

= Yank Adams =

Frank B. Adams ( December 19 , 1847 ? after January 1923 ) , commonly known as Yank Adams , was a professional carom billiards player who specialized in finger billiards , in which a player directly manipulates the balls with his or her hands , instead of using an implement such as a cue stick , often by twisting the ball between one 's thumb and middle finger . Adams , who was sometimes billed as the " Digital Billiard Wonder " , has been called the " greatest of all digit billiards players " , and the " champion digital billiardist of the World . " George F. Slosson , a top billiards player of Adams ' era , named him the " greatest exhibition player who ever lived . " Adams ' exhibitions drew audiences of 1 @, @ 000 or more , leaving standing room only , even in small venues .

Adams ' career began when he found his aptitude for bowling translated to the playing of billiards . One day when he was 25 years old , he picked up some billiard balls and began to " bowl " on the table and soon discovered he could manipulate the balls with great accuracy in this manner . Largely self @-@ taught , Adams thereafter amassed a large repertoire of finger billiards shots . He engaged a manager and began to give performances , his first was at an engagement in New York City . Later , Adams traveled extensively , giving exhibitions and taking on challengers in cities across the United States and some in Europe . During his travels , Adams performed before the Vanderbilts , the Goulds , three U.S. Presidents , the Prince of Wales in London , and the Comte de Paris in Paris . One of the largest matches ever played of any form of billiards took place at Manhattan 's Gilmore 's Gardens in 1878 . Adams played using his fingers against William Sexton , the reigning cue champion of the world , who used a cue ; Adams won the three @-@ day competition in the game of straight rail .

= = Early life = =

Adams was raised in Norwich , Connecticut , which led to him being nicknamed " Yank " later in life . From a young age , he exhibited the substantial hand strength required for finger billiards . When he was less than a year old , he could hurt his mother with his grip ; she gave him chunks of bread to squeeze instead . Adams was large for his age , and in 1863 , he disguised his youth , and joined the Eighteenth Connecticut Volunteers , with whom he served for three years , fighting for the Union in the American Civil War . After being discharged , Adams worked as a carpenter from 1872 to 1875 , and then became a traveling salesman for the American Sterling @-@ Silver Company .

= = = Beginnings in billiards = = =

Adams finger billiards and exhibition work had its germination in his early bowling interest . By the time he was 17 , Adams was an adept bowler ; he often gave informal exhibitions of bowling tricks such as " cocked hat " , " back frame " , and letting the head pin remain standing . In a 1913 interview , Adams said that , " [ i ] n those days we rolled what was termed ' skew ball ' , similar to the english put on a cue ball in Billiards . "

When Adams was 25 he was employed as a traveling salesman for the Derby Silver Company in New York . One day , while he was waiting for customers in a Poughkeepsie hotel , he strolled into a billiard room , took six pool balls over to a billiard table , and commenced to " bowl " . The attention of everyone in the room was attracted by the manner in which Adams made the ball travel . One man asked for the privilege of placing the balls in a certain position for Adams to bowl at ; Adams made the shot easily . This started Adams ' career as a finger billiard expert . In the next town he traveled to , he hired a table , performed the same stunts with the balls , and added a few new shots . For three months after that Adams practiced various shots each day , and some of the shots he developed during that time became part of his regular exhibition repertoire .

When he returned to New York , Adams met with Maurice Daly , then the " dean of billiards " . Daly listened to Adams ' story , and said that he was not aware that any startling shots could be accomplished using only the hands . Daly offered Adams a set of four balls , and sat down to watch

Adams . After 12 shots , Daly became greatly interested , often asking Adams to repeat shots . At the end of the performance , Daly told Adams that if he ever entertained any idea of entering the billiards field he would give Adams an engagement at his room .

= = Professional career = =

= = International success = = =

As Adams became more involved with billiards , he gave up his job with the silver company . Adams went to Sexton 's billiard parlor in the Bowery and Sexton employed Adams at Miner 's Bowery Theater at \$ 115 a week . Adams sought to employ a manager as was typical of billiards professionals of the time ; he was taken on by Billy O 'Brien , a well known sports authority and one @-@ time pugilist who managed Dominick McCaffrey later in his career . O 'Brien organized an exhibition tour of the United States for Adams . Three months into the tour , Adams reached Chicago , where he played a three @-@ week engagement for Billy Emmett at \$ 500 a week . After leaving the stage , Adams opened at O 'Connor 's billiard room , at Fourteenth Street and Fourth Avenue , where he played nightly for a year . Adams then resumed traveling , and gave exhibitions in nearly every city in the United States and a large number of cities in Europe .

