

2007 / BDAWARDS /

# ELEVENTH ANNUAL B D AWARDS

RECOGNIZING THE PEOPLE AND EVENTS THAT SHAPE THE GAME WE PLAY

**PLAYER OF THE YEAR, MEN: RALF SOUQUET.**

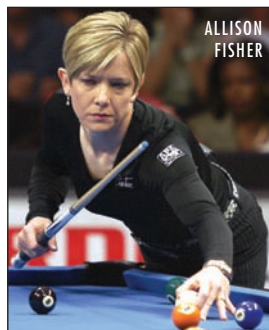
Nice guys finish first. The “Surgeon” stayed sharp throughout the year, snapping off the Derby City 9-ball title in January and anchoring Team Europe with a 5-1 record at the Mosconi Cup in December. Titles at the European Pool Championships, EnjoyPool.com 9-Ball Championships and World Pool Masters, plus strong showings at the World Pool Championship (2nd) and both IPT events (5th, 10th), gave him the edge over Efren “Don’t Cry for Me, Manila” Reyes, who cleared \$800,000 in winnings between Dec. 1, 2005, and Dec. 1, 2006.



**PLAYER OF THE YEAR, WOMEN: ALLISON FISHER.**

Once again, Allison Fisher edged out Karen Corr for POY by the slimmest of margins. Corr won three titles; Fisher won three titles. Corr won the Tournament of Champions invitational for \$25,000; Fisher took sec-

ond at the Enjoypool.com 9-ball Championship, the toughest women’s event of the year. Their record against each other this season was 1-1. But by the end of the year, Fisher’s fight in the face of a cancer diagnosis, as well as her superior showings in International Pool Tour events, put her over the top.



but his game never had this much bite.

**MOST IMPROVED PLAYER, WOMEN: ALICE RIM.**

Rim became a WPBA touring pro in 2000 and briefly flirted with the top 20 in 2001. Since then, she has hovered around the 50-mark — that is, until 2006, when she emerged from what she calls “a five-

**MOST IMPROVED PLAYER, MEN: RONNIE ALCANO.** Alcano once so revered Efren Reyes that he reportedly had all of his teeth removed so he could better resemble his hero. (Apparently, he didn’t have many teeth to begin with.) Alcano, 34, emerged from



Reyes’ oversized shadow in a big way in 2006, besting “Bata” at the World Pool Championship in Manila on his way to the \$100,000 title. That win came after his strong showings on the IPT (ranked No. 14). We’d seen Ronnie before,

year slump” and earned two back-to-back fifth-place finishes at the Great Lakes Classic and San Diego Classic, eventually jumping to 25th in the Classic Tour rankings. “I’ve learned a lot about myself recently, and I feel that somehow it’s been incorporated into my game,” she said.



**COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR, MEN: NICK VARNER.**

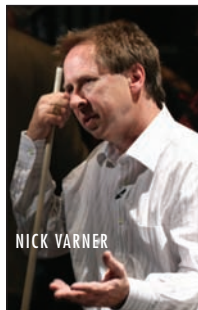
After Nick underwent aorta femoral bypass surgery in 2004, we were content just to see him up walking around and enjoying infant son Nicholas. But the 58-year-old

**“NOT EVERYTHING’S BIGGER IN TEXAS”**

**AWARD:** To the 2006 Billiard Congress of America International Billiard & Home Recreation Expo. The industry’s favorite debate — whether to hold the BCA Expo in spring or summer — became a lot less academic when buyers basically abandoned the April show in Houston (registered buyer attendance down 32 percent from 2005 in Las Vegas). The business-to-business bonanza felt more like a social experiment to see what happens when a convention center full of competing salespeople are stuck together with no customers. (Not surprisingly, traffic at the bar was brisk.) BCA brass reacted quickly, rescheduling the 2007 Expo from April 12-14 to June 21-23. Rumor has it that new BCA honcho Rob Johnson will offer to carpool with buyers for the show this year.



“Kentucky Colonel” hit the gym, streamlined his diet and made an impact on the IPT in 2006, earning \$31,910 and an impressive No. 39 ranking in two events. The guy’s got heart. Stay healthy, Nick.



