

# RUNNING



*Rennie,  
O'Sullivan*

**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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# RUNNING

## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Ronnie O'Sullivan  
*with Simon Hattenstone*



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*To Lily and little Ronnie, with all my love*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the following: Mum, Dad and Danielle, Lily and little Ronnie, Laila for their love and support; Damien Hirst, Antony Genn, Sylvia, Irish Chris, Scouse John and Little T for being in my corner; Jimmy White and Stephen Hendry for showing me the way; Django and Sonny for their management skills; the farm and the pigs for keeping me busy and sane; Tracey Alexandrou, Chris Davies, Terry Davies, Barry Elwell, Amanda, Mark, Terry McCarthy, David Webb, Alan, Sian, Claire and Jason Ward for being the best of mates: the brilliant Dr Steve Peters for teaching me how to cope; agent extraordinaire Jonny Geller, Alan Samson and Lucinda McNeile for their editing skills; and Simon Hattenstone for his friendship, ability to get into my head and for being as bonkers as me (it takes one to know one).

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Me when I was little Ronnie and Dad ... Dad has been a powerful presence in my life ... and a powerful absence. When he went down for murder, I was in pieces.

Me and Mum ... When we went into business together, I said to Mum, whatever I earn and whatever you earn we'll pool together.

With Stephen Hendry back in 1996 when we both looked like kids ... for me, Hendry is the greatest player ever. When we fell out I was hurt, but it was my fault. (Louisa Buller/PA)

2004 ... winning the World Championship and celebrating with a pair of Dracula teeth. Everyone thought it was a tribute to Ray 'Dracula' Reardon, but I'd promised my mate Scouse John I'd stick 'em in if I ever won the World again. (Rui Vieira/PA)

Me with six-time world champion Ray Reardon ... I love Ray, he's the funniest man I ever met and a great coach, but I started playing too cautiously. (Trevor Smith Photography)

The great snooker cover-up ... 2005, UK Championship, I put the wet towel over my head because I couldn't bear watching Mark King play. (Eric Whitehead)

Giving Lil a kiss after winning the World Championship in 2008 – my third world title, and a lovely feeling. (Getty)

Me and the trophy in 2008. I was so gaunt everyone asked if I was ill, but I was just super fit. (Anna Gowthorpe/PA)

Me and little Ronnie in 2012. To go from barely seeing the kids to having my little boy sharing that moment with me was just perfect. It couldn't get any better. (Getty)

Me and little Ronnie 2013. What a way to cap off the craziest year in my snooker life. After my self-imposed exile, I came back and won the World Championship for the fifth time. (Rex)

Me, Sylvia, Damien and little Ron partying after I won the 2013 Worlds – Sylv is Damien's assistant and part of the gang.

Me and Damien Hirst, giving the world the finger. He makes me look almost civilised!

Running ... my religion, my belief system, my way of keeping calm. (Mel Fordham)

Me and my personal trainer Tracey Alexandrou ... she's a brilliant athlete and has been a constant in my life. Tracey gives it me straight. If I'm not fit, she won't pretend otherwise.

At the farm ... I loved working there during my year away from snooker, but cleaning out the pigsties didn't half put me off my hair. (Tom Jenkins)

On my way to victory in the Lactic Rush assault course ... it was bloody murder, but I was determined, especially after I heard one fella shout out to his mate, 'You can't let a snooker player beat you.' (Mel Fordham)

Running in Birmingham with the great Ethiopian Olympic 5,000m and 10,000m gold medallist Tirunesh Dibaba. She couldn't believe the miles I was putting in. (Alan Walter)

Me, Chris Davies, his family and friends. They promised me I'd do my PB in France and I did.

Me and Chris Davies and his wife Amanda in France. All the family are incredible runners, and I loved the fact that I became part of their extended family. Happy days.

At Woodford Green athletics club with Alan Rugg, Barry Elwell, Bernadine Pritchett and Terry McCarthy ... none of them cared that I played snooker, and most of them didn't even know. They just accepted me as a runner. (Tom Jenkins)

Me, Chris Davies's dad Terry and his mum Lyn in France ... we were staying in a hotel for £18 a night, running every day, eating pizzas, talking about running, and I thought I'd cracked life.

Love this pic ... me, Lil and little Ronnie. Everything that makes life worthwhile. I took my year off the game to make sure I could get quality time with the kids.

Me, Damien and Irish Chris ... vital men in my corner. Lovely fellas as well.

I'll tell Irish Chris how shit I think I really am at snooker and he just looks at me as if I'm mad. That's friendship! But here we are with a nice little world trophy.

In the first half of my career, it was drink and drugs that kept me on the straight and narrow – crazy though that sounds. This time round, it's been the running that's kept my head straight. Or at least as straight as mine will ever be. (Tom Jenkins)

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## PROLOGUE

I wasn't sure what to call this book. It was a choice between 'My Year Out', 'The Comeback Kid' and 'Running'. The first two are pretty self-explanatory – I took a year out for reasons I've not gone into until now after I won the World Championship in May 2012 and returned in May 2013 to win it again. It was the first time I've won successive Worlds in my career, and I was the first player to do so since Stephen Hendry, whom I regard as the greatest ever, did so in 1997. Happy days.

