

The California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame

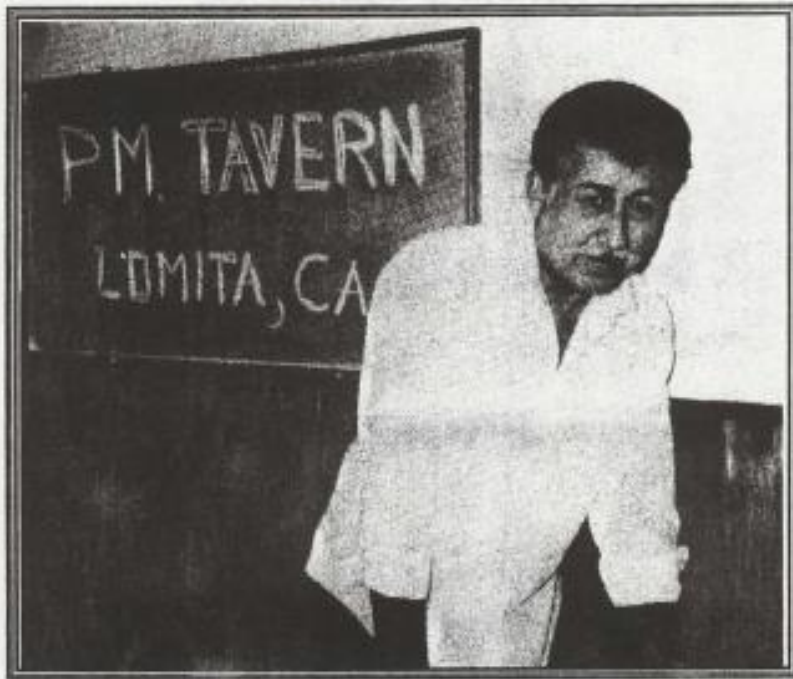
**Induction Ceremony
to Honor
Tommy Workman**



**Presented at the
Dixie Belle
Downey, California**

November 28, 1998

**CONGRATULATIONS
TOMMY WORKMAN**



THIS IS YOUR LIFE!

TOMMY WORKMAN — THIS IS YOUR LIFE

The man we know as "Mexican Tommy," was born Thomas Ramon Workman, in Riverside, California, one of six children.

At the age of nine, already working at shining shoes, Tommy watched his first shuffleboard game. When he saw the money changing hands, he decided that was the game for him.

He began working with his longshoreman father in 1949, and soon learned the ropes, but it wasn't till 1951 that his shuffleboard career began at the Homeport Bar in Wilmington, and at The Bird Cage.

In 1953, Tommy was married, and that was the start of something big—a BIG family. They had seven children, three boys and four girls, and through the years a total of thirty grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been added.

Through the mid-fifties and sixties, he traveled playing shuffleboard around and up and down the coast from California to Washington, Arizona, New Mexico, and through the midwest. He became such a good player that the lesser players absolutely refused to play against him, because they knew for sure they were going to lose their money.

During this time he became known as Mexican Tommy. Word got around to look out for that tall, thin, Mexican, since he always ended up with the money.

"I didn't have to go to work or send home for money during those years," Tommy said.

"I played with all the great players, but Bob Miles was my idol. He was the best. He was a true gentleman of the game. Bob always wore a suit, white shirt and tie, *and* a towel around his waist so he wouldn't get his trousers dirty.

"We used to play at the Homeport Bar. It was one bar

playing against another in those days. We loved the game and used to play all day and all night, and never get tired."

In 1963, Tommy played in the State Championship Tournament in Martinez, California. "Joe DiMaggio was supposed to present the trophy, but Joltin' Joe never showed up, so the mayor of Martinez presented my second place trophy," said Tommy. "In my travels, I met lots of wonderful people, like the Meltons in Oklahoma and others all over."

"Some places it was hard to find someone who wanted to play me," said Tommy. "One night at the Blue Star in El Monte, I lay down on the shuffleboard, and said, 'Wake me up when someone wants to play'."

"We played at all night joints like the Bloody Bucket, and the Spotlight. Sometimes it got pretty scary, especially if I was all by myself."

