



# Sports

SECTION C

Thursday, March 10, 2005

## Black Widow takes cue from other top athletes and markets image

By the norms of sports market- Jeanette Lee should be squarely in the eight ball.

Female athletes, compared to male athletes, have a harder time getting

orsement deals.

As a pro billiards player, Lee is in a sport hasn't produced a household name since

Minnesota Fats.

But like Rudolph Nader Jr., who is going by Min-xa Fats after Jackie

son played a character with that name in

1961 movie *The Tiger*, Lee, 33, has a

catchable moniker. As the self-

id "Black Widow," she appears to be one of the most

catchable women in sports.

When you walk into a hospital-

suite and she's there, she's instantly recognizable," says Jeff Ur-

sports marketing director for Trade, which used Lee for its

orate hospitality at the Super Bowl. "Will she be the next Serena Williams? No, probably not. But she's making an impact."

That includes appearing at about 25 corporate outings, at up to \$10,000 a pop, so far in 2005 — up from about 20 last year.

Says Kevin Lee, no relation, who staged a sports-themed awards banquet for Cisco Systems featuring

Lee: "It's a bit of a stretch to consider what she does as a sport, but she's attractive, well-

spoken."

Usually at corporate events, Lee shoots pool.

At first, she was nervous. But she says, not anymore: "They don't

need to see the trickiest

shot. There are trick shots which I see as the easiest on the planet but that really impress them."

Next week in Las Vegas, Lee stages her first fantasy camp. The three-day "Black Widow Experience" costs campers \$2,950. But, Lee says, "At many sports fantasy camps, the celebrity just comes in at the beginning and the end. Here, they're all going to get to play a lot with Jeanette Lee."

John Rousseau, a Phoenix busi-

ness consultant, will attend to "learn something." And he clearly admires Lee: "With her talent, she could do a TV talk show."

Lee hosted a cable TV pilot for a celebrity billiards series that recently aired on Bravo and is shop-

ping a reality TV billiards series.

She has her own downloadable video game for cellphones, will tour U.S. military bases in Europe this summer and this month gets her own DVD animated feature.

That DVD, her agent Tom George



**Nice combination:** Pro billiards player Jeanette Lee plans to take her career to another level. Next week she's staging her first fantasy camp.

is meant to lead to spinoff products for the character she plays in it — "a globe-trotting pool hustler by day, super CIA operative/martial arts expert by night."

Don't laugh. The Women's Professional Billiards Association tour includes fewer than 10 events, and first-place prize money can run under \$10,000. But Lee, partly through made-for-TV events, manages to draw TV exposure many pro athletes might envy. She appeared for more than 40 hours on ESPN or ESPN2 last year.

And Lee got plenty of close-ups. Mike May of the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association says at least 40.7 million Americans play billiards, and 63% are males. He says Lee might benefit from being in a familiar sport that might become a fad, like TV poker. And, he says, there's this: "Sex can sell in billiards, just like in other sports."

Bob Dorfman, who analyzes athletes' marketability for the San Francisco-based Pickett Advertising agency, says when "channel-surfing and (I) see her, I stop. I'd never watch her more than marveling

at her athletic talent."

Amidst "the paucity of marketable female athletes," Dorfman says, "all the top female endorsers have an element of sex appeal."

Lee, he says, is a natural for shampoo ads — "great hair."

The nickname helps, says Bob Williams, a Chicago talent broker who links athletes and marketers. "Having a nickname like Tiger, Shaq or the Black Widow lends itself to advertising and creates an instant identity beyond sports," he says.

Lee got the nickname from a friend a few years after picking up pool at age 18. Lee, who is married with a baby and two stepdaughters and lives in Indianapolis, suggests it helps create a colorful image: "It almost gives me the freedom to be as bad as I want to be."

**Hot:** The steroid controversy isn't hurting interest in Major League Baseball, at least with MLB merchandise. Sales are up 36% this year, says research firm SportScanINFO. The 10 top-selling items are New York Yankees or Boston Red Sox items. New Yankee Randy Johnson has MLB's best-selling jersey.