

ALL AROUND THE TOWN

**'Minnesota Fats'? . . .
We Have 'Em Here . . .**

★ **SHARKS**--In the telephone book it says, "Sam's Recreation, 447 High street," but if you know the place and mention it in everyday conversation, you would say, "Let's go to the pool hall," or "Come on, let's go shoot 50 at Sam's." On the outside, it is just another store on High street. You can walk past any time and hear the same noises in the street. But when you open the door to Sam's, the similarities end, because Sam's pool hall has a cast of its own. It has a sound. It has an atmosphere. And it lets you know it. There are no last names at Sam's. Everyone knows it is Sam Guloitta when he pays the bills. He is the short stocky man, wearing a T-shirt or an open necked white shirt, with a cigarette hanging from his lips, who has small stubby fingers and looks like he is bearing the burden of life . . .

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★ **HE IS SAM.** Just Sam. He owns it. He watches it. And he lives it. Last names don't make a difference. You still maintain all of your identity. The women behind the counter, Mary, Sam's wife, and Ruth, are always there and an integral part of the scene. "Hey, Russell, shoot me 50," or "Mike, give me the eight and I'll shoot you nine ball," are two of the familiar sounds. You can hear yourself talk at Sam's even while someone is banging and slamming on the pinball machine trying to maneuver the steel ball and win a free game . . .

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★ **SAM THE SHAM** will be singing "Little Red Riding Hood," or there will be a touch of "soul" music on the jukebox. It doesn't matter, you can still talk across the room. These pieces of background are natural at Sam's. They are as much a part of the place as the smoke hanging over the tables. Of course, the real sounds are of pool. Seeing or hearing Charley, or Mike, or George, or John make the break shot. That's what pool is all about--making the break shot. And they got some guys at Sam's, who, even though they don't take the game seriously 80 percent of the time, can make that break shot effortlessly, run the rack, and keep their cool. They do it like they eat . . .

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★ **YOU FIND** Sam either sitting at the counter nursing a cup of coffee and puffing on a cigarette. Or behind the counter waiting on customers. Other times he is shooting. Sam, who runs the place, who pays the bills. Sometimes he shoots with you--loser pays. Sam, a modest lefthander, who tells you he can't make any long shots, may tell you how when he first opened many years ago he couldn't beat anybody. Now though, "I can beat half the guys who come in," he says proudly. But Sam, who tastes his share of defeat, also administers beatings to handfuls of cocky 20 year olds who think they can come in and "play for free" . . .

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★**IT IS SAFE** to say that when Sam is not at or behind the counter, or shooting, he is asleep, but that is after 10 hours of making a living. His son, Dick, takes up the slack when Dad goes upstairs to bed. At night, the faces are more familiar, and slim, white-faced Charley Saylor, who manages the pool hall, may get down on the green, and with a jerky motion gently run the rack. It rarely gets boring. Even Saylor, who spends seven days a week there, will attest to that. Maybe the crowd from Conshohocken will drop in, or the boys from Pennsburg show up for a game. They may come as far as Norristown to shoot Saylor, the O'Dells, Russell, or George. But whether they come or not, the pool sharks are there, waiting.

Howard Sann, *The Pottstown Mercury*
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