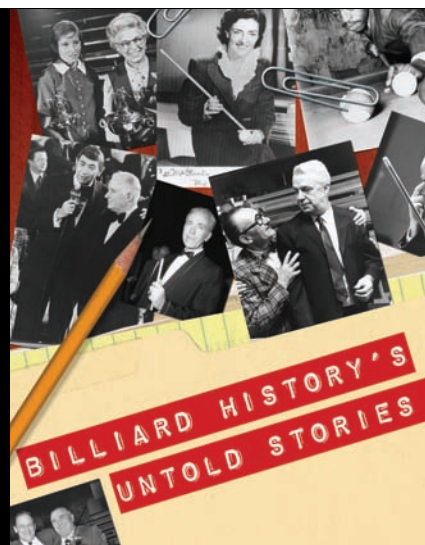


POOL'S BAD BOY VS. BRUNSWICK

Jilted Greenleaf filed suit for \$100K in industry row.

— Story by R.A. Dyer



ON NOV. 5, 1946, at precisely 10:35 a.m., pool superstar Ralph Greenleaf sent a short telegram to table-maker Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co. It was written in all caps — which I know is how such things were written back then — but it nonetheless gives the note an appropriately breathless feel.

This is what it said:

“HAVE BEEN PLAYING BY FAR BEST POCKET BILLIARDS OF MY CAREER IN MATCHES RIGHT IN PHILADELPHIA WHERE TOURNAMENT IS TO BE PLAYED. ALSO HAD GOOD PUBLICITY ON SAME. ALSO IN BEST SHAPE OTHERWISE EXPECT TO BE IN TOURNAMENT. UNDERSTAND THROUGH ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE I AM NOT. PLEASE HAVE COURTESY TO ANSWER ME ON THIS OR HAVE NATIONAL BILLIARD ASSOCIATION DO SO TO 153 NORTH QUEST ST LANCASTER PA.”

I came across this curious note in the National Archives, along with records of a startling lawsuit. As it turned out, Greenleaf was right: He was being kept out of the 1946 world tournament. And so he sued, claiming Brunswick-Balke-Collender had blackballed him because he had declined to use the manufacturer’s equipment during various exhibitions.

Brunswick countered that it was the Billiard Association of America, and

not the company, that barred Greenleaf. Brunswick further alleged that Greenleaf was barred from the tournament not for any improper monopolistic reasons, but because the former champion had acted deplorably during previous matches.



Barred from the world tournament, Greenleaf struck back.

The principal witness for Brunswick said that Greenleaf, who arguably is the greatest pool player this country had ever known, had for years harmed the sport. Yikes.

Welcome back to *Untold Stories*. This month’s installment is about that fascinating \$100,000 lawsuit, 282 pages of which I managed to dig up after several long-distance phone calls and discussions with various archivists and reviews of newspaper clippings. Although it’s unclear how the lawsuit turned out — I imagine it was probably settled or dropped — the papers do provide a fascinating glimpse of some of the behind-the-curtains ugliness of the pool world. One document also provides a rough timeline of Greenleaf’s professional career, which is the first I’ve ever come across.

This month’s column is mostly based on those court records, but I also consulted the *New York Times* archives, a book on the history of the company called “Brunswick: The Story of an American Company” by Rick Kogan, Willie Mosconi’s memoirs, written with Stanley Cohen, and the BCA’s Rules and Records Book. Likewise, I’ve taken some text from a reprint of a *Philadelphia Daily News* article. I’ve also drawn a little bit from the research I recently completed for my new book, “The Hustler & The Champ.”

It’s important to understand the lawsuit in context. Greenleaf then was considered the finest pool player America had ever produced. Many still consider him so. Before it was over, Greenleaf would win 14 world titles. He remains the youngest man ever to win

IMAGE COURTESY THE BILLIARD ARCHIVE

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE UNITED STATES FOR
THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

RALPH GREENLEAF,
Plaintiff

vs.

BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER
COMPANY,
Defendant

Civil Action No. 6776

FILED

MAR 14 1947

RE-AMENDED COMPLAINT

JOSE BRODECK, C

TO THE HONORABLE, THE JUDGES OF SAID COURT By _____ Dpty. Clerk

The plaintiff above named brings this civil action against the defendant above named and complains and alleges as follows:

1. The action arises under Sections 1 and 2 of the Act of Congress of July 2, 1890, 26 Stat. 209, c.647, 15 U.S.C. Sections 1 and 2, commonly known as the Sherman Act, and Sections 3, 4 and 16 of the Act of Congress of October 15, 1914, 38 Stat. 730, 731, c.325, 15 U.S.C. Sections 14, 15 and 26, commonly known as the Clayton Act, as hereinafter more fully appears.

2. Plaintiff is now and for many years has been a professional billiard and pocket billiard player, and has participated in many exhibitions and matches and world championship tournaments and has been the publicly recognized world champion pocket billiard player on many occasions, and more often than any other player of the present or past.

3. Defendant is a corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of Delaware, and defendant has an agent and transacts business in the State of Pennsylvania, particularly in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and has an office and place of business in said District at #1400 North Broad Street in the City of Philadelphia.

-1-

The suit drew the curtain back on industry politics and Greenleaf's behavior.

the world straight-pool championship. For years he destroyed the competition.

But he was also a known drunk and a known troublemaker, a bad-boy sports superstar in that long colorful tradition of American bad-boy sports superstars.

Brunswick-Balke-Collender, by contrast, did all it could to promote pool as wholesome family fun. It was also America's leading billiard manufacturer, and until about 1950 pretty much ran pool. The fingerprints of the company's iron hand can be clearly found on the tournaments, the titles, and the career trajectories of the sport's greatest stars.

The lawsuit, which was filed in U.S. District Court, represented a conflict of the proverbial immovable object and the irresistible force. It represented the two great symbols of the sport going against each other, head to head.

GREENLEAF WON his first title in December 1919, and then went on to win again in 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1929, 1931, 1932, 1933 and 1937. He continued to play and compete in subsequent years, although it can safely be assumed that his drinking and wild ways had by the 1940s begun taking a toll. One news re-

port shows he went missing altogether in 1946.

The earliest court document that I came across was filed on March 14, 1947. It's an amended petition from Greenleaf, and it alleges that Brunswick "controlled, dominated and monopolized the said business of staging and conducting exhibitions, matches, tournaments and championship contests." It further alleges that Brunswick "dictates who may participate in said matches, tournaments and contests, the time and place of same, the equipment that may be used therein, and all participants ... are further required to agree, to endorse, and to endorse only (Brunswick) billiard equipment."

Greenleaf, interestingly enough, also manages to drag into his assault on Brunswick that other great icon of the sport, Willie Hoppe. The three-cushion champion joined with future Hall-of-Famer Charles Peterson in 1941 to form the Billiard Association of America. The association, as Greenleaf clearly shows in his lawsuit, had extremely close ties to the pool company. For instance, Peterson was the BAA director, and he received a \$500 monthly stipend from Brunswick. It was his only income.

Greenleaf alleges that the BAA was formed so Brunswick could achieve "more complete and perpetual control over professional billiard and pocket billiard players" and that all tournaments conducted since Sept. 20, 1941, until the moment the lawsuit was filed, were done so on behalf of Brunswick.

"The defendant (Brunswick) has now and always has had complete and direct control over said Billiard Association of America, and all activities of the Billiard Association of America are designed and executed by the servants, agents, and employees of defendant," the document alleged. Elsewhere, Greenleaf's attorneys claim the champion was barred from the 1946 tournament, which was conducted Dec. 3-11, 1946, at Philadelphia's Town Hall, because he had not played exclusively on Brunswick equipment. (Irving Crane won the tournament, and Mosconi came in second.)

"In public contemplation, all of the better pocket billiard players of the world participate in all world championship tournaments, and any failure of a former world champion player to enter the competition is regarded by the

public as an indication of the player's loss of ability or moral fitness," Greenleaf alleged.

