# World Snooker Championship’s future at the Crucible in doubt amid global expansion



The World Snooker Championship recently concluded at the iconic Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, its home for nearly half a century. This year’s tournament was remarkable for its unprecedented global reach, drawing close to 200 million viewers as Zhao Xintong claimed his historic victory, becoming the first Chinese world champion in snooker. Such figures starkly contrast with estimated viewership of fewer than 5 million at the dawn of the 21st century, highlighting a significant surge in the sport's popularity, particularly in Asia.

However, as the dust settles on this year's championship, questions loom over the future of the Crucible as the event's host. The existing agreement with the World Snooker Tour (WST) is set to expire, and reports suggest that the WST is eyeing larger venues, potentially in regions like Saudi Arabia or China, where substantial financial backing is readily available. This move underscores the increasing commercialisation of sports, where financial implications often dictate venue choices.

The global market for snooker is booming, driven primarily by a grassroots upsurge in China and the Middle East. These regions are not only filling large stadiums but are also offering escalating prize money. In stark contrast, the Crucible's 980-seat capacity has remained unchanged for decades, along with the world champion's prize of £500,000, which pales by modern sporting standards. As Barry Hearn, president of Matchroom Sport which manages snooker, has pointed out, the sport’s evolution is necessary to meet escalating global demands. Should Sheffield fail to modernise, the championship may need to explore international options, with potential hosts like Beijing and Riyadh being touted.

This migration of sporting events to countries where financial resources are more abundant mirrors trends across various sports industries. Cricket has shifted its heart to India, and Saudi Arabia has become a hub for boxing. Additionally, the exploration of alternative global golf tours demonstrates a broader shift in how international stakeholders view sports investment.

The implications of such shifts extend beyond just sports. The UK has witnessed a concerning trend of world-class companies, including ARM and DeepMind, being acquired by international parties, often with the long-term benefits of these firms proving elusive post-acquisition. Losing a flagship event like the World Snooker Championship would resonate deeply, akin to the regret following the sale of premier national assets.

Despite its smaller stature compared to giants like football and tennis, snooker has shown encouraging growth, particularly as it makes inroads into expanding markets in China, the Middle East, and potentially India. In capitalising on this momentum, investing in the Crucible and snooker in Sheffield could solidify its status as the sport's epicentre while unlocking broader economic benefits akin to those seen with the transformation of Stratford following the 2012 London Olympics.

The disparity in public investment between Sheffield and other UK cities, such as Manchester or Westminster, is striking, with Sheffield receiving less than half the per capita support. This oversight carries potential economic repercussions. Notably, snooker has never benefited from public funding, raising questions about the government's commitment to fostering growth outside London.

With the Chancellor's Spending Review approaching, there lies an opportunity to reconsider these investment strategies. Supporting snooker in Sheffield not only anchors the sport but could also catalyse private investments in the region, generating substantial economic growth. Moreover, a focus on grassroots development is essential to nurturing emerging talent in the UK, contrasting with China, which boasts around 300,000 snooker clubs compared to just a few hundred in the UK.

The vision for Sheffield to become synonymous with snooker parallels the historical narrative of the city and steel in the previous century. As the sporting landscape continues to evolve, the potential for Sheffield and snooker to emerge as a powerhouse duo presents an enticing proposition. It is a testament to the notion that committed investment in local sports can yield significant returns, both economically and socially, elevating the UK’s global standing.

