

# Inside Stefano: The Drive & Determination

By Samm Diep © March 2006

During this year's Super Billiards Expo in Valley Forge, PA, I had the pleasure of spending a little time with the very talented and charming Stefano Pelinga. With several top finishes, Stefano's recent championship titles lead him toward his goal of joining the ranks of Mike Massey and Earl Strickland in the Billiard Hall of Fame. Having received throughout his career, the highest number of worldwide official awards as "audience's favorite champion," I consider him to be the male Jennifer Baretta of Artistic Pool.

***"If I had lived in a different time from Mike [Massey], I would have been several times a world champion..."***

For 22 years now, Stefano has been serving as a police officer in Rome for the Italian government. How exciting would that be to get pulled over for a traffic violation and look up to find Stefano Pelinga standing outside your car window? I was curious if he'd ever been recognized by someone he was arresting, but his response was no. He's even recently been working undercover. Sshhh...

Even working 36 hours a week, he still manages to practice about three hours a day, every other day. Adding, "unless there is something important coming up, I'll try to play those three hours at least five days a week." It's hard for him to practice more than three hours at a time because he works mainly on stroke shots and it can be very physically demanding.

He believes he's much more recognized in the US than in Italy, explaining, "You give more space to the cue sports over here than we do over there." Having just quit the official artistic pool circuit, he now only attends a handful of invitational events a year, along with various special appearances.

Sponsored by The Cue Masters, Tiger Products, The Chameleon Rack, and Hampton Ridge Billiards, he was definitely easy to find while making his rounds at the expo. If you missed him there, you might be able to catch him at one of the eight shows he has scheduled in the next two weeks before heading to Houston for the BCA expo. Now that's a busy man!

Having a built physique, I inquired if he was on any strict diet or exercise regimen. "Unfortunately, I don't exercise that often. I believe, in pool, if you want to exercise, it has to be something very mild because otherwise if your muscles get too tense you get, not just soreness, you might get some shakes or vibrations in your muscles as you're playing." Describing his experiences with some uncontrollable twitches from over exercising, he suggests, "If you want to work out, I recommend some nice, long walks and some very light weight exercises... and, some stretching."

***"I hope that I will be so good to one day be inducted into the Hall of Fame. That's my next goal. I have to repeat myself a couple more times, to win a couple more world championships."***

As you may have imagined, Stefano's been competing since a very young age. However, it may not be in the sports you would think. During his late teenage years, "I became a black belt in Kung Fu and then I switched to boxing and then I became a good boxer for several years."

"I don't have a table at home... But, in a way, that helps me to socialize. I like to go to the pool room... [There's] wonderful people and good friends." He really enjoys interacting with other players and meeting new people.

As he recalls winning the U.S. Open and European Artistic Pool Championships, he adds, "But I think the most memorable was the one I just won in October, the Trick Shot Magic which is, for us, it became the

equivalent of a world title because the eight best players are invited. And, I really deserved that, I believe, because I've taken, in the past, way too many second places because of Mike Massey being in the picture. If I had lived in a different time from Mike, I would have been several times a world champion... I'm working on repeating myself next year."

Bringing up Mike Massey, I was curious if his size and build contributed to his ability to execute many of the stroke shots. "He's taller and it might help him a little bit but if you want to calculate it mathematically, I'd say maybe 5% but no more than that... The Far East countries have so many great players that are only maybe 100 pounds and they can make all the shots that Mike and I can make so it's not really a matter of strength." I like that answer!

When asked where he saw himself five years from now, "I hope that I will be so good to one day be inducted into the Hall of Fame. That's my next goal. I have to repeat myself a couple more times, to win a couple more world championships." Speaking of the Hall of Fame, he wanted to add his sincere happiness for Earl Strickland, a good friend of his. "He might be criticized for his attitude but he's a great player, one of the greatest players that ever lived."

Having high expectations for himself and for this game, when asked how he felt about the artistic pool vests, he responded, "I'd rather play in a tuxedo. I think it looks much better. It's a nice thing to look sharp and to show people that pool is a sport and a class-act also. That's a nice message that we try to send out and especially when the TV is there, you shouldn't look sloppy. Unfortunately, it happens way too many times. That's why the ladies have been so much more successful than the men. The ladies knew how to behave or to carry themselves much better than the men did. That's my personal opinion."

One thing that many people may not know about Stefano is that he is an enormous Dean Martin fan. In fact, his inspiration for playing this game was sparked by watching old Dean Martin movies. Some of his fondest childhood memories are of being "young and foolish, like an old Dean Martin song says" in the pool room without any worries. His favorite shots are all the power stroke shots. He also enjoys playing straight pool, 3-cushion, and rotation. When he's not shooting pool or working, he enjoys watching television and old movies. Aside from being incredibly talented and driven, he is as humble as they come and very down-to-earth.

When asked if he had any advice he could share with up and coming players, he said "Keep focused. I wanted to be a world champion one day and I made it. I can be very focused. When I want something, I'll get something, most of the time." While remembering an old friend he admired dearly, "He taught me a lot of things and he talked to me about all those big players... next thing you know, twenty years went by and I get to be very good friends with all of them." For more information on Stefano Pelinga, visit [www.StefanoPelinga.com](http://www.StefanoPelinga.com).



Samm Diep, "Cherry Bomb"  
House Pro at Table Steaks East in Aurora, Colorado  
**[blog.SammsPocket.com](http://blog.SammsPocket.com)**