

# All Around Champions

A few weeks later I was in a gab fest with a group of Chicago's top players at Marie's Golden Cue in Chicago trying to untangle a similar mix up on who won Joe Jansco's promoted Stardust Open in Vegas. In this event Ervolino took top money in the 1-pocket division over Larry "Boston Shorty" Johnson and Lassiter took third. In the 9-Ball division Lassiter defeated Balsis and Ervolino. But Balsis won the 14.1 division with Johnny Ervolino in second place. Somehow that made Luther "Wimpy" Lassiter the ALL AROUND CHAMPION and Balsis didn't need the BCA entry for his straight pool win because he got it for taking second in Los Angeles. And on top of that.....

The counter phone rang and the incoming message from the Golden Q Billiard Lounge in Woodside, New York spread from player to player throughout the Golden Cue in Chicago, silencing the "who won what" discussion.

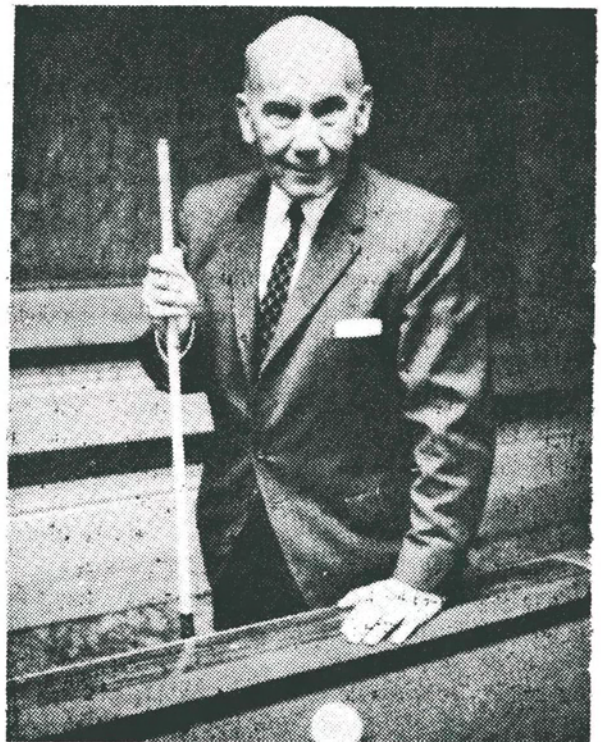
It was the evening of April 1, 1971 "April Fools Day" and everyone hoped it might be someones idea of a bad joke. But the pool world wasn't so lucky, it was true. Onofrio Lauri, known to everyone involved with the game as "The Dean of Pocket Billiards" had died that evening. Lauri was a legend in the game as long as I had been a part of it. He had competed in over 20 World Championship events. The year before his death, at the age of 74 he was trying to qualify for the 1970 U.S. Open and defeated Jack Colivata and then was barely beaten out by Steve Mizerak.

Onofrio Lauri and Cue-Ball Kelly were a road team that gave hundreds of demonstrations in hundreds of rooms and entertained wounded veterans in hospitals across the country. When learning of his death, it was reported that Kelly said "He may never have won the World's Championship, but in every way, he was the World's Champ.

Onofrio Lauri's last professional tournament was the World Championship event in Los Angeles during the 1971 Los Angeles Earthquake. He played against players young enough to be his great grandchildren and he played to win.

Onofrio died of a sudden heart attack in the New York room that night of April 1, 1971. It was reported that with his cue in his hand and knowing his time had come, Lauri said to his friends "this is my last shot".

When I heard that, I new that Onofrio Lauri was not only "The Dean of Pocket Billiards" he was the real ALL AROUND CHAMPION. ▲



Onofrio Lauri

"Dean of Pocket Billiards"  
and  
All Around Champion