In 1868 Adams appeared before the Prince of Wales in London and the Comte de Paris in Paris . While in London , John Roberts , Jr. offered Adams \$ 300 per week for one year to play afternoon and evening at his Argyle Rooms . After playing for the Comte de Paris , the Frenchmen wanted Adams to state his figures for an indefinite period . Adams also played for three Presidents of the United States ; while in New York he was paid \$ 100 per night by the Vanderbilt and Gould families . Bullocks Billiard Guide said that Adams had earned more than \$ 70 @, @ 000 for exhibition alone over seven years , which was more than the combined earnings of all other listed billiardists . Though champion players with cues sometimes dabbled in finger billiards , it was said even of such greats as Jacob Schaefer , George Slosson , and Eugene Carter that " their work , compared with that of the Finger Wonder , is like a novice playing an expert . "

= = Public exhibitions = = =

Adams ' first major public exhibition in New York was held on January 31 , 1878 , at the Union Square Billiard Rooms before a large audience ; he performed there nightly for a week . Reporting on the first night of the event , The New York Times wrote :

The intricacy of the various shots he played , as well as the marvelous accuracy with which they were executed , frequently roused the spectators to an unusual pitch of enthusiasm .... Many of Adams ' shots are entirely new , never having been attempted before by any billiards expert . Among them may be mentioned the wonderful " bottle " shot with which last evening 's exhibition was brought to a close . Two soda @-@ water bottles were placed at the head of the left @-@ hand rail , about a foot apart , a red ball being placed in the mouth of each bottle . A white ball was next placed against the right @-@ hand rail , directly opposite the lower bottle . Everything being in readiness , Adams then took the remaining white ball in his hand , and masseing upon the ball in the mouth of the upper bottle , jumped his ball to the ball in the mouth of the other bottle , whence , falling upon the table it was carried by a reverse " English " to the middle of the top rail , whence it glided with unerring accuracy to the right @-@ hand rail and caromed upon the first @-@ mentioned white ball , its successful execution being greeted with great applause .

= = Competitive play and rivalries = = =

= = = M. Adrian Izar = = =

Prior to Adams ' performances , finger billiards had been demonstrated in New York by French player M. Adrien Izar , who had astonished spectators with an exhibition held on September 20 , 1875 , before which the game was little known in the United States . In France and England , Izar was considered the game 's champion player . The night before his 1878 exhibition , Adams received a telegram in which Izar challenged him to play for the championship and named Chicago as the venue for contest . Adams replied that he was unwilling to leave New York at that time , but that he would pay Izar 's expenses to travel to New York . Adams later issued the following statement to newspapers :

I have never intended to play a public match in my line , having never arrogated to myself a superiority above other hand billiard players , although I have deemed myself the equal of any one living in my line , not excepting Mons . Izar , by whom continually letters are written , whose contents have for their purpose a derogation of my skill . That this may be checked , and summarily , I would state that I am willing to play Mons . Izar a match game for \$ 500 a side , in New York City , Boston or Chicago , on a 5x10 table , full size balls and Collender cushion ; the championship and gate money to be awarded the player showing the greatest variety of shots in connection with accuracy , and in all giving the most interesting exhibition of finger billiards .

= = = = William Sexton = = = =

On March 15 , 1878 , a billiards match of straight rail began that lasted three days at the game The match was between Adams and William Sexton , then the cue champion of the world , at Manhattan 's Gilmore 's Gardens ? the predecessor venue of Madison Square Garden . The match pitted Adams ' finger billiards against Sexton using a cue , for a purse of \$ 500 . The audience was one of the largest that had ever witnessed a billiards game . The terms of the contest stated that on each day of the match , Adams was required to score 2 @ , @ 000 points , while Sexton needed only 1 @ , @ 000 .

