

# Running the Table

*Pool pro Shari "The Shark" Stauch always anticipates the next shot*

JASON A. ZWIKER • PHOTOGRAPH BY NORMAN LORENZO

“A **A**n industrial strength human being” That’s how local writer Brenda Dale McClain describes former Women’s Professional Billiard Association (WPBA) pro Shari Stauch.

Stauch’s relentless drive helped fuel the rise of women’s pool from relative obscurity to a major presence in pro sports. “When we broke from the men’s tour in 1993, ESPN gave us only four hours of air time,” Shari says. Since then, she’s helped the game gain recognition as an Olympic sport, promoted billiards participation at the World Games, coauthored two books—*Precision Pool* and *Pier Player’s Edge*—and contributed a chapter to *You Can Do It! The Merit (Ridge) Handbook for Grown-Up Girls*—all while serving as executive editor of *Pool & Billiard Magazine*.

“In 1975, my dad opened what was then the only freestanding billiard club in the Chicago suburb,” she says. “It was a risky business venture. My family isn’t always driven by sense, but we’re always driven by passion.” At 16, Shari began frequenting her father’s club, immersing herself in the game of pool. That’s where she was first dubbed “The Shark” by her father and his friends. “Unless I lost a game,” she says, “then they demoted me to ‘The Guppy.’” She learned not to lose.

By the early 1980s, she and her father were publishing *Pool & Billiard Magazine* and actively organizing tournaments. Their experience earned them a gig as special consultants—reviewing the screenplay for accuracy, setting up the final tournament scene, and appearing as extras—to the 1987 film *The Color of Money*, starring Paul Newman and Tom Cruise.

“Shari makes things happen,” says Iwa Mabrya Laurance, past president of the WPBA and hostess of the hit ESPN series *Ballbreakers*. “She doesn’t just let a great idea sit there. She keeps coming up with more new ideas and programs and sees them through.”

While touring with the WPBA, Shari and husband Jeff discovered Charleston. “We stood next to a live oak with its heavy limbs dipped in the waters of the Ashley,” she recalls. “I said to Jeff, ‘We’ll be living here within five years.’ He laughed, but it only took us four.”

Now retired from competition, Shari is a freelance marketing consultant and is working on her first novel. She measures her enthusiasm for each project by how late into the night she stays awake immersed in it. “That’s my ‘passion barometer,’” she says. “When I don’t even realize how late it is until my eyes give out, I know I’m invested.”