Tommy fared pretty well until the mid 70's when a bunch of hooligans jumped him, beat his head with a bumper jack, stabbed his body and left him for dead. This caused a severe stroke, paralyzing his left side, which took away the strongest part of his game. Part of his therapy included playing shuffleboard with his left arm. He was in rehab for over a year, just learning how to walk again, and still suffers some effects, such as big crowds or loud noises tend to terrify him. To this day, he can't walk very far or stay on his feet too long.

Since he retired as a longshoreman in October of 1994, Tommy has been instructing others in the art of shuffleboard at the PM Tavern in Lomita, which is his favorite place to play.

When asked his opinion on the best shuffleboard players now, he said, "I'd have to say Darrol Nelson. He's pretty hard to beat. And as for a team of players, it's hard to beat Joe Muniz and Billy Maxwell."

Tommy's final comment was, "Shuffleboarders are very special people."

And Tommy, you are one of the most special!

Tommy's amigos speak out . .

I met "Mex Tom" in Oakland, California in the early 60's. He was on a road trip with Long Beach Jim McDonald and LeRoy Waggoner. He beat every player in town, in every town he went to, all the way up the Oregon and Washington coast. He had the best delivery of them all. He showed me what a Jersey Shot was all about. I was told that once when Billy Mays and Bob Miles were playing a match, that Billy won, and Billy said he would not play Tommy on that board. Tommy was a cross-country player, and a great ambassador of Shuffleboard.

When Tommy won a match, he wouldn't say, "good game." He would take the money, smile, and say, "Gracias, Amigo." He was a trail blazer of the greatest form. Gracias to you, Amigo, for the lessons and the memories. You deserve this honor. Enjoy!

—*Glenn Davidson*

Though I had heard of Tommy Workman's remarkable playing ability, I really never got to see him play. However, everyone who has ever had any dealings with him agrees that he is a great shuffleboard player, and a true gentleman, with class. Tommy, congratulations on your induction into the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame.

—*Paul Weber*

I thought I had heard all the Mex Tommy stories over the past twenty years, but thanks to the tributes from all your friends, now I've heard some more very interesting ones. Congratulations to a very deserving shuffleboard player-promoter.

—*Jolene Lembke*

Congratulations to one of the classiest players in the game of shuffleboard that I've ever known. Tommy and I go back at least 35 years. Tommy was not only the greatest player that I ever saw play, he was also always a perfect gentleman.

Best of luck always, Tommy.

—*Joe Muniz*

More from Tommy's friends

We were so pleased to hear about your induction into the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame! Do you remember the Frisco Eddie story which appeared in The Board Talk in the July 1994 issue, about the man who actually "died" from playing shuffleboard? Let me refresh your memory.

Long Beach Lil was telling the yarn..." Now this happened very late one Saturday night after a bunch of us had been playing all weekend. The action took place at a joint called the 3P's in El Monte. There was this group of guys from Southwest L.A. who had driven up there—in this *HEARSE!*"

Eddie interrupted and said, "Hey, come on. I thought this was going to be a *TRUE* story!"

Lil replied, "I'm telling you man, it is. these guys had showed up in an old, used Packard Funeral Wagon. Everyone was pretty wasted from being up all weekend. Now, I had a side bet with one of the "undertaker" guys, whose name was Two Hanger Tommy. I won my game, so I looked around for him so I could collect my bet, but he was nowhere in sight. I decided to check out the parking lot to see if he was out there. It was after they stopped serving alcohol, and some of the players kept a jug in their cars so they could sneak out for a snort.

"Sure enough, I found my man in that there hearse! He was laid out all straight in the back, with his eyes closed and arms folded over his chest. As I looked at him through one of the rear windows, I thought he was just asleep, so I tried to open one of the doors to wake him up and straighten out our business. The doors were locked, so I went to the rear, knocked on one of the windows, and called out his name. He didn't move. I thought he was passed out from being up so long. I shouted and pounded on the windows. He still didn't budge.

