post-match analysis. "If you're going to think of the pressure,

**Manalo opened on a tear, posting a 16-2 record in the first stages.**

## Women Fail Their First IPT Exam

### English 8-ball ace Ellerby Sole WPBAer To Reach Third Stage

SARAH ELLERBY finally has her spotlight.

Despite pin-up looks and a formidable stroke, Ellerby has never quite captured the fancy of fans of the WPBA's Classic Tour, unlike fellow U.K. expatriates such as Allison Fisher and Karen Corr. Ellerby turned pro on the 9-ball tour in 2001 but has yet to win a Classic Tour event.

But Ellerby had the distinction of being the only female player in the IPT's North American 8-Ball Open to reach the third round and the final 60 players.

"I've in a way proved a point," Ellerby said. "If I could break better, then I could really make a dent [on the IPT]. And the women are capable enough to come here and do well."

If that's so, they did a poor job of proving it in the IPT's debut event of the 2006 season. Of the 15 women who started the event,

only four made it to the second round — Ellerby, Fisher, Loree Jon Jones and Gerda Hofstatter.

Few outside of the British Isles were aware that Ellerby had collected dozens of 8-ball titles in U.K. and European competition in the 1990s. That experience was the difference.

Ellerby posted a 3-1 record in the first round of round-robin matches. In the next round, she eked by with a 3-2 record, beating Americans Corey Harper, Danny Basavich and Teddy Garrahan.

She then went 1-3 in a tough third-round bracket that included three players who would finish in the top 18.

"I played like crap," she said after her last match. "I would have liked to finish off the tournament at least playing better. To me, it's not about the money. It's about playing your best."

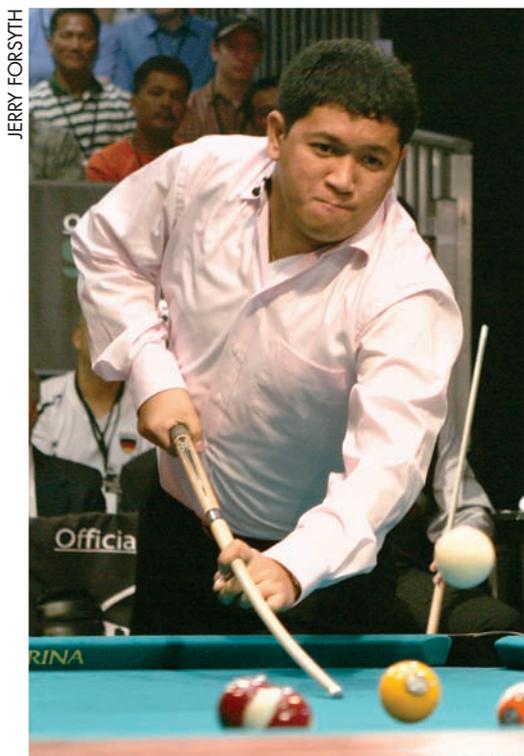
Her last match ended around 9:15 p.m. Wednesday. Arrangements were made for her to hop on an 11:35 p.m. United Airlines flight to Chicago, where she would board a limo bound for Peoria, Ill., and the WPBA Midwest Classic (see story, page 54).

In Peoria, other WPBAers were talking about lessons learned at the Open.

"I need to develop my break," said Monica Webb of the U.S. "Women have never been asked to break from the box. I quickly learned, or mastered that as fast as I could, anyway."

Webb went 0-4 in a tough first-round bracket, but was heartened by her performance in hill-hill matches against Dallas West and Scott Frost of the U.S. and an 8-6 loss to Mexico's Ismael Paez.

"All I need to do is just get a little tougher," Webb said.



# Lessons Learned

Players will be ready for rigors of format at \$3M World Open

SURELY, ALL of the 150 card-carrying IPT members took their participation in the \$8.5 million tour seriously and approached the North American 8-Ball Open with perhaps more conviction than other pro events. Extra hours of practice for certain, and, for some, even a modicum of conditioning in preparation for the grueling schedule.

Still, following the North American 8-Ball Open, most players admitted underestimating the mental and physical demands of the IPT's round-robin marathon. And, armed with firsthand knowledge of the tournament's rigors, all vowed to arrive in Reno, Nev. (site of the \$3 million World 8-Ball Open in September), with battle plans intact.