NOW THAT was one side of the story. Brunswick's was quite another. Yes, the company had deep connections with the Billiard Association of America. Yes, the BAA insisted on the use of Brunswick tables. But the fact that the BAA barred Greenleaf had nothing to do with the company's corporate interests, or for any monopolistic reasons.

The reason the BAA barred Greenleaf was because he had been acting like a maniac.

Peterson, a former fancy-shot champion and an eventual Hall of Famer for his work promoting the sport, noted in a July 2, 1947, deposition that during Prohibition many poolrooms had become fronts for bootlegging and gambling. He said that he had spent years attempting to rehabilitate the sport's image, much of it through his work with Brunswick, but also through his work on behalf of the Association of College Unions and the Boys' Clubs of America.

Peterson said that Greenleaf in recent years was not helping that effort.

"I have known Ralph Greenleaf since he began his career as a professional pocket-billiard player in 1919," Peterson said in the deposition. "Throughout his career he has been a player of outstanding ability. However, for many years past his conduct while participating in exhibition matches and tournaments has been extremely harmful to the game of billiards. He has engaged in unsportsmanlike tactics, has used vile and profane language, and had indulged in the use of intoxicating drink during matches and tournaments."

And then Peterson goes on to cite chapter and verse:

"Specifically, in the 1941 World Pocket-Billiard Championship, staged by the Association in Philadelphia, Greenleaf, on several occasions, appeared for his scheduled match under the influence of intoxicating drink and frequently used vile and profane language.

"In the 1942 World Championship



Peterson took sole responsibility for banning Greenleaf.

Pocket-Billiard Tournament, conducted by the Association in Detroit, Greenleaf, on several occasions, violated the rule of the tournament with respect to delay in play, appeared for at least one match while under the influence of intoxicat-

ing liquor, and used vile and profane language.

"In the 1942 World 3-Cushion Billiards Tournament held at Chicago under the auspices of the Association, Greenleaf again violated the rules with regard to delaying tactics, appeared for some matches while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, and used vile and profane language."

Peterson wrote that he witnessed first hand this deplorable conduct. He said he pleaded with Greenleaf on several occasions to change his wanton ways. "Because he persisted in his objectionable conduct, I decided that Greenleaf would not be invited to play in any exhibition, match or tournament thereafter sponsored, staged or conducted by the Association, and I so informed Greenleaf."

Greenleaf was initially barred from the 1944 World 3-Cushion tournament, but Peterson relented after receiving an appeal from an associate. Peterson said Greenleaf behaved himself during that event, but by the 1945 exhibition match with Willie Mosconi had returned to his old ways.

Q With whom did you have the discussions?

A With Mr. R. F. Bensinger.

Q When did you have that discussion?

A Well, that was before -- I couldn't give you the date but I told him that I probably would not let him in the tournament.

Q What did he say when you said you probably wouldn't let him in the tournament?

A Well, that was up to me, entirely. I know well enough if I said No --

Q Now, I didn't ask you what you knew. I am asking you to state, if you please, what he said. If you don't know, say that, but please answer my question.

A He said, "It's up to you."

Q Did you have any discussion with any other officer of the Brunswick-Balke Collender Company besides Mr. Bensinger?

Interviewing Peterson, Greenleaf's lawyer tried to link the BAA with Brunswick.

"The two men played for a week in Chicago, at the billiard rooms of one Norman Bensinger, and I was present," said Peterson. "Greenleaf was almost continuously under the influence of intoxicating drink and frequently used vile and profane language. On one occasion Greenleaf cursed a spectator. On another, he deliberately broke his cue in a fit of temper. Bensinger and I called Greenleaf in Bensinger's office and remonstrated with him, but without effect on his conduct."

PETERSON ALSO said he had received numerous reports from others of similar conduct by Greenleaf. The court documents included a few telegrams hinting at the conduct, and there's also paperwork in which Brunswick attorneys cite example after example of Greenleaf's supposedly out-of-control ways. The company attorneys also suggested they were willing to call up stars like Willie Mosconi, Andrew Ponzi, and Jimmy Caras to testify against Greenleaf, although I find no record that that ever occurred.

