

= Masako Katsura =

Masako Katsura ( 1913 - 1995 ) listen , nicknamed " Katsy " and sometimes called the " First Lady of Billiards " , was a Japanese carom billiards player who was most active in the 1950s . Katsura blazed a trail for women in the sport by competing and placing among the best in the male @-@ dominated world of professional billiards . First learning the game from her brother @-@ in @-@ law and then under the tutelage of Japanese champion Kinrey Matsuyama , Katsura became Japan 's only female professional player . In competition in Japan she took second place in the country 's national three @-@ cushion billiards championship three times . In exhibition she was noted for running 10 @,@ 000 points at the game of straight rail .

After marrying a U.S. Army non @-@ commissioned officer in 1950 , Katsura emigrated with him to the United States in 1951 . There she was invited to play in the 1952 U.S.-sponsored World Three @-@ Cushion Championship , ultimately taking seventh place at that competition . Katsura was the first woman ever to be included in any world billiards tournament . Her fame cemented , Katsura went on an exhibition tour of the United States with eight @-@ time world champion Welker Cochran , and later with 51 @-@ time world champion Willie Hoppe . In 1953 and 1954 she again competed for the world three @-@ cushion crown , taking fifth and fourth places respectively .

Little was seen of Katsura for the next few years . She made 30 exhibition appearances in 1958 , and went on a one @-@ week exhibition engagement the following year with Harold Worst , but did not compete in any professional tournaments . In 1959 , she made two television appearances on ABC 's You Asked for It , and one on the CBS primetime television hit What 's My Line ? . Katsura returned to competition in 1961 , playing a challenge match for the World Three @-@ Cushion title against Worst , then reigning world champion , and was defeated by him . Katsura disappeared from the sport thereafter , only making a brief impromptu appearance in 1976 . She moved back to Japan in about 1990 and died in 1995 .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Little is known about Katsura 's childhood in Japan . Katsura had three sisters and a brother . Their father died when Katsura was 12 years old and she went to live with her older sister and her sister 's husband , Tomio Kobashi , who owned a billiard parlor . By 13 she was spending time in her brother @-@ in @-@ law 's billiard room , and by 14 she was working as a billiard attendant there . Kobashi was a fine player and taught Katsura the fundamentals of various carom billiards games . Katsura also had a billiard table at home , bought by her family after she showed intense interest in the sport . Katsura practiced diligently , and began competing against Japanese men and beating them . At just 15 , Katsura won the women 's championship straight rail tournament of Japan . " Then I turned professional and began touring with a sister all over Japan , China and Formosa " , said Katsura in a 1959 interview . Katsura 's two younger sisters , Noriko and Tadako , also won the women 's straight rail championship in other years .

In 1937 , Katsura met Kinrey Matsuyama , who had won Japan 's national three @-@ cushion championship multiple times . Matsuyama was also U.S. national champion in 1934 , runner @-@ up three other times and had four second @-@ place finishes in world competition at 18 @.@ 2 balkline prior to World War II . Matsuyama was impressed with Katsura and began teaching her top level play . By 1947 , Katsura was a long @-@ established billiard star in Japan ? the country 's only female professional player .

= = = Marriage and titles in Japan = = =

During 1947 Katsura caught the eye of American serviceman Vernon Greenleaf ( no relation to the pool and carom billiards champion Ralph Greenleaf ) , a master sergeant in the U.S. Army 's

Quartermaster Corps who had been in the armed services for 22 years . Katsura and Greenleaf first met in a Tokyo service club where she was giving billiard exhibitions . Greenleaf began taking lessons from Katsura and was quickly smitten with her . They were married on November 30 , 1950 , but never had any children .

At the time of their marriage Katsura already boasted two second @-@ place finishes at Japan 's national three @-@ cushion championship ; one from the year prior to their wedding . She claimed the runner @-@ up spot for a third time the year of her marriage . About that time she accomplished the lofty feat of scoring 10 @,@ 000 contiguous points at straight rail in an exhibition by nursing the balls around the table 27 times over about 4 1 ? 2 hours . She stopped at 10 @,@ 000 points only because it was a benchmark round number . In later years she said that her high run in three @-@ cushion billiards ( number of points scored consecutively in a single inning ) was 19 .

