

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

pinball

"You see, I just got tired of hanging out in those dusty arcades banging those pleasure machines."

— Bruce Springsteen

"4th of July Asbury Park (Sandy)"

Since its crude beginning in the early 20th century, pinball has been viewed as a cultural escape for ruffians, gamblers and greasers.

In 1942, New York City Mayor Fiorella La Guardia not only outlawed the games, claiming they were bad influences and tied to the Mob, but was also photographed smashing pinball machines with a sledgehammer.

I can hear uptight mothers in the 1950s and 1960s decrying the games as outlets for hoodlums in leather jackets.

But for all of the negative baggage that once attended the game of flippers, bumpers and plungers, there remains the simple fact that playing pinball combines skill and chance in a way unlike any other entertainment.

Now, I was never a greaser nor ruffian, but I did spend time banging pleasure machines in all types of spots — truck stops, all-night convenience stores, campgrounds, mall arcades, bars and in a bathroom (really) at a Kansas City coffee shop. And, while I am not literally deaf, dumb or blind, for nearly 30 years I have been playing — at times — a mean pinball.

I started as a precocious 5 year-old,

DESPITE THE
DIFFICULTY OF FINDING
TOP MACHINES, THE
GAME IS STILL A POPULAR
PASTTIME AMONG AMERICANS

BY MARK LUCE

sitting on a barstool at Daisy Mays in Salina, Kan. pumping quarters into machines while dad and his dudes did whatever they did at the bar.

Back in Salina as a fifth-grader, it was \$5 from Pops and a trip to the nine machines at Pinball Alley for more silverball action. As a college kid I headed to the bowling alley for my freshman flipper fix. As a graduate student, the bar I worked at featured seven machines. I had the keys to all of them and played and played and played. Over all this time, I have determined that there is no better, cheaper or less-destructive way to let off steam than flipping away your

troubles for an hour or two.

Sadly, it's becoming harder to find new machines, as the pinball industry isn't anywhere near the \$2.8 billion behemoth it was in 1990. Now there is but one pinball manufacturer — Stern — and purists will tell you its tables simply don't stack up to the classic Bally-, Williams- or Midway-built games of the 1970s and 1980s.

So what's the attraction? Unlike video games, pinball is always different and takes a combination of prowess and good fortune to perform well. More importantly, you can actually win something in pinball if you're good or lucky. That potential of earning replay has held nearly seven decades of American pinball players in its thrall, with players working for that unmistakable "crrrrackkkkk" that signals to everyone that you have not only whupped the machine, but you have something to show for it.

Mark Luce, a Golfdom contributing editor in Lawrence, Kan., dreams of owning a pinball machine.

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