"I learned more at this one event than I have anywhere," said Shannon Daulton, who finished with a 4-5 record and failed to make it out of the second round. "We can all make balls and run out. The difference here is being mentally prepared. I know one mistake I made was trying to save a few bucks and staying at a different hotel. Can't do that. I spent too much time between matches sitting and waiting. I would have liked to run up to the room for a shower now and then, or just to get out of the tournament room."

"I know from now on I'm going directly to my room after the last match," added Jimmy Wetch, who reached the tournament's third day, finishing with a 6-7 record and tying for 37th place. "Room service and then right to bed."

Evgeny Stalev, the surprise sixth-place finisher from Russia, planned to get out of bed each morning well before the start of matches.

"I lost 80 percent of my first matches," he said. "You come to a match, it's a tough match, and you're too sleepy. You can't make a ball. No concentration."

Hall-of-Famer Nick Varner prepared for the event by hitting a local health club, but he learned that wasn't enough.

"I think after this trip I'm going to try to do a little harder workout with the cardio," he said. "I think I'm going to start jumping rope to get in a little bit better shape. I think I'm going to need it."

— Mike Panozzo

it will affect your game. So I just think of the moment."

Good advice. The pressure to reach the fifth round flustered much of the field. A spot among the final 18 guaranteed at least \$30,000, and it was believed by many to be enough to secure a top-100 ranking at the end of the season and a 2007 IPT tour card.

As the clock rounded 8 p.m. on July 27, several players teetered with records of 2-2. Each needed one more win to have a chance at advancing. Players took turns in front of the tournament's Greyhound-sized scoreboard, nervously sketching numbers in the air as they figured the calculus of their respective brackets and how they would fare in different scenarios.

Making the position even more perplexing, the fate of players who tied at 3-2 would be left to a deciding "games-won" statistic. A database figured the percentage of games won by each player out of his total games played for the tournament. That figure became the tie-breaker, and dozens of players had already been eliminated in earlier rounds by scant percentage points.

At 9:30 p.m., the cavernous Venetian ballroom that housed the tournament began to shudder with jubilant shouts and the deep thud of cue butts slamming the floor.

"Haallllloooooo!" hollered Reyes, as he sank the winning 8 ball in a must-win, hill-hill match against Mick Hill of the U.K. He capped his cry with a relieved chuckle, as he watched the cue ball roll an inch from scratching.

"YES!" roared Englishman Darren Appleton, upon hearing that a bracket-mate had lost his last match of the day, leaving the door open for Appleton's ascension into the next round.

"Thank you! Thank you! See you tomorrow, everybody! Yiiii yiiiiiii!" shrieked Ronato Alcano of the Philippines, after his stats were posted on the scoreboard, and he saw that he had beaten American Dee Adkins for the last spot in his bracket by a percentage point.

## NUMBERS GAME

■ 77

Highest number of break-&-runs: Ralf Souquet (in 28 matches).

In customary cliffhanger fashion, Hohmann squeaked by Nick Van den Berg of the Netherlands, 8-7. Manalo sat quietly in the players' lounge in one of more than a dozen black leather recliners, awaiting his chance to make his father proud.

WHEN THE REMAINING 18 fell into their fifth-round brackets, a few trends were evident to the enthralled but sparse crowd in the Venetian ballroom.

First, the host country had allowed the rest of the world to trample all over it. Of 104 American entrants, only three advanced to the fifth round. Two of them were *qualifiers*: barrel-chested Larry Nevel of Beloit, Wis., and barbox legend David Matlock of Olathe, Kan. The third was 2004 U.S. Open 9-Ball



Players congregated around the giant IPT scoreboard to see who advanced ...

# The IPT on TV: An Armchair View

Tacky, error-prone broadcasts a poor start for EuroSport networks



**A KEY ELEMENT** of the IPT's business model is to get its events televised worldwide. The EuroSport and British EuroSport networks picked up the tour, in a deal to broadcast live from all 2006 IPT events. At the North American 8-Ball Open, the networks aired three hours of action per day to more than 50 countries across Europe. **Justyn Barnes**, a U.K.-based billiard journalist, took the measure of the broadcasts for BD.

Real pool. Real rules. Real money. Rubbish TV.

I really wanted to like this — the North American 8-Ball Open, the first major IPT event of the season, with a \$2 million prize fund and broadcast live across Europe each night on Eurosport. Sadly, the TV production was disappointing from start to finish.

With the amount of money Kevin Trudeau

is throwing at pro pool, he could at least have held a few dollars back for TV, but it all looked so cheap. Wobbly hand-held close-ups, cameramen forever walking across the screen, and, most damning of all, rows and rows of empty seats. Without fans and atmosphere, any sport dies on TV.