But in the end I opted for *Running* because this book is about what has sustained me through the second half of my career. In the first half, it was more drink, drugs and Prozac that kept me on the straight and narrow – crazy though that sounds. This time round, with the not so odd exception, it's been the running that's kept my head straight. Or at least as straight as a head like mine will ever be. Running can't have done me too much harm, if I'm being objective about it. When I wrote my first book 10 years ago I was 25 and I'd just won my first World Championship. Nobody expected me to take the time long to win it – with the possible exception of me. Until then I'd become known as the greatest snooker player never to have won the World Championship. And, believe me, that was a big ol' albatross to hang round my neck.

I was relieved when I finally won it, but there was always the worry that, despite the other big tournaments I'd won, when it came to the Worlds I'd be a one-hit wonder. Now I've won five, and only Steve Davis and Ray Reardon with six and Hendry with seven have won more. Despite all my talk of retiring (and whatever people think, it's not just talk – if I tell people I'm getting out, I believe it when I say it) I still reckon I could overtake their records. This year at Sheffield I overtook Hendry for the number of centuries made at the Crucible in the final against Barry Hawkins (131), and that was a great feeling. I also scored six centuries in that final, another record. So slowly but surely I am writing my way into snooker's history books.

Without running, I reckon I would have given up on the game a long time ago. Running is my religion, my belief system, my way of keeping calm. Running is painful and horribly physical, but it's also probably the nearest I get to a spiritual high. I want to share my running buzz with everyone. Those of you who are already on the buzz will hopefully recognise what I'm writing about; there might even be the odd bit of decent advice here. And it might encourage others to get out in the fresh air, put your foot down and get a serotonin boost.

It made sense to me to write a book about running – not only is it my hobby/obsession, but it's become a recurrent theme in my life. As the sports psychiatrist Dr Steve Peters will tell you, I've spent loads of my life running away from shit, and running to shit – be it drink, drugs, bad people, good people, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, running clubs, family, food, TV cameras, the snooker authorities, my own demons, you name it.

But, of course, this book is also about snooker – my game. The sport that I sometimes detest so much I can't bear to look at a cue; the sport that has been the love of my life. More than anything, this book documents the year between May 2012 and 2013 – even by my standards the craziest 12 months

of my life. In 2012, I won the World Championship for the fourth time. It was the greatest feeling ever at the end – my son, little Ronnie, came to join me on the stage at the Crucible and I threw him in the air, the roars were going up and it was just pure bliss. Straight after I announced I was quitting the game, and I did – for 11 months. Then I agreed to come back for the World Championship to defend my crown. I don't really know what I thought I was going to achieve – after all, nobody had successfully defended the title since Hendry in the 1990s. I'd played one competitive match the whole season, my ranking had slipped down to 29th in the world, and even though they still made me one of the favourites I thought that was just crazy. Until I went into practice six weeks before the tournament started, I'd barely hit a ball all year.

Throughout Sheffield 2013 people asked me why I'd quit, why I was back, and though dribs and drabs emerged I knew I couldn't tell the story properly in a few sound bites. Some of them sounded daft or unconvincing in an 'Ah, that's just Ronnie' way – when I said I'd come back to pay the kids' school bills everybody laughed and said, how could you not have money for that? They thought I was joking. But I wasn't. So this book is to set the record straight.

What I want to do is to give an insight into a sportsman's life, and show how difficult it can be to balance family and professional life. Don't get me wrong, I ain't asking for your sympathy – I know just how lucky I am to be gifted, to have a huge following and to be able to make money and travel the world playing the game that I love (when I'm not hating it that is). And, yes, in one way it is a very glamorous life. But sometimes, if things don't work out as you'd hoped in your private life, it becomes impossible to keep a happy balance between family and work, and sometimes you're forced into choosing one ahead of the other.

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# 1

## GETTING THE BUZZ

‘Wednesday, four miles, 30 minutes, six x 400m, off 30-second recovery, times of reps was 72 secs, 71 secs, 70, 72, 73, 71.’

‘Oi, Ron, get up!’

‘Ah, Dad, give us a break, I’m knackered.’

‘Come on, son, time for a lovely little run. You know you want it.’

Jesus. I was about 12 when I started running. Dad made me run, and it was like the Chinese water torture. I hated it. I was always talking about leaving school early to play snooker. And Dad said you’ve got to be disciplined about it – you’ve got to go to bed early, do your three-mile run every day to keep fit. Healthy body, healthy mind. He said if I was physically fit I’d be able to focus better when I went down the snooker club. Dad realised I was already capable of winning little tournaments if I could have the edge of being fit. Back then snooker players didn’t bother with fitness. The opposite, in fact. Hurricane Higgins would always have a fag on the go, and a pint of Guinness at his side. The Canadian Big Bill Werbeniuk even got a sick note from the doctor saying that he had to drink beer when he was playing to control the tremor in his arm. That was his excuse anyway. As for all the up-and-coming kids, most of them spent their time playing fruit machines and gambling rather than keeping fit.