But some of the examples of Greenleaf's behavior to which these other men were supposedly witness, include:

- In 1933 and 1934, Greenleaf was disqualified from a tournament in Chicago because of bad behavior.
- In 1938, Greenleaf failed to appear for a scheduled exhibition match in Philadelphia with Andrew Ponzi.
- In 1937 and 1938, Greenleaf refused to appear in a New York tournament, although he had contracted to do so.
- In 1942, Greenleaf appeared 35 minutes late — and drunk — for a Rhode Island exhibition match.
- In 1945, while playing a match with Willie Mosconi at Bensinger's recreation center in Chicago, Greenleaf allegedly cursed a spectator.
- In 1946, Greenleaf showed up for a Baltimore, Md., match "under the influence of liquor" and was abusive to his opponent and the referee. Some spectators allegedly walked out.

"As a result solely of the foregoing, I decided that Greenleaf would not be invited to play in the 1946 World Pocket-Billiards Championship, con-

ducted by the Association in Philadelphia," Peterson testified. "It was due to my decision alone that Greenleaf was not invited to participate, and that his request for permission to participate was refused. My decision was based entirely on my judgment that his participation in the tournament would be detrimental to the best interests of the sport of billiards."

Greenleaf denied all of Peterson's and Brunswick's allegations. His at-

fair deal all around, and competition open to everyone of merit. So Greenleaf has a few bad habits. He is still the greatest billiard player of the world."

As I noted earlier, it's unclear how all this turned out. One thing is certain, however. Brunswick and the industry group did maintain, at the time of the lawsuit, a firm grip over the sport and the players. It's also true that that grip was slackening by 1950, which was also the year of Greenleaf's death.

One last observation: Greenleaf was not alone in getting banned by the BAA. From a review of other documents, it becomes clear that Peterson and/or the association also barred George Kelly, Johnny Irish and 12-time world three-cushion champion (and Hall-of-Famer) Johnny Layton. In my last column, I wrote about Andrew St. Jean, a talented pool player who largely squandered his talent because of his heavy drinking. He's also on the list. What I find interesting about his case is that it appears he may have been unaware he had been blackballed.

The following exchange is between Peterson and an attorney in the case. It was taken from a March 10, 1948, deposition.

Q. Any others (that you barred)

that you can recall?

A. I am trying to think of the name; it's in the East somewhere; he asked several times to get into the tournament and I kind of put him off, saying that we already had the entry of enough players to participate and we couldn't use him this time. I turned him down a couple of times. Just a moment and I'll think of the name. He lives in Massachusetts.

Q. Was it St. Jean?

A. St. Jean. That's right.

Those interested in reviewing some of the documents from the case file can go to the www.poolhistory.com Web site. Click on the "blog" link and look for the Ralph Greenleaf section. I'll also post the timeline I came across that delineates Greenleaf's pro career.

R.A. Dyer is author of *The Hustler & The Champ: Willie Mosconi, Minnesota Fats and the Rivalry that Defined Pool*. For more about the book, Greenleaf and the history of the sport, go to www.pool-history.com.



The Brunswick brand cultivated a family-friendly image.

torneys also managed to drag Mosconi into the unpleasantness, as they noted that a May 26, 1947, magazine article appeared to describe unsportsmanlike conduct similar to that which Greenleaf had been accused. Specifically, the article noted that Mosconi had banged his cue and stomped around after missing a shot. He allegedly also snapped at spectators. All of this, of course, would have been very much in character for the hotheaded Mosconi.

In a Dec. 5, 1946, article, *Philadelphia Daily News* sports editor Lanse McCurley summed up the Greenleaf controversy. Even if the allegations against the champion were true, he wrote, that was still no reason to bar him.

"They say Greenleaf had a fight with the firm which is said to control the association — if this is the only reason Greenleaf isn't playing, the people staging the tournament will hardly be fair to their champion," wrote McCurley. "The general public, strangely, likes to see a

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