



▲ "Pool takes so much style and grace and smoothness," says Lee, who practices 60 hours a week. "When I play, I feel alive."

BALL OF FIRE

Dressed only in black, Jeanette Lee is the white-hot queen of the women's professional pool tour

THE HUSH AROUND THE SHOW table at Amsterdam Billiards in New York City is shattered when a cue ball scatters a cluster of six balls into five pockets. Jeanette Lee nods in satisfaction. "Isn't it beautiful?" she says.

Beautiful, for sure. In fact, pool has been striking in many ways since Lee, 23, stormed into the sport's top rank just two years after turning pro, becoming the 1994 player of the year on the Women's Professional Billiard Association tour. Ewa Mataya-Laurance, No. 1 from 1990-93, calls Lee "a great asset to the tour and a real great player."

"From the time I started playing, I

wanted to be the best pool player who ever lived," says Lee, leaving no doubt she means both men and women.

Before there was pool, there was an increasingly rebellious youth in Brooklyn, N.Y., where Jeanette was the youngest of three children of Bo Chun Lee, 64, a smoke-shop owner, and Sonja, 54, a nurse who had emigrated from South Korea in 1968. "It was a Korean and American culture clash," says free-spirited Lee of her strict upbringing—including no sleep overs ("My mother said it was too much of an imposition on the other person's family"). But when Lee was 12, her parents relented and let her

move in with friends in Manhattan, where she attended private school. Then she drifted through classes at the prestigious Bronx High School of Science until, at 18, she stepped into a Manhattan pool hall—and was transfixed. "I was like I was in the *Twilight Zone* of heaven," she says. "I was just in love."

In 1990 she tried to break pool's grip by attending college, but to no avail. She joined the WPBA tour at 20—and concentrated on the applied geometry of billiards. "When I learn a new thing at pool," she says, eyes widening, "I feel like I just had the most beautiful baby."

Lee, who won \$50,000 in prizes last year, plans to enter all 18 of the major tournaments of 1995 and defend her title in the ESPN televised Nationals in December.

But Lee doesn't measure the payoff in dollars and cents. "Pool is my oxygen," she says. "When I play, I am the happiest girl in the world." ■