= = = Emigration to the U.S. = = =

In 1951 Greenleaf was transferred to a U.S. post from Haneda Air Base in Tokyo . He and Katsura , who spoke little English , set sail for the United States on the USS Breckinridge , debarking in San Francisco at the end of December 1951 , just a few months before the 1952 World Three @-@ Cushion Billiards tournament was scheduled to begin in that city on March 6 . Katsura had been conditionally invited to play at the world championship after Cochran , whose billiard parlor was hosting the tournament , had heard of her brilliance from Matsuyama . Cochran was an 8 @-@ time world champion having won the world crown at three @-@ cushion billiards in 1933 , 1935 , 1937 , 1938 , 1944 and 1945 , and at 18 @.@ 2 balkline , in 1927 and 1934 . Cochran sent his son , W. R. ( Dick ) Cochran , a naval officer stationed in Japan , to investigate and received back a glowing report that said ( possibly to Cochran 's annoyance ) , " this girl is better than you are ! " Though the decision was ultimately in the hands of the Billiard Congress of America as tournament sponsor , they gave Cochran the option to invite her .

After Katsura arrived in the U.S. , she gave a private exhibition for Cochran , who wanted to make sure she was as good as reported before finalizing the invitation . At that meeting she clicked off runs of 300 and 400 at straight rail , made in the words of Cochran " almost unbelievable shots " after switching to balkline , and showed high competence at three @-@ cushion , consistently scoring . Cochran made the invite " final " and stated : " She 's the most marvelous thing I ever saw ... She 's liable to beat anybody , even Willie Hoppe ... I could not see any weak spots ... She 's going to give lots of those players fits . " As a warm @-@ up for the competition Katsura gave a number of billiard exhibitions during February 1952 .

= = 1952 World Three @-@ Cushion Billiards tournament = =

= = = First woman to compete for a world title = = =

Katsura 's participation in the 1952 World Three @-@ Cushion Billiards title marked the first time that a woman had competed for any world billiards title . This was only ten years after Ruth McGinness became the first woman to have ever been invited to play in any men 's professional billiard championship ( the New York State Championship of 1942 ) . The defending champion was the then 64 @-@ year @-@ old internationally renowned Willie Hoppe , who would retire later that year with 51 world titles to his name between 1906 and 1952 in three forms of carom billiards , three @-@ cushion , ( four sub @-@ disciplines of ) balkline and cushion caroms . Before the tournament , speculation had it that when Hoppe met Katsura in the championship in the race to 50 points format , he would defeat her with Katsura still needing at least 40 . After seeing her play , Hoppe said " she has a fine stroke and can make shots with either hand . I look forward to playing with her . " The public was fascinated by the novelty of a woman player . Life magazine reported that " San Franciscans who did not know a cue from a cucumber crowded in to see her ... Katy [ sic ] ... stole the show . "

= = = Tournament roster = = =

The 10 champions slated to play in the round robin format tournament were Katsura , her mentor , Matsuyama , favorite and defending champion Willie Hoppe , Mexican champion Joe Chamaco , Herb Hardt of Chicago , New York 's Art Rubin , Los Angeles ' Joe Procita , Ray Kilgore of San Francisco , Jay Bozeman of Vallejo and Binghamton 's Irving Crane . The championship between the invitees was to take place at Cochran 's 924 Club , with 45 total games to be played ( each player to play every other once ) over the 17 @-@ day tournament ending on March 22 , 1952 . The tournament was reported to have " The greatest billiard field since before World War II " . First place earned a \$ 2 @,@ 000 purse ( today \$ 17 @,@ 800 ) , plus thousands in exhibition fees . Following behind to eight places were prizes of \$ 1 @,@ 000 , \$ 700 , \$ 500 , \$ 350 , \$ 300 , \$ 250 and \$ 250 respectively .

= = = Detail of play = = =

On the second day of the competition , March 7 , 1952 , Katsura drew Irving Crane for her first match . They made quite a contrast as Crane was the tallest player at the tourney , while Katsura was described by reporter Curley Grieve of the San Francisco Examiner as " so small and doll @-@ like she looks like a figurine in her flowing , gold @-@ satin gown . " Crane 's main discipline was straight pool , at which he won numerous championships , including six world titles . The match was close , but Crane prevailed 50 to 42 in 57 innings . On March 10 , Katsura defeated Herb Hardt 50 to 42 in 58 innings . Katsura was significantly behind at one point but counted 15 points in five innings to take the lead . On March 11 , she lost to Chamaco , 50 to 35 , but the following day Katsura upset Procita 50 ? 43 in 63 innings , with runs of six , five and four . " Spectators exclaimed ' brilliant ' and ' sensational ' at some of her shots . "

