



BOTTROP In a hospital in his home town of Bottrop, German billiard director Wolfgang Rittmann has passed on today. The 68-year old CEB president had been seriously ill for several weeks. His passing is a tremendous loss for the international billiard world. Wolfgang Rittmann had been the CEB president since 1988, and as such, vice-president of the UMB for 31 years. From 1982 until 2002 he was president of the DBU, the German billiard union. In his long executive career, Rittmann was one of the main figureheads of international billiards. He spearheaded many innovations and initiated organizations such as the bi-annual multi-discipline European championships in Brandenburg.

In Wolfgang Rittmann, billiards loses a distinct leader with a personal vision of the future of billiards. He championed modernization and new rules with shorter matches, intended to attract the media and the general public.

Farouk Barki, the newly elected president of the UMB, the world federation, was shocked by the death of Rittmann. „Wolfgang is one of my very best friends for a long time, not only within billiards. That makes it hard for me to realize that he passed on. There is not only friendship between us, also a long mutual trust. Wolfgang dedicated his life to the billiards. He was available to help in solving any problems."

„Unfortunately, he could not join us for the last UMB General Assembly in Cairo, but even in his last days, he worked hard and was one of the people behind the success of the congress." Barki: „Billiards has lost a huge personality and for myself a very dear friend."

Two years ago, in an interview with Kozoom, Rittmann said: „Our sport, under the dominance of soccer, is in a fierce battle for media attention and sponsorship. Studies have been done to find out what the public wants from sport today. Everything they don't understand, is inevitably boring. It must be swift and spectacular."

He emphasizes that boredom kills ratings. „Sport to service the interests of players, officials and fans is a legitimate thing, but it does nothing to excite the bigger crowds."

His vision of the future for over a decade, was: „It will eventually no longer look like today. As an insider in the TV world since more than 25 years, I know the state of affairs in sports development well. Ten years ago we had 100 hours of television for billiards in Germany, which has now dropped to zero. But of course the billiard sport isn't facing total destruction. We are today witnessing an explosive growth in Asia, especially in Korea and Vietnam. A temporary setback does not necessarily lead to destruction. "

Johny Houtsch, his right hand man within CEB for many years, says: „Before Wolfgang came to billiards, he travelled a lot and saw most countries in Europe and Asia as a mechanical engineer. He was a representative for road-construction machinery."

Helmut Biermann, CEB secretary general: „I used to work with Wolfgang for more than 35 years in various regional, national and international organizations. And I have had the privilege to gain a lot of experience during this time. We had many internal controversial discussions, but were mostly able to find a solution for the sake of billiards. His guidance will be missed."

Jean Perre Guiraud, sports director for CEB: „The decision to organize the European championships every two years was very important for our sport. It is a giant undertaking, but a very rewarding one because the event holds all the billiard disciplines: 3-cushion, artistic, 5-pins, classic disciplines, juniors, etc. It has given our sport stability and credibility."

„It was always Wolfgang's intention to modernize. A good example is the battle we won to change the 3-cushion match length to 40 points, to bring more rhythm and excitement to the matches. Nobody should forget that matches in sets sometimes lasted up to four hours. It was a major problem, to make our sport attractive to the public."

Highlights of his directorial career in billiards:

From 1988 to 2016, the number of European member federations went from 18 to 25.

- Rittmann played a key role in the addition of the African confederation to the UMB.
- He initiated and shaped the Classic Masters trophy for club teams in the classic disciplines. x The European championship in all disciplines, held for the first time in 2013 in Brandenburg.
- Integration of the East German Billiard Federation after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1990.
- Unification of carom, pool and snooker under the umbrella of DBU after 1992.
- He initiated the Billiard Fair in Essen (Germany) and introduced the World championship for teams in Viersen.
- He was one of the founders of the World Confederation of Billiard Sports.

Bennie Deegens from Holland, the current vice-president, is the ad-interim president for the time being. „According to the statutes of the CEB, we have to initiate a special congress within three months. Then will be decided whether I will be president until next year's CEB congress in Italy."

Wolfgang Rittmann was in his daily life managing director of ISPC, International Sport Promotion and Consulting. He was married to Bärbel, they lived in Kirchhellen near Bottrop. Rittmann had two daughters: Beate and Cornelia.

As one of only a few German sport officials, Rittmann received the Order of Merit First Grade of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2005, to honour his career in sports at all. In 2001 he received a deed of honour from the IOC to pay tribute to his achievements.