Okay, so as a Brit, maybe I've been spoiled by a decade of Sky Sports' top-end production of events like the World Pool Championship and the Mosconi Cup. But the IPT event didn't even look much better than fellow American productions like the WPBA Classic Tour.

The sponsors' signage consisted of plastic banners tied over the railings, and the scoreboards were tacky cardboard affairs (come on, guys, it's the 21st century — we've invented electricity!). All of this and more added to the relentless low-budget feel.

The TV show had no meaningful graphics to speak of, so matches were played without the viewer ever having a clue as to its meaning within the context of the tournament. Oh, and the interminable round-robin format needs an urgent review before the next event — it may be scrupulously fair to players, but it's slow, slow telly.

As for the commentators, they must have won a raffle to get the job, because their knowledge of pool and its protagonists was absolutely non-existent — hence, mispronounced stars such as "Rick Van den Berg,"

## NUMBERS GAME

■ 20

Number of languages that the EuroSport IPT broadcasts were translated into.

"Gaby Owen" and "Marlon Manilow" playing on the main tables. Presumably, they weren't helped by a lack of communication with the tournament's mission control, as they had very little info at hand as to the standings within groups. Occasionally they would cut to a match with no idea of the score, waffling in limbo until the camera cut to a scoreboard.

The high spots? The emergence of the snooker genius Ronnie O'Sullivan as a serious 8-ball contender and his brutally honest self-analytical post-match interviews; and Earl Strickland's comical monologue after his meltdown against Van den Berg.

The final was well attended and a close-fought affair, which ultimately saved the event, but even then the broadcast sound was dire. Manalo jabbering in Tagalog throughout and the ambient mikes creating a constant background drone didn't help.

Perhaps I'm being hyper-critical, but I feel it has to be said. For the sake of all the great players I've met who've never previously earned what their talents merit, I want the IPT to be a long-term success. But if the tour intends to be a serious contender in TV sports, it has a very long way to go.

Championship winner Gabe Owen, who slipped past Croatia's Ivica Putnik into the final 18 by 1.7 percentage points.

Second, as many had expected, the Filipino superstars emerged unscathed through the first four rounds (see story,

page 47). Seven Pinoy potters crowded the brackets and made their bubbling mother tongue, Tagalog, the unofficial patois of the fifth round.

The only land mass that could equal the Philippines was the entire continent of Europe, which also accounted for seven shooters. Their success was the third shocker. Of course, most expected to see Germans Hohmann and the red-hot Ralf Souquet late in the Open. And Sweden's Marcus Chamat had a rep for excelling in big events. But what about those surprising Limeys from the U.K.?

MASON KING



... based on their records and games-won percentages.

the national team. The whole brotherhood numbered about a dozen players (including a few mates from Australia), and they ate together, strategized together, sweated matches together, and served as cornermen for Appleton and Peach.

"Oh yeah, we all get behind each other," said Peach. "It's always been the same, wherever we go. ... We share information. It has to be done. Anything you can do to give yourself a little bit extra can make all the difference."

Unfortunately, neither Peach nor Appleton could beat the IPT bean counters. Both posted 3-2 records in the fifth round, but missed the cut for the final six players by mere percentage points.

Appleton, lithe and fiery like a middleweight boxer, fell in his last match of the round to Russia's reedy Evgeny Stalev — and almost didn't get back up. Devastated, he slumped in his chair at tableside for several minutes, hiding his head in his hands. Also finishing 3-2, Stalev beat Appleton to the sixth round by 2.42 percent.

Peach lost his last match in similarly gut-wrenching fashion. He knew he could allow opponent Dennis Orcollo no more

than four games to make a place for himself in the next round. On the hill at 7-4, Peach stranded all 16 balls with his break. Orcollo pocketed two more games before losing, 8-6, nudging his winning percentage 0.4 percent higher than Peach's — 56.86 to 56.46 percent.

