



Get paid out early if your player goes 3 frames ahead

Applies to singles & multiples

18+. Applies to bets placed on the 3 Frames Ahead Snooker market. Not paid out as a winner if your player is winning by 3 Frames, even if they lose. Applies to Singles & Multiples. Stakeholder only. T&Cs apply.



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EUGENE Hughes remembers the trophy presentation.

“The plan was to keep it for four months each,” says Hughes.

“Alex wanted to keep it for the first four months and Dennis said to me, ‘We’ll never see it again.’”

World Cup winners from Ireland are thin on the ground, but Hughes is one of them. It’s 40 years since the Dubliner was part of an Ireland team with Alex Higgins and Dennis Taylor that won the 1985 snooker World Cup.

It was the start of a remarkable three-in-a-row.

“We had a meeting a few weeks beforehand and felt we had a great chance... as long as Tom and Jerry behaved themselves,” he says, laughing.

“I had a great relationship with both of them. Two great guys.”

“Alex was like a bag of Revels, you never knew which one you were going to get.

“But he wanted to win. Dennis wanted to win.

“So they put their differences aside.”

Hughes was one of the few players from south of the border to break into the professional ranks in the 1980s when snooker was king and Higgins and Taylor were among the gods of the game.

“The very first professional I played an exhibition match against was Dennis Taylor,” he says.

“He played an exhibition in CrossGuns snooker club in Phibsborough.”

“I got two busses out from Dún Laoghaire. I waited and waited for my turn to play. I was the last one on against him.

“I broke off... and then he made a 98 break. That was it.”

Hughes starts laughing.

From the outset he wanted to emulate players like Higgins and Taylor.

He wore a suit to matches on the Irish amateur circuit and studied the masters at work whenever he could.



David COUGHLAN
EXCLUSIVE

“I always had this thing in my head, if you look the part, you play the part,” he says.

Higgins is regarded as one of the main reasons snooker went into orbit in the 1980s for his flamboyance on the baize and turbulent life off it.

Hughes was around him for decades and knew him better than most.

“Alex was very, very good to me starting out,” he says.

“He must have had his ear to the ground about who was up-and-coming and all that.

“The first time I met him, I couldn’t believe he knew who I was. I couldn’t believe it.

“He was so good to me early on. I’ve got nothing but good to say about the man.”

Club

Hughes turned professional in 1981 and moved to England, eventually ending up as a club pro in London’s King’s Cross.

Opportunities on the professional circuit were few and far between back then.

There were just five tournaments a year the Dubliner was able to qualify for, the rest were invitationals dominated by the game’s elite.

“The prize money was very top heavy. It didn’t really filter down,” he says.

While working in King’s Cross he became good friends with Higgins.

The Hurricane could blow into the club at any hour of the night or day — usually night — and it was never dull.

“It was a 24 hour club, so if Alex was out in the West End he used to go into King’s Cross Snooker Club at about three o’clock in the morning,” says Hughes.

“It would be full of people who’d come from Chinatown once that closed down.

“They’d all converge on King’s Cross Snooker Club and they were playing for savage money.

“Alex would turn up and oh my God, they loved it. They loved it.

“Sometimes I’d go in in the morning and find Alex asleep in the office.

“I’d go in and wake him up and try and get him to have some breakfast because he hardly ate.”

Higgins had a reputation for a wild lifestyle off the table and was frequently in trouble with the game’s authorities.

He was banned for head-butting an official in 1986 and banned again in 1990 for punching a press officer. He also threatened to have Taylor shot.

The Belfast star struggled with alcohol and gambling throughout his career, but Hughes saw a different side to Higgins and remembers his mischief and sharp wit.

“He used to call me Eugenius. He’d say, ‘Here



‘Alex was like a bag of Revels, you never knew which one you were going to get... But he wanted to win and Dennis wanted to win’



THE BAIZE IN GREEN: Alex Higgins lifts the World Cup trophy, with Dennis Taylor and Eugene Hughes looking on and (far left) Hughes and Taylor are on cue



EUGENIUS AT WORK: Retired snooker star Eugene Hughes in Carlow and (below) Hughes with Alex Higgins



wanted in the game after that.

“I don’t think he could accept the fact he wasn’t going to be winning anymore. But that was out of order, Dennis didn’t deserve that. Dennis is a great guy.”

Hughes eventually fell out of love with the game himself and came back to Dun Laoghaire in the late 1990s.

He has lived in Carlow for the last 15 years and loves watching snooker, but no longer plays.

“I had a few setbacks with my health, so I don’t really play at all now,” says the 69-year-old.

“I’m actually only out of hospital after having a heart attack. I had a heart attack on my birthday — not many can say that.

“I ended up getting one stent. I’m on medication. I very fortunate. I’m trying to live as healthy a life as I can. Everything is good. I’m very fortunate. I’ve always been a bit lucky.”

He counts himself lucky to have been around for snooker’s golden age and to win three World Cups for Ireland with Higgins and Taylor.

Even if he never got his hands on the trophy in 1985.

“Dennis was right we never did see it because Guinness took it back that night. We never saw it at all!” he says, laughing.

“They never even gave us a replica trophy.”

But Hughes is a World Cup winner from Ireland. A very rare breed indeed.

And no one can ever take that away.



THE NATURAL: Ronnie O’Sullivan was already a talent at a young age when he met Hughes

Eugene Hughes on Ronnie, Alex, Dennis and 40 years since winning World Cup

Eugenius, I want to show you a new shot I just invented,” says Hughes.

