

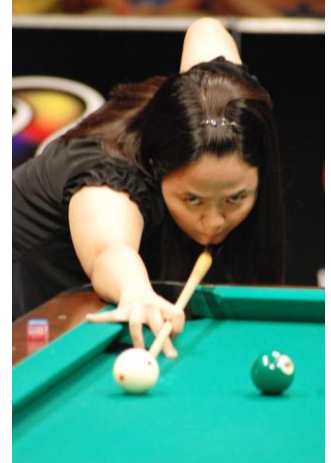


THE 2008 WPBA US OPEN 9 BALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

SEMIFINALS #1

YU RAM CHA VERSUS IRIS RANOLA

By Anne Craig - WPBA



August 2, 2008: Riverwind Casino, Norman Oklahoma

In an ironic twist of fate, the two unknown players who have made such an impact here at the US Open happened to be in the same part of the bracket and must play each other to determine who will make it into the final match. Philippine's Iris Ranola and South Korean player, Yu Ram Cha are both treading on unfamiliar territory, since they are both having their first experience in the Semifinal's of a WPBA event.

Iris qualified via the Virginia State Women's 9 Ball Championships, while Yu Ram Cha was invited by way of 2007 year end rankings. Who knew at the start of this event that between the two of them, they'd knock out the top 4 ranked players in the world!!

As the crowd's applause died down to a whisper, Iris and Yu Ram stepped up for the lag, which Iris won. She made a ball and the match was underway. Right from the start Iris showed she was ready to play as she pocketed a long 1 ball shot and gained perfect position on the 2 and continued through the rack, making the 9 ball with ease and taking the first game.

It was Yu Ram's turn to show what she could do and she broke with enough power that the cue ball jumped in the air and landed on the table. Unfortunately for her she came up dry and Iris stepped back up to the table to survey her options. She was forced to play a safety, sending the 1 ball up table and the cue ball back down table. Yu Ram went for the long rail bank but missed, leaving Iris with a tough thin cut. Iris failed to make the ball but luck was on her side and the 3 ball came to rest in front of the 1 and a short safety battle ensued. Iris blinked first and Yu Ram began the task of picking her way through the tough layout. The 2 did not have an open pocket and Yu Ram's safety attempt failed, giving Iris a tough 2/7 combination. She made it look easy and continued around the table. Iris's style of play is simple, clean and steady with nothing fancy unless forced into it. Perhaps a little bit of nerves crept into her mind as she missed an easy 5 ball, rattling it in the pocket and giving Yu Ram the opportunity she needed, running out to even the match at 1 all.

Iris would need to shake off the error as she stepped up to break and successfully pocketed a ball. The 1 came to rest next to the 5 ball and Iris played a great safety and although Yu Ram did hit the ball, she left Iris a shot. But Iris over-hit the 2 ball after making the 1 which allowed Yu Ram to step back up to the table and run out the rack to take the lead 2-1. Yu Ram had the break advantage and did sink 2 balls on her break. After missing a long 2 ball shot, Iris determinedly came back to the table to ponder a 2/8 combination, but missed it, fortuitously not leaving Yu Ram an open shot. Yu Ram played a poor safety and Iris's own safety attempt proved less than stellar.

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Yu Ram's shot on the 2 fell into the side pocket and she even got shape on the 3 which she pocketed. The 4 ball proved to be too tough as she had to stretch out full length of the table and cut the 4 into the corner which she missed, leaving the 4 hanging in the pocket and breaking out the 5 from the 9. Iris knew she had to take this opportunity to tie the match back up, pocketing the 4 to continue through the rack. She missed a thin cut on the 7 but left an equally difficult shot for Yu Ram up the side rail, which Yu Ram confidently made, gaining perfect shape on the 8. Her nerves got the better of her and she overshot shape on the 9, leaving herself a "50 yard line spot shot" and out came the bridge. Keeping her cool, Yu Ram made the ball and took a 3-1 lead. Iris stepped up for her break and knew she needed to steady herself otherwise the match could completely get away from her and while she sank a ball, was forced to push out after the cue ball came to rest behind another ball for the 1. Yu Ram made a beautiful bank shot on the 1 but wasn't rewarded for her efforts as the cue ball snookered itself behind the 8 for the 2. She kicked 2 rails but didn't hit a rail after making contact with the 2 ball giving Iris ball in hand. Iris mapped out her path around the table and began sinking each ball starting with the 2, 3, 6 to the 7, coming up a bit short in position. Pilipino players are known for their cutting ability and she easily pocketed the back cut with tight but makeable position on the 8. Again making a delicate cut shot, she left herself a 3rd one making that one with no problem and got back to within one game of Yu Ram, 3-2.

Yu Ram had the break, making 2 balls but having a long, difficult back cut on the 1. She made the ball but the cue nicked off of the 5 and she scratched into the opposite corner pocket. Iris had 6 balls left between her and tying the match up, but overcut the 6 ball in the corner. Yu Ram sighed as she saw the 6 frozen on the rail, knowing she'd need to cut it thin and bring the cue ball around 3 rails with inside English for shape on the 7. Executing the shot perfectly, she continued with the 7, 8 and 9, regaining the 2 games advantage.