Sometimes when I ran, Dad followed me round in the car. It was horrible. I was always a bit scared of him – certainly too scared to say no to him. But there was sense in what he was saying. I wasn’t fast, but I was okay – I was a bit porky, but I could get round three miles easily enough, and keep going.

In the end I stayed on at school till I was 16, when I turned professional. I also kept up with the daily three-milers. Not that I had any choice. But it all changed when Dad got banged up for murder. As soon as he was charged I stopped running and training. I stopped doing everything really. I wasn’t in the right frame of mind. My mind was elsewhere. I couldn’t believe what was happening to my world or that my dad could be charged with murder – let alone be guilty. I was in pieces. Then he came out on bail, and he insisted I went back to the old routine.

‘Just because I’ve been away is no excuse for you to stop the running, is it, Ron?’

No excuse? What, he’s been in nick for months, I’m in pieces for what the police say he’s done to some poor fella, and he’s having a go at me for not having a jog. Bloody cheek.

‘No, Dad,’ I muttered.

‘Right, let’s go, son.’

So I got my running shoes on, he got the car out and stalked me for three miles.

Bloody hell. I thought I was going to die. All it takes is a few months off the pace, and it’s like

you've never run in your life. My heart was going like crazy, my legs didn't belong to me and my feet were already blistering.

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'See, not that bad, was it, Ron,' Dad said with a huge grin.

'No, not bad,' I puffed. Not bad, my arse.

But Dad was right about body and mind. When I ran my snooker was better, and I did better in pro-ams, where both amateurs and professionals compete. Pro-ams are a long day; you'd get picked up at eight in the morning, get home at midnight if you got through to the final, and you had to keep focused throughout. Somehow, when I wasn't running, my mind wandered all over the shop.

Also, weirdly, running helped me with my sweating problem. I've always been a hairy fella, and I find myself sweating under my arms, through jumpers and shirts. It was horrible; embarrassing. I found that when I wasn't running my armpits were squirting like the Trevi Fountain. If I wasn't running, I'd forever be in the toilets, drying my pits under the heater. As soon as I started again the problem would disappear. I sweated while running but afterwards I was fine. It's like a detox – it just flushes the shit out of you. There were other advantages to running, too. My legs wouldn't rub together and cause me chafing hell because they were slimming down.

Dad was in custody for nine months, and then he came out on bail, and the first thing he said was you've got to start with your running again. I'd put on a bit of weight, but not changed drastically except in my attitude. I'd become a procrastinator: 'I can't be bothered, I'll do it tomorrow.' So I started running again while he was out, and then when he was finally convicted for murder that was Boom! The end. I fucked it off for about six years. I swapped running for bingeing – on drink and drugs.

I knew I was losing it but I didn't realise I was turning into a right porker. By the time I was 20, I got myself up to 15½ stone, a 37½-inch waist, and I could have fitted two 15-year-old Ronnies in my playing pants. I'd become huge – a rhinoceros of a fella – and I wasn't even aware of it. I just naturally grew into it, and nobody said anything to me about it.

I was out one night at a club with a mate, and someone said to this girl: 'That fella's Ronnie O'Sullivan.'

She looked at us and said, 'Is he the fat one or the skinny one?'

I was like, well, I know I'm not the skinny one because this geeza I was with was skinny. And I just thought, fuck, I must be fat. I'd never thought of myself as fat at all. It hadn't even crossed my mind. But that really hit home. If I could see the woman now I'd thank her and shake her hand and say you've done me a massive favour. The next day I started training. I felt heavy, slobbish, gross, and I knew I had to sort it out.

So I started running regularly and got my weight down to a decent level. I lost three stone, and felt so much better for it. I'd had a big wobbly belly and now I'd started showing muscles. Wow! That was a mad feeling because it seemed to happen overnight. Until then, I couldn't see any results. Then one day, after about three months, I looked in the mirror and thought, fuckin' hell, I don't recognise this bloke. It was 1997, I was 22, and now I'd gone from 15½ to 12½ stone. Result!

I kept the running up for six to seven years. There were times when my head was in pieces – too many times to remember, to be honest – but I always think it would have been that much worse if I hadn't been doing no exercise. I'd go down the gym, run, get a swim in, play football occasionally. But nothing extreme. It was just a way of keeping myself in decent nick.

Then, in 2004 I started serious running. Competitive running. A mate of mine, Alan, who I ran with at the gym, said, come up to the running club, see if you like it. I was, like, alright, even though I didn't know anybody, and I'm shy by nature. I got to know a few of the lads there – they were a friendly bunch and said, d'you want to meet up on Sunday, we'll do a long run.

I was world champion at the time, but not in the best of spirits. I'd been in the Priory, come out

been clean for nine months, which was wonderful. I went to meetings every day – drug addiction, alcohol addiction – and I was feeling fantastic. I was reborn. I couldn't believe it. I was getting up in the morning, running, eating healthy food.

My life was good. I felt fit, fresh, alert. And that was all because of going to Narcotics Anonymous and getting structure to my days. Good structure. And because I was enjoying my snooker more my game was getting better and better, more like it was when I was a youngster.