“I’d say, ‘You’re looking well today. Alexander Gordon — Gordon was his middle name — but there again I haven’t got my glasses on’.

“He’d say, ‘Ah yeah, I seen you play Eugenius, you need glasses.”

Hughes discovered he had a knack for teaching snooker as well as playing and began giving lessons at the club.

He would break off and then let the students get down to work, watching for mistakes and working with them to correct them.

“I’m in there one day and this guy was bringing in his son. His son was 10 or 11 and he’s small for his age,” he says.

“So I break the balls from the back and then I stand back and watch.”

“I’m making mental notes about what he’s doing wrong and this 11-year-old... is perfect.

Perfect

“He’s perfect. At 11. I’m looking at my him, scratching me head.

“I said to his father, ‘Look, he doesn’t need lessons. All he needs is to play against good players.”

“Don’t bring him to any more lessons because there’s a lot of people out there, they might mean well, but they don’t really know what they’re doing.

They’re what we would call in Ireland spoofers.”

“That was the first time I met Ronnie O’Sullivan.”

Hughes got the young O’Sullivan free membership at the club and arranged free time on the tables as well.

He arranged for good club players to play O’Sullivan when he came to King’s Cross and watched him progress rapidly.

A year later Hughes was offered a job in Ilford, near where O’Sullivan lived, and saw the genius really take flight.

“The way he was moving the white ball, you just knew he was going to be so special,” he says.

“He was doing things on the table that weren’t normal for someone so young.”

O’Sullivan would say years later in his autobiography: ‘I learned a lot of my snooker from Eugene Hughes.’

“He was based at Ilford and was the top Irish player. So when the Irish lads, like Ken Doherty, came over, they based themselves in Ilford and Eugene was like a father figure to them.”

Ladder

The club in Essex became the first port of call for many young Irish players hoping to make it in the professional game as Hughes helped them get a foot on the ladder.

He arranged free digs and free practice at the Ilford Snooker Centre for hopefuls like Ken Doherty and even a future star of Mrs Brown’s Boys.

“There was a lot of Irish lads came over. Stephen Murphy, Fin Ruan, Damien McKiernan from Mrs Brown’s Boys — Damien took over a role in the show from Rory Cowan,” says Hughes.

“Damien was over in Ilford, he was a very good Irish amateur player, but he never quite made it as a professional.

“Eamon Dunphy’s son Timmy, he was a very good amateur player as well. There were lots of them. No end of them.

“There was Anthony O’Connor from Cork, I thought he was going to make it, he was a lovely player.”

When it came to his own professional career, Hughes will never forget the 1985 snooker World Cup when he came together with Higgins and Taylor in Bournemouth.

It was just a few weeks before Taylor would win the world title at the Crucible with a memorable final frame black ball victory over Steve Davis.

The World Cup was a team tournament sponsored by Guinness, and England ‘A’, with Davis, Tony Knowles and Tony Meo, were favourites for the title.

Ireland beat a strong Canada team of Cliff Thorburn, Kirk Stevens and Bill Werbeniuk in the quarter-finals and then overcame Terry Griffiths, Doug Mountjoy and Ray Reardon of Wales in the semi-final to set up a decider against the favourites.

England ‘A’ looked in control in the final until Hughes took a crucial frame off Knowles and it all came down to Higgins against Davis in the deciding frame.

“Alex had a big thing about Davis. Oh my God,” says Hughes.

“Alex, he seemed to keep his best for last. He played tremendous against Davis and he won it.

Hero

“He was a hero. That made his year, I’d say. He beat Davis and he was a hero.

“And then after that, the next few years, we demolished every team that we played. We didn’t just beat them, we destroyed them.”

But after the three-in-a-row came partition and Ireland was split into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for the next few World Cups.

The two teams met in the 1990

semi-finals after the Ireland team of Hughes, Paddy Browne and Tony Kearney pulled off one of the most famous upsets of all time against England.

“That was the best result ever. Nobody ever talks about it,” says Hughes.

“England was Davis, Jimmy White and John Parrott. I was on the Republic team with Paddy Browne from Finglas and Tony Kearney from Dundalk.

“I convinced the two of them ... I convinced Paddy that Jimmy was afraid of him and convinced Tony that Davis wasn’t really that good and would collapse under pressure!”

Davis had won his sixth world title the previous season, White is regarded as the greatest player never to have won the world title and Parrott was a future world champ and a rising star.

“We were 4-1 down and Parrott was leading me 58-4. I made a 67 clearance and then won the next two frames. So now it’s 4-4,” says Hughes.

“Now Paddy is going in against Davis. I said, ‘Don’t have any regrets coming off the table. If you think you can get it, go for it.’

“He went for everything and it was one of those frames where everything went in. He beat Davis and we won 5-4.”

The tournament is also infamous for the friction between Taylor and Higgins as the North made it to the final, beating Ireland 5-2 in the semi-final.

Canada won the final, but it was overshadowed by Higgins threatening to have Taylor shot the next time he returned to the North.

Slipping

“That was uncalled for. Completely,” says Hughes.

“I think at that stage Alex could see the whole game slipping away from him.”

“There were younger players coming into the game, the standard was going up. He wasn’t getting any younger and his own playing standard was starting to go down the tubes a bit.

“I think he knew he wasn’t going to have the success that he

BAIZE OF GLORY