



Stephen with Riley Steer and Braxton Wood, 2016 national junior disability snooker championships finalist, academy director Steven Mercer, mum Shirley Harrison and academy ambassador Maureen Green

Top of the pots

RAY HARRISON IS USING THE POWER OF SNOOKER TO HELP TRANSFORM LIVES, WRITES RACHEL MARTIN.

Ray Harrison, 1985 Paraplegic World Snooker Champion, was the inspiration behind a ground-breaking Sheffield social enterprise, set up by his son, Stephen Harrison following his death.

Inspired by his father's legacy, Stephen went on to play snooker professionally for twelve years, before becoming a UK and world qualified snooker coach and setting up The Stephen Harrison Snooker Academy in 2007.

Fuelled by his passion for the sport and, in particular, for increasing access to the game, The Stephen Harrison Snooker Academy is a non-profit enterprise based in Sheffield providing snooker coaching and competitions for a wide variety of disadvantaged groups.

"The focus of our work is with young

offenders, people with physical and learning disabilities or mental health problems and young people and adults not in education, employment or training," says Stephen.

"My father, Ray Harrison, was highly successful at playing this sport and also in promoting snooker to many disabled people. He was in a wheelchair, a victim of polio, but he had learned how to lift and move his body into certain positions which gave him full control of the table.

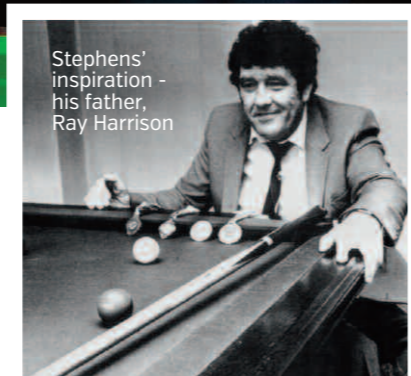
"He was such an inspiration and because of him I know that snooker is not only accessible to people with physical handicaps, but it is also a terrific sport for helping people with weak, concentrative powers.

"I train people who find focussing on strategy difficult, helping them learn where to

position the balls and which part of a ball to strike with the cue, and have found that with patience, respect and specialised tuition they can enjoy the sport, follow the rules and learn how to improve their standards."

Since launching the academy, Stephen has gone on to set-up the UK Snooker Awards, a national project aimed at kick-starting snooker at grassroots level, and the enterprise has continued to grow – proving that snooker can help young people, in particular, with complex needs such as autism, Aspergers and ADHD with social skills, numeracy, literacy, concentration, confidence, independence, dexterity, hand-eye coordination, nutrition and employment opportunities

"A lot of the children struggle to cope in social situations and can find it daunting



Stephens' inspiration - his father, Ray Harrison

when first join the club. Once they get into it and start making friends though, you see the concentration they channel into the game and just how much their confidence increases and attitudes and lifestyles evolve. We even see children attending the club independently, which is a huge step.

"Once members turn eighteen, we also offer them the opportunity to become a voluntary coach, so that they can continue to play snooker throughout their adult life and pass on their skills to the younger children who attend – with the hope that this will eventually lead on to securing fulltime work."

In April, the academy staged the fourth National Junior Disability Snooker Championship and Stephen hopes that it will continue to grow across South Yorkshire and eventually take-off worldwide.

"We want to encourage more and more young people, both boys and girls, to get involved and while we're focused on growing the enterprise from its grass roots here in Sheffield right now, in the long-term I'd love to see it expand worldwide and snooker be reinvigorated and reintroduced into the Paralympics, where it hasn't been played since 1988.

"I watched the Paralympics in pride and wonder and to see well trained athletes performing to such incredible standards in spite of their disabilities was truly inspiring. Quick, skilful movements, bordering on the dangerous at times, were exciting to watch and the satisfaction the athletes felt because of their achievements was a joy to see.

"With this in mind, I'm asking for support in backing my dream and we'll be fundraising in the local community as we work to become more sustainable and increase the services we currently offer.

"We'd love to hear from you if you have any ideas or would like to get involved. The more people I can find who will support me in this endeavour the greater chance it will have of success."

If you or anyone you know is interested in joining the club or want to help be the difference and raise funds, contact Stephen Harrison at stephen@snookerskills.com or call 07864046826.

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www.snookerskills.com
www.snookerrooms.weebly.com



Stephen with David Collins, who has been attending the Academy since the age of nine.

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Stephen with Daniel Barker and Josh Garner

HOW TAKING UP A CUE HAS HELPED MY SON COPE WITH AUTISM

I'm so grateful that my son James has been able to attend the Stephen Harrison snooker sessions over the last six/seven years.

James is a young man on the autistic spectrum and as such, he has difficulties with social communication and interaction. He has a very limited range of unusually strong and narrow interests, so I was surprised and delighted when he first said he wanted to join the snooker club.

Over the years, it has helped him develop his social skills by mixing with other young people and he now has another interest - we went to see the World Championships at the Crucible earlier this year and James wants to continue to play snooker as a leisure activity throughout his adult life.

Playing snooker has helped James learn about persistence, focus and concentration. Keeping score helps with maths and it has significantly improved his hand-eye co-ordination. Going to snooker on Saturdays was also James' first experience of spending time away from his family, apart from school, and he even appeared on BBC Look North last year talking about the snooker club.

All in all it's had a big impact on his independence, confidence and maturity. And, in turn, I've really appreciated having that time at the weekends to give me a bit of a break.

The club has such a lovely atmosphere, it's a calm environment but full of fun too. The staff are so friendly and encouraging and you feel like you're part of a big, extended family.

This is all down to Stephen. He is such an inspirational man, with a huge passion for the sport and, in particular, for increasing access to the game for people with disabilities.

James has since continued to attend the club as a volunteer, helping with various jobs such as cleaning the tables, and this has also had another positive impact - James has been able to include this on his CV when applying for jobs, he can talk about snooker at interviews and Steve has kindly agreed to provide a reference for him.

Very recently, James has accepted a part-time job and I firmly believe that attending the snooker sessions were a vital part of this journey.

I cannot praise Stephen and the snooker club highly enough for the huge impact it has had on James' life and on mine too. I am sure other families feel the same.



Sheena Mansell



WE'RE ON THE HUNT FOR HEROES

Never mind Superman or Wonder Woman... Sixer is on the look-out for some real life local heroes.

We know there are lots of people out there who dedicate a huge part of their lives to making the world a better place for others.

We're taking about people like John Burkhill,

our very own pram-pushing, wig-wearing, fund-raising legend. He's the Man with the Pram, who has dedicated his life to raising money for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Quite rightly, John has become an instantly recognisable and widely praised local personality because of his tireless efforts to

improve the lives of others. But we know there are many more inspirational characters out there whose stories deserve to be shared by a wider public.

That's why Sixer is launching a search for the heroes and heroines who are really making a difference in our community... and we need your help.

Do you know someone who is going that

extra mile to raise funds for a good cause or make a difference in their community? Has a friend or relative overcome adversity and channelled their energies into helping others?

Please let us know... so we can share the good news in Sixer every month.

Contact managing editor Chris Wilson at chris.wilson@rmcmmedia.co.uk



John Burkhill