I went to the meetings every night, and I was reminded where my addictions could take me. I kept away from all the nutters who were likely to tempt me, and got my head down on the pillow early every night so there was less chance of me weakening. I used Narcotics Anonymous as a drop-in centre, to stay around people who weren't using. And by 10.30 p.m. I'd be ready for bed anyway. It was that tricky time between 6.30 and 10.30 p.m. that was most tempting. I'd think, I'm bored, I've played snooker, done what I've had to do, I've got this three-hour gap to fill, what now? And that's when the meetings were so brilliant. They were perfect – I'd go to them, have a cup of tea, sit there and listen to what everyone had to say, say my little bit, have a cup of tea after, go for coffee. It was the company more than anything that helped.

I knew I didn't have the strength to say no to drink and drugs for ever. I was always tempted, and after nine months I gave in to that temptation. After that, every so often I'd go on a bender. I kept dipping into it now and again. Going on a bender here and there – a lot of puff, and I could get through 15 pints of Guinness a night. It sounds a lot, but it isn't really when you're on the other stuff. You could drink all night if you were taking drugs, then you'd take more drugs because you were drinking. I loved a joint. The only problem with a joint is that one spliff follows another, and another, and then you get the munchies and you eat everything in the fridge, and put on loads of weight.

At the end of the night I'd go to someone's house, start smoking, and, boom! I felt good. Great! I knew I didn't want to get back on the constant drinking and drugging benders, but also I knew I didn't have the strength just to say no, never again. Then every now and then you'd have a night where you got a bit out of hand and you'd go, fuckin' hell what's happened now, and you'd think about all the stuff you learnt in the Priory about addiction, and you'd feel ashamed of yourself.

After my first bender, I got clean again for three to four months, and then went on another bender. It became a pattern. I thought, lovely: so long as I was going to my meetings, and was just dipping in and out, I'd be fine – it was just a bit of a release I was after. And, after all, the damage wasn't that bad – I'd justify it to myself, tell myself it was just the occasional drink or joint and so long as I wasn't doing it every day. But, of course, I was deluding myself because the reality was I was hooked on it.

At my worst I had to have a joint first thing in the morning just to function. Without it, I felt paranoid, uneasy in myself. So I thought, if I can keep the benders to once every two, three, four months and then have a blast. But loads of the time, the snooker got in the way of my benders rather than the other way round. It was as if I was in training for the benders. It was my Olympics. Every four months I'm going to get totally wasted. I'd tell myself that was a good reason to stay clean. You'll enjoy it more, you'll deserve it.

I'm not really sure how I managed to get through the drugs tests during this period. I remember getting to every World Championship and thinking, I can't wait till this tournament is over 'cos there's no more drugs tests, there's nothing for three months, so I can go out and smash it. I'd get caught once early on in my career, but that's all. I'd get tested between events, and I was just trying to judge it perfectly so there'd be no drugs left in my system, but I was pushing my luck.

My mum said to me, 'You're going to get caught soon. You can't carry on like this.'

I said, 'No, I'll be alright. As long as I don't overdo it and stop a week before the tournament I'll be fine.'

In the end it took a new addiction to knock the drink and drugs on the head. Running. So Alan got me to go to the club. I still run with him now – he's 50 and killing me at the moment. He's probably running 10 kilometres in 36 minutes just now, but he's one of the best vets in Essex.

I'd had a bit of a bender and saw Alan at the gym. He took a look at me, and could tell I wasn't my best.

'What's up with you, Ronnie?'

'Ah, you know, Alan, bit of a night last night.'

'Looks like more than a bit to me,' he said.

I didn't answer.

'You alright, Ron?'

'Yeah.'

'I thought you were doing your NA and all that.'

'Yeah, I am.'

'Well, I'm sure massive benders aren't part of your twelve steps, are they?' He'd sussed me. Anyone else, I'd think they were taking a liberty, but he said it so kindly. I knew he was just thinking of me.

I smiled at him – bit of a stupid smile, really, but I couldn't think of anything to say.

'Come on, Ronnie, come for a run with me. You don't need all this booze and stuff. Fresh air, get your heart pumping, serotonin, that's what you need.'

I did about five, six miles and it killed me. *Killed* me. Then he introduced me to the athletics club at Woodford Green in Essex, which is quite famous as it happens. Until then the only running I'd done was by myself or with a few fellas at the gym. And once I'd been to the running club for about two months I ran at the gym with normal members, and the other guys couldn't believe how fast I was.

The first time I went down the club I was a bit shy. I didn't say much, did my bit and sneaked off. But the runners were really friendly, and after two or three times they'd introduce themselves, and I'd go to the bar and have a glass of orange with them after we'd killed ourselves on the track. A few of them recognised me, but they didn't seem that interested in who I was. We never spoke about snooker, it was all running. Everyone left their job at the door. It was just about racing; who's running well. If you were into running, Tuesday night at the track was just the best thing.

There'd be 50 to 60 people on the track, running all kinds of distances, and javelin-throwers, shot-putters, long-jumpers, all sorts, and I just thought, blimey, there's so much going on here. Everyone had their own little group.