On March 14 , Katsura faced the undefeated Hoppe , losing 50 to 31 in 36 innings . Though Hoppe was a darling of the public , the crowd of more than 500 spectators was clearly rooting for Katsura throughout . The next day she faced her mentor , Matsuyama , considered the contender with the best shot at beating Hoppe . Matsuyama edged out his protégé with a close 50 to 48 finish in 51 innings . By the 21st inning Matsuyama held a 29 ? 21 lead . Katsura battled back , the score 43 ? 42 in her favor by inning 33 , but Matsuyama ran three in the 46th inning , and Katsura could not close the gap . Mentor and protégé alike posted high runs of six in the match

On March 18 Katsura trounced Art Rubin 50 ? 28 in 58 innings. but was handed a worse defeat in her next match on March 20 , losing to Bozeman 50 to 18 in 52 innings . In her last match on March 21 , Katsura pulled off a 50 ? 46 win against Kilgore in 61 innings . This was the biggest upset of the tournament . Kilgore , the " Giant Killer " , was the only player other than Matsuyama who was considered to have a fighting chance at dethroning Hoppe . Between this win and her earlier win over Procita , Katsura had beaten the only two players in the tournament that had won their matches against Hoppe . That evening a separate exhibition match between Katsura and Kilgore was featured on KRON @-@ TV , with commentary provided by Cochran . The next day the tournament concluded with Hoppe repeating as champion as he had so many times before . Katsura took seventh place , ahead of Procita at eighth place , Chamaco at ninth and Rubin at tenth . Above her were Crane at sixth , Rubin at fifth , Kilgore at fourth , Bozeman at third and Matsuyama as runner @-@ up .

Following the competition , Jay Bozeman , said " We 've found it hard to believe that a woman could actually step into the best billiard championship in the world and hold her own . Miss Katsura is one of the finest players I 've faced in a world 's tournament , while Welker Cochran , five @-@ time holder of the Billiards World Crown , predicted : " Given another two or three years of American competition and she will be the world 's champion .... Masako has opened a new field for women . Her presence has made the game attractive to women for the first time . She has the power of a man and strokes beautifully . Her maneuvers with the cue ball are fantastic . All she needs is a bit more experience and she will be unbeatable . "

= = Exhibition tours = =

Soon after the 1952 championship , Cochran announced he was coming out of a seven @-@ year retirement to play an exhibition tour with Katsura . " Millions of fans want to see this charming first lady of billiards " he said , " now some of them can . " The duo previewed their tour with a three @-@ day engagement at the Garden City Parlor in San Jose starting on April 18 , 1952 . Thereafter , they planned stops in Kansas City ( May 2 ? 3 ) ; Chicago ( May 5 ? 11 ) ; Detroit in mid @-@ May ; and on to tentative stops in Cleveland , Buffalo , Boston , Philadelphia , Dallas , San Diego , Los Angeles and Long Beach . The format was to be a 100 @-@ point straight @-@ rail match , followed by a 50 @-@ point three @-@ cushion game played under tournament conditions with trick or " fancy " shots to follow . Katsura stated prior to departing : " I hope my tour will convince women that billiards is not only a man 's game . Women can play just as well as men . "

Billiards champion Tex Zimmerman ( Cochran 's partner in the 924 Club ) and well known pool hustler Danny McGoorty had a hand in organizing the tour . In preparation , they played up Katsura 's exoticness and her physical attractiveness . Tex Zimmerman 's wife sewed tight @-@ fitting kimonos for Katsura , slit up the side , which she wore during her exhibitions with high heels . Katsura was a tiny woman , weighing between 88 and 96 pounds. and standing 5 feet tall ? just about the height of a standard cue stick . McGoorty later mused : " Masako was cute ! She was thirty @-@ nine years old but she looked twenty @-@ nine . She hopped around that table on her high heels , giving the fans a little smile , and everybody loved her . "

It was Katsura 's playing ability , though , rather than her other charms , that made her a phenomenon . When Cochran returned from his tour with Katsura he told McGoorty , who was a world class player in his own right , " you will have trouble with her . " When they finally got a chance to play , the match drew crowds . " They could have sold seats in the toilet ! " McGoorty exclaimed . After the match , McGoorty confirmed Cochran 's prediction :

I had trouble with her . I played hard and I threw her all the dirtiest stuff I knew , and I was lucky to win five out of the ten games . If you had the slightest idea of easing up on her because she was only a cute little girl , you were dead . She would murder you . I found out damn quick you could not leave her an open shot . If you did she would take those balls away from you and stick them right up your pooper . The killer instinct ? that broad had it , and never mind the little smile .