"I went back into the bar and got some others to check it out. The joint emptied out to see what happened to old Two Hanger Tommy. The crowd banged on the windows and even rocked that old wagon. Someone hollered out, 'I've had medical training and this guy is *DEAD!*' Some of the gals were crying, and the crowd was panicking, ready to call 911.

"Then, a strange thing happened. Someone shouted, 'Wait a minute—I think he moved.' Suddenly old Two Hanger's arms started to unfold. He raised up from the waist, until he was sitting up in the hearse with his eyes closed, arms stretched out in front, looking just like a corpse coming back from the dead. After the initial shock was over, we figured out what old Tommy had done to us, everyone closed in and started shouting and beating on the hearse, while he sat inside, laughing his ass off."

Now, Tommy, only you, myself and a few others actually know that it was YOU in that old hearse, and that it happened in the summer of 1961, and also who it was that first went out to look for you. You really shook us up, and pulled that scam off—to perfection.

Seriously, we commend you for all that you've contributed to the game of shuffleboard. We're all thrilled that you're going to be in the Hall of Fame (including my sister Marcia, who sends her congratulations). You really deserve the honor and recognition that you will receive on the special day of your induction, and you're indeed a Living Legend.

You're a wonderful guy, Tommy, and I'm privileged to count you as my friend.

God bless and take care of you.

—“Balboa” Ron Schweikert

*Reprinted from the January 1988 issue
of The Board Talk . . .*

“Mexican Tommy” Workman — Grand Old Master

by Louis L. Lusero
Carson, California

The name “Mexican Tommy” Workman is synonymous with Shuffleboard. Some old-timers say Workman invented the sport of shuffleboard; that is probably not true. Some say he invented the “short weight” game; that is also probably not true.

What is probable truth is that Tommy Workman undoubtedly *perfected* the short weight game and, for several years during the 50s and 60s, Mr. Tom “Mexican Tommy” Workman was Mr. Shuffleboard — teacher, player, gentleman.

Many of today’s “big names” in shuffleboard are well aware of Tommy’s proud history. Darrol Nelson of Oregon remembers him as the first “road player” he ever knew. California’s Billy Chiles credits him with “teaching me more about the game than any other man.” Billy Mays of Texas and Glen Davidson of Oklahoma speak of his expertise on the boards with great respect.

Over the years, countless men and women, young and old, have benefitted from Tommy’s teaching. He could see their potential and took them under his wing, sharing his knowledge of the basics and strategy.

Tommy has always been a true gentleman. He never raises his voice and it is not unusual for him, after he’s won a match, to show his opponent what he could have done to beat him. He gives of his time and his talent, to the younger players especially, because he wants the sport not only to survive, but to grow.

Tommy is 55 years old, one of six children, born in Riverside, California. He is the father of seven children, three

boys and four girls. He currently lives in Wilmington, California, and has been a longshoreman for the past 24 years.

He began playing shuffleboard at the Homeport Bar in Wilmington. He says he vividly remembers that his very first shuffleboard tournament match was against the legendary Bob Miles, the then reigning world champion. No storybook ending to this tale, though, because Tommy lost the match. That was in 1953.

It was later that "Mexican Tommy" emerged as the dominant player of his era and eventually became a legend in his own time.

A few years ago, a motorcycle accident, complicated by a work accident, left Tommy with two broken wrists, a seriously broken ankle and a broken tailbone. The Grand Old Master steadfastly refused to compete in recent major tournaments because he would not play unless he believed he could once again play at the level of excellence worthy of the game. Said another way, Tommy did not want to embarrass himself or the sport.

On Thanksgiving weekend, 1987, Mexican Tommy entered the doubles competition at the Stagger Inn in Bellflower, California. Those of us who were there were given the unique privilege of taking a trip back in time. Tommy played his heart out. He finished second in the tournament — and Leroy Ledford and John McDermott almost became the answer to a trivia question.

His strong finish in this big tourney gave Tommy the recognition he so richly deserves. He proved that he is still a force to be reckoned with in The World of Shuffleboard.

Tommy is well-known on the West Coast as the greatest finesse player the game has ever seen. The mere mention of his name brings recollections of Tommy's many triumphs of years gone by. Everyone who knows him loves him and shares my belief that he belongs in Shuffleboard's Hall of Fame.