NICK VARNER

**COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR, WOMEN: LOREE JON JONES.**

After floundering against Mike Sigel in the IPT’s debut event in 2005, Jones came back in 2006 to prove that she could hang with the big boys. At the IPT World Open, she provided the biggest upset of the tournament by thumping North American 8-Ball Open champion Thorsten Hohmann, 8-4, after running five racks in a row. In two IPT events, the semi-retired Hall-of-Famer was the third-highest ranked woman on tour (No. 97 overall).



LOREE JON JONES

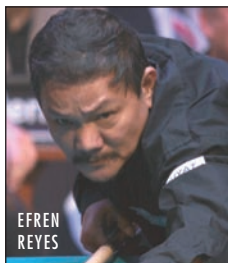
**MOST OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE, MEN: EFREN REYES, IPT WORLD OPEN 8-BALL CHAMPIONSHIP.** The IPT’s two events in 2006 were valuable for a number of reasons, such as providing an acid test for the game’s best pressure players. With a record-shattering \$500,000 on the line in the World Open final, and after a grueling week of playing 10 to 12 hours per day, 52-year-old Reyes shook off the

**THE YEAR’S BIGGEST STORY: The Philippines Rules Pool.** Yes, we all knew that the Philippines produced more than its fair share of world-class players. But in 2006, the “Philippine Invasion” turned into a full-on Occupation. In addition to established names like Reyes, Bustamante and Pagulayan, players such as Dennis Orcollo, Ronnie Alcano, Marlon Manalo and Rodolfo Luat terrorized the men’s circuit. Consider this:

There was at least one Filipino in the final of the five richest events of the year, and three were won by Filipinos (Efren Reyes: IPT World Open, \$500,000, and World Cup of Pool, w / F r a n c i s c o Bustamante \$60,000; Ronnie Alcano: World Pool Championship, \$100,000). At the IPT North American Open, there were seven Filipinos left in the final 18, although the country’s contingent accounted for a mere 6 percent of the 200-player field. Even more frightening, the notoriously freewheeling country recently began a push to organize and train players, bringing to light a whole new wave of talents who were on display at this year’s World Pool Championship in Manila. That the WPC will likely remain on the island nation for 2007 is no comfort to the rest of the globe.



THE GANG OF SEVEN AT THE N.A. OPEN



EFREN REYES

fatigue and expectations to bag the biggest prize in pool history. Too bad he didn’t walk off with the money case when he had the chance.

**MOST OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE, WOMEN: MARY RAKIN, 2006 WORLD JUNIOR 9-BALL CHAMPIONSHIPS.**

Rakin, 18, made history by becoming the first-ever American to win a junior world title since the competition began in 1992. Rakin plowed through an intimidating

field of 27 international players. To make the victory even sweeter, Rakin beat her biggest rival in the final — her teammate and fellow American, Anna Kostanian, 18. Rakin wanted revenge after Kostanian beat her, 7-2, in the final of the BCA Junior Nationals earlier in the year.



MARY RAKIN

**WEIRDEST PRODUCT ENDORSEMENT: The “Bada Break Cue.”**

In another coup for the billiard industry’s image-shapers, the character of “Gay Vito” (Joe Gannascoli) on “The Sopranos” was skewered in May with a cue stick. So, what’s an enterprising (and suddenly unemployed) actor to do? He develops a signature pool cue to trade on his infamy — The “Bada Break: A Cue to Die For.” We can’t make this stuff up: The portly Gannascoli also has line of cooking products, including “A Sauce to Die For,” “An Olive Oil to Die For,” and a cookbook called “A Meal to Die For.”



**BREAKOUT PLAYER OF THE YEAR, MEN: DENNIS ORCOLLO.**

With a rags-to-riches story to rival countryman Efren Reyes, 28-year-old Orcollo positioned himself this year at the crest of



DENNIS ORCOLLO

the latest wave of Filipino cue wizards. Landing on the West Coast early in the year, the former fisherman proceeded to snag seemingly every major event north of Baja. After plowing



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through an IPT tour-card qualifier at Hard Times Billiards, he recorded third- and fifth-place finishes on the tour, second only to Reyes for overall performance. His 2006 riches: \$202,500 in total winnings — fourth-best among pros.