A number of pre @-@ booked stops on the tour suffered from lack of attendance . Cochran was very bitter about it . NEA sports editor , Harry Grayson indicated that the game was in general decline , and said that Cochran " traces the decline of championship and exhibition billiards to manufacturers taking the stars off the payroll during the depression . " In a previous exhibition tour by Cochran and Hoppe in 1945 , they had sold out in 13 cities . Despite some lackluster stops , upon her return to California , Katsura continued to play exhibition matches with the game 's greats . Katsura and Kilgore put on a week @-@ long exhibition in San Francisco in January 1953 , where they seesawed back and forth . On January 12 , Katsura beat Kilgore in their first match with runs of seven and ten , but lost to him in their second . The total points scored by the two at that time was 349 for Katsura to Kilgore 's 379 .

Katsura started another exhibition series with Cochran at his club in February 1953 and , tuning up for the 1953 world tournament , to start on March 26 , went on a nationwide tour with Willie Hoppe in the latter part of February 1953 . The 30 @-@ day tour of the northeastern U.S. included Chicago , Boston and other locations . Her husband accompanied her to provide translation . In their multiple @-@ day exhibition match in Chicago , it was reported in the midst that Katsura had unsurprisingly won only one out of four matches against Hoppe , often pegged as the greatest player of all time .

= = 1953 ? 1954 = =

= = = 1953 World Three @-@ Cushion tournament = = =

With Hoppe retired as of 1952 , there was excitement over who would take the 1953 world three @-@ cushion crown , to be held in Chicago at the Chicago Town Club in the Sheraton Hotel . Eleven competitors were slated to play , many repeats of the prior year , including Chamaco , Katsura , Matsuyama , Bozeman , Kilgore , Procita and Rubin . New to the field were Harold Worst of Grand Rapids , Hollywood 's John Fitzpatrick , Mel Lundberg of Minneapolis and Ezequiel Navarra of Argentina . Navarra was considered the favorite by experts , having won championships that year in Cuba , Colombia , Peru and Argentina and having just come off an exhibition tour with Cochran in which Navarra averaged a formidable 1 @. @ 16 , scoring 1 @, @ 295 three @-@ cushions in 1 @, @ 120 innings over the length of the tour .

In Katsura 's first match she defeated Lundberg 50 ? 44 , in 71 innings . Thereafter she : lost to Matsuyama 50 to 37 in 39 innings ; lost to Rubin , 50 ? 37 , in 52 innings ; beat Fitzpatrick 50 ? 38 in 50 innings , undefeated to that point ; beat Chamaco 50 to 44 , in 56 innings with a high run of eight ; upset favorite Navarra 50 to 40 in 43 innings ; followed by a loss to Kilgore , 50 to 41 , in 42 innings ; and a loss to Harold Worst 50 to 42 , in 52 innings ; but then defeated Bozeman 50 ? 48 in 60 innings in her last match . When the dust had settled , Katsura shared fifth place with Matsuyama , each having won and lost five matches . The winner of the world crown was Kilgore with an eight @-@ win , two @-@ loss record . Navarra and Bozeman tied for second .

= = = Exhibitions and death of Matsuyama = = =

After the 1953 championship wrapped up , Katsura and Matsuyama gave an exhibition together in Long Beach , California ( advertisement at right ) . The format was 100 points at balkline , followed by a race to 40 at three @-@ cushion and then a trick shot exhibition . Katsura crushed her teacher , 100 ? 11 and 100 ? 3 at balkline , but Matsuyama won both the three @-@ cushion matches , 40 ? 34 and 40 ? 39 . This was Katsura and Matsuyama 's last close interaction . After returning to Japan , Matsuyama suffered a heart attack and died on December 20 , 1953 . He had had plans to move to Honolulu with his family , become an American citizen , and purchase a billiard parlor . His eldest son , Hideo , 18 , was attending a San Francisco high school at the time . He was said to have taught all of Japan 's top players , among which Katsura was the star pupil .

Next , Katsura played a five @-@ day , 600 point three @-@ cushion exhibition series with Ray Kilgore in San Francisco , March 12 ? 17 , 1953 . At the end Kilgore was the winner with a final score of 600 to 547 . Kilgore said : " She played really remarkable billiards and I played a little over my head . " The next week Katsura faced Kilgore again in another exhibition at Welker Cochran 's room , beating him 50 ? 33 in 45 innings .