Welcome back, Tommy. The game has missed you.

More from Tommy's friends . . .

When I was playing in Fontana, San Bernardino, Highland, Ontario and Pomona, I played with and against a guy named Al Moreno. Al was always saying, "If you get to Inglewood, look up Mexican Tommy. If you play against him, you have been in a game!"

This was around 1977 or 1978. I never did get to Inglewood, but later, I met him in Bellflower or Downey. I respected him then and I respect him now. Congratulations, Tommy, you deserve this honor!

—*Frank Zavales*

I first met Tommy when I was a very young player in Roseburg, Oregon. Tommy came through town and left with all the best players' money in his pocket. He was definitely one of the very best players of his era. Tommy is also one of the finest gentlemen I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

—*Darrol Nelson*

When I first met Tommy, I had only been playing about four years. Although he wasn't playing as much anymore, he impressed me with one of the smoothest, most effortless-looking strokes I had ever seen. He was also quick to give advice and tips to newer players like myself. Always a gentleman and a class act!

—*Billy Maxwell*

In the mid-seventies, I met Tommy, Billy Chiles, Hal Perry and Joe Muniz at the Rodeo Room. Tommy acquired many nicknames, such as Sweet Stroke, Smooth, and Slick. He was always gentle, sportsmanlike, courteous, honest, and a neat dresser. He was such a great guy I wanted to ask him to marry me!

It is fitting that Tommy be honored by this select group of his peers. He was one of the frontiersmen, and certainly paid his dues. He has been an example to others, and has always gone out of his way to teach the game to new players. Congratulations, Tommy.

—*Freddy Thuman*

More from Tommy's friends

I've known Tommy Workman for 34 years. I first met him in 1964 when he came to Visalia at a little beer joint I had just opened called The Hut. He came with Troy Albert, Jack Glenn and Long Beach Jim. Jim and Tommy did most of the playing. I knew very little about the game, but I could tell that Tommy was a very fine shot.

I've heard Tommy's name mentioned many times in the same breath with Billy Mays. I learned very early to steer clear of Tommy when the money went down (if I wanted to take any home with me). I've always liked Tommy, and it's very hard to like a man that can beat you out of your money! Welcome to the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame, Tommy. I couldn't be in better company.

—*Bobby Goldsmith*

From 1955 until the early 60's, Tommy could be found at the Bird Cage, the Neptune Club, and the Balboa Club. He was the best short game player I've ever known—an all-around player. Except for poor health, he would still be competing.

Tommy played all the good players in his time. At one time, we saw and played each other every day—at the Bird Cage for the better part of a year. On weekends, we either went to the Spotlight, the Balboa Club, or wherever the action was. He is a quiet man, a gentleman, and I'm proud to say that he is a friend of mine. In my opinion, he has always been one of the best. He well deserves to be honored in the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame.

—*Jay Wilson*

I've known Tommy Workman for over 40 years. He was one of the top players in his time, and one of the top GENTLEMEN of *all* time. If there were a Hall of Fame for gentlemen shuffleboard players, Tommy would be the first inductee.

—*Al Stewart*

More from Tommy's friends

I'm really pleased to hear Tommy Workman is going to be inducted into the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame. I can't think of anyone more deserving.

I met Tommy some time in the early 60's. I had been trying to learn how to play shuffleboard at a little bar in Wilmington, Calif., called the 716 Club. Tommy came in and was watching me. He asked if I would mind if he showed me a few things. I didn't.

We became friends, and he started teaching me about shuffleboard. He told me some of the places where the good players were playing, but he wouldn't take me those places because he said I wasn't ready yet.

After a few weeks he said we could go see how we could do with the big boys. He took me to a place in El Monte, the Blue Star, which had three boards, and the place was packed. He put a challenge on one of the boards and told me I was going to have to play real good. At the time I didn't know any of the players. He said all I had to do was lag the weights off and give him the hammer. I did and he lagged solid 3's. We won three games. Only then did I find out that we had been playing Bob Miles and Billy Mays.