I've always tended to keep my head down when I've been out to places. People will recognise me and come up and talk to me. You get used to it. I don't mind people chatting to me, it's just when they start driving you mad and you think: 'Oh, mate, give it a rest!', and before long they do your head in. But this place was different. Just gentle chit-chat, encouraging you to run better. Eventually, once you got to know them, you'd get the odd one who might say: 'How are you doing with the snooker, Ron? Watch you', but generally they weren't interested. It was just times, races and who had decent form.

My first race was 3,000 metres, seven and a half laps on the track; 10.06 minutes was my time. I'd only done it once, so it's my personal best. One of the coaches on the side was saying: 'Stay on his shoulder, stay on his shoulder', so I did. I was about 40 to 50 metres behind the next fella, and they meant use the one in front, to push yourself, then I'd come round for the next lap and he'd say: 'Push on now, Ron, push on to the next group', so I'd push on and I was thinking, I ain't got it in me, but I just found this speed. I thought, if the coach believes in me I must have it. So I went on and he'd be saying 'Get on the next one, get on the next one now', so I'd push on to the next one, and by then I'd made up 40 to 50 metres, and on the final lap I was up with three of the faster boys and I remember just finding a sprint down the last 100 metres and I beat a couple of the runners who I would have never dreamt

getting in front of. So I surprised myself.

~~I'd been at the club around six months and was loving it. Then I started on the 10 kilometres. I don't know why 10 kilometres is such a perfect distance, but it is. I suppose it's a sprint, but still a long way. If you can run six miles you can run 10 miles, and if you can run 10 miles you can run 13. And the thing is, once I started running – really running – I wasn't interested in jogging, I wanted to give my all. I'm not the first sportsman to get obsessed by the 10 kilometres – though maybe the others didn't to the same extent. The great England batsman Kevin Pietersen had the same thing. There was a time he was touring India, and all he seemed bothered about was getting his 10 kilometres down. He'd finish a day at a Test match, the team would all get in the coach and then he'd be, like, right I'm running six miles back to the hotel. At one point he said he had to decide whether to focus on getting a PB with his running or his cricket. I could understand it because that's just how I was.~~

I became a running bore. Just talked about it all the time. I knew I couldn't go to the snooker and bore them all with it because they weren't interested, but I could talk endlessly about it to the fellas at the club. In the end I stopped hanging round snooker venues or with players except when there was a match on. I used to get my mate to ring up the local running club if I was playing in, say, Telford, tell them I was coming down and that I'd like to join them for a run.

And if I wasn't out running I'd be having dinner with one of the runners I'd made friends with. The only way I could enjoy my snooker was if I could run while I was away, so snooker tournaments became like training camps – an opportunity to run with different runners and try different routes.

Running became so much more important to me than snooker. After a while I wasn't worried if I won the World Championship, so long as I could get my runs in and improve my PB. Everything else was secondary. I'd established ages ago that I had an addictive personality and that I tend to pursue things to the end. Now it was just about trying to make the addictions healthy ones. I knew if I was sitting in the pub or in a snooker hall I'd get bored and need a bit of excitement in my life – and that meant benders. So I thought, well, as long as I stay away from those places and hang around gyms and running clubs then I can channel that addiction for the good.

Running is such a different world from snooker. It's outdoors, it's physical and the very opposite of that claustrophobic snooker hall. Sometimes when I'm on TV I'm so aware of the camera picking up every tiny thing I'm doing – flicking my ear, picking my nose, twitching my eyes. It interrogates you. Horrible. But in some ways running and snooker aren't so different. You're still on your own – you get the disappointments, you get the glory, it's all for yourself. It's still a one-man-band sport. Whereas snooker is all about technique, running is much more blood, guts, determination and finding something within yourself to keep going. There are times when you think you can't keep going, but you do. And after a race you swear you're never going to put yourself through that again, as you cross the finishing line, but invariably you do. It's so painful, and you just wonder what made you do it. Nearly all runners feel the same – even those who make it look easy and win all the races. But when you see you had a good race, and you're getting somewhere, and getting rewards for it, it makes it all worthwhile.

When I did my first 10 kilometres at the club, it took me 39 minutes. Then I whittled it down by a couple of minutes – almost six-minute miling. The next goal was to get under six-minute miling. It was becoming an obsession. I thought if I could only run 5.50-minute miles I'd be happy. I did the Southend 10 kilometres and started off terribly. I felt really heavy legged because I'd been on a bender the night before; not a heavy bender, but I'd been smoking a few spliffs and that, and I remember getting out and feeling lethargic. The first three miles I thought, I'm going to have a nightmare here, then after that I started to get going. I picked a few off and ended up coming in my best time, which was 36.30 minutes. But I was still really pissed off because it meant I was just outside sub-six-minute miles.

Then I did the Essex cross-country, a tough 8½-mile race, and I came 27th. A decent result. I was cream-crackered by the end, no energy; I was just gone. I could have fallen asleep standing up. But everybody was saying to me, that was a really good race.

