

**Walter V. “Red” Penrod**  
**“End of an Era”**  
**By Jay L. Carlton**

Somewhere it’s going to happen; today, tomorrow, next week. Perhaps it’ll be next month or next year. It will be an end to another era. A period of time characterized by particular circumstances; memorable events of years and decades gone by; unforgettable personages and characters that remains indelible on our minds. A permanent mark ever lasting not easily erased or washed away.

Without exception general consensus has always been as long as there is one person left from that precise point in time, the memory will last. Forgotten only when the last link of the chain has moved on. Such is the case of Walter Penrod. It is this time of which I speak. Another part of a long ago era has moved on. It ended Wednesday, December 31st, 2008. It will be an easy date to remember; it was the last day of the year. New Year’s Eve is supposed to be remembered for its gaiety, its celebrations. A time to look forward to new beginnings. But not this time. This New Year’s Eve was bitter-sweet. For we close the chapter and say goodbye not only to a good friend, but like a member of the family. For that’s what he was for many years, a member of the Missouri 8 Ball family.

I’m not sure of the actual date, I can only tell you it was almost fifty years ago, 1960 or ’61, the first time I walked into Poor Pete’s, a small five-table establishment owned and operated by Pete Cheatham, located at the water tower circle way up North Grand Avenue in St Louis. I knew Walt Penrod only by sight. He was twice my age back then. He exchanged courtesy nods with me and that, I thought, showed class. I watched him perform a few times, along with Fat Bill and other local talent. And if there was no action at Poor Pete’s, there was another room a few miles down at Grand & Olive.

Across the street from Poor Pete’s was a bar co-owned by two St. Louis Cardinals players, outfielder Rip Repulski and third-baseman Steve Bilko. North Grand Avenue was the place to be. One side of the street you could rub shoulders with pro baseball players after the game that day or night, not only Cardinals players, but also from visiting teams’ players. And on the other side of the street bum around with some of the best pocket billiards talent St. Louis had to offer.

Walt Penrod was a regular at Poor Pete’s. Better known as “Red” in his pool playing hey-day, closed out what could be the antepenultimate chapter of North St. Louis pool. There’s still a couple of us around, but when it came to the fine art of running racks of ‘9’ ball, the best may all be gone. Fat Bill Taormina (The Italian Stallion) passed away seven or eight years ago. Lean Gene Burgin has been gone three years now. Tom Ferry, Leroy Johnson among others; and now - “Red” Penrod. Vernon Humphrey is still with us. Terry Huelsmann is active and with Marc Cooper co-owns and operates “The Break” in Cahokia, Illinois. And that’s pretty close to it.

**Fast forward 35-years:**

Now I run into Walt at Crooked Cue and Classic’s Sports Bar on West Florissant, Florissant, Mo. As a member of several teams the last dozen years, Walt still handled a pool cue like the old days; straight and smooth. And I would be remiss if it wasn’t mentioned that “Red” Penrod reached back and brought out of himself what many consider to be his finest season of Missouri 8 Ball competition.

Case in point: It was the 2008 summer session when Walt did all but hi-jack the Top Player Award from Division 106. For top honors Walt (22-4 .846) outlasted a younger Pat Row (31-6 .838), and a much-much younger Floyd Dooley (27-6 .818). And here’s the kicker, at that time Red was 82 years of age... 82! Can you dig it! This was the “Red” of old. He owned this division like Ali owned the heavyweight division.

Red was like a lion surveying its dinner from the bushes; with coolness and patience. You never knew he was there waiting, stalking then pouncing when the moment presented itself. It was like the old days, running out rack after rack week after week. Keeping many of the game’s best players in their chairs. Performing as if five decades had magically disappeared. But then, what difference did it make? When you’re hot... you’re hot. Thirty-two or 82, it was the same clear blue eyes surveying the perimeter, the same steady hand stroking the cue stick making the shots, pocketing ball after ball closing out another win. It was vintage Penrod at his best.

According to a reliable source, one league night a young opponent snickered when he drew Walt. He told his teammates that this game is going to be like a walk in the park. The old boy looks a little tired. Probably has a hard time making it around the table. That he would make it easy on Walt so he wouldn't have to get outta his chair. It was a walk in the park... for Walt. More like a comfortable stroll down Primrose Lane. As the kid relaxed in his chair, awaiting his turn at the table, watching as Walt made the group of solids methodically disappear one by one, his expression turned to what one bystander described as 'panic', like he knew the Titanic was going down, but there was no life-preserver for *him*.

After Walt dropped the '8' and the handshake done, the kid mumbled to himself as he walked back to his table. When a teammate asked how it felt to get beat up on by Mr. Penrod, who was *only* 82-years-old, the kid responded that he was so embarrassed that if he were totally submerged under water he would scarcely kick to bring himself to the top. That's the way a lot of opponents felt after taking the taciturn Red Penrod lightly.

### **“In Commemorative”**

Long-time friend Terry Huelsmann: “Talk about a breakout moment, a comeback season. There is no question that this was the “Red” of bygone days? It was like being back at Poor Pete’s. Red’s life to this point was remarkable and one more sparkling and praiseworthy chapter was added.”

To borrow a quote from Grantland Rice: ‘Something one rarely sees beneath a sun that shines upon few novelties.’ An example could mean: “When was the last time an 82-year-old waltzed through opponents 30-40-50, even 60-years his junior? We may never again see a season matching this season from an octogenarian with such a profound influence over opponents and teammates as Walter V. “Red” Penrod pulled off. No flash or dash, no show-offish, and never stand-offish. Certainly one of the most polite and accomplished diplomats to represent our game.”

I.Q. Jones: “Walt Penrod went after the Top Player Award the way Ty Cobb went after another batting title, with earnest determination. No quarter asked for, no quarter given. Whereas Cobb was hard and ruthless, Penrod was soft and quiet. There was gentleness to Walt. A friendliness that was unforced. Friends and teammates from Classic’s Sports Bar and the Missouri 8 Ball Pool League in general will have to go quite a distance before it picks up a sports-gentleman the quality of this rarest of individuals.”

Missouri 8 Ball Pool League Office: “Walt Penrod had a history. A man that just turned four-score and three (twenty-six days earlier) would have a lot of memories. And those of us who knew him will have endless stories to share. Great shooting, Red; it’s been a fun ride and a great pleasure knowing you.”

Walter V. “Red” Penrod: December 5, 1925 – December 31, 2008