

Sports Spirit

CATTLEMEN'S SALOON HOSTS 7TH ANNUAL RR SHUFFLEBOARD TOURNAMENT

By Patricia Cruz
Special to the Press

Tournament

Director and Pacific Northwest Hall of Famer, Art Elliff of Rogue River, brought professional, semi-professional and amateur level shooters together from Oregon, Washington, California and Canada to compete in the 7th Annual Rogue River Table Shuffleboard Tournament held on July 13-15, 2007 at Cattlemen's Saloon.

Celebrating his 75th birthday a couple of days before the tournament, Elliff, a semi-professional player, has focused on directing the tournament for the past three years, rather than playing. However, when it came time to play, Elliff and wife, Joyce partnered to bring the total number of teams to 15.

"We had a lower turnout than expected, so Joyce and I stepped in to play," said Elliff. "It was a lot of fun, but directing and playing takes a lot out of me these days."

The Elliff's came in 3rd - not bad after a three year sebatical from participating in the Rogue River Tournament.

A double elimination tournament with Timi Kale, owner of Tolo Tavern in Gold Hill, and partner Al Hudson of Eugene went into the finals undefeated. Up against Kenny



photo courtesy/Patricia Cruz

Art Elliff at a shuffleboard table.

Rogers of Medford (not to be confused with country singer Kenny Rogers), and partner Ray Nordin of Medford with one loss. Rogers/Nordin won the first round leaving each team with one loss and forcing Kale/Hudson into a final playoff game. The Tournament ended with Kale/Hudson coming in 1st place and Rogers/Nordin coming in 2nd.

The tournament routinely attracts shooters from up and down the west coast. Bill Wonnacotti, a semi-professional level player for more than 25 years, has traveled from

Vancouver, Canada for the past five years to play in the Rogue River Tournament.

"I love shuffleboard and playing in Rogue River," said Wonnacotti. "I can play in the tournament and visit my son and his family at the Mission Bell Ranch in Wimer at the same time."

National Champion for more than 20 years, Darrol Nelson of Eugene has been participating in this tournament for the past five years. Despite being ranked second in the nation the past two years, Nelson will always be considered one of the nations true professional shuffleboard players, commonly referred to at Cattlemen's Saloon as the 'Lance Armstrong of shuffleboard'.

"Shuffleboard is a beautiful game and has fascinated me since childhood," said Nelson. "It takes desire, focus, skill and, above all, meditation. I use meditation to calm my nerves and block out the typical tavern noise."

Shuffleboard attracts people of all ages and all walks of life. Participants at Cattlemen's Saloon ranged from 21 years old to nearly 80 years old. One player, Janis Stumpf, legally blind since childhood, played in the tournament using a telescope to see the end of the board.

All sports have unique histories, but few, if any, have been as affected by political and international events as table shuffleboard.

True shuffleboard, initially called shoveboard and later shovelboard -- originated in England where there's a record of its being played as early as 1532, and consisted of shoving English coins across a polished tabletop as a pastime for royalty. Later, the game became so popular with the masses that people stopped going to work, resulting in banning of the game.

Shuffleboard made its debut to the

United States around the time of the Civil War and enjoyed tremendous growth during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Then came prohibition. Speakeasies were convinced by U.S. Congress they did not need games of skill to be successful businesses. For the next eight to ten year period, shuffleboard began to decline. Back in business following the repeal of Prohibition, pockets of shuffleboard players began to reappear and the Tavern industry once again began to change.

With World War II, men from all across the country were routed through New York and the Northeast on their way to Europe. As a result, shuffleboard went national after the war, with soldiers bringing a love of the game back home with them. Regional tournaments began to take place everywhere and the first national event was held at the Armory in Springfield, Illinois, in 1948. By the mid-1950's, shuffleboard had jumped into the foreground where it was played on military bases, in fraternal clubs, rehabilitation hospitals, youth clubs, senior centers and taverns everywhere.

According to Nelson, "Shuffleboard is a great sport and a lot of fun, but it's not a sport you can make a lot of money playing. In other words, don't quit your day job."

Despite a long and sometimes bumpy history, the game has endured. Across the nation, established shooters have made it their top priority to help novice players develop their talents and nurture their enthusiasm for league and tournament play. Years from now, it is expected history will show that the passing on of skills will keep this famous tavern sport growing.

What's great about shuffleboard players is that they love to teach other people," said Dan Glasscock of Rogue River. "I've been playing since 2001. I watched a game after work one day and have been hooked ever since."

With Glasscock's teacher and mentor Art Elliff thinking about stepping down as Director of the Rogue River Tournament, when asked if he'd be interested in taking over as Director, Glasscock's first response was that he didn't think so.

"Although I'm not pursuing following as Director in Art's footsteps, Art has been like a father to me for the past 6 years," said Glasscock. "Everyone knows how much I admire and respect Art, and I'd do just about anything he asked me to do."

If interested in learning more about the game leave a message for Art Elliff at 582-1631 or Dan Glasscock at 582-1195.

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Art Elliff