

Sharing The Light

Pool through the eyes of Christian players

Question #2, August 2021:

What is the difference (from a moralistic standpoint) between matching up and playing tournaments?

Steve Lillis:

When you match up it becomes more personal. When playing in a tournament you are playing the field and not a specific individual. In my opinion a tournament with many players makes it more of a sport than having the appearance of gambling by "matching up." You could argue that this is simply a two-person tournament but again the appearance particularly to potential sponsors would be that it is gambling and as such limits potential sponsorship and consequently the sport itself.

Personally, I have another important reason for not "matching up." I have found through my 50 plus years of playing pool competitively that matching up usually leaves hard feelings especially for the loser and consequently having good relationships with other players is significantly more difficult. As a Christian, I do not want walls to come between us so I do all I can to encourage people to get along and hopefully find the love of Jesus in the process. Here is one of my Gospel Trick Shots featured in the AZ Billiards Buzz magazine back in March 2020 that demonstrates this principle <https://youtu.be/xNoZx9n8S8c>.

Tommy Kennedy:

Hello Christian Pool Players and pool fans all across AZ Billiards. I will answer this as best I can. This is what I see as the difference. From a moral viewpoint, playing tournaments is honorable, and matching up isn't. When the common person looks at matching up (gambling), they see it as gambling like most players did years ago. But when they see a tournament being played, they see it as a more legitimate way to present the game, and in a better light. Anyone who is honest with themselves can make the distinction. There is definitely a difference in matching up one-on-one, and playing a tournament. The bible says, "Avoid *all* appearance of evil." And again, the question always comes up, "Well in a tournament you are putting money up to play just like you would in a gambling/matching up match." Well, I feel the issue isn't about putting money up; it's about perspective. Most times, if there are two people matching up, and I see that, it brings to my mind the days of my gambling activity and all the evil that went along with it. But when I see a tournament being played, it doesn't have that evil connotation to it. There is no deceit and sleight of hand, so to speak, in a tournament. People know upfront what they are getting into when they play a tournament. *BUT*, in a gambling/matching up setting, you have all kinds of evil and lustful heart attitudes and deception involved. Not to mention the sex

and drug activity that goes on behind the scenes. Also, everybody wants to hit that big score so they can live a life of no work and laziness. That's how I was. Let's be honest here. If you are going to gamble with someone, you will do everything you can to win, and it might just mean you will have to lie and cheat to accomplish your goal. Believe me if you're honest with this issue like I said earlier, you will admit that there is a difference in the two situations. And honestly, The Lord Jesus Christ knows the difference. So, you are not fooling anyone when you justify gambling/matching up. You can say all you want, but it will never change gambling/matching up into an honest, wholesome way to play. I know because I have been there, done that. And I am at peace with tournaments, but not with matching up. The Bible says, "Let him who stole, steal no more." That is one of my favorite verses, because it promotes a work ethic, not a lazy play pool and gamble lifestyle. God will honor hard work and honesty, but He will not honor gambling matches, and He will punish those who gamble in some way or another sooner or later. So that's my short answer to a long question. Lol Love you all in Christ Jesus My Lord!!!

Robin Dodson:

Back before there were tournaments, everyone gambled. And everyone seemed to love the "action." I was young. I mostly watched. But I did get in on the action when I could.

What I remember most was the devastating affects gambling had on my friends. What at first started out to be excitement and fun soon became a full-blown addiction. Their lives were torn apart by one more bet — the one that emptied their pockets and found them sleeping in their cars.

Then tournaments came along and some said they were bad for pool (meaning they were bad for gambling, actually). But I noticed something very different happening. Players started finding ways other than gambling to support themselves. The trap of thinking that "big score" is coming, subsided.

Not everyone survived the gambling addiction, but those who did thrived.

Pool is in our lives forever, so I say keep it fun. Practice and enjoy the love of the game. Then hit the local hot spots and compete in the tournaments. If you're married and have a family, they will love you for it, and will even enjoy you playing.

So, whether it's gambling or tournaments, I've been around both in excess and extremes. Gambling destroyed many lives (of those I loved). Tournaments kept the game exciting and gave everyone perspective on life outside the poolroom.

I understand gambling is fun, but just be careful. And be thoughtful of the person you're gambling with. They might be one of those players like I remember: one who's betting all they have in their pocket, and to their name.

Romans 14:1-23 ESV

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind

Tom “Dr. Cue” Rossman:

I believe that the “game of the heart” is the most important part of a player’s moral approach and overall fairness to our cue sport activity. In this regard one has to take a look at the motives, attitudes, and foundational guidelines for “matching up” versus “playing in tournaments”. Below I have listed some bullet points for your comparative consideration. I will refer to “matching up” as “A” and “playing in tournaments” as “B” to avoid repetitive wording.

- “A” often focuses on some “staged / impure motive” approach prior to playing, while “B” is almost always done with one objective – to play one’s best game against an opponent while recognizing the challenge is done in fairness to each other WITHOUT any notion of “getting an advantage” in some subtle or deceptive manner just to win...prior to and/or during the actual match.
- “A” often has a pre-match set of rules that are tilted / slanted unfavorably to one player over another, even though both players THINK they “have the edge”. “B” assigns a high degree of fairness to each player in the competitive arena via official rules presented at a player’s meeting...vocally and/or in print established under the guidelines of the organization / promoter directing / running the event. These standards take the “hustling perception” and/or “moves” out of the equation that “A” often reflects. A foundational “mooring of the heart” (and mind) provides comfort within the tournament environment.
- “A” often is about the “taking” aspect of the money, while “B” has an “up front” established entry fee (“giving”) that must be paid to allow play in the event and under the fairness attached to it. Monies are set in place before play begins in both “A” and “B” however, “B” lends itself to more confidence that said monies will be paid as promised and not harbored “in the heart” unjustly, which can sometimes be the result of “A” matchups. The following verse relates to this point: **II Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) – “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”**
- “A” almost never has a referee / judge to monitor disputes between the players, but rather lends an open opportunity to friction on questionable shots...leading up to moral dilemmas on language used, demeanor actions not always reflective of “playing like a true champion”, and often ill will and long lasting indifference between the players involved. “B” has qualified referees and / or judges to observe / call questionable shots,

enforce rules, and keep the play moving smoothly to assure the tournament players will leave friends and not disconnected. Demeanor and player image can be maintained at the highest moral and professional level in almost all “B” scenarios.

As I noted in my prior feedback / comments to the first question on gambling from last month I believe one should:

Ask and seek the Lord's direction for the competitive opportunities in your own life – He will guide you! I strive to maintain a main foundational (and primary Biblical approach) to competitive play whether “matching up” (WITHOUT money attachment) or “playing in tournaments” (WITH money attachment), and that simply is to:

“Play Skillfully with a Shout of Joy” (Psalms 33:30 NKJV)

The beauty of God’s “sport gift” to us will become for you a masterpiece to behold when the Holy Spirit truly “guides your steps” both “on and off” the table. Thank God we are free to “share the light” of Jesus and the moral values of the game, even when there is a divergence of opinion / perception when comparing “A” versus “B”. I leave you with the following words of wisdom from the Bible, which pretty much sums up my position on this topic.

Romans 14:17-19 (ESV)

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Note: These verses are the key to “doing the right thing” (moralistic standpoint) and exhibiting a Holy Spirit focus and selfless walk.