The biggest race I did was the Southern England cross-country. All the top boys who run in the European cross-countries and the World Championship were competing, and I finished 180th out of a field of 1,200. I came off saying that was horrible, and I never wanted to do it again. A friend said exactly the same, and he told me it was the hardest race I'll ever do – a three-mile loop over Parliament Hill that you have to go around three times. What a fantastic run, though – nine miles cross-country; it took me just over an hour up-and downhill. I didn't realise it at the time, but that was a good achievement.

The only time I'd miss my Tuesday nights at the club was when I found other runners to run with. For example, I found this Irish fella, Matt, and he could only run between 6 and 8 a.m., so I'd have to meet him in the morning. He was much faster than anybody else I'd run with on the track, and I was looking for somebody to push me on, so I'd run with him two or three times a week. They would be eight-mile runs and from the go it was fast. So I'd get to 3–4 miles and be knackered, but hanging on and he wouldn't stop, he just kept going. Most of the time I didn't even know where I was, and I just had to keep him within my sight so I didn't get lost. Eventually that took my running on to another level.

I've often wondered if it's the same competitive instinct that makes me run and makes me play snooker. I'm pretty sure it is. It's not that I'm a bad loser but I don't like losing, and they are two different things. And with the running, it wasn't always about the winning, it was about how could I improve. Running taught me a lot about snooker as well. Even though the sports are so different, the tips I picked up running translated into the day job. In running, you could be a great trainer or a great racer, but you couldn't be both. What I mean is, you can't give your all to both. You either have to cut back on your training to be fresh for your races, or concentrate more on the training than the actual races. You'd get people flying round on a Tuesday night and you'd think they're unbeatable and they'd do the same on Thursday but come Saturday they've got dead legs. They'd still race, but they were well past their best by then. You had to leave a little bit in the tank in training: train your bollocks off Tuesday and Thursday but don't race Saturday; or train Tuesday, then go steady Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and your legs are fresh Saturday and you'd have a good race.

Eventually I got 10 kilometres down to 34 minutes. I'd say anything under 36 minutes is decent club running, and this was 5.40 minutes a mile. I couldn't believe I was running that fast. Having said that, this is not great running: it's decent club running.

I learnt so much from the training regime and started applying it to snooker. If you run all the time you end up physically exhausted. I'd always thought you had to give your all to training in the build-up to a snooker tournament. Six hours a day for a month building up to, say, the World Championship. But the running taught me you can overdo it. Sometimes you can do half an hour, and that's just fine. The week before a tournament your practice should be done, and you should have started winding down.

I want to do it, I'm chomping at the bit, but the reality is it's not that good for you. Sometimes you wouldn't practise at all and just trust myself. Maybe a month before a tournament I'd put the hours in but now the week before I just relax. A week before a marathon, runners will hardly run; they just do a mile or two or three to keep their legs ticking over. No more intensive stuff; that's already in the bank and you've got to let your body recover. Then, boom! Whether you're playing well or not, now it's time to switch on and be ready mentally. As long as you've got a full tank to draw on, there's no point going to an event driving yourself mad and leaving your best form on the practice table.

The more I ran, the more obsessed I became. Now I had a new dream. I wanted to represent my



county at cross-country. (To put this in context, my fastest at 10 kilometres put me in the top 1,500 in the UK, so I wasn't reckoning on an Olympic medal.) To do that you had to get into the top six in Essex, and I thought that was doable. I'd come 27th in my first year running, and I thought if I could just devote more time to it, give me two years, maybe three. But that was the problem. I couldn't devote more time to it. I was still a full-time snooker player and everyone in the game was telling me I was mad giving so much to the running.

I was doing a lot of road races – local ones within a 10-to 20-mile radius of where we lived. At one stage I was racing every other weekend, and running really had become the most important thing in my life. It was the only thing I talked about, yattering away on the phone every night.

'Alright, Alan?'

'Alright, Ron, how you doing?'

'Yeah, good. But not good enough. Got to get under six minutes. Getting there, I think. Fuckin' 'ell. I was done for by the end of my ten kilometres. Lovely out there, fresh, crisp, cold, but it killed me. But I loved the fact that it took so much out of me.

I loved the routine. My mate would come over to me, we'd get there for 11.30, get dressed, ready for 12, ready to race at 12.30, timings done, shower, boom boom boom. In the pub for 3.30–4 p.m., just off the orange juice, focused, everyone talking about their time, the race, where they'd come.

It's funny that it became such a huge ambition to represent Essex. Let's face it, there was no money in it for me, and no status – you're not going to be remembered for having run for your county, are you? Certainly, I'd be better off concentrating on the snooker from a financial point of view. And yet still there was something pushing me on. I was desperate to do it. I began to think if I *did* represent Essex it would be the same as winning the World Championship. The running replaced AA and NAC meetings in my life. There wasn't time for meetings, snooker and running. One had to give way, so it was the meetings. By now I looked totally different. I weighed 11½ stone and was down to a 31-inch waist. Everybody would go, you look really ill, and I'd think, great, that must mean I'm really fit. Then, when they said to me: 'You look really well', I'd think: 'Shit, I've put weight on.' I knew when I looked gaunt that I was in good shape and could run a good race. I'd be flush, I'd think, cor I'm flying.

