

The World Championships Balkline 45/2 and 47/2

The first balkline tournament - immediately played as a so-called world championship - was held in Chicago from 26.3. to 6.4.1883. Seven professionals determined their champion in balkline 20/2. The games went to 600 points and the averages were between 7,78 and 23,22 for the winner Jacob Schaefer.

From 1890, the competition continued in balkline 35/2 with the then common numerous challenge matches for the title, which were played in balkline 45/2 from 1896. At that time, however, there was no federation, and there were no binding rules for participation and organization. The tournaments were organized and promoted by the American billiards company "Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company", which also had a subsidiary in Paris and later also supported the first world championships of the FFB and FSFAB from 1904. The next world championship of the Professionals was not held until the beginning of 1903 in Paris.

In 1893, the first organization of billiards amateurs was founded in the USA, which also organized some regional Cadre championships, but remained nationally as well as internationally without any major importance for the time being. The real history of the world championships in this discipline began ten years later.

After organizing a few amateur tournaments in 1902, Frenchmen Théodore Vienne and Frantz Reichel, doubtless inspired by the Professional World Championship in Paris the same year, called the strongest amateurs from France and Belgium to an international championship in 1903, dubbed the world championship. It was played at the Café l'Eldorado in Paris. They succeeded in mobilizing the best players of that time, and not only that, immediately after these championships, still in the evening after the award ceremony, the first important federation, the 'Fédération des Sociétés Françaises des Amateurs de Billard' (FSFAB) was founded by Comte Raymond de Drée (president), Frantz Reichel¹ (secretary general), Théodore Vienne and dedicated players. These personalities also shaped the international title fights in balkline in the first years, especially in the organizational area.

Shortly after the FSFAB was founded, there was already a scandal. Because of differences of opinion in questions of rules and in the definition of the amateur concept, the two initiators Théodore Vienne and Frantz Reichel left the federation three days after the foundation and founded two months later the 'Fédération Française de Billard' (FFB).

¹ Frantz Reichel's baptismal name was Francois Etienne Reichel. However, since he came from the Alsace region, he was listed in magazines and publications only under Frantz Reichel.



Théodore Vienne



Frantz Reichel



Raymond de Drée

For ten years both federations existed side by side and both organized international tournaments which were more or less clearly titled as world championships in parallel. Foreign players, in whose home country no billiard federation existed yet, had to become a member of one of the federations to participate in the world championships.

In 1913 an arrangement was made with the foundation of the 'Fédération Française des Amateurs de Billard' (FFAB).

In the agreements made at that time, the tournaments of the FFB were subsequently assigned the status of world championships alone, in addition to the first competition of 1903. The reason given for this was that the FFB had registered the title "Championnat du Monde" with French courts and had thus secured the rights. In the board of the new federation only Raymond de Drée can be found as president, Théodore Vienne was only 'honorary president' and Frantz Reichel was not represented at all.

In the following lists of all world championships in balkline 45/2 and 47/2 the international tournaments of the two competing organizations of the FFB, the FSFAB and the cooperating 'National Association of Amateur Billiard Players' (NAABP) of the USA are listed, although only the FFB championships were subsequently recognized as world title matches.

This procedure offers a possibility of comparison, especially since the FSFAB united the stronger players and from 1909 on more nations were involved in it. It also entered into cooperations with other federations and made efforts to establish a world federation. The unification with the FFB was another step. Unfortunately, the First World War put an end to all efforts to found a world organization. Only in 1923 the "Fédération Internationale des Amateurs de Billard" (FIAB) was founded, which changed into the 'Union Internationale des Fédérations d'Amateurs de Billard' (UIFAB) in 1924.

The chronology begins with the title matches of the FSFAB. In 1904 and 1905 balkline 35/2 (on match tables) was played. From 1906 on there was only balkline 45/2.

At the tournaments of the FFB, which are still held as world championships today, there were much lower averages, because the best amateurs of that time played in the other federation. However, shortly before the merger of the two organizations, the last championship of the FFB in 1913 was already attended by the players of the FSFAB.

The balkline 45/2 in the years between 1903 and 1925 was characterized by another phenomenon. Not always, but often the runner-up or even the third-placed player of the title matches had the right to challenge the reigning world champion to a single match for the title. In 1923 and 1925, this had to be done within six months of the tournament. Matches were played to 1200 points in 1908 (FSFAB), the same in 1910 and 1912 (FFB), and 1500 and 1200 points between 1923 and 1925. These challenge matches were played over three sections (usually several days), with the final series of one section being continued in the next without changing the ball positions.

Until the outbreak of World War II, there was more or less regularly a world championship in balkline 45/2 every season. With the resumption of international tournaments in 1947, this continuity was lost, only 11 more world title matches in this discipline followed.

1947 also brought a significant rule change. Balkline 45/2 became balkline 47/2, not only increasing the line distance from the rail, but also abolishing the "free center field", the rules now applied to all fields.

After 1978, a last attempt was made in 2003 in Ronchin (FR) to revive the world championship in balkline 47/2.

The game distance in the world championships was 400 points. Only from 1920 to 1924 it was 500 and at the last tournament in 2003 only 300 points.

The world championship average record is held by Rafael Garcia from Spain with 131,90 (over 6 games) ahead of Frédéric Caudron from Belgium with 126,66 (7 games) with a distance of 300 points per match. Jean Marty from France achieved 102,85 from 9 games of 400 points each.

A best single average of 400.00 was achieved by Jean Marty (FR), Henk Scholte (NL), Hans Vultink (NL), Manuel Girves (AR) and Ludo Dielis (BE). 300.00 were achieved by Frédéric Caudron (BE) and Fabian Blondeel (DE).

Until 1964, the 1951 world championship in Buenos Aires (AR) can be considered the best tournament with 24,36 tournament average with 8 participants. However, similar performance was already achieved in 1930 in Antwerp with 22,56. The best tournament average overall can be found at the last championship in 2003 in Ronchin (FR) with 54,08 with 20 players.



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