

History

The beginning as a table game (England, 15th - 17th Century)

The history of Shuffleboard begins definitely at latest in England in the 15th Century. At that time a game was played, at first in aristocratic circles, then as well in taverns, where one had to throw coins as close as possible to the edge of a long table. Little by little this game, now already known as "Shoveboard", "Shovelboard", "Shovegroat", "Slidegroat" or "Shovelpenny" was refined, the coins (Groats or Pennies) had to stop in painted scoring areas. As the game was associated with excessive bets on money and drinks and as it kept the subjects away from work, King Henry VIII. decreed that only aristocrats were allowed to play Shuffleboard. As Henry VIII. played Shuffleboard himself, he wasn't immune of loosing and so there is evidence in the royal records of 1532 about a payment of nine pounds 'Paied to my lord Wylliam for that he wanne of the kinges grace at shovillaborde'.

As most prohibitions this one about Shuffleboard was more or less ineffective. As around 1600 the upper class started to play Billiards, Shuffleboard came to new highs in the taverns. In German-speaking countries this form of pastime was known as "Beilkespiel" and nowadays still popular as table game "Jakkolo" or "Sjoelbak" (Dutch). As well, the sport of Curling has the same roots as our Shuffleboard.

The start in the United States (17th - 19th Century)

Together with the expatriates from England the game early made its way to the East Coast of the USA.

Shuffleboard gained a questionable publicity by the drama "The Crucible" (1953) by Arthur Miller, where Bridget Bishop (historic: Sarah Bishop) runs a tavern with Shuffleboard. She was accused of witchcraft, sentenced to death and she was the first out of 20 people to be executed on June 10th, 1692.

In the year 1848 a Court in New Hanover (Pennsylvania) ruled, that Shuffleboard is not a gamble but a game of skill. The sentence for the accused innkeeper was one of acquittal and the now legal game became more and more popular.

From table to deckgame (since 1870)

Simultaneously traveling on cruise ships gained popularity in the second half of the 19th Century. Besides other games people played Shuffleboard on bord, but still as a table game. It must have been between 1870 and 1880, when Shuffleboard was moved away from table to deck. Sources vary about the originator, either an employee of the P & = Cruise Lines or passengers of the White Star Lines. The coins were substituted by heavy discs made of wood, which were shot across deck by means of cues. Shuffleboard (named "Deck Billiards" or "Peel Billiards" by some cruise companies) in today's form was born and became a synonym for amusement on deck

The now grown rink was marked with chalk on the planks. The scoring area was made out of a square, being divided into 9 smaller squares and a circle, divided into 2 semicircles. Each of the eleven areas was marked with a number, whereby the numbers 1 to 9 in the squares horizontally, perpendicularly and diagonally sum up to 15. By and by the semicircles were marked with 10 and 10 off (see picture).

Over the years the cruise companies standardized the scale of the court. One foot for a square became standard. That resulted in a width of 3 and a length of 6 feet. The starting line varied however: 28 feet for the "Ladies" and 37 feet for the "Gentlemen". The four wooden discs had (as today) mostly a diameter of 6 inches. At some stage another scoring area at the opposite side of the court was invented. That saved one way for the players or resulted in playing capacity for four players at a time. Already at that time the same rules as today applied, where the loser of a match had to start the next match and therefore concede his opponent the advantage of the last disc (so-called "hammer"). Winner of the match was the player who first reached a predefined number of points (normally 50,75 or 100 points).

From the mid 1920s Shuffleboard lost some of its absolute popularity, mainly due to the upcoming movie-theaters on bord. But even today Shuffleboard is an essential part of the pastime activities on most cruise ships. In 2006 the GSA has installed a PolyCourt (and shortly thereafter due to the great success) a second PolyCourt on bord the "MS Amadea".

From deckgame to Sports (starting 1913)

It took until 1913 when Shuffleboard made it to the mainland again, when Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ball expanded their pastime offers at their Lynhurst Hotel in Daytona Beach (Northeast of Florida). That created a boom for Shuffleboard, everywhere in the country concrete courts were built outdoors. In the first instance in conjunction with hotels, in the early 1920s also as separate clubs.

St.Petersburg (on the Northwest Coast of Florida) developed to the center of the Shuffleboard World. It was there where on Jan 24th, 1924 the "Mirror Lake Shuffleboard Club" was founded (renamed to St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club Inc. in 1932) and where the still valid Shuffleboard Rules were implemented. Whereas until then the squared scoring area was in use, from then on the triangular scoring area (10,8,7,-10) was favoured.

The "Mirror Lake Shuffleboard Club" was essential in the founding of the "National Shuffleboard Association" in 1931 in St.Petersburg. In the same year the first Men's Nationals were held, one year later, in 1932 the first Ladies' Nationals. During the next two decades Shuffleboard spread over the whole continent, the "Works Projects Administration (WPA)" even built various courts on playgrounds.

Shuffleboard reached its time of prosperity in the 1950s. The "St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club" had approximately 5.000 members, who played on 110 courts (see picture, today still 65). A large grandstand was built in 1939 and is still there today for the spectators.

Starting in the 1960s Shuffleboard lost popularity permanently. On the one hand there existed disputes amongst the different leagues, on the other hand new forms of pastime activities such as TV and later Video and Internet arised. The main point for the loss of popularity though was the lack of interest to get the Youth involved in Shuffleboard, resulting in an image of sport for retired people only. Unfortunately this image lasts until today on the NorthAmerican continent.

International Shuffleboard (starting 1979)

The "International Shuffleboard Association (ISA)" was founded March 10th, 1979, again in St. Petersburg. The ISA was designed to make Shuffleboard more popular in countries outside the NorthAmerican continent and foster Shuffleboard by international contests. In 1981 in Muskegon (Michigan, USA) the first ISA Team World Championships were held, starting with teams from Canada, the USA and Japan only. Australia (1991), Brazil (1996) und lately Germany (2005) founded National Associations and joined the World Championships, which take place yearly and last for one week.

In the 1990s the "National Shuffleboard Hall of Fame" was provisorily established in St.Petersburg, shortly thereafter it was moved to the "Clearwater Shuffleboard Club" (15 miles north, 52 Courts). There you can find as well the "International Shuffleboard Hall of Fame".

An important factor for gaining popularity in other countries is the international travelers group, holding "Inaugurals" in various countries. These have been held e.g. 1995 (Zimbabwe), 2000 (Ireland), 2003 (Denmark/Norway/Sweden), Eastbourne/England in 2004 and in spring 2008 in Amsterdam/Netherlands and Langenselbold/Germany in combination.

Another important step was the invention of alternative Court-surfaces apart from the still dominating concrete Courts. In the mid 80s Sandy Myers from Canada offered Rolloc-Courts (thin plastic mats), so that Shuffleboard could be easily played indoors in less sunny countries throughout the year. Further enhancements are the "PolyCourts", offered by the "Allen R. Shuffleboard Co. Inc." (massive, mobile one-click plastic Courts), preferred by the GSA in Germany. The design was further developed since 1988. The oldest still existing manufacturer of Shuffleboard equipment (est. 1941 in St. Petersburg) still has a patent of the US Government on the actual surface. (see picture above on deck of the MS Amadea).

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Sources amongst others.:

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