

Speaking of Dustin Dunham

By
Jay L. Carlton

The Date: The weekend of October 9th, 10th & 11th, 2009.

The Venue: Side Pockets Sports Bar & Grill, St. Charles, Mo.

The Event: The 71st Missouri 8 Ball Pool League Shootouts.

For those who couldn't be here, I'm going out on a limb and say it's very possible you missed the greatest exhibition of shooting put on by a single individual in the 24-year history of Missouri 8 Ball. And I'm guessing it will be a long time before this is duplicated or surpassed.

All due respects to Jim Croce, there are other things you don't do besides 'spit in the wind', or 'tug on Superman's cape'. I mean, you wouldn't marry someone from Al-Qaeda, would you?

But you can add this to the list of 'don'ts' without fear of contradiction: You don't give Dustin Dunham a second chance at the pool table.

A lot of Dustin's opponents learned an important lesson this weekend. That's the shortsighted scale. It's like, you get one audience with the Pope; or one request from Tony Soprano. Do it now or turn in your dance card. Because there will be no call from the Governor. No reprieve. Nothing.

I.Q. Jones says there's a new term floating around that refers to showing respect. It's called – Buzz-worthy. And for this weekend, in the true sense of the vernacular, Dustin Dunham was BUZZZZZZZZZZ-worthy.

He barely missed winning the Top Player title (.031) from Division-15. But a different story this weekend. Neither Dustin nor his Side Pockets teammates were to be denied in bringing the first place trophy to their home base.

Dustin plays '8' ball like a new wave version of Jerry Terbrock or Ed Libby or Rich Sager or Kenny Vaughn; wearing his charisma like expensive cologne, unleashing a never-ending stream of idiosyncrasies. Everything about him stands out – the way he leans into his stance at the foot of the table free stroking prior to breaking. You see a slight movement from his cue stick as he prepares to send the cue ball toward the rack. Head steady, eyes darting rhythmically, etc. past the cue ball to the target; then WHAM! If a ball finds a pocket you can forget it. You now get the chance to witness his effortless ability in pocketing the balls. Take a seat, watch the show. Oh, you can try saying a prayer, but don't expect divine intervention.

Gradually, you could see him finding a rhythm and settling into an effective mix of runouts, ducking, banking, hiding. It was like the second coming of Houdini. Oh, you could try to tie him up and try to lock him down, but attempting to keep him confined or detained is like a fish attempting to play the piano. Ain't gonna happen, dude! Dustin was getting out from everywhere.

Actually, it's a misnomer saying Dustin did a lot of 'ducking' or 'hiding'. Just thought I'd throw that in. Because there's no reason to duck and hide when the balls are just sitting in the wide open spaces like Custer was at Little Big Horn. Like the whole Sioux Nation, Dustin was in dead punch. You could see it on the faces of his opponents. They were done. Even better, their teammates knew it. By the fourth round you couldn't hear a peep coming from the other team's section.

There's always something going on with him, only it never seems contrived (like with Wyatt Earp at the O.K. Correll). This even translates when helping out teammates and offers opinions in coaching situations, without fear of retribution. In this respect, Dustin shares the same refreshing qualities as Keith Valet, another fine player who ignited this team. It showed this weekend when both were more than reliable in clutch spots. Both are superlative eight-ball players, rather than being repelled by pressure, both naturally drawn to big moments, like Bill Mazeroski in the bottom of the 9th of the 1960 World Series. That's a tough combo.

Case in point: Down 10-9 in the Saturday noon match against Kenny Vaughn's Bar and Grill, Dustin interrupted Charlie Miller's winning streak by making it a double-hill situation setting up Rick King for the winning game.

Against Libby's in the 4 p.m. match Dustin's 4th win put his team on the hill setting up the victory for Susan Valet. (And that's another story for another time.)

The 8 p.m. match against another very good team out of Libby's saw Dunham with another 4-win match that set the stage for Keith Valet to take the match by winning both the 10th and 11th games. I mean, can it get any better!

It does. The Sunday noon matchup with Mario Webster's Side Pockets team was no gimme. But Dustin was fine-tuned as he was well-focused and turned in another stellar performance by having his *third* 4-win match of the tournament. Did you get that; at this writing Dunham is the only player to accomplish this feat. His 4th win of the match was the team's 11th setting the stage for the Championship. For bragging rights and the Championship match, Dustin fired off another three wins, including the 12th and final game in a 12-1 (12-6) romp over Cotter's.

And it didn't stop there. Add another three wins from the "Ultimate Challenge" shootout and we find that Mr. Dunham finished the weekend with an omniscient 19-game winning streak and an unparalleled, but not surprising, 20-2 record. I mean, he was like a runaway boxcar. Good God! Th-that's Rich Sager's music! Except Sager never won 20-games at any M0-8 weekend! Until 'Bustin' Dustin came along, no one had ever turned in a 20-win performance or a 19-game winning streak at any previous Missouri 8 Ball event.

And to think, it almost didn't happen. And believe me, there are several teams and opponents this weekend who were looking for the genie in the bottle. You know what wish would have been asked for! What happened is this: Dustin began the tournament with his original team out of Teachers. They went down the first match Friday night, 11-7. Dustin had a 2-2 record for this losing match. Missouri 8 Ball rules say players that qualify with more than one team have to decide on which team to open with. As long as that team is winning the player has to remain with them. But once their first team is eliminated (before Sunday's matches) they can join their second team (as long as that second team wants to add them to the roster). No problem here.

Combine Dustin's two-team totals and we get yet another record. His 22-4 is by far the best performance turned in by any player. And, as mentioned, the single team 20-2 might never be beaten.

It's safe to say that Dustin Dunham goes after big-game wins like immigrants go after citizenship, only without the 5-year wait. This is a very good argument of whom you want at the table with a big game on the line. Because, as All-States Dennis Haysbert tells us, you know you're in good hands with Dustin Dunham! Congrats, and great shooting, man!