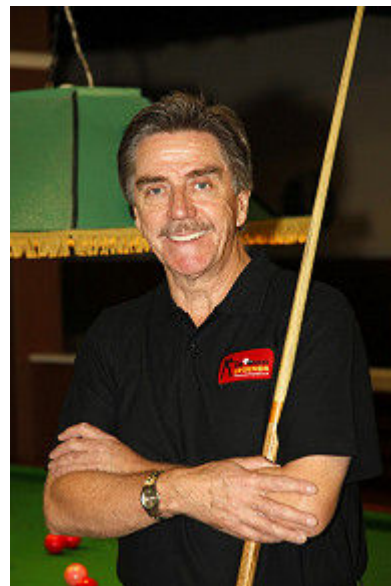


## Cliff Thorburn Free to press interview

Cliff Thorburn remains the only ever overseas player to win the World Championship a feat he achieved in 1980 beating Alex Higgins in the final. His second indelible mark on the Crucible came in 1983 when he recorded the first ever 147 maximum break against Terry Griffiths. Play stopped on the other table as good friend Bill Werbeunik peeked around the screen to see the final few colours potted. Now some 15 years after retiring from the game, and 30 years on from lifting the World Crown, Cliff is returning to the Crucible in Sheffield to lock horns once again with Alex Higgins, John Parrott and Jimmy White at the launch of a new venture... Snooker Legends. But far from seeing this as a swansong Cliff, Alex, John and Jimmy, along with the guys at Snooker Legends, are hoping that this is the birth of an annual series of events bringing the legends of yesteryear back to the baize. We caught up with Cliff via phone in Toronto where he has started the build up practice to these special events.



So Cliff what persuaded you to come all the way to the UK again after all these years and more importantly how much are you looking forward to playing again in front of a packed house at the Crucible?

I'm looking forward to coming over to the UK again and having the opportunity of playing against Jimmy White who is STILL! much younger than me and of course against Alex as it will be almost 30 years to the day since our World Final in 1980. I'm just starting to practice and looking forward to the moment of playing at the Crucible again.

Thirty years on from the final, what do you most remember about that night, and were you aware at all that the BBC were switching between the snooker and the SAS storming of the Iranian Embassy?

I remember what seemed to be the longest time between the afternoon and evening session on that final day. Coming out to face the audience was quite nerve-wracking until I hit my first shot. Then my nerves eventually went away like they normally did. I wasn't aware of the Embassy siege at all, but we were told of a "bomb scare" while we were playing. Missing what felt to be an awkward brown in frame 32 to go 16-16 was more than made up for with a 119 clearance. The 1st black in that frame was not potted until the very end. Holding the trophy up was quite a thrill!

I've been told that Alex's wife was so confident overnight that he was going to win that she prepared a cake iced with "Alex Higgins World Champion" is this true?

Yes it is true! But rumour has it she didn't bake it herself.

Back in the 1980's the World Snooker attracted huge viewing figures throughout its two weeks. In your championship year we also saw fellow Canadian's Kirk Stevens make the semi final and also Jim Wych and the legendary late Bill Werbeniuk in the main draw. Sadly now Canada seems to be struggling to produce a strong player on the tour when at that time I think I'm right in saying you had 3 players in the top 8 of the World rankings, do you have a theory why no one else has broken through?

Yes, the game of snooker has lost its direction in Canada for junior development and sponsorship.

Moving back to your visit, it's been a while since we've seen you over here, and it seems a series of events like this for the senior players is long overdue. Why don't you think it's happened for Snooker until now?

Other promoters have tried in the past and put in a lot of time, effort, and funding to host a few tournaments for seniors, but when it came to a tour they were not supported by the obvious people who could have helped.

"Every shot a pint of blood," was the phrase you used about the kind of frame in which you revelled, do you think the game has moved on now where players look to win the frame in one visit rather than work a winning position tactically?

Almost every successful player seems to have a top notch safety game, but why use it when their break building skills are so wonderful. With the thinner cloth the balls seem to spread a lot more, which presents more opportunity.

As well as the Crucible, the tour is taking in a number of towns in May and then July next year. As part of the format one audience member will get the chance to play in a frame of snooker with the legends on the night. How much do you enjoy getting the chance to meet the fans up close and more importantly should the lucky audience member who gets to play you start brushing up on their safety play!!!

I very much enjoy meeting the fans who supported me as well as all the players in the past. They will be pleased to know that I no longer have as much patience for "Safety" play.

Finally Cliff what chance do we have of seeing a repeat of 1983 when you were the first player ever to achieve a maximum 147 break at the World Championships?

Wouldn't that be great for the fans! Let's focus on getting the century first and then see what happens.

All dates for these Snooker Legends Events can be found by going to [www.snookerlegends.co.uk](http://www.snookerlegends.co.uk)