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PLAYER SPOTLIGHT Two Careers, One Love: Schwartzreich Drawn to Pool

Lab coats are never mentioned in the WPBA dress code. And Liz Schwartzreich has no problem leaving hers at work, because pool is her primary career focus — even if she feels as though that career has been stuck in idle.

"I've been on kind of a plateau at the past two years," Schwartzreich says. "I'm getting seasoning, but my game isn't improving the way I need it to."

Determined to become a touring pro, Schwartzreich moved from Portland to New York City in 2001 in search of tougher competition. Competition she found, but positive results have been in frustratingly short supply. For example, Schwartzreich played six Classic Tour events before she won her first match, shaking her confidence.

Adding to her frustration, Schwartzreich had to take her first full-time job last year to combat the financial costs of life in the Big Apple. She works at Columbia University's Herbert Irving Center as a research assistant, doing clinical drug trials for breast cancer research. Full-time work means less table time, and while Schwartzreich is hoping to find something part-time, for now she has had to cut the Chesapeake Area Tour from her schedule, playing only on the New England Women's Tour (where she won the tour title in 2003) and in scattered WPBA events.

Schwartzreich is optimistic that her current pool-playing plateau is only a temporary fixture on her geographic landscape.



ALIE KENNETH

Schwartzreich will keep her eyes on the prize.

WE WANT TO KNOW ...

Name: Liz Schwartzreich

Age: 28

Home base: New York City

Plays on: NEWT and WPBA events

Playing Cue: Hunter Classic, with a Predator shaft and a Predator break cue

Favorite Tip: "There's nothing like the time you spend alone playing."

Pool hero: Torry Robles

Favorite room: Amsterdam Billiards on the East Side in New York City

When I'm not playing pool: She likes doing yoga and playing games. "My aunt's trying to make me into her bridge partner."

"I think at this point, I'm so close, I can't walk away now," Schwartzreich says. "A year ago, when I was struggling more than I am now, I was thinking about walking away."

Schwartzreich has shifted her focus this year to "building up my game and my knowledge base," regardless of the results. She also began working with her first-ever instructor, Todd Sleitman, in May.

The early returns have been positive, as Schwartzreich has been encouraged by her solid play in recent Classic Tour events.

Schwartzreich's foray into pool began as a diversion from studying during her freshman year at Reed College, but it quickly became a passion that supplanted more academically oriented career plans. After graduating, she joined the Portland pool community, and she won two regional tour titles.

Success whetted her appetite, and while she soon realized she had overestimated her game in Portland, her competitive attitude helped her to hang on out East.

"Luckily, I was a little overconfident," Schwartzreich says. "I don't know that I would've been able to stick it out otherwise."

One of her table strengths is her focus. Faced with a tough shot, she trusts her "ability to shut everything else down and make it." Such focus will serve her well.

"I know I've gotten through it on other levels," she says of periodic career ruts, "so I think I will this time, too."