

SPORTING LEGENDS: JOE DAVIS

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COMPETITIVE ERA: 1922 - 1964

Joe Davis (15 April 1901 - 10 July 1978), was an English professional snooker and billiards player, generally regarded as the father of modern snooker, and one of the greatest players of all time.



He was born in Whitewell, Derbyshire, and by the age of 12 he had made his first century break at billiards, then the most popular cue game. Within a year he had become the Chesterfield and District amateur billiards champion, his only amateur win as he turned professional at 18.

In 1922 Joe played in his first billiards world championship, losing to the champion Tom Newman, but he was already developing an interest in snooker. At the time it was considered a light-hearted diversion for billiards players, but Joe and two billiards traders, George Nelson and Bill Camkin, saw that it could become more popular. The breaks were shorter, so both players were more involved, and there was a greater element of luck than in billiards, which made for a good gambling game in the men's clubs.

Davis and Nelson drew up plans for the first world professional championship, which was held in 1927, and Davis easily won it and a first prize of £6.50p. He had already reached his first world billiards final the year before and set the world record snooker break, with 96.

From the first tournament, Davis was world snooker champion every year until he retired from the championships in 1946. He also picked up the world billiards title in 1929, which he won a total of four times.

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Joe Davis – the father of the modern snooker game.

According to his brother Fred, himself a useful player who won eight world titles, Joe was a very good player before anyone else knew how to play the game. He continued to make record breaks - the first century came in 1928, and by 1938 he had taken the highest break to 138.

After retiring from world championship play to concentrate on lucrative exhibitions, Joe continued to play other tournaments, but nearly always gave his opponents a head start - and still won!

But Joe did not only dominate snooker on the table. After World War Two he was elected head of the Professional Billiards Players Association, and he started to promote snooker at the Leicester Square Hall. During the war he had raised over £125,000 for war charities by playing variety theatres like the London Palladium, performing trick shots which could be seen via an angle mirror overhead.

The BBC started to show snooker in the 1950s, and it was always Joe playing a challenger - and all negotiated by Joe. He was undoubtedly Mr Snooker but one feat escaped him; he had never made a maximum break of 147. Others had achieved it in practice, but it wasn't until 1955 that someone made the first official maximum break - of course it was Davis.

He did it at Leicester Square Hall just a few weeks before its lease ran out and it closed. But it took nearly two years before snooker's governing body recognised its validity, because of a rule dispute. He was awarded an OBE in 1963.

It was the climax of Joe's career, and in 1964 he retired from all competitions. He still watched, and it was while watching his brother's world championship semi-final in 1978 that Joe collapsed and subsequently died some weeks later.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Joe Davis made snooker what it is today.

Although the game had been invented some years earlier, Davis was the first man to spot its possibilities as an entertaining sport.

Before Joe Davis came along, snooker was not taken seriously, with breaks of a couple of reds and a couple of colours. But Davis developed the techniques of positional play and break building which are taken for granted today.



Joe Davisõ still the man!