

= Irving Crane =

Irving Crane (November 13 , 1913 ? November 17 , 2001) , nicknamed " the Deacon " , was an American pool player from Livonia (near Rochester) , New York , and ranks among the stellar players in the history of the sport . Considered one of the all @-@ time greats , he is best known for his mastery in the game of straight pool (14 @.@ 1 continuous) at which he won numerous championships , including six world billiards titles .

= = Early life = =

Crane 's fascination with billiards started at age 11 , sparked by play on a toy pool table his brother received as a Christmas gift . Showing interest and ability , his father Scott Crane , a trial lawyer and sportsman , and his mother , a high school teacher , soon replaced their dining room table with a 4 ' by 8 ' pool table . He soon ventured out of the home to practice a couple days each week at Olympic Billiards , a room that was part of a bowling alley in Scottsville , a suburb of Rochester , New York . Crane stated in 1998 : " Other kids , you know they 'd play for twenty minutes or half an hour and they 'd say , ' let 's do something else . ' I could play all day and never get enough . I couldn 't wait to get home from school to play . "

Crane 's status as a wunderkind was quickly evident ; although he was entirely self @-@ taught , at 14 he ran 89 balls in straight pool at a local pool room , calling each shot in advance , as is mandatory in straight pool . Following this feat , his parents replaced the smaller table with a full size tournament table . Over the next ten years some of the best players of the era , including Willie Hoppe and Andrew Ponzi , came to practice with the promising champion . Despite consistent play throughout his teenage years , Crane did not enter any tournaments until he was 23 years old .

In February 1939 , at age 26 , Crane ran 150 balls and out against his opponent in an exhibition straight pool match on a difficult 5 ' by 10 ' table in Layton , Utah . While this was impressive in and of itself , at the crowd 's urging , he continued his run , ultimately pocketing 309 consecutive balls thus shattering the previous world record of 244 consecutive balls .

= = World titles = =

This coup was soon followed by his first world title in 1942 . Over the following three decades , Crane won almost two dozen major championships , including the World Crown in 1946 , 1955 , 1966 , 1968 , 1970 and 1972 , the Ballantine International Championship in 1965 , the International Roundrobin championship in 1968 , and the World Series of Billiards in 1978 at age 65 . Of these triumphs , his win at the 1966 World Crown is the most celebrated . At that tournament he ran 150 and out in the finals , never letting his opponent back to the table after an early safety battle ; an accomplishment that has never been equaled . Crane also holds the record for the most runner @-@ up finishes for the World Crown with 13 .

Despite his mastery and world renown , Crane found it hard to make a living solely playing pool , and in 1957 began working as a Cadillac salesman at Valley Cadillac Inc . 333 East Avenue in Rochester , New York . He continued there for 17 years . According to Crane 's daughter , at Rochester 's annual auto show his dealership 's exhibit featured a pool table at which Crane would run balls while answering questions . " Working " for a living was purely a choice of survival . In an interview with Sports Illustrated in 1969 Crane said " If I had to make a choice between selling cars and playing pool , I 'd choose pool ... The only time I 've ever been really happy is when I was at a pool table . "

Described as a " tall , lean man with the imperial bearing of the headmaster of Eton , " Crane earned the appellation The Deacon because of his gentlemanly ways , his very cautious approach to the game and his impeccable dress , never approaching a pool table except in a conservative suit . Los Angeles Times sports columnist Jim Murray once said Crane " would make Henry Fonda look furtive . " Highlighting Crane 's both cautious approach and mastery , Mike Sigel , one of pool 's most illustrious players , reportedly asked Crane to play one day when Sigel was a young player .

Crane assented and after Sigel broke , Crane ran 200 balls and then played a safety .

= = Later life = =

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times , Crane 's wife of 64 years , Althea , stated " A lot of people , if it was a hot day and there was no air conditioning , they 'd take off their coat to play . But not Irving Crane . " Rudolph Wanderone , a / k / a Minnesota Fats , once opined , " Irv Crane would have been the only guy to notice the horse under Lady Godiva , " while professional rival Willie Mosconi who had criticized Crane for his cautious style , stated in his 1993 autobiography , Willie 's Game , that " Crane wouldn 't take a shot unless his grandmother could make it . "

Crane was inducted into the Billiard Congress of America 's hall of fame in 1978 . In 1999 Crane was ranked as number eight on Billiard Digest 's fifty greatest players of the century . In his entry there he is lauded as having been , along with Mosconi , the " best in the world , flat out " between 1941 and 1956 . In 1980 Crane retired from professional play . He stopped playing entirely in about 1996 . On November 17 , 2001 at age 88 , four days after entering a nursing home , Crane died of natural causes . He was survived by his wife Althea , son Irving , daughter Sandra , three grandchildren , and three great @-@ grandchildren .