

Dennis Taylor – The Man from Coalisland

By Elliott West

Dennis Taylor is easily recognisable from his distinctive voice and his playing glasses designed by the late Jack Karnehm. His most memorable win will always be the black ball decider in the 1985 final. However there is much more to Den (as friends call him) than meets the eye. Taylor had long been a professional before his famous win at the Crucible. In fact he first turned professional in 1972 at a time when there were only a handful of players and prize winnings were nothing to write home about. Snooker was just hauling itself into the modern era and colour television had become the catalyst for audience recognition.

Dennis has always been a battler and in his early years he had to chip away at the veneer of success in order to win. His first appearance at the World Championship in 1973 ended with an early bath as he was narrowly defeated by Cliff Thorburn in the first round. A man who was to become his best friend off the table. However, persistence paid off and Dennis managed to progress further in the tournament with semi-final losses in 1975 and 1977 before reaching the final against Terry Griffiths in 1979. Griffiths, a qualifier that year beat Taylor 16-24 but make no mistake this was excellent grounding for Dennis to lay the foundations for a future win.

Taylor was an ambassador for snooker and was one of the first players to play and promote the game in places such as Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Thailand. With 17 non ranking titles to his name, Dennis had to use these to build up to his greatest win. Either side of the 1985 World Championship win came the Grand Prix in 1984 when he beat Cliff Thorburn 10-2 in the final and his classic battle against Alex Higgins in the Masters in 1987, having trailed Alex, 5-8 to eventually win 9-8. Perhaps Taylor should have been nicknamed “The Comeback Kid” because two of his finals clearly prove this in victory.

However, these really were to be the halcyon day's of this player and as the 90's approached his game deteriorated but like the true fighter he is, he continued to play until 2000. Having formerly retired he now spends his time between commentary, the golf course and a new passion; Seniors Snooker. For a long time Dennis left his cue in its case and forgot about playing but a call from the Seniors brought that desire to play back to the Northern Irishman. Yes, his body and joints ache but you can't keep this man off the table and he is raring to go for the new Seniors season.

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Name: Dennis Taylor
Born: 19 January 1949
Nationality: NI
Highest break: 141