= = = 1954 World Three @-@ Cushion tournament = = =

The 1954 World Three @-@ Cushion tournament was held in Buenos Aires with only 8 contestants : Katsura ; Ray Miller of Jackson , Michigan ; Harold Worst ; Argentinian brothers Juan and Ezequiel Navarra ; Welker Cochran , who had come out of retirement ; Chamaco ; and defending champion , Kilgore . As usual , Katsura was the sole female contestant .

In her first round she was victorious over Miller , 60 ? 47 in 76 innings , then beat Chamaco 60 ? 55 , but followed with a loss to Ezequiel Navarra 60 ? 28 in 48 innings . Katsura then beat his brother , Juan Navarra , 60 ? 52 in 77 innings in her last match to take fourth place overall . On the last day Harold Worst and Ezequiel Navarra ended in a tie with a playoff to be held initially to 60 points , later raised to a 350 point format , at which Worst ultimately prevailed on October 25 , 1954 .

= = 1955 ? 1961 = =

= = = Hiatus and exhibition = = =

Little was seen of Katsura for the next few years . She made 30 exhibition appearances in 1958 but

had been in " virtual retirement " for about five years . During this break the second of Katsura 's two billiards instruction books came out in Japan : ????? ( 1956 ) ( " Improve Your Billiards " ) . An earlier primer , ???? ( " Introduction to Billiards " ) , was published in 1952 . In 1959 it was announced that Katsura and Harold Worst would compete in a one week exhibition match to 1 @,@ 200 points , beginning February 9 at Randolph Recreations in Chicago . Worst and Katsura moved their show to Philadelphia next where they played six matches at three @-@ cushion billiards to 50 points , and thereafter went to exhibit in New York .

= = = TV spots = = =

On March 1 , 1959 , Katsura appeared on CBS ' popular primetime television show , What 's My Line ? The show was in the format of a guessing game , in which a panel attempted to determine the line ( occupation ) , or in the case of a famous " mystery guest " , the identity of the contestant . After she signed in using Japanese characters on a chalk board , show officials listed Katsura 's occupation for the audience as " Professional Billiard Player ( World 's Women 's Champion ) " . Panelist Arlene Francis was successful in guessing Katsura 's occupation , though she admitted that she had read about her but said she had never seen her picture . Later that month Katsura made a guest appearance on ABC 's You Asked For It , going behind the scenes of westerns to show how television productions set up and filmed a covered wagon rolling over and crashing on cue . She appeared again on You Asked For It in a November 25 , 1960 broadcast , this time operating in her bailiwick , demonstrating trick shots for the camera .

= = = 1961 title match with Worst = = =

By 1961 and for a few years prior , there was no longer an organized world three @-@ cushion championship . Accordingly , Harold Worst , the reigning champion since 1954 , issued a challenge match to Katsura to defend his title , with the match to take place March 13 ? 18 of that year at the Pantlind Hotel in Grand Rapids , Michigan , for a purse of \$ 2 @,@ 000 . The preceding year Worst had issued a similar title @-@ defending challenge to Joe Chamaco of Mexico , which also took place in Grand Rapids at the same venue . Worst even took unsuccessful legal action to block an Argentinian three @-@ cushion tournament , billed as a " world title " event , that was scheduled to overlap the dates of his title match with Katsura . Worst defeated Katsura in six out of seven matches , with total three @-@ cushions scored between them , respectively , of 350 and 276 . Meanwhile , Chamaco claimed the world crown as well , after winning the tournament in Argentina .

= = After 1961 = =

Little was heard from Katsura for many years after the 1961 world championship . McGoorty lamented her retirement , stating various theories that he had heard bandied about in billiard circles , such as that her husband ( who died in June 1967 ) kept her from playing for various reasons . In 1976 Katsura made an impromptu appearance at Palace Billiards in San Francisco . She borrowed a cue from someone present and proceeded to run 100 points at straight rail without problem . Prolific pool and billiard author Robert Byrne wrote that after Katsura finished that 100 @-@ point run , " without a miss she smiled and bowed to the applauding crowd , stepping away from the spotlight , and disappeared forever from the American billiard stage . " Katsura returned to Japan in or about 1990 to live with her sister , Noriko , where she said she planned to live out her days . Katsura died in 1995 . In September 2002 a memorial tournament for Katsura , billed as Katsura Memorial : The First Ladies Three Cushion Grandprix , was held in Japan and aired on SKY PerfectTV !