

The Match with Mr. Sweet

By
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This could be entitled ‘The Pain in the Ass Mr. Sweet’, which will become quit apparent to you as I relate this tale. But after some deliberation and soul searching I nixed that title because of what he did for me. His constant one-word adjective became so offensive as the match went on that it forced me to wake up, get off my dead butt and try harder, I mean really try to win. I needed to win this match if (as you will see later) I was to pull off the perfect ending. Had I not won this match it would have been just another mundane episode in the life and times of Jay Carlton’s ‘9’ ball career. But let us begin at the beginning.

Each year since 1988 Players Pub owner and operator Mr. Al Pruett holds his annul 9-Ball tournament in recognition of Rick Dunham. Rick was a local player and genuinely nice guy liked by one and all. He could play but never tried to hustle, as far as I know. He didn’t try to hustle me anyway. People would try to hustle him and he would take their money instead of the other way around. Rick passed away at the early age of only 42. In his honor, tournament proceeds were sent to the American Heart Association, in his name of course. It would not be right to send it in anyone else’s name. It is a well-received and very worthy cause indeed. Al has always had a full field of 32 players. In fact it’s a first come first signup. Many players have to be turned away. Pruett cuts it off at 32 mainly because it is a one-day affair. It is always double elimination and handicapped and with only eight tables it works out that the event doesn’t last into the wee hours of the morning. Plus he has goodies on hand like hot dogs and hot wings and hot chicks and such.

Some entrants go as high as ‘8’ (at one time there were ‘9’s and ‘10’s but no more) and as low as ‘3’. Al sometimes puts dolls in as ‘2’s. We will leave the reasons why to your thoughts and imaginations. Not many complain because it is a charity event. Besides, it’s a good chance for old ‘friends’ who haven’t seen each other since the last tournament to catch up on worldly events, discuss politics, the weather, their parole, their divorce and all other such personal and mundane matters that make the Earth spin.

Mostly it’s one hustler trying to out-finagle another hustler. They haven’t hit a ball in six months; they forgot the proper way to hold a cue; they wouldn’t know what a run-out was if one whispered in his ear. (It’s their way of trying to convince the other that they need weight.)

And then they come back with: “Why just this very morning I found where I put my stick. I didn’t even know I still had it. I thought I lost it sometime back to pay off a gambling debt to the Ragu or Mayday Rick May or the Swamp Foxx.” (Another con-job trying to convince the target that they retired from the game.) “Why, I only showed up to say hello.”

And now comes the offer: “But if there should be a chance that when you get knocked out of this fracas, I will be over there watching the Cardinals game and, well, possibly we can match up for some cheap 9-ball action for say a yard-yard and a half.”

It never ends. But it’s fun listening to the repartee and see who is being taken in by whom and who out fumbles the other, and who still falls for the same old lines.

So now we get down to what I have been leading up to, my match with Mr. Sweet. Now understand me his name was not Sweet, at least I don’t think so. Now that I think about it, I don’t recall ever hearing his moniker. In fact, from that day to this I have not set eyes on this character. All I know about this gent is he was from somewhere down in south St. Lou. But the best way to describe him is to say that he looked a dead ringer for Eddie the Echo. Remember him (?) from those McDonald commercials.

The difference between the two citizens (?) at least Eddie the Echo had a vocabulary. Example: How you doin', how you doin'; or: You da man, you da man; or: Lookin' good, lookin' good; or: Little hungry, little hungry.

My opponent also had a vocabulary. It consisted of only one word but a vocab nonetheless. His one 5-letter word was "sweet". Example: Every time I missed a shot the guy would say 'sweet'. That was his new word- 'sweet'. If he missed a shot and I had nothing to shoot at- 'sweet'. If I scratched- 'sweet', committed a foul- 'sweet', made no ball on the break- 'sweet'.

It was sweet this and sweet that. If he made a shot- 'sweet', when he made a ball on the break- 'sweet'; when he won a game- 'sweet'. When he pulled a safety- 'sweet'. I looked at Willie White and Willie White looked at me. I asked him how many times this guy uttered that word. Willie answered about low to mid 60's. I lost count around 40. But this I can say for sure, it was getting old real fast.

As I mentioned earlier, I did not enter the tournament to go balls to the wall for the win. This was the annual Rick Dunham event that we played for the American Heart Association. So I really wasn't trying my best against my opponents. But, this guy! He was fast getting on my last nerve.

I entered as an '8'; Mr. Sweet was in as a skill-level '5'. Truthfully, I wasn't mentally charged up for him. What I should have done was just go about business as usual and let it roll off. But, I don't know, ever now and then you run into a guy, and understand me he wasn't a bad person, obnoxious maybe, but not really a bad guy. He wasn't doing this 'sweet' thing to shark me or to upset me. It was his new word for the month and he didn't want to forget it. That's how you remember new words, you repeat them over and over again until it, number one: becomes a part of your vocab, and number two: to piss me off. He succeeded in both departments.

As I struggled, he took advantage. My nonchalant attitude had to change real fast. After seven games the score was 4-3 in his favor. At this point all Mr. Sweet needed was to runout or luck-out or have me hand him another easy game by jawing the '9' in the corner pocket or something as stupid for his fifth win and the match. I needed five. And the way things were going it might as well be fifty.

I settled down to a more conservative game. I decided not to take any flyers or unnecessary chances. I really played it close to the vest. We fought it out and eventually I got the match to double hill, 7-4. As we jockeyed for the deciding game I couldn't believe my luck. After everything imaginable had happened throughout this horrific meeting, I was left with a, ready for this, a 'Tom Cruise Run' to win the game. A Tom Cruise run is (if you saw the movie) five easy straight-in shots).

As the 9-ball reached the pocket and disappeared from sight, I made a fist, a to the floor genuflect, and while pulling my arm sssloooowwwly back behind me, I let out with a long 'swweeeeeeeettt'. It was the only time all day I said it. And it was 'SWEET'.

I lost my next match and was k.o.'ed from the tournament, but, as they say in books, that's show biz.