

Rack 'em up

Students enjoy unique sport; billiards' popularity on rise

Kerry Reardon '07

When most people think of billiards, they visualize a crowded bar with a cloud of smoke so thick that breathing is nearly impossible.

Not **Anthony Marasco**. When Marasco, a Grizzell Middle School seventh-grader, thinks of pool, he thinks of fun times with friends.

On a rainy spring afternoon, Marasco hung out at the Teen Lounge at the Rec Center.

Lining up a not-so-perfect shot with deep concentration, Marasco laughed and joked with his buddy, fellow seventh-grader **Steven Reed**.

As the latest music boomed in the background, the two friends socialized and brushed up on their skills. The sound of balls colliding filled the room as they landed in the pockets of the pool table.

"Not that we have any skills," Reed laughed. "Mostly, we just play for fun and to have a good time."

According to the Women's Professional Billiards Association, billiards is becoming increasingly popular, and many teens are giving it a try. In fact, participation by teenagers is up 17 percent since 2002.

Mr. Veltri, a Rec Center receptionist, understands why teens are willing to give pool a chance.

"Pool is a great sport for kids," Veltri said. "It gives them something really positive to do. Also, it's a lot of fun for them and so inexpensive that it doesn't put a dent in their

wallets."

Reed and Marasco agreed. "Pool's fun," Marasco stated. "It's really cool because you get to whack things!"

"Pool is so entertaining," Reed added. "Plus, it's a sport you can play with a bunch of friends, so that adds something to it."

As much as teens enjoy pool, however, the game does have some frustrating aspects.

"I think it's frustrating when I hit the eight ball," Marasco said. "When that happens, I just feel the urge to break my cue stick."

Reed said, "Breaking can be pretty difficult as well."

As the popularity of pool amongst teens increases, more and more kids are visiting pool tables across the country.

Reed and Marasco both play two to three times a week. "We wish we could play more, though," Reed said.

Mary Doljack, the Teen Lounge Supervisor at the Rec Center, said, "I think it's good for teens to play billiards because it teaches hand-eye coordination."

Doljack added that the pool tables very popular at the lounge.

"The pool table attracts a lot of teens," Doljack stated. "On average, about a dozen kids come to the lounge to play pool per day. They really seem to enjoy it, and they get better and improve their skills as time goes by."

The Teen Lounge also offers a big screen television, Playstation, couches, and a free jukebox.

"Sometimes it surprises me how much the kids use the pool

table," Doljack added. "Lots of teens will march right past the television and video games in favor of pool."

"One reason I think pool is important here is that it gets kids up and moving, instead of lounging around and just watching more TV."

The term "pool" comes from England. When people were bored with horse races, they would pool their money together to play billiards and place bets.

Teenagers, however, don't have to use money to wager on a game. They can add competitiveness to the game by placing small bets of candy or other treats.

"It's pretty neat, if you think about it," Marasco said. "I mean, how many other sports combine friends and candy?"

Freshman **Kevin Snow** agrees. "Pool is a cool thing to do if you're playing with friends," Snow said.

Snow plays pool a couple times a month, mostly at friends' houses.

"I like pool because it's free and it's simple," stated Snow.

"In the movies, you only find pool tables in bars," Snow added. "But in reality, lots of kids play."

In fact, the number of American pool players rose from 36 million to 39 million in 2002.

"I think a lot of kids are getting into pool," Reed added. "That's probably why the Rec Center offers it for teens. I mean, you don't see a pool table in the Senior Lounge!"

Bump, set, spike

Adam Young listens to music while he warms up before a recent volleyball game.

Brian Johnson and **Adam Young** get ready to pound the ball over the net.

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