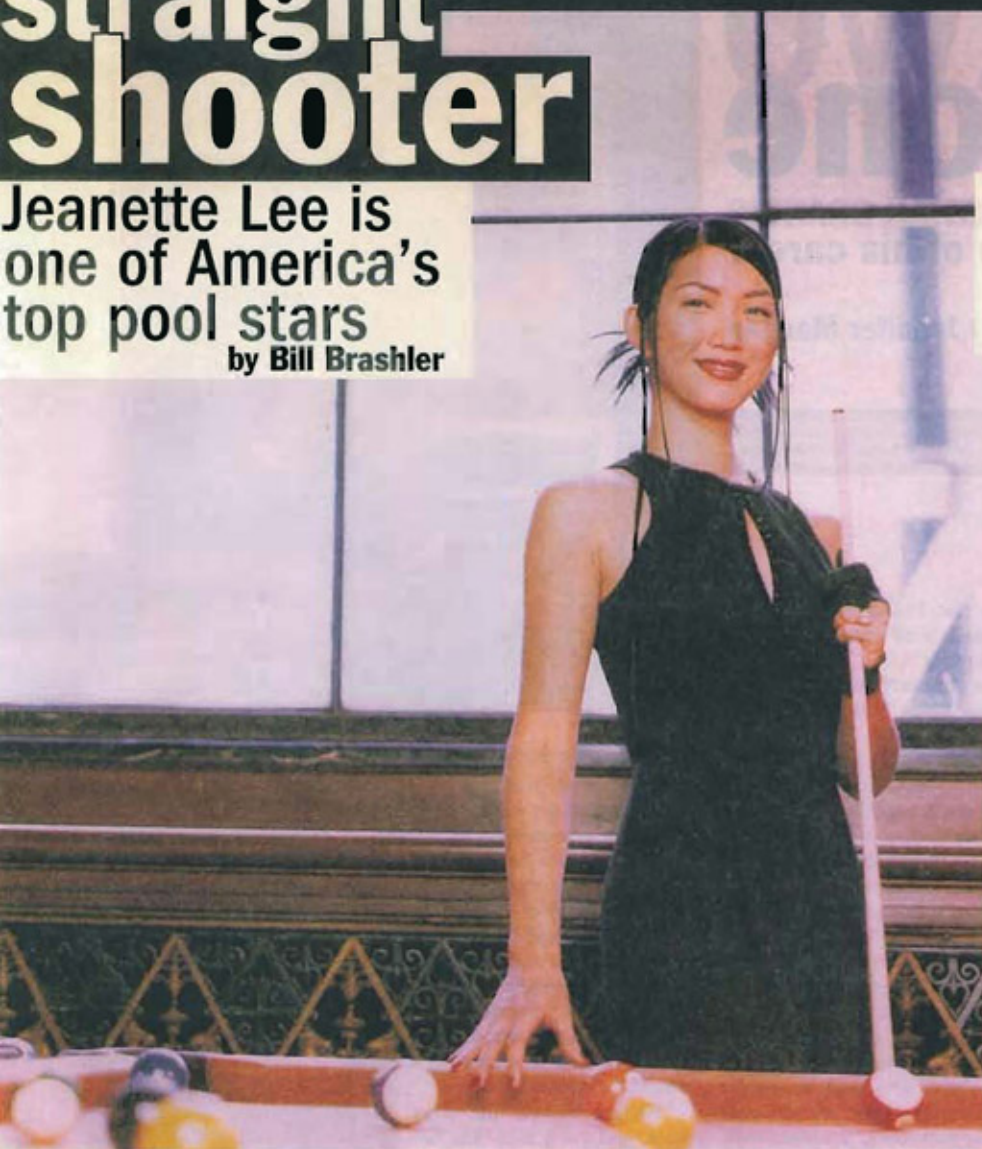


straight shooter

the sports page

Jeanette Lee is one of America's top pool stars
by Bill Brashler



Lee discovered pool at age 18 when a friend took her to Chelsea Billiards, a famous New York City pool hall. Open 24 hours a day, it was a place for hustlers and characters. It was also where the best local players gravitated.

"I loved the whole atmosphere," she says. It was everything her strict home life wasn't. "I wanted to be part of it. The action just pulled me in."

Lee began spending every day at the pool hall. Top professional players practice three to six hours a day to stay sharp. Lee often played for 14 hours at a stretch. She worked relentlessly on her technique—the way she held the cue, her stroke. To make sure she didn't vary the position of her left hand, the hand that rests on the pool table and guides her stroke, she taped her fingers together before she went home for the night.

Soon she grew obsessed. "I'd watch the top players at the Chelsea, and I would try to breathe like them," she says. "I'd look at their eyes and wonder what they were thinking. I watched what speed they hit a ball, how they hit it, the tiny strokes, the release, the timing. I absorbed everything."

Two years later, against her parents' wishes, Lee quit Queens College and turned pro. She struggled at first. But in 1994, she won five of 15 WPBA tournaments, earning about \$50,000 and the tour's top ranking. Last year, she won two more tournaments and married fellow pool pro George Breedlove. Now her parents are her biggest fans.

The Twin Cities Classic is Lee's first tournament of 1996. She finishes third—not good enough for her.

Afterward, Lee heads straight for a practice table and racks up a nine-ball diamond. She lines up the cue ball and hits it with such force that her body nearly lifts off the floor. Three balls shoot into pockets.

"Pool is my oxygen," she says.



Around pool halls, Jeanette Lee is known as the Black Widow. Like the deadly spider of the same name, she attacks opponents like a predator. She will make you pay for any missed shot, any error.

Lee is the second-ranked female pool player in America. Her specialty is nine ball, a game of speed and intimidation. To win, you have to sink the yellow-striped nine ball after sinking balls one through eight in numerical order or in combination shots. Lee seldom misses. Once in a tournament, she sank 74 balls in a row.

On this February day, she is at the Treasure Island Casino near Minneapolis. She's after the \$6,000 first prize in the Twin

Cities Classic. You can't miss her at the tables. The raven-haired 24-year-old looks glamorous dressed all in black.

She can't wait for the tournament to begin. "I hunger to play pool. I ache to play pool," she says.

That hunger has made her the talk of the women's tour. "Jeanette's good," says Mark Cord, director of the Women's Professional Billiards Association (WPBA). "She has an attitude that draws people to watch her."

It's hard to believe she has been playing the game for just six years.

She was raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., by Korean-American parents so strict, even schoolgirl sleep-overs were forbidden.

be a trick-shot artist

Want to learn one of Lee's favorite trick pool shots? surf virtually react: <http://www.react.com>