On the first day of the match , Adams scored 1 @ , @ 110 points using finger billiards . Despite Adams ' impressive opening performance , by the third day of the match , Sexton was far in the lead . In Dewey @ - @ Defeats @ - @ Truman @ - @ style , many newspapers reported that Sexton won the tournament , as their reporters left the venue at a time when Sexton had a seemingly indomitable lead and before the match was over . The New York Times , for example , reported that Sexton won the match , though they leavened the result by reporting that despite the prize fund , it was a " friendly match " , geared toward exhibition , and that " Adams could undoubtedly have run the game out on three occasions , but preferred to make ' display ' shots in place of his usual " nurse " play , against which a cue player stands no chance whatever . " However , with Sexton needed only seven points to win the championship , Adams stepped to the table and ran out , making 1 @ , @ 181 points in a row to win the match .

= = = = Louis Shaw = = = =

Adams ' chief professional rivalry in later years was with Louis Shaw . In 1891 Adams and Shaw disagreed about the format of the finger billiards championship which they would both contest that year . Adams wanted the match to be played for a \$ 500 stake , while Shaw wanted the receipts to be donated to the local firemen 's fund .

= = = Other accomplishments = = =

In 1879 , Adams was chosen to be the official referee for the championship Collender Billiard Tournament held at Tammany Hall . It was contested by top players Marice Daly , Albert Garnier , Eugene Carter , A. P. Rudolphe , Randolph Heiser , William Sexton , George F. Slosson , and " the Wizard " , Jacob Schaefer , Sr. at the newly introduced carom billiards discipline called the champion 's game , an intermediary game between straight rail and balkline .

In 1889 , Adams broke the world record run for successive straight rail points in a match with

champion player Jacob Schaefer , Sr. , in which Adams scored 4 @, @ 962 counts in a row , which was 2 @, @ 400 points more than any prior competition high run , albeit with his fingers rather than with a cue . Adams stated in an interview in his later years that his personal high run was 6 @, @ 900 consecutive straight rail counts .

In 1890 , Adams returned to Paris after signing a contract with Eugene Carter to play at Carter 's billiard academy for thirteen weeks at 1 @, @ 000 francs ( approximately \$ 200 ) per week . Afterwards , Adams went in London , under the management of M. Farini , to play at the room of John Roberts , Jr . On a previous trip to London in 1887 , Roberts offered Adams £ 60 a week for six months to give exhibitions , but Adams declined , citing a need to superintend his sporting journal .

Adams was the editor and proprietor of The Chicago Sporting Journal , and the general manager of the New York Sporting and Theatrical Journal . Through his association with the sporting journals , Adams was an intermediary for the issuance of challenge matches , such as boxing bouts . He held the winning stake and distributed the winnings upon the event 's conclusion . Adams owned a number of billiard parlors during his lifetime , including two in Chicago ? one named the White Elephant , another called the Academy Billiard Hall , and one on Union Square at 60 East 14th Street in New York City . Adams ' business cards , in 1877 , said , " Yank Adams , champion finger billiardist of the world . Residence immaterial . "

= = = Later life = = =

Adams continued to give exhibitions and was still able to perform well into his later years . For example , the New Rochelle Pioneer newspaper reported that Adams gave an exhibition on December 21 , 1915 at 68 years of age , at Chamberlain 's Derby Billiard Academy in New Rochelle , New York , and that he was " at his best and made some exceptionally brilliant shots in the presence of 300 lovers of the game . While at the table he kept up a continuous humorous monologue to the great pleasure of his audience . " In 1919 , when Adams was 71 , the Brooklyn Daily Eagle reported that he gave an exhibition before a large audience at Lawler Brothers Billiard Academy of Brooklyn .

In 1923 , when Adams was 76 , the following newspaper story appeared in The Salt Lake Tribune , telling of his whereabouts :