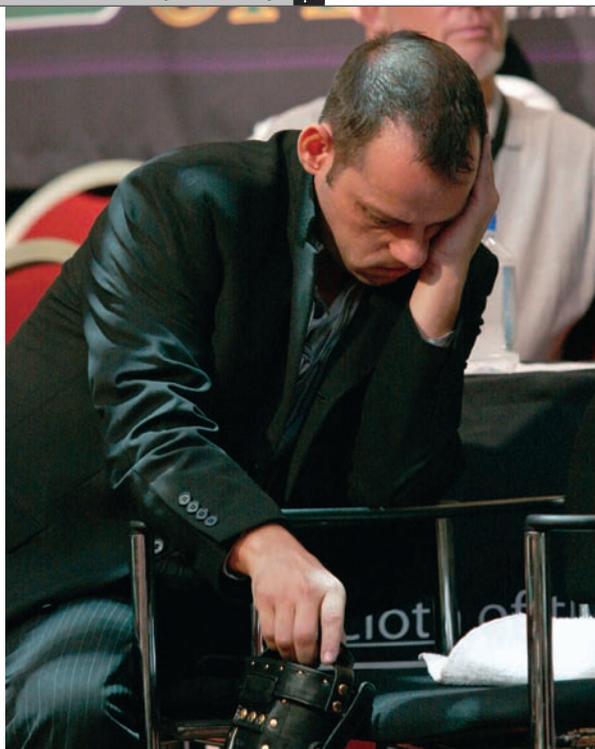
**NUMBERS GAME**

■ **60.41%**

**Highest percentage of games won (by a player with 10-plus match wins): Marlon Manalo.**

"I was gutted — absolutely gutted," Peach said. "When you think we've played about 300 racks in five rounds, to lose out by one or two racks is heartbreaking, really."

Hohmann faced the same head game of "what if," trailing Chamat, 7-5. Then the Swede hooked himself on the 6. After Chamat missed a multi-rail Hail Mary, Hohmann seized the table and didn't let go until he had the 8-7 victory



**Failing by mere percentage points, Appleton fell hard.**

and another narrow escape.

Sticking with a good thing, Hohmann kept his nightly routine of hitting the Venetian's noodle bar for dinner — ordering stir-fried soft noodles with

chicken — and then hitting the hay. Tomorrow would be a big day.

**SIX PLAYERS REMAINED**

— Reyes, Souquet, Stalev, Orcollo, Manalo and Hohmann. The top two in this five-match round would advance to the final and its promised payday of \$350,000.

Hall-of-Famer Reyes loomed large, spooking the field with his 5-0 performance in the fifth round. At 51, it appeared the world's greatest player could handle the IPT's round-robin marathon.

"Tomorrow's more pressure," Reyes said the night before, still giddy from his promotion to the last group. "I need to play good tomorrow. My break now, it's OK. That's why I [did so well]. I break and run out, break and run out."

Not so in the sixth round. Reyes looked listless, and his fruitless breaks were the seeds of his quick elimination from the final. His countrymen did him no favors,

JERRY FORSYTH

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# Really Really Good Fellas

## Evidence of the Filipino Takeover of Pool: 7 in the Top 18

**ONCE THE** 200-player field at the North American 8-Ball Open had winnowed to 18, IPT officials took aside the remaining Filipino players for a photo op. With each dressed in a black suit, the group of seven looked less like a national team and more like pool's version of the mafia (above).

The U.S. might have invented pool, but the Filipinos have moved all over its turf.

To no one's surprise, the 12-man Filipino contingent, led by Hall-of-Famer Efrén Reyes, dominated the Open with their street-bred, action-honed pool smarts.

Consider this sobering comparison: The Philippines placed seven players in the final 18, while the U.S. could only muster three, out of 104 total American entrants.

The surviving seven were perennial favorites Reyes, Francisco Bustamante, and Alex Pagulayan, up-and-comer Marlon Manalo, and lesser-known but tough talents Dennis Orcollo, Rodolfo Luat, and Ronato Alcano.

The Open housed the greatest concentration of elite players in history, and many had opinions on the Philippines' dominance.

"They live, breath and sleep in the pool-

### NUMBERS GAME

■ **6%**

Percentage of the field hailing from Philippines (12 of 200)

■ **20%**

Percentage of the total prize money won by Filipinos (\$407,000 of \$2 million)

rooms," said Sweden's Marcus Chamat, who has spent months at a time in the Philippines honing his game.

"A lot of other guys don't. For example, for me, in Sweden, pool is a small sport. It's almost a disgrace to practice. But it's cultural over there in the Philippines."

Verna Mariano, who with her husband, Perry, owns three nightclubs and one pool-hall in Quezon City, shed light on why her countrymen are so dedicated to the sport.

"We are in the Third World, so when you do something, you have to do it good, or else nothing will happen to your life," Mariano said. "Either you do well in this sport, or you will go hungry."

