

SPORTING LEGENDS: ALEX HIGGINS

SPORT: SNOOKER

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1968 - 2005

Alexander Gordon Higgins (born March 18, 1949) is a world-famous snooker player. He was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where he started playing snooker at a young age.



In 1968 he won the All-Ireland and Northern Ireland amateur snooker championships. He turned professional at the age of 22, winning the World Professional Snooker Championship at his first attempt in 1972, aged 23.

His opponent in that final was John Spencer. Higgins was the youngest winner of the title until Stephen Hendry in 1990 (21). He won again in 1982 after beating Ray Reardon 18-15 (with a magnificent 135 total clearance in the final frame). Higgins was also runner-up in 1976 and 1980.

While well beaten by Reardon in 1976, actually conceding before Reardon reached the finishing post, he should have won in 1980 after leading Cliff Thorburn 5-1 and 9-5.

Alex's quickness around the table and flamboyant style earned him the nickname Hurricane Higgins, and made him by far the most popular and high profile player in the game.

He drank and smoked during tournaments, as did many of his contemporaries, helping sponsored tobacco advertising. His volatile personality got him into frequent fights and arguments, both on and off the snooker table. Perhaps the most infamous of these clashes was when he head-butted a tournament official at the UK championship in 1986.

He is now semi-retired and battles throat cancer periodically. However, he did make an appearance in the 2005 Irish Professional Championships; the comeback ended in a first-round defeat by Garry Hardiman.

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Alex Higgins gave the sport of snooker a lot of brilliance and controversy!

It is estimated that Higgins earned and blew a £3 million fortune over twenty years. His unorthodox brilliance is best encapsulated in his break of 69 against Jimmy White in the penultimate frame of the World Professional Snooker Championship in 1982. Experts and players continue to cite it as one of the greatest ever breaks under pressure.

Higgins was 0-59 down in that frame and one ball away from going out, but managed to compile a clearance that almost defied belief. He was scarcely in position until he came to the colours.

In particular, one pot will long live in the memory: a half-ball blue into the green pocket with the cue-ball screwed off the side cushion towards the top cushion. Dennis Taylor considers that the shot could be played 100 times without coming close to the position Higgins reached with cue-ball (he actually went too far for good position on his next red).

Willie Thorne, whose biography arguably displays a certain jealousy of Higgins' popularity, does not consider him a great player. However, few would dispute that his natural aptitude and cueing ability revolutionised the sport and mark him out as one of the best players ever.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Alex Higgins is certainly a controversial character within the world of professional snooker.

Liked by some, although hated by some as well.

During his prime, his skills were unmatched and converted millions of armchair TV viewers into major snooker fans.

Yes, he was a pain in the arse to the snooker establishment, but he was also a genius with a cue in his hand. That is the main thing people should remember of him.

Higgins came over to Nottingham during the 1970s, to play an exhibition match against members of my Dad's snooker club. My Dad apparently got lucky and made a break of 36 against Higgins, much to the shock of the crowd around the table! Midway through the break, Higgins playfully whispered in my Dad's ear

” They're Here To Watch ME do this, You Fucking Idiot! “

Sure enough, it wasn't long before my Dad missed a shot, and Higgins quickly stepped in to clear the entire table in just one visit! All of the crowd were in raptures for the entire exhibition, and my Dad often says that there was a certain type of stardust surrounding Higgins. I guess he was right



Alex Higgins possessed the swagger and smarminess of a two-time World Champion!