Perhaps you old fellows , too , thought Yank had passed on , but he turned up in New York the other day and is now spending his last days in a Bronx flat . There was a time when Yank Adams was known in every billiard room in America . He was as much at home in Eddie Graney 's room at San Francisco as at Tom Foley 's in Chicago or Maurice Daly 's in New York , and he knew all the billiard players and big and little room keepers from coast to coast . When the history of billiards is written and the names of Willie Hoppe , old and young Jake Schaefer and Welker Cochran are included with others of the great exponents of the indoor sport , there will be a distinct division for one man ? the man who did the impossible , who could make the ivories travel the wrong way , or , in the language of the billiard realm , " make ' em talk all languages . " That man is Frank B. Adams , known the world over as " Yank " Adams , at one time and even now the world 's only finger billiardist who can make all the apparently impossible shots on the table without the aid of a cue . Adams is 76 years old , and after fifty years of exhibitions all over the world has retired from active work to live in the Bronx and conduct a billiard academy of his own at Burnside and Creston avenues in New York with his business manager for the last ten years , Samuel Polakoff . Yank now lives at 635 West 136th street In New York . When I told Tom Foley , the daddy of all the roomkeepers , that Yank Adams was back in the business he laughed and said : " I thought Yank had cashed in . But he 's like all those billiard players . They never die . "

= = Style of play = =

Adams played only with his fingers , disdaining the cue stick entirely . He was known for his skill at finger billiards and for the quickness of his play . In exhibitions it was sometimes advertised that Adams would attempt to make 100 shots in 100 seconds . He would always begin by " feeling out "

the cushions on the table , as the speed of the tables varied almost nightly , some fast and some slow .

Adams would sometimes accept challenge matches at his performances . For example , at an exhibition held in Omaha , Nebraska , on November 20 , 1889 , Adams played against twenty of the best players in the city . Adams manipulated the balls with his fingers , while his opponents used cues and were given a handicap equivalent to a 1 @, @ 000 point lead .

Adams performed about 80 shots per exhibition . He had a large repertoire of practiced shots ? more than 500 ? affording him the luxury to not having to repeat a single shot during a week @-@ long exhibition . The abundance of shots was unusual , and was described by one sports writer as " more extensive than the entire billiard fraternity put together " . The following description of Adams ' shots appeared in an 1891 newspaper article , which highlighted them as , " among his difficult feats " :

Two quart wine bottles are placed at the short end of the table , three feet apart ; a ball is placed on the top of each bottle , and a third ball , six feet from the bottles in the opposite corner . Adams makes the hand ball jump from bottle to bottle then to take an English in space , counting on the third bail , a double shot .

Fifteen balls are placed in a line , three inches apart . On the last ball is placed a piece of chalk , while two feet from the other end , at a square angle , is placed a single ball . Yank drops the hand ball with a Massé twist , which , after hitting the single ball , describes a semi @-@ circle , taken the cushion first , then makes a carrom on the fifteen balls , but is played with such a delicate calculation as barely to reach the last ball ; in fact , freezes against it so gently as not to dislodge the chalk previously placed thereon .

A derby hat is placed on the table , under which is a ball . One foot from the hat are two balls a foot apart , which he carroms on , the hand ball continues striking the rim of the hat , forces it up , and goes under making the stroke on the third ball , then returns from under the hat when it rocks the second time .

He also stand at the head of the table , throwing the balls with a hundred @-@ yard force but has them stop eight feet away in such a position as to spell his name .

In an article in the St. Paul Daily Globe , the reporter summed up the events of Adams ' exhibition on April 26 , 1888 :

The great finger billiard exhibition came off last night at the Standard billiard hall to a packed house , and those who saw Yank Adams handle the spheres were more than delighted .... Shot after shot were made in lightning rapidity , spotting the ball , running the whole length of the rail , crossing over , with two cushions and counting , going under hats and in between them , cutting the letter S and making the carom , jump shots , masses and hundreds of others too complicated to put in type . Mr. A.M. Doherty played a game with the exhibitor , and at twenty @-@ eight points left the balls in a scattered position , which were gathered at one shot by Mr. Adams , who made fifty shots in sixty seconds . What seemed his most difficult shot was that of placing fifteen balls in a line , and a piece of chalk on the last ball . The hand ball was then dropped a distance of two feet , described a semi @-@ circle , making a carom on all of the balls and freezing against the last ball . Adams ' finger shots discount Schaeffer , Slosson and J. Carter combined .

The public flocked to Adams ' exhibitions ; often the pool room where he was performing could barely contain the crowd . When Adams performed in Rochester , New York in 1892 , the local paper reported that " [ n ] o man in these broad acres can draw the crowd " Yank " Adams does when an exhibition with the ivories is the card . Last night 's crowd was banked up , against the walls , twenty deep in someplaces and many witnessed the exhibition from the table tops and window ledges . "