

City pockets pool tourney

By **KAREN KRAMER**

Special to The News

Billiards history will be made this week when the U.S. Open Pocket Billiards Championship is played in New York City for the first time.

Starting today and ending Sunday night, the 15th tournament will bring together the top players from around the world.

One of the top contenders will be Brooklyn's Cisero Murphy.

Born in North Carolina and reared in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the 53-year-old Murphy started playing pool at age 11.

Started at PAL

The Police Athletic League at the corner of Mercy and Gates Sts. became his training ground, but it was by chance that the young Murphy ever picked up a pool cue.

He really wanted to box, and every night he'd go to the center to practice. "One night fate stepped in," he said. "You had to sign up between certain hours to get the equipment, and I got there late one night so I couldn't get it. I went into another room instead. There were a few pool tables, and that's how it just started. I've always been fortunate to be a quick learner."

Murphy excelled at other sports as well, playing handball and professional softball ("My arm was for hire," he said), but it was pool that became his game and his

life. He became city champion in 1953 and state champ in 1959. From 1959 until 1964, he was Eastern state champion.

"I was undefeated in every tournament. I never lost a match," he said. By the time Murphy was 16, he was recognized as a top player.

Faced racism

But as good a player as he was, the world of pool was not always easy. In the early '60s Murphy often faced racial discrimination, and he was not invited to many competitions — including the World's Tournament.

That began to change when he won the Summer League Tournament in 1964, making him automatically eligible to compete at the World's Invitational in Burbank, Calif., in 1965.

"I was the Jackie Robinson of billiards," he said. "I was the first black to ever play in the World Pocket Billiard Tournament." He also set a record there, winning 14 matches in a row to capture the title.

For more than 20 years Murphy has been part of a city program, Billiards in the Streets, sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Tours city

Taking a few high school kids with him to help move tables on and off the truck, Murphy visits senior citizen homes, veterans hospitals and mental hospitals, giving trick-shot exhibitions and teaching people to play.

He has worked with cere-



ON CUE: Pool-playing legend Cisero Murphy of Brooklyn warms up for tourney at Amsterdam Billiards yesterday.

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bral palsy and multiple sclerosis patients, and he becomes angry when he hears fellow pool players complain of having an off day. "A lot of times," he said, "I'll hear pool players talk about how bad they've played, or of having a bad day, and I'll say I'll take you to where people are doing bad. You all are walking around with your health and strength."

Because this week's tournament is the city's first, Mayor Dinkins has declared U.S. Open Billiards Week.

The tournament, in the Grand Ballroom of the Roosevelt Hotel, will feature evening and afternoon ses-

sions, with the finale Sunday night. Matches will be played simultaneously on four tables, and the players are required to wear formal attire.

A large draw

This will be Murphy's first tournament in some time, although he drew a large audience several months ago when he played an exhibition at Amsterdam Billiards on Manhattan's upper West Side.

"The place never had so many people watching a match. Because people come from all over to see how I'm playing, as opposed to yesteryear."