For many, the poolroom is the only school they'll have, and their curriculum often starts with the game of rotation.

"It's not the hunger; all these guys are hungry," said Mike Sigel. "The difference is playing rotation. You play a game where you break, you have to shoot at the freakin' 1 ball first — 15 balls on the table — and run out. That's all they play. And then they play a game like 8-ball, and it looks like a joke."

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## Get to know them ...

The IPT's giant purses promised to flush out the world's best 8-ballers. Here are some surprise finishers among the top 18.



### David Matlock, 53 • USA • Tied for 7th (\$30,000)

The highest-finishing American, longtime barbox king Matlock all but gave up on pro pool after the demise of the Camel Tour in 1999.

"After that, it didn't seem like there was anything worth messing with," he said.

Matlock won entry into the IPT Open at a Las Vegas qualifier in May. He practiced for the Open for a grand total of two hours in the weeks prior to the event, because he and his girlfriend were preparing to move into a new, 1,800-square-foot house in Olathe, Kan.

"As much as I got to play [before the Open], I'm surprised I got this far," he said of his tied-for-7th finish. His \$30,000 in winnings will help outfit the new house, including buying an IPT table, plus cloth and balls, for practice sessions.



### Rico Diks, 30 • The Netherlands • Tied for 7th (\$30,000)

Formerly a fixture on the European circuit, Diks had quit pool last September to pursue a career in London as a rock singer. 9-Ball was too demanding.

"You are away 30 or 40 weekends a year, and I didn't feel like that anymore," Diks said. "I found out after five years that doing two different things really well [music and pool] is not really possible."

But when the IPT surfaced, he couldn't resist. He earned entry into the Open through a qualifier in Switzerland. With a tied-for-7th finish at the Open, he's in good shape to earn his 2007 tour card.

Meanwhile, his current band in London is recording its first release. He plans to stick with music if he's forced to make a choice.



### Evgeny Stalev, 27 • Russia • Sixth place (\$40,000)

A resident of Litkarino, 20 miles outside of Moscow, Stalev rarely ventures outside his home country for pool events. But he's a legend in Russia, having won nearly 100 titles in the cue sport of pyramid.

He had solid plans for the \$350,000 if he made it to the final. "I promised my friend [IPT member] Fabio Petroni that we would go on a vacation to Hawaii with five girls," he said.

The rail-thin shooter ran out of gas in the sixth round. But he happily accepted his \$40,000 check, roughly \$33,000 greater than his previous high-watermark for prize money.

"I feel like [crap], but with money," he said in halting English. "Next time, I will be more ready for this."



### Quinten Hann, 29 • Australia • Tied for 7th (\$30,000)

The ill-tempered Hann ended his tempestuous snooker career in February by resigning from the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association, in the wake of allegations that he agreed to dump a professional match for close to \$100,000.

Now banned from pro snooker for eight years, Hann looks to have a successful career on the IPT. He finished an impressive tied-for-7th, although he had almost no previous experience in American 8-ball.

"I started practicing maybe a month ago," Hann said. "I played maybe 10 times. I used a pool cue for two weeks, and then I used a snooker cue because I didn't like the pool cue. And then I went back to the pool cue. It's been the worst preparation ever."



### Dennis Orcollo, 27 • Philippines • Third place (\$80,000)

Although one of the top players in the pool-rich Philippines, Orcollo is not among the players sponsored by the influential Puyat Sports organization. Thus, his options for competition and travel are more limited than the likes of Efren Reyes and Francisco Bustamante.

Supported by Filipino nightclub owners Perry and Verna Mariano, Orcollo made his first trip to the U.S. in February in search of an IPT tour card. He ran undefeated through the 78-player qualifier at Hard Times Billiards in California.

His winnings at the Open will secure him a 2007 IPT tour card, but he likely will need to arrange for a new visa to compete in the U.S.

Orcollo's wife, Ronah, is 6 months pregnant with their second child.

as Manalo dropped him, 8-7, and Orcollo dominated, 8-3. In an 0-2 hole, Reyes was all but out of the running.

"The breaks were against me," he said.

Souquet dropped close behind. Playing at a plodding pace, he earned no rest between his first three matches, hopping from a heartbreaking 8-7 loss to Orcollo, to an 8-7 squeaker over Hohmann, to an 8-3 nightmare against Stalev (the Russian's only win of the round). His dour cornerman, Ralph Eckert, looked like an accountant accompanying his client to an audit.

