

Rack 'em up

The shot has been called — eight ball, corner pocket — and the only thing to do is sit back and watch. If the shot is missed there is still a chance for victory and bragging rights, but if it is made, it probably means the next round of drinks is on the loser.

Pool has always been a popular game, especially with the college crowd. To anyone who doubts it, just walk into any bar in town and count the number of pool tables, most of which are probably being used.

Luke Peterson, a bartender at Alfred T. Hornbacks and a junior biomedical science major, said pool halls offer a substitute for people who are tired of the club scene.

"People who can't dance don't usually like to go [to clubs], but you don't have to be good to enjoy playing pool," Peterson said. "The clubs are usually loud, and you can't hear people. But [at the pool hall], you can actually hear what somebody is saying, and it's easier to get to know people. There's no pressure, and it's a really laid-back environment."

Peterson said there are many reasons people play pool, and there is a definite social aspect to the game.

"One of the big things is that it is relaxing; you can come out and do it with your friends and kick back a couple of beers," he said. "Sure there's competition, but it still gives people a chance to come and hang out. There are a lot of people who aren't great, but they come out for the fun anyway."

Jim Diehl, manager of the Rack Warehouse, said pool has crossed the gender barriers.

"Guys and girls can play competitively. It is one of the few sports that women can match up and compete head to head with men," Diehl said. "Some of the better players in the world are women, and most nights, at least half of our crowd are women."

Diehl said the social aspect of the game is one main attraction for people.

"It gives you something to do while you're talking and drinking with your friends," he said. "The girls don't have to sit and watch, and you don't get hot and sweaty when you're playing."

Diehl said the great thing about the game is anybody can play.

"You don't have to be in good health to play, unlike most sports," he said. "And because there is really no special equipment, it is one of the cheapest recreational games."

Pool has definite social characteristics, and many organizations are picking up on this, using it to bring their groups closer together.

Peterson said many fraternities use pool halls during rush week.

"The pool halls are big during rush week. Almost every single fraternity will have at least one night at a pool hall," he said. "It introduces the potential pledges to the social life and brings them closer together."

Peterson said pool stretches across many social barriers.

"Everybody comes out," he said. "We get college kids, women, cowboys, professional types and elderly people. We get a wide range."

Hector Cortes, semi-professional pool player and a regular at the Rack Warehouse, said pool has gone through several changes since he started playing.

"The game has changed throughout the years," he said. "Now there is a more defensive-minded strategy to the game. People play safe now, and it is such a big part of the game. They didn't do that years back. I feel like it hurt the game."

Cortes said there are certain unspoken rules that should be followed by the players.

"Pool is a gentleman's game, so there is etiquette," he said. "It is little things like not talking while you're opponent is shooting and standing away from the table so he can concentrate on the shot."

Cortes said although pool is a game of strategy, the basic goal is simple.

"Different people have different methods and games," Cortes said. "But the bottom line is you have to put the ball in the hole."

Peterson said going out and playing pool is now becoming a more popular option for people looking for something to do.

"It is definitely becoming more popular," he said. "It gives people a chance to come out and play for beer with their buddies."

STORY BY SCOTT HARRIS

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY GUY ROGERS

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