In the words of England’s memorable philosophers, Chas and Dave, it would be utterly “snooker loopy” not to seize this opportunity for growth, ensuring that the legacy of snooker continues to flourish in Sheffield for generations to come.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.ft.com/content/37f9ec8a-f8d7-4d7d-a708-ed6fcc5d8f92> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://snookerhq.com/2023/05/05/big-tv-snooker-audience-world-snooker-championship/> - This article reports that the 2023 World Snooker Championship final between Luca Brecel and Mark Selby attracted a peak TV audience of 3.6 million on BBC Two. The 17-day event had a total TV audience reach of 13.3 million on the BBC, averaging 599,000 viewers. Additionally, the tournament set a new record on BBC online platforms with 23.3 million streams, surpassing the previous record of 22.5 million set in 2022. Warner Bros. Discovery also reported strong figures across its platforms, with Eurosport and discovery+ streaming platforms generating a 7% increase in video views and a 37% rise in minutes streamed compared to 2022. Belgian audiences showed significant engagement, with Eurosport attracting its highest viewership ever in the country, marking a 177% average increase compared to 2022. WST Chairman Steve Dawson expressed enthusiasm about the outstanding viewership figures and commended the BBC and Eurosport for their exceptional coverage of the championship. He also highlighted Brecel’s remarkable performance, emphasizing that a talented young champion from Europe playing in a flamboyant style will undoubtedly inspire new fans and players.
* <https://www.reuters.com/en/curtain-could-come-down-crucible-theatre-hosting-world-championship-warns-hearn-2025-04-25/> - Barry Hearn, president of Matchroom Sport, has warned that Sheffield's iconic Crucible Theatre may no longer host the World Snooker Championship after 2027 unless significant upgrades are made. Although the Crucible has held the tournament since 1977 and is beloved for its intimate setting, Hearn argues its 980-seat capacity and outdated facilities are no longer sufficient. Matchroom, which has managed snooker since 2010, is negotiating with Sheffield City Council to improve the venue. Hearn suggests that if local authorities fail to invest and modernize the theatre, the championship might rotate internationally between cities like Beijing, Riyadh, and Sheffield. He emphasizes the need to enhance commercial viability, increase attendance to around 3,000 per session, and boost prize money akin to darts. While the Crucible holds sentimental value, Hearn insists the sport must evolve to meet global demand and financial requirements. Ongoing discussions with local stakeholders remain confidential during the current championship.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_World_Snooker_Championship> - The 2023 World Snooker Championship was the 76th edition of the tournament, held at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield from 15 April to 1 May 2023. The event featured a total prize fund of £2,395,000, with the winner receiving £500,000. The BBC's coverage of the final attracted an average of 2.7 million viewers, with a peak of 3.6 million. In territories without other coverage, the event was broadcast by Matchroom Sport. The prize fund was distributed among various stages, with bonuses for maximum breaks and highest breaks. Notably, Kyren Wilson and Mark Selby each made a maximum break at the Crucible, earning additional bonuses.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/snooker/36207912> - This article highlights the significant viewership of the World Snooker Championship in China, particularly during Ding Junhui's run to the final. Ding became the first Asian man to reach the final, where he was defeated 18-14 by world number one Mark Selby. The afternoon sessions of the final attracted more than 45 million viewers in China, marking the highest sports audiences for post-prime time programmes that year. The total global audience for the tournament exceeded 300 million. World Snooker chairman Barry Hearn predicted that, over the next 10-15 years, China will dominate most sports, with the government investing heavily in the sector. He also noted Ding's rise to world number nine, emphasizing the growing prominence of Chinese players in the sport.
* <https://www.azbilliards.com/world-snooker-championship-attracts-huge-audience-on-bbc-and-warner-bros-discovery-platforms/> - This article reports on the impressive viewership figures for the World Snooker Championship, highlighting the peak audience of 4.5 million BBC viewers during the final, the highest in eight years. Ronnie O'Sullivan secured his seventh title by defeating Judd Trump 18-13. The average audience for the evening session was 3.1 million, with a 20% share of the overall viewing audience. Across BBC iPlayer and the BBC Sport website, there were a record 22.5 million requests during the championship, including 2.8 million during the final. Warner Bros. Discovery Sports, which broadcasts the tournament in over 50 countries across Europe, also recorded strong figures on its Eurosport linear channel. The World Championship was the most streamed sport on discovery+ UK during the event period, with the highest viewing time per unique video viewer across the duration of the tournament. The event was also a top acquisition driver among new subscribers during that period, demonstrating strong viewership on Warner Bros. Discovery services across both linear and direct-to-consumer platforms.
* <https://www.thestar.co.uk/sport/other-sport/world-snooker-championship-attracts-huge-audience-on-bbc-and-warner-bros-discovery-platforms-as-ronnie-osullivan-made-history-3683526> - This article discusses the substantial viewership of the World Snooker Championship, noting that the final attracted a peak audience of 4.5 million BBC viewers, the highest in eight years. Ronnie O'Sullivan made history with his seventh title, defeating Judd Trump 18-13. The average audience for the evening session was 3.1 million, with a 20% share of the overall viewing audience. Across BBC iPlayer and the BBC Sport website, there were a record 22.5 million requests during the championship, including 2.8 million during the final. Warner Bros. Discovery Sports, which broadcasts the tournament in over 50 countries across Europe, also recorded strong figures on its Eurosport linear channel. The World Championship was the most streamed sport on discovery+ UK during the event period, with the highest viewing time per unique video viewer across the duration of the tournament. The event was also a top acquisition driver among new subscribers during that period, demonstrating strong viewership on Warner Bros. Discovery services across both linear and direct-to-consumer platforms.