Iris broke, making a ball and the rack setting up nicely for a run out. Iris's focus seemed to have waned and she missed the 1 ball, as she sat back down with a chagrined look on her face. Yu Ram had no open shot though and her safety attempt came up short of the mark, giving Iris an opportunity to make up for her error. Shape from the 3 to the 4 proved difficult and Iris had the choice between a side pocket bank and a safe. She chose the safety, leaving the cue ball behind the 9 so that Yu Ram had to kick one short rail. Almost making the ball in the side, the 3 ball drifted back off of Yu Ram's kick, leaving a straight open shot for Iris into the corner which Iris sank. She was dissatisfied with her shape on the 5, but made the ball in the corner and continued with the 6 in the side, going 2 rails for shape on the 7. She left herself a spot shot on the 9 which she made and hanging in tough to get back within one game, 4-3.

Yu Ram's break gave her a pocketed ball and the chance to keep her lead with an open shot on the 1. While she made the ball, her shape on the 2 forced her to play an unplanned 2/9 combination. Yu Ram lined up the shot, stood up and took her extension and resurveyed the situation. With some indecision, she got back down on the shot and struck it, with the 9 jawing once, twice before finally falling, giving Yu Ram the 2 game lead 5-3.

Iris scratched off her break as all seemed to now be going in Yu Ram's favor. Yu Ram pocketed the balls in order, the key shot being the 2 ball in the corner and the cue ball coming off of the 6 back up table for shape on the 3, which went as planned. Yu Ram wasn't pleased with the shape she had on the 4 for the 7 (the 6 had been made after striking the 2), since she was nearly straight in. Drawing the cue ball off of the shot, she rattled the 4 in the corner pocket and Iris immediately came to the table to pocket the remaining 3 balls, she was not going to give up and the score was now 5-4.

Yu Ram failed to pocket a ball on her break, but left Iris only half of the 1 ball to look at. Iris took her extension for this game, finally deciding to push out. Iris pushed the cue ball very close to the corner pocket with the 1 ball above the spot, and Yu Ram's attempt to sink the ball failed, leaving Iris a long shot the opposite way. Iris had to jack her cue over the 3 and struck the ball beautifully, making the 1 and coming around for shape for the 2, followed by the 3.

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She struck the 4 too hard though and missed it, sitting back down with a wry look. Yu Ram took her extension deciding on the best course of action, and then pocketed the 4. She wasn't happy with the result having left her a sharp angle on the 5, and jawed the ball in the pocket. Iris finished off the rack and tied the match up 5-5.

Iris broke, nearly scratching the in corner but the cue ball mercifully stayed out and she had pocketed a ball. The layout wasn't pretty and she took her extension for the game. She pocketed the 1 in the side but over-hit and the cue ball snookered just enough behind the 4 to block the full 2 ball shot. She did hit the ball but scratched giving Yu Ram ball in hand to run out to reach the hill first. Running to the 5 ball, she was forced to try a cross bank safety but failed to execute it and left Iris an open shot and her opportunity to grab the hill first. She made a critical error, playing shape off of the 6, her cue ball struck the 9, pushing it in the way of the 7 ball. Iris had to kick gently one rail but the 7 ball squirted out to an open pocket, even though the cue ball was about 2 inches away. Yu Ram couldn't hit the cue level, having to jack up to legally strike the ball, and missed the 7 in the side. Iris was forced to play a safe which she did well, and Iris returned the favor, one-upping Iris by snookering the cue ball behind the 8. Iris played the 1 rail kick, and the 7 ball came around to rest near the 2 spot on the side rail above the 9. Yu Ram went for the combination, missed, but got incredibly lucky as the 9 came to rest blocking the 7 from Iris's view! Iris kicked the short rail sending the 7 up-table, leaving Yu Ram a nearly rail to rail thin cut shot. Yu Ram beautifully made the shot, with perfect position on the 8. Sighing with relief, Yu Ram ran out the 8/9 to reach the hill first!

Yu Ram broke, made 2 balls but had to play a safe, which she did. Iris's return safety wasn't well executed and Yu Ram did have an open pocket. She missed the cut into the side, and Iris stepped up knowing she'd need to come with a shot to keep herself in the match and she took her extension to look over the rack. Iris played the 2 off of the 7 nicely, into the side, and had good shape on the 4, pocketing the ball for shape on the 5. Unbelievably, she followed the cue ball in after the 5 trying for shape on the 6, giving Yu Ram ball in hand! Yu Ram's nerves got the better of her and she overshot shape from the 6 to the 7 since the 8 was laying near the 9. Yu Ram actually missed the 7 ball and walked away in disgust, even though she got lucky and the cue ball ended up behind the 8. Iris kicked at the 7, and ended up leaving a shot for Yu Ram. Using hard inside English, Yu Ram made the 7 but came back up at an awkward angle not leaving herself an easy shot for the 8. She rattled the ball in the pocket and Iris had the chance to make 2 balls to go hill hill.

Iris found herself with the break advantage and she pocketed FOUR balls on the break! She even had an open 2/7 combination which she made and there were only 4 balls left on the table between her and the finals. Pocketing each ball, she sank the 9 and in only her 2nd WPBA Pro event, she advances to the finals!