

My First Encounter With Shuffleboard

Was driving down Alternate U.S. 19 and crossed over a small bridge between Dunedin and Clearwater, when the good wife and I noticed a lot of cars, campers and what-have-you, parked off to the left of us. Thinking we had found a new flea market, we turned in at the third driveway and noticed a sign stating that we had entered a Shuffleboard Club. Seeing as there was no sign telling us we were not welcome, we figured we would take a gander at what was going on with all these folks around. Figured there must be something being given away free or a sale of some sort. We could see it wasn't a flea market by the looks of the place.

Well, we got a place to park after driving around a bit and got up on the side of a bunch of green sidewalks with markings at each end and each sidewalk had a bench at each end with people sitting on them. These folks had long poles which they used to push saucers down these sidewalks. A fellow was standing in between two sidewalks with a shorter pole that had yellow on one end and black on the other. He called out some numbers and a gal on the one end of the sidewalk put them up on a blackboard. Wife said "This must be some kind of a game." She is a lot smarter than me, so I had to agree with her. After a few minutes a fellow came up to us and said "Bet this is the first time you ever saw a game of shuffleboard played?" We told him it was not only the first time but the first time we ever heard of a game called shuffleboard. First question I asked was, "Where is the board?" He gave me a funny look and sat down and I could see he knew something about the game as he had a ribbon on that said, "Chief Referee." He then began to tell us what the game was all about. Found out what we thought were sidewalks painted green were called courts. Each end had a place where you could score a 10, two places to score a 8 and also, two places to score a 7, and then behind this was what he called a kitchen. When you put a saucer in this, it meant that you got a 10 off. Must say here, that the kitchen part had me stumped but didn't want to look dumb and didn't seem to bother the good wife, so figured she knew what he was talking about. He then called what I thought were saucers, discs. There were 4 yellow and 4 black. Told us that the yellow used to be red, but some of the older folks couldn't tell the difference between the red and black, so now they make them yellow.

He said that the lady on one end of the court was playing with the fellow on the other end of the court. Here I figured that this game was not much if you had to be some 30 to 40 feet from the woman you were to be playing with, but again not wanting to show how dumb I was, I kept quiet and he told us what they were trying to do. Called the poles a cue, which made sense, as I had played some pool in my day. Told us that the woman that was shooting a yellow disc just put out a St. Pete block. The gal on the black side hit that disc and it went three courts down between some peoples' legs, but all she got was a dirty look and they kept on shooting. On the third disc, this lady the fellow said put out a Tampa block. Again I wondered where the names St. Pete and Tampa came in, when we were closer to Clearwater and Dunedin. Maybe they call them discs different names at different places. I didn't ask and the fellow didn't give us any answer for the names. Anyway, again all these ladies discs were knocked off the court and on her last one she tried to place it in the 10 on spot, but was short. The other lady left it alone and put in a good 8 with her last disc. He called the fellow with the short pole a referee and this fellow gave a score of 8 black to the gal at the blackboard which she put down, giving the yellow a big fat zero. Noticed that he called the referees short pole a stick and told us that when yellow is out he has the yellow down and when black is out he has the black side down. You see, they took turns going out. You can tell this fellow was getting something into my thick head as I was starting to catch on to what they were up to and that was to hide a disc if the other fellow didn't knock it off. Told us they had to reach 75 points to make a game. Had to win 2 of them in a row or the best 2 out of 3, as he put it, and this in turn moved them out on a chart. They they would be called again to play someone else. Told us there were District Amateurs, State Amateurs and Pro's. We were watching an amateur game, as here they can play either men together, ladies together, or a lady and a man as partners. In the Pro's they had to play men against the men and ladies against the ladies. Gave us some reason for this about not getting enough money to give trophies and money when they had so many divisions. Amateurs got trophies and the Pro's got the money.

After playing for a few months we had so much fun that we would like to have more of you folks get interested in the game, meet all the nice folks that play the game, enjoy the sunshine and see how good you can become by playing the game and try to win some trophies, or better yet, some money. Hope to meet you on the courts next season.

Willie E. Wolf