Any dreams of a Souquet comeback disappeared in his epic collapse against Manalo. Leading 6-2, Souquet scratched on his break. Manalo then won six straight games, aided by Souquet's head-scratching misses on the 6 at 6-6, and the 9 with Manalo on the hill.

"In the end, I just totally lost focus," Souquet said. "I couldn't even sink two balls in a row with ball in hand. I was just running out of gas."

Manalo's record reached 4-0, the magic number for a shot at \$350,000. The battle for the second spot in the final would be between Orcollo and Hohmann. At 3-1, Hohmann needed a victory against Manalo in his last match to clinch it; and Orcollo, 2-2, faced a must-win melee against Stalev.

The suspense didn't last for long. Still energetic and tack-sharp, Hohmann sprinted to an 8-1 finish. As was his habit by now, cornerman Williams shouted his victory cheer, "Toasty!"

The two buddies embraced, exchanged high fives, and then left for a quick dinner with some German friends. Then Hohmann went straight to bed. Big day tomorrow.

**B**ACK IN the tournament arena the next morning, Hohmann looked pristine — almost "Ken"-doll perfect — in black slacks, vest, and a crisp gray shirt with his sponsors neatly embroidered into the fabric.

His mental state seemed equally tidy. Facing the biggest payout in pool history, he was already contemplating the next big match, that opportunity in the future to be even better than today.

"I already won a decent amount of money here, so it will give me a chance to prepare even in a better way for the next tournament," he said. "I'm far away from the peak of my game. But I think with every year I gain more experience and I become a more complete player."

Manalo awoke at 7 a.m., and headed for DJ Bibinkahan, a local Asian-Filipino restaurant. He ate rice, vegetables and squid for breakfast, loading up on cozy home cooking. He called his family to check in.

“They said, ‘Good luck, and we’re here. All of us, your family, are behind you, to support and pray for you. Whatever will be the outcome, we’ll be proud of you,’” Manalo recalled.

The smart money favored Manalo. His overall record in the Open, 23-5, bested Hohmann’s, 21-7. His games-won percentage, 61.04 percent, eclipsed Hohmann’s, 57.27 percent. But the German had an edge in two other key stats. He had beaten Manalo twice in the tournament, 8-3 and 8-1, and the percentage of his game wins through breaking and running out was higher, 37.06 percent to 30.65 percent.

“The break is important,” Hohmann said. “I have to make a ball on the break, then I have to get a good layout, and the same for him. He can run five racks in a row, and I can run five racks in a row. It depends on who gets the better start and who can hold their nerves together.”

Adding to the gut-clenching pressure was the EuroSport network’s live feed across the European continent. But any

butterflies were at least temporarily buffered when the opponents faced each other nose-to-chin in a choreographed staredown. The crowd guffawed at the goofy dramatics. The mild-mannered opponents tried to stifle their smirks.

Their smiles flattened to thin creases after Hohmann won the lag. With both

The score soon climbed to 4-2.

Hohmann had the mojo. He moved more crisply, usually split the pockets, and always, *always* kept his eyes trained on the table. Even when an Amazonian showgirl with ten-gallon assets crossed his path to change Manalo’s scorecard between each rack — Hohmann’s genetic match, a woman with whom he could mate and create a colony of blond supermodel pool players — he stared straight ahead.

But whenever Hohmann seemed poised to run off with the match, he would jaw a ball in the foot rail’s left corner pocket. He did it when leading 4-2, and again at 5-4. Then, at 6-6, he aimed his break shot a smidge too far to the right, and the cue ball careened into the side pocket.

“Of course, I thought, ‘I don’t want to end the game with a scratch on the break,’” Hohmann said. “But those feelings, they come and they go, or I make them go away. I accept the situation, and wait for my opportunity. And it came.”

At 7-6, Manalo broke dry for the fourth time in the match. Hohmann cleared the slate to tie it up, and then faced the biggest break shot of his career.

He clobbered the rack and watched the 9 ball stroll into a corner pocket. His eyes widened. The cue ball sat at the center of the table. None of the object balls were



Cornerman Williams helped Hohmann in the clutch.

players possessing roughly equal pocketing and cue-ball control skills, the match devolved into a breaking contest. If one guy broke dry, the other ran out. If one broke in a ball, he finished the rack. That held true until Manalo hung a 10-11 combination with Hohmann ahead, 3-2.



