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The Rack Pack



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By Alexander Baron

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The Rack Pack is a half decent **semi-comedy dramatisation** of the rise of the game of snooker seen through the eyes of two of its greatest protagonists: the steely nerved impeccably mannered pretender, Englishman Steve Davis; and the mercurial charismatic star, Irishman Hurricane Higgins. People who know about snooker and followed the game during especially the mid-1970s through the 1980s will appreciate this.

The first world professional snooker championship was held in 1927 when it was won by **the legendary Joe Davis** – no relation to Steve – who held it for 20 years, winning 15 titles in a row (the championship was suspended for the war years). Joe Davis died in 1978 and his brother Fred (8 times world champion) in 1998. Although these men were giants, snooker remained a game played in smoke-filled halls, with the world title stretching to innumerable frames, and pitiful prize money for even the very top players.



When Higgins burst upon the scene he injected new life into the game, winning the world title in 1972 and more importantly becoming the people's champion. Unfortunately, his temperament and his drinking often got the better of him, otherwise he might have won the title more than twice. He also thought he was bigger than the game, always a fatal flaw in any sport, profession, trade or pastime. We see here his moment of greatest glory, his 1982 win over Welshman Ray Reardon when his wife and baby joined him at the presentation. Sadly, it was all downhill from there.

The self-destructive Higgins is played to a tee by Luke Treadaway, but it is Kevin Bishop as kingpin Barry Hearn who has all the best lines. It has to be asked though, was Steve Davis really that wooden? Yes and no, but he was – and is – a genuinely nice guy, something that couldn't always be said for Higgins. Likewise, Steve Davis and scandal have always been strangers, something that could definitely *not* be said of Higgins, and at times other top players, especially those who shoved the white stuff up their nose between tournaments. More recently one player has been banned for life for cheating, and another stood trial for rape twice, being acquitted both times.

Snooker is now a worldwide phenomenon, and this is due largely to one man, Barry Hearn, who kept a tight rein on the image of his stable. Hearn has also taken snooker to the Far East (notwithstanding it was invented in India), and if at some point soon a Chinese player should win the world title, it will surely become bigger than the misnamed beautiful game.

The characterisations of the players in *The Rack Pack* are spot on; bit player Gary Davis could pass for Bill Werbeniuk – who died in 2003. Some authentic voices from the past are included, but how did the actors play those spectacular shots, or did they?

There is also a decent soundtrack, everything from *Sunshine Of Your Love* to *Tiny Dancer* and (inevitably) *The Boys Are Back In Town*. And let's not forget *Snooker Loopy*, of course!

Alexander Baron

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Tim Sandle • 2 years ago

As a snooker fan myself, I thought it was fantastic. Great characterisation. Alex Higgins was a genius, who sadly spent most of his talent (about from his two world, two masters and one UK championship). Shame to see pool balls ('poor man's snooker') are used as the lead photo (but that's only because of the superiority of snooker and English biliards over pool).

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