JASMIN OUSCHAN

**BREAKOUT PLAYER OF THE YEAR, WOMEN: JASMIN OUSCHAN.** The 20-year-old Austrian gave spectators whiplash this year, not only with her head-turning good looks but with her fearless playing style. She beat Allison Fisher in final of the EnjoyPool.com 9-Ball Championships, cracked the top 8 at the World 14.1 Straight Pool Championship, and became the first woman to qualify for an IPT tour event. What's next? "I want to become competitive in men's tournaments," she said. Brace yourself, boys.

**BEST IMPRESSION OF JARED FOGLE: WU CHIA-CHING.** Husky. Heavysset. Beefy. Big-boned. However you wanted to put it, there was no denying that Taiwan's Wu Chia-Ching was a Big Kid when the 16-year-old wun-

**THE CLASSIEST CROWD OF THE YEAR: Manila (World Pool Championship).** After Ralf Souquet lost to Ronnie Alcano in the final of the WPC, the usually level-headed German couldn't contain his disappointment and frustration during a tableside TV interview and broke down. The Filipino crowd, which numbered more than 1,000, spontaneously began chanting "Sou-quet! Sou-quet!" and applauding until he lifted his head and waved. It was a genuine exchange of respect and gratitude that no one will soon forget.



WU: 2005



WU: 2006

derkind won the World Pool Championship in 2005. He was listed at 5-foot 8 and 187 pounds, though one suspected that those figures were one growth spurt and a large sausage pizza out of date. And there's nothing wrong with that. But Wu shocked the international pool community in November when he showed up to defend his title at the WPC a mere slip of his former self — a full 60 pounds lighter. Take note, fellas: The secret was a

strict diet of fruits, vegetables and protein. And being 17 years old. That helps.

**THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD GO US: JENNIFER CHEN.** We folks in the pool world are known to do a little bit of gambling from time to time. Maybe losing \$500 in a 10-ahead set or on the craps table means you have a problem, maybe not. That's your business. But we all should seriously ponder the fate of Taiwanese billiard superstar Jennifer Chen, who allegedly lost as much as \$600,000 betting on Taiwanese and U.S. baseball, and the 2006 World Cup. Debts to gangsters reportedly forced her to flee Taiwan



JENNIFER CHEN

**DR. JEKYL & MR. SNIDE — LOVING/LOATHING EARL STRICKLAND**

**Good Earl ...**



longer I got, to tell you the truth. Pool players live in dog years. When you're 40, you're like 80."

- "I'm going to try to wash once a day."
- "[Pool players] may not be scrupulous, but that doesn't mean we're not talented."
- "Pool is the worst drug on earth, ... but it's a good drug."

We fell in love with Earl all over again in May when he was inducted into the BCA Hall of Fame and delivered an acceptance speech for the ages. By turns humble, spunky and just plain wacky, Strickland left the crowd gasping for air with enough quips and zingers for a full edition of "Bartlett's Quotations." Among the highlights:

**Bad Earl ...**

Alas, "The Pearl" exhibited boorish behavior in 2006 above and beyond his established baseline. As usual, we had our pick of outbursts to recognize, but Earl really distinguished himself at the World Pool Championship in November. Against Taiwan's Ying-Chieh Chen, Strickland repeatedly threw his cue to the ground after innings, cursed in the crowd's general direction, and then threatened to hit Chen when the Taiwanese shooter refused to shake his hand after Strickland's 8-6 win. Runner-up: Earl snapping his cue during a snit at the Mosconi Cup in December (at right), and then walking out of a televised interview.



in late July and essentially go into hiding in the U.S. for a couple months (and in the process missing two WPBA events). She since has been named as a defendant in a wider gambling scandal. Remember, folks: Moderation is the best policy.

