Student Spotlight

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Mary Ulmer, a Fargo, ND, native is finishing her third year here at ISU. When she’s not studying, she has another major interest - playing pool. She captains a team in the Ames league, sanctioned by the Valley National Eight Ball Association (VNEA), which is one of the largest league systems in the world. Several places in Ames have weekly tournaments that she competes in whenever possible.

Pool, she says, is a serious hobby. “It’s a lot of fun. Every game is different. It’s never the same.” Ulmer said. “I’ve met a lot of interesting people and had the chance to travel and compete in a lot of tournaments. Everywhere I’ve lived, I’ve met new pool players.”

She tries to practice anywhere from 10 - 20 hours a week, but sometimes veterinary school gets in the way. “Veterinary school and pool are alike in that both require undivided attention, time and concentration,” Ulmer says. “Sometimes it’s tough to worship two masters.”

Ulmer started playing pool when she was about fourteen. She began playing competitive league pool while an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Numerous college and bar tournaments followed. Her first major tournament was the Minnesota state singles tournament in 1990, in which she placed ninth. The early 1990’s found her playing in many bar tournaments, Minnesota state singles and team events, and the VNEA International Championships in Las Vegas, NV. This tournament is one of the largest amateur tournaments in the world, with players coming from the U.S., Canada, Australia and several European countries. Ulmer has competed in the VNEA tournament four times. In 1994 Ulmer finished in the top 16 in the Women’s Open Eight Ball Division, out of a field of over 300 players. Ulmer won the Iowa Women’s Eight Ball championship in both 1994 and 1995, and most recently competed in the Midwest eight ball championships in Lincoln, NE, on April 7 - 9, winning the women’s masters division.

She credits a lot of people with her success. “A neighbor, Harold Greer, who owned a resort (with a pool table) taught me to play when I was a kid. Since then, everyone I’ve played pool with has taught me something. Every time you play, win or lose, you learn. Actually, you learn more by losing than you do from winning, because you’re watching someone who is better than you are,” Ulmer said.

Ulmer plans to attend the VNEA tournament again this year at the end of May, and hopes to improve on last year’s performance. After veterinary school, she hopes to find a job in a mixed practice somewhere in North Dakota or Minnesota.