In 2008 I was playing well and won the World Championship for the third time. I really was flying then. I'd beaten Ali Carter in the final, my daughter Lily was just over a year old, little Ronnie had just been born, I was world champion: life was good. About a week after the Crucible final I won my first race and I did it for charity. There were 150 to 200 people racing. When I was overweight and doing it, I came about 100th. Middle of the pack.

This time round we got to the race in Epping Forest and my mate the mad Irishman's running. He was about 42, and he could run – about 33 minutes for 10 kilometres. He was a class act. I thought there's no way I'm going to beat him so I just sat in behind him in about fourth or fifth. I thought, I'll stick on his shoulder and I did till mile two. After about two and a half miles I got in front of him and I thought, come on, you're in front, just push on. So I pushed on and pushed on and won it by 40 to 50 seconds. And I'd done five miles in 27 minutes. I couldn't believe it – the thrill of running through the tape, and winning £80 worth of vouchers. I was buzzing. Ecstatic. It was on the back page of the local Epping Forest paper. Me on the sports pages – and not for my snooker. I'd always wanted to make *Athletics Weekly* and I thought the only way I was going to do that was through running.

But that day in Epping Forest I peaked. I don't know why but it all went downhill from there. I'm still hoping it hasn't – that I'll get back and beat my PB. Maybe I just got a bit lazy. Maybe I didn't know where to go on to once I'd won a race. I suppose it was always going to be impossible balancing the running and snooker.

One of the problems was with Jo, my then partner and the mother of Lily and Ronnie. She always

felt my running was selfish because she'd had two kids and was bringing them up and I was ~~o~~  
~~playing snooker and running. She didn't like me going out racing, then she didn't like the mess I~~  
bring in – dirty running gear, dirty legs. Often I'd put my clothes on top of my clobber, run upstairs  
get in the shower and wash all the mud off before she'd had time to complain about it. Running was  
probably one of the things that brought our relationship to an end.

## WHEN LIFE KICKS YOU UP THE ARSE

‘Monday, five miles, 47 minutes. Did not enjoy my run, calves felt tight, lost my love for it at the moment, it feels like an effort.’

Life has a knack of kicking you up the arse when things are going well just to remind you who’s boss. It was 2008: I’d just won the UK and World Championships, I’d made three 147s that season, my snooker running was going brilliantly, I had a beautiful baby and a two-year-old toddler. I was on top of the world. In theory. Unfortunately, my relationship with Jo was collapsing.

The role of dad has always been important to me – I knew what it was to have a good dad who would do everything for you, and I knew what it was like to lose one for the best part of 20 years. I’d always thought I would be a dad, but didn’t really know what to expect.

I was only 20 when I became a father, but unfortunately I’ve never really been part of Taylor’s life so I had never properly experienced what it meant to be a dad. And then, when Lily was born, it suddenly hit me. Boom! It’s hard to put into words what it’s like. When friends of mine are having their first baby, I tell them this is going to be the best feeling you’ll ever have. That’s what it was for me. It just gave a bit more meaning to life. Everything seemed to have more point.

I was there for the birth. Jo had an emergency Caesarean because the cord wrapped round Lily’s neck, and they said, we’re going to have to do a quick Caesarean and get her out. It wasn’t planned but it worked out well because it was short and sweet. I got a phone call, rushed down there, didn’t know what to expect. It was 2–3 a.m. You get to the hospital and it’s all quick, quick, quick. You’re panicking, but for the nurses it’s just an everyday thing. Then, within 10 to 15 minutes, it was done. The baby came out, it’s a girl. Wow! Pure elation.

I was 28 and life suddenly made more sense. Until then I had just been playing tournament snooker and one year rolled into the next; then Lily arrives and a sense of responsibility comes with it. It was a bit of pressure, I suppose, because I had to provide for this little baby. I’d provided for Taylor for eight years, but because I didn’t have an active role in her growing up it didn’t feel like it. You stop thinking so much about yourself as a self-contained unit and more about yourself as a father – making sure the baby eats and sleeps and has a good home.

When you’re just looking after yourself you kind of know you can get through to the other end, and in the end it will be alright. The feeling I had now was almost primitive – I was the hunter-gatherer, the provider. Family has always been important to me, and we have always been a close unit, even when both Mum and Dad were banged up in jail. Mum, Dad, me and my younger sister, Danielle – the O’Sullivans. We’d always supported each other throughout, and this is what I hoped for with my new family. We were close in every way. Last year I bought a house in Loughton, a couple of miles away

from the rest of the family in Chigwell, and I couldn't cope. I thought, what have I done? It was like another world to me, and I seemed to spend all the time driving from Loughton to Chigwell so I knew it wasn't right for me. Mum, my snooker table at Mum's, Dad, Danielle, my running routes, my local haunts, like the bagel bar, are all around Chigwell. Sometimes you don't realise how rooted you are in your community; it took me moving a few miles down the road to realise it!