## Trudeau Eyes Changes for Next Event

Staggering prize money by winning percentage a possibility

**S**URVEYING THE massive Venetian ballroom that at one point held 60 Diamond tables and 200 players, all of whom took home shares of a \$2 million prize fund, IPT founder and promoter Kevin Trudeau jotted down a few notes on a piece of paper and slid it into the breast pocket of his suit jacket.

“When I see things that I think we can change or do better,” Trudeau said, “I write them down. Then I discuss them with my staff, and we implement them before the next tournament.”

Did Trudeau see much at the inaugural IPT tour event that needed changing?

“Overall, I’m very pleased,” he said. “We may change a few things. I think we’re going to stagger the prize money a bit. For instance, instead of paying all 24 players who tie for 37th place the exact same amount, we’ll stagger the prizes based on players’ match wins and winning percentage. That way, every game means money. And every game should mean something.”

Trudeau said he wasn’t surprised by the sense of urgency players took away from the first tour event.

“Every player told me they learned a lot here, and will come to Reno better prepared,” Trudeau said. “And they’re virtually all making arrangements to have IPT equipment put in their homes or local billiard clubs, which I knew would happen. They realize the importance of duplicating the conditions.”

Not even the sparse pre-finale crowds, leaving the daily EuroSport-televised matches almost painfully unwatched, bothered the Teflon Pool Don.

“Fans in the arena are great, but not critical,” Trudeau insisted. “There aren’t many fans in the early rounds at golf events. Besides, it’s tough to get fans to Vegas for a week. The fans will come over time. And if not, it’s not a big deal. EuroSport isn’t concerned, because the key is the number of people watching on TV, and they’ve been very pleased with those results.”

PHOTOS BY JERRY FORSYTH



Hohmann's haul will go toward a new home, plus more tailored shirts.

within four inches of each other, or a rail.

"Oh, my God, this is the easiest runout I've had in the tournament!" Hohmann thought to himself.

## NUMBERS GAME

### ■ 5 to 3

Number of times Hohmann & Manalo, respectively, sank a ball(s) on their breaks in the final (out of 15 breaks total).

With a simple set of stop shots — the cue ball touched a rail just once — Hohmann picked through the solids to reach the 8 ball. He took only seven seconds to size up and shoot the \$350,000 ball.

"I just wanted to get it over with," he said.

**F**OUR DAYS AFTER the victory and back in Manhattan, Hohmann still felt wiped out.

"I sleep the same amount of time I did in Vegas, and I'm still tired," he said. "It tells me I have to do more."

He could take a breather, but that's not Thorsten. He remembered something he saw on one of his Tiger Woods DVDs.

"When he won his first major title, he was up the next day at 7 a.m. and went to the driving range to practice," Hohmann said. "It's very motivating."

Sure, the money's great, but it's not his main incentive. Make no mistake

— Hohmann was looking forward to buying a home in roughly the same neighborhood as his buddy Williams in Orlando, Fla. But for a guy who had more than a quarter-mil at his disposal, he wasn't exactly running wild.

"I have reinvested some of the money in some nice custom-made shirts," he said, chuckling at how fuddy-duddy he sounded. "I want to look nice for the next tournament."

He returned to his old gym-and-pool-hall routine. The funny thing, he said, was that he'd also been hanging out with Manalo, who was staying with a friend in Manhattan.

Evidently, there were no hard feelings. Manalo told a Filipino newspaper after the final that he was a victim of "tough luck, but I gave it all for my country. I know my Papa is happy wherever he is now."

Manalo still threatens to top the IPT's money list at the end of the season. And Hohmann is helping him get there. Nobody is better qualified, after all. Just days after the final, they were sparring on the pool table. Hohmann was looking into getting him a gym pass. He wanted to take Manalo jogging in Central Park.

It's not all about winning for Hohmann. It's about serving the game he was born to play. To honor it with fidelity, piety and perfection.

"There is so much more I can learn," he said. "Always try to become a much better player. That is what I want to be."