**MAN OF THE YEAR: YEN MAK-ABENTA.** It's hard to believe, but the Philippines has been churning out world-class pro pool players for the last two decades with no meaningful assistance from government sports agencies. That changed this year when the Billiard and Snooker Congress of the Philippines decided to get serious by staging pro events, starting a national billiard academy to develop new players, and creating an official ranking system. All this came under the watch of new BSCP chairman Makabenta, who also did the heavy lifting necessary to bring the World Pool Championship to the Philippines for the first time. His sports promotions firm, Raya Sports & Events, paid a \$1.1 million site fee and spent another \$200,000 to stage the event in the pool-crazy island nation. Knowing Raya would lose money on its first attempt, Makabenta took a \$100,000 hit but laid the groundwork for hosting the WPC in 2007 as well. With nearly three generations of great Pinoy players in good stroke all at once, and the strength of an egalitarian promoter and government agency behind



them, it looks like the Philippines will be the epicenter of international pool for the foreseeable future.

**THE "TEMPEST IN A HASH PIPE" SCANDAL OF 2006: DOPING.** It seemed pretty far-fetched at the time: A 2005 study conducted by the World Anti-Doping Agency found that an astonishing 9.96 percent of billiards players tested positive for prohibited substances (or "methods"). It was the highest incidence rate by far of all the 64 sports tested. (Sumo wrestling was next, with 5.88 percent of the study sample testing positive.) It was easy to dismiss the findings, as WADA couldn't provide any information about when or where the samples were provided, or which drugs were detected. And whoever heard of a pool player injecting himself with steroids for a more powerful break? A closer examination of the report revealed that the study also covered some recreational drugs. Aha. Makes more sense now.

**BIGGEST LOSSES:** Time isn't kind to most pool players, and we lost several of our most beloved figures in 2006: Hall of Famer Steve Mizerak, 61, on May 29; Bill "Weenie Beenie" Staton, 77, on Feb. 18; Allen Gilbert, 77, U.S. three-cushion champion, on July 15; and Gene Nagy, 59, straight-pool star, on July 13 — to name a few. Rest in peace, guys.



**THE YEAR IN QUOTES**

**"I wanted to puke up a lung."**  
 Aaron Goodwin,  
*after a fateful scratch for his team (Ritchie's Chicago) at the BCA Pool League 8-Ball Nationals.*

**"I promised my friend Fabio Petroni that we would go on a vacation to Hawaii with five girls."**  
 Evgeny Staley,  
*on what he would do with the money if he won an IPT event.*

**"I started practicing maybe a month ago. 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!"**  
 Quinten Hahn,  
*before tying for seventh place and winning \$30,000 at the IPT North American Open 8-Ball Championship.*

**"Rick Van den Berg ... Gaby Owen ... Marlon Manilow."**  
 EuroSport TV announcers,  
*having a hard time getting players' names straight at the IPT North American Open (referring to Nick Van den Berg, Gabe Owen and Marlon Manalo).*

**"Mr. Albanese emphasized that he is proposing a 'family style' facility and wouldn't have strippers, bachelor parties or even billiards."**  
 Report in the Riverhead (N.Y.) News-Review,  
*about a proposed bowling alley project in the city.*

**"You know, maybe it's like 'American Idol' — the one who comes in second always sells more albums, right?"**  
 Rodney Morris,  
*after finishing runner-up at the IPT World Open 8-Ball Championship and missing his chance at \$500,000.*

**"I am expensive."**  
 Xiao-ting Pan,  
*a native of China, in her acceptance speech for winning the WPBA's Rookie of the Year Award. She meant to say "excited."*

**BD FASHION AWARDS**



**A 'Braveheart' Statement: To Pat Holtz.** We're not sure how these Scottish guys continually pull it off, but Holtz made the kilt work for him at the World Pool Championship (he tied for ninth). That design is from the Scottish flag, by the way. "It's my lucky charm," Holtz said.

**Best Accessory: To Thorsten Hohmann.** We know it's hard to think about Hohmann without drawing comparisons to Paris Hilton. And "The Hitman" made it even tougher when he adopted his own Chihuahua, appropriately named "8-Ball." No word on whether 8-Ball travels in Thorsten's cue case.

