

Women cue it up at the U.S. Open

Big Apple hosts 16th annual billiards championships

By **KAREN KRAMER**

Special to HER New York

The finals of the 16th annual U.S. Open Pocket Billiards Championship will take place this weekend at the Ramada Hotel on Seventh Avenue and 33rd Street. The championship, which opened Wednesday, is the premier 14.1—or straight pool—tournament in the world, and Mayor David Dinkins has officially claimed October 13-17 as "U.S. Open Pocket Billiards Week."

For many years, women's billiards—like many other sports—was not taken as seriously as men's. But that's changed radically in the past few years. The sport has begun to change its image, and the women involved have become extremely organized.

"This year's tournament is historic," said Fran Crimi, a top-ranked professional player based in New York, "because it's the first time where men and women are playing for a proportionate

share competing for a \$27,500 purse, while 32 men will play for \$42,000. Men winners receive \$12,000 and women \$7,500. The women's division is composed of the top 20 ranked players in the U.S. (including several from the New York area), plus four invited players from Europe, Japan, and Taiwan. The competition works on a double-elimination basis, with 150 points needed in the men's division and 100 points in the women's. Each player is allowed 45 seconds per shot. Formal attire for competitors is required.

Some records were broken in last year's championship, also held in New York. The final competition came down to a match between Ewa Mataya and Loree Jon Jones. Jones set an Open record by running 64 consecutive balls, only to have the record broken a few minutes later by Mataya's 68-ball run. In a marathon match, each player



Loree Jon Jones stretches for a shot.

Christian Tumpling/For HER New York

amount of prize money. We've been working with the Billiards Congress of America to make sure that the women's purse is equal to the men's. They really approve of what we're doing because we have such an organized tour."

The billiards tour takes the top 28 ranked women to 12 cities over a year period. According to Crimi, New York's U.S. Open is not part of the tour, but is an event in itself.

In this year's event, there are 24 players in the women's divi-

sion. Jones used carefully guarded shots to block her opponent. Jones finally won the match and the women's division. Both she and Mataya are back again at this year's Open.

The Open continues with day and evening sessions at 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. today and tomorrow, and at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Sunday. The semifinals and finals in both the men's and women's divisions will take place on Sunday, with a trick-shot exhibition in between rounds.