## IPT NORTH AMERICAN 8-BALL OPEN SCOREBOARD

(Win% : Percentage of games won out of total games played)

PLAYER	PRIZE	WIN%
1. Thorsten Hohmann (GER.)	\$350,000	57.1
2. Marlon Manalo (PHIL.)	\$99,000	60.41
3. Dennis Orcollo (PHIL.)	\$80,000	56.03
4. Efren Reyes (PHIL.)	\$65,000	58.87
5. Ralf Souquet (GER.)	\$50,000	58.24
6. Evgeny Stalev (RUSSIA)	\$40,000	53.75
<b>7. (TIE)</b>		
Ronato Alcano (PHIL.)	\$30,000	52.4
Darren Appleton (U.K.)	\$30,000	54.88
Francisco Bustamante (PHIL.)	\$30,000	60.36
Marcus Chamat (SWEDEN)	\$30,000	56.36
Rico Diks (NETH.)	\$30,000	54.06
Quinten Hann (AUSTRL.)	\$30,000	51.47
Rodolfo Luat (PHIL.)	\$30,000	55.18
David Matlock (USA)	\$30,000	55.17
Larry Nevel (USA)	\$30,000	52.49
Gabriel Owen (USA)	\$30,000	54.96
Alex Pagulayan (PHIL.)	\$30,000	55.44
Daryl Peach (U.K.)	\$30,000	56.46

### 19-36 \$17,000

Dee Adkins, Yannick Beauflis, Corey Deuel, Niels Feijen, Michael Hill, Raj Hundal, Mika Immonen, Jason Kirkwood, Alex Lely, Antonio Lining, Rafael Martinez, Rodney Morris, Shawn Putnam, Ivica Putnick, Santos Sambajon, Earl Strickland, Sandor Tot, Nick Van den Berg.

### 37-60 \$10,000

Gary Abood, Johnny Archer, Karl Boyes, Sarah Ellerby, Vilmos Foldes, Jianbo Fu, Dennis Hatch, Lee Heuwagen, Bobby Hunter, Markus Juva, Jon Kucharo, Marko Lohtander, Sam Monday, Steve Moore, Carl Morris, Ronnie O'Sullivan, Jonathan Pinegar, Paul Potter, John Schmidt, Nick Varner, James Walden, Jimmy Wetch, Charles Williams, Johl Younger.

### 61-120 \$5,000

Floyd Barger, Christopher Bartram, Daniel Basavich, Jeff Beckley, Keith Bennett, George Breedlove, Richard Broumpton, David Broxson, Sal Butera, Jerry Calderon, Wayne Catledge, Tony Chohan, Philip Harrison, Kim Davenport, Ralph Eckert, Allison Fisher, Troy Frank, Scott Frost, Theodore Garrahan, Leil Gay, Anthony Ginn, Brian Groce, Corey Harper, Philip Harrison, Gerda Hofstatter, Greg Hogue, Allen Hopkins, Bernard Jahnke, Jeremy Jones, Loree Jon Jones, Sammy Jones, Cliff Joynor, Andreja Klasovic, Andreas Koukiadakis, Johnathan Macias, Imran Majid, Marco Marquez, Keith McCready, Robert McKenna, Tomoki Mekari, Goran Mladenovic, Edwin Montal, Takeshi Okumura, Chris Orme, Oliver Ortmann, Ismael Paez, Fabio Petroni, Neil Raybone, Luc Salvat, George San Souci, Michael Schmidt, Mike Sigel, Tom Storm, Mark Tademy, Scotty Townsend, Gandy Valle, Howard Vickery, Gerry Watson, John Wims, Michael Zimmerman.

### 121-200 \$2,000

J. Abernathy, R. Acosta, D. Alcaide, F. Alvarez, O. Amine, P. Brienza, J. Broadhurst, C. Bryant, L. Butera, L. Carter, A. Carvajal, M. Cernero, L. Chenman, C. Colenso, L. Condo, K. Corr, W. Crane, T. Crosby, A. Czetli, M. Davis, D. Di Liberto, J. Di Toro, R. Dodson, E. Dominguez, M. Eberle, T. Edey, V. Faquet, K. Fisher, A. Franken, B. Friend, J. Fusco, T. Kiat Goh, R. Gonzalez, M. Gulyassy, E. Hjourleifson, P. Holtz, W. Incardona, Z. Jakulj, T. Jones, R. Keller, E. Kelly, T. Kennedy, M. Kenniston, W. Kiamco, J. Kutcher, E. Laurance, M. LeBron, G. Leonardo, M. Manabu, R. Martin, M. Massey, G. Mathews, J. Miller, J. Minici, A. Murphy, J. Parica, J. Raney, D. Reljic, A. Rivera, J. Roberts, T. Robles, I. Runnels, R. Saez, M. Sakai, L. Salazar, B. Saleh, S. Santl, L. Schwartz, K. Takahashi, H. Thornfeldt, S. Troungeau, L. Travers, S. Van Boening, M. Vidas, J. Weast, M. Webb, D. West, A. Wheeler, J. White, R. Wiseman