



Paul Weber, left, and Jared Boothe stand next to a pool table and their trophies.

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Racking up

Area pool players sink opponents with back-to-back national titles

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Paul Weber and Jared Boothe know one way to get to the Riviera Hotel's penthouse in Las Vegas: win lots of pool matches.

It takes 10 wins — in the midst of hundreds of opponents — to get to the top of the hotel, where the American Pool Players Association's 8-Ball Doubles Championship is held.

And McComb residents Weber, 33, and Boothe, 30, have done it back to back, winning the championship in 2005 and 2006.

Jason Bowman, a spokesman for the American Pool Players Association, said that's never been done before.

"To come all the way through the tournament a second time is really unique," Bowman said.

The players association is a national organization for amateur pool players who develop their skills by playing pool halls, Boothe said.

The organization's Web site said it has more than 250,000 members.

More than 250 teams played in the doubles tournament in Las Vegas this year. Even more tried to qualify at regional tournaments held across the country.

The first time Boothe and Weber won it all, in 2005, they made it all the way through the tournament in Las Vegas without a loss.

They called their team Back Again, and, this year, they returned to tournament play.

However, while defending their title, Back Again suffered a loss in the first round of tournament play.

However, for these billiards veterans, it proved to be only a little obstacle.

Weber and Boothe have been playing pool since high school.

Both have typical day jobs. Weber owns a construction business, and Boothe works in an oil field.

But pool is their passion, and when they're on their game, it can pay a nice sum. In 2005 the two received \$5,000 for the tournament championship.

However, after that first-round loss in this year's tournament, another \$5,000 prize seemed out of reach. But it was a double-elimination tournament, leaving them still in contention as long as they could navigate their way out of the loser's bracket.

It wasn't easy because rebounding from a loss meant an extra match, Weber said.

Bowman said every team is trying to take down the defending champions.

"They just get in a zone where they play off each other," said Weber's wife, Patti, who serves as the team's scorekeeper.

Since teammates alternate shots in pool doubles, players have to be in unison and have to set each other up for makeable shots.

Each has their strengths. Patti Weber said Boothe is skilled at banking the cue ball off the rails toward his target ball, while Weber can



Boothe shoots pool during a recent practice.



Weber takes a shot while practicing with teammate Boothe.

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cut the ball, or direct the cue ball to the desired ball without aid from the rails.

Before the 2005 tournament, which was Weber and Boothe's debut as a team together, Weber said he had a good feeling about the tournament — and they won it all.

During this year's tournament, they made their way back to the winner's bracket and found themselves among the final teams still in the running.

The bulk of tournament play takes place in two huge rooms inside the hotel with so many pool tables lined up it resembles a billiard factory warehouse.

Weber said there were about 128 tables in each room. Inside, players are everywhere, tending to hundreds of clacking billiard balls.

When 16 teams remained in the tournament, Back Again's comeback quest came the closest to ending. They were down 0-3 in a match that took four wins to advance.

But the duo won four games in a row to stay alive.

After that, Boothe said he wasn't going to be satisfied with just a good showing. He wanted to win it all — again.

The semifinals and penthouse soon called. All the raucousness and clamoring voices and chorus of billiard balls striking of the main rooms is replaced with a surreal hush in

the penthouse. "The main room was really loud considering, but once you got up top it's as quiet as a mouse," Weber said.

Occasionally, the room's silence breaks when a missed shot causes the crowd to emit a collective groan, Weber said.

In the penthouse there are only two billiard tables, and the room is equipped with grand stand seating for spectators.

Players are asked to dress smartly for their penthouse matches. In 2005, Boothe had to rush to buy slacks before the semifinals, because all he brought for the tournament were shorts.

Along with their appearance, each shot is closely examined. Before the semifinals, several referees floated around the main floors, but in the penthouse one was assigned to scrutinize each game, Patti Weber said.

All of a sudden, playing pool is no longer anonymous. Boothe said he almost felt out of place because the penthouse felt so foreign.

"Everyone is focused on you," he said. But the high stakes of the penthouse never didn't affect their mojo.

After all, this is where players want to be. This is why Weber has a table at his house. This is why Boothe joined the pool association as soon as he could. And this is where a player must show his skill, Weber said.

HOW APA 8-BALL DOUBLES WORKS

- **Players association doubles** matches allow teams with unequal degrees of skill to compete against one another.
- **It all starts with a player's handicap**, or skill level. A player is given a handicap rating based on individual play in player association matches. The higher the rating, the more skill the player possesses.
- **Men entering the system** are automatically given a 4, women 3. Weber has 6 handicap, Boothe has a 4. Doubles teams can be made up of any two people whose combined handicap does not exceed 10.
- **If two unequally ranked teams** face off, then the less skillful team needs to win fewer games to win the match. The system is designed to include everyone while pushing all sides to play their hardest.

In the finals, the first team to win four games took the championship. Back Again lost the first game, but then rallied to win the next four. For the last shot, Weber set up Boothe.

"It was a difficult cut-shot in the lower corner pocket," Boothe said. But he knew he was going to make it. And he did.