Tommy was the original ice man when it came to pressure. He could lag more 3's than anyone I have ever seen. There were many times when we were playing and would need a 3 to win the game and Tommy would say, "Go ahead and mark the points. I would mark up the points and he would lag the 3. He was like watching poetry in motion, he was so smooth.

Back in the 60's we had a lot of session play, at Sally's Old Dixie, the 3 P's, the Peanut House, and Blue Star. I have seen Tommy stand at the end of a shuffleboard for two days and nights non-stop. I remember the trip I was on with Tommy and Paul Galton. We went to Gallup, New Mexico to a place called the Rock Castle. The bartender told us that their players weren't there at the

players weren't there at the moment, but that he would call them. In the meantime, in order to keep us there, the bartender was playing us for \$50.00 a game.

When the players arrived, we played all afternoon and night. Paul and I were taking turns being Tommy's partner. I don't believe we lost a game. Most of the night the bar was packed to SRO. People were outside looking in. I wondered how we were going to get out of town, but we left at closing time and nothing happened.

Thank you, Tommy, for being my friend. It is an honor to have been your partner. Hang in there.

—*Jim McDonald, aka Long Beach Jim*

Sincere congratulations to Tommy on his induction into the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame. I met Tommy in the late 50s or early 60s when I had just started to play the game. He was the Michael Jordan of shuffleboard and all of us young lions watched and learned from the California master.

Most people remember Tommy for his shuffleboard skills, but my memories will be of a true gentleman, who treated everyone he met as if he had known them forever. He was always a humble winner and in particular, a great loser, which didn't happen too often. I have said often that when I grow up I want to be just like Tommy Workman.

—*Bud LaChappell*
Denver, CO

Congratulations, Tommy, on your induction to the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame. I can think of no one more deserving. Your knowledge and presence at the P.M. Tavern always picks up the quality of the game. We all appreciate the way that you have always shared your experience and finesse with all who had a hunger for the game.

—*Doug Tucker*

More from Tommy's friends . . .

Being from Northern California I never played "Mexican Tommy" when we could both really play shuffleboard with our "A" game, but believe me, I certainly heard his name many times.

For whatever reason, the couple of dozen times I played down South through the years, he was never part of the action, but it seems his name always got thrown in when you started talking about the great players across the country, from his lagging or board play to that beautiful stroke that seemed to flow from either hand. He was truly a great player. No question that he belongs in the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame.

For me, the greatest part of Tommy was as a person. I was lucky enough to spend some time with him in the last few years at some of the local Southern California tournaments. He might even be a finer person than he was a player. What a truly great guy and a real gentleman. The game sure could use more of his kind.

Congratulations, Tommy, on your induction. The California Hall of Fame is not only adding another great player, but a fine person as well. That's a tough combination. In fact, it's almost like adding two people.

Congratulations, twice, Tommy!

—*Hal Perry*

It's a pleasure to know Tommy Workman, the greatest player I ever played with. Congratulations on your induction into the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame. You deserve it. Here's a high five from me to you, with a twist. Your friend,

—*Clyde, aka. Clydene Wolfe*

Tommy's friends have the last word:

Gentleman Tommy Workman: A great shuffleboard player and friend.

Congratulations!

—*Jim Anderson, Jr.*

Tommy, besides being a gentleman, is a great player, one of the smartest, and a teacher.

I remember the first time I hit the Dixie in Chino about 30 years ago. Tommy had the next challenge, and was crashed in the corner. When he started playing all I saw was lag after lag. I said to myself, "Who is this guy?"

Best of luck in the future, Tommy.

Your friend —Ted Z.

Tommy was a session player—the best.

I remember the weekend at the old Dixie in Carbon Canyon. Tommy and Don Anger had been playing since Friday night with no sleep.

Sunday morning about 5:00, D.P. Jones and Jack Ahern showed up fresh as a daisy, and thinking Tommy and Don would be tired out, they challenged them. They played 4 or 5 hours and D.P. and Jack never won a game.

Tommy would fall asleep in between frames, but never lost his stroke.

Congratulations on your induction into the California Hall of Fame, Tommy. You are a deserving candidate.

—*LeRoy Waggoner*