So when Lily was born it was important to be around Chigwell. For the first few months Jo and I were getting on fine. We'd started going out in 2001 and had been together for around five years. Jo and I met at Narcotics Anonymous, where we were both being treated for addiction. We had a bond from the start, and in the early days we got on great. We'd always had our little tiffs, like everyone does, but soon after Lily was born things started to become difficult. Before, I'd always had my own routine. Ask any sportsman or sportswoman and they'll tell you the same. Without routine you're lost; you're not going to achieve anything. I would go for my runs, work out in the gym, play my snooker. But when Jo was pregnant there was more pressure on my time. She wanted me to go to all the meetings about childbirth and getting ready to have a baby, but I wasn't into all that. Perhaps I could have been more supportive, but I saw that as her role. I was there for her to tell me about it when she came home, but I couldn't break up my day for hospital appointments and meetings about birthing pools or how to pack your bag for the maternity ward.

I didn't feel it was something I had to contribute to until the baby came along, and I always felt like we'd know what to do when it happened. I've never been one for preparing for things; I've always been much more, let it happen and see how it goes. I think men are just constructed differently from women biologically. There is something in women that makes them want to prepare for babies, and they feel it much earlier than men do – 'course they do, they're carrying the baby. Whereas for fellows we're not really involved and don't understand what our contribution is supposed to be till the baby arrives.

I'm not saying I'm right, but this is the life of most successful sportsmen. We need our routine; we need to be focused; we are selfish; we do have to put ourselves first. Jo wanted more of my time, but I didn't know how to change and wasn't sure if I could change.

Sportsmen also tend to be superstitious, and I thought any slight change to what I was doing would detract from where I wanted to go. Also, practice is bloody important. As Matthew Syed says in his great book *Bounce*, it's not natural-born genius that tends to distinguish high-achievers from less successful sports people, it's practice – he reckons that you're never going to get anywhere in a sport unless you've put in 10,000 hours' practice, and he's got a point. Then, when you've put in your 10,000 hours you can't just stop. You've got to keep practising, reinforcing your good habits. So the idea that you could give all your practice a miss, then just turn up for tournaments, was always going to be a nonsense to me.

It might seem old-fashioned, but the way my life is it was always going to be my partner's main role to bring up the kids. I don't mean that in a sexist way. I'd be happy to do it if I wasn't playing. And I am happy to do it when I'm away from the game. But the reality of life for any sportsman is that you're on the road loads of the time, travelling from hotel to hotel, earning your crust. Obviously, I'd be there once I finished my practice and come home and bath them and feed them, do whatever, but it never quite worked out that way.

I spoke to other snooker players who had become dads to see how they felt, and how they worked out their fatherhood responsibilities. So I chatted to Stephen Hendry and Jo Perry – I chose them because Stephen's the best the game has known, and Jo hadn't achieved as much but had still dedicated his life to sport. In terms of application, there was probably no difference between the two, but one was seven-time world champion and the other was a good player who hadn't won the same kind of silverware. I wanted two different perspectives. Jo Perry told me: 'I get up in the morning, get

to do my snooker, go to the gym, and when I come back from the gym my missus says, do you want help feed, put the baby down, and it's all great.' Stephen Hendry said: 'My life didn't change at all. My missus knew what I was like, I was down the snooker club five hours a day, I'd be in the gym in the morning for an hour, my missus was happy for me to do anything I had to. If anything she was, get the fuck out of the house because you're getting in my way.'

For any sportsman a successful relationship is always tricky to negotiate, particularly where kids are involved. Talk to any golfer or tennis player, anyone who spends most of the year on the road. Yes, they might well want to be home most of the time, and share all the domestic responsibilities, but that's not ever going to be the reality while they take their sport seriously. It's impossible. The simple truth is that for those years you're playing sport at the highest level, you can't maintain a true balance between family and job, and something has to give. In the relationships that work, wives and girlfriends accept that they are going to be left to shoulder the burden of bringing up kids unless they hand over to childminders. It ain't ideal, but life's not ideal. Of course, lots of women don't want that deal – they want their own career, their fella at home most evenings, shared responsibilities. My advice to them? Don't get involved with a sportsman – and certainly don't have their kids. (One of the few exceptions is football where it is much easier to be around a lot of the time because you're only playing once or twice a week for 90 minutes, and after training you have so much spare time – but even then you're going to have loads of time when you're simply not around for your partner.)

Again, I want to stress I was never going to be the easiest person to live with. But that was obvious from day one. I've always been obsessive about practising. There's nothing unusual about that – Steve Davis once said he overpractised when he was at his peak, but if he didn't he felt guilty. If you didn't practise you felt guilty, and if you felt guilty you didn't play well. Daft, I know, but that's how it works. It's difficult enough to make any relationship work, but so much more so when you are on the road for so much of your life. I couldn't blame Jo for getting frustrated, but nor could I change my lifestyle unless I gave up snooker.

At the time, running was a huge help. It would clear my head. I was running well then, and keeping records of my progress. I was flying back then. And the running was holding me together. I learnt how to manage family, conflict and snooker as best as I could. I decided the best thing to do was move out of home three days before a tournament started, so by the time I got to the tournament I was clear-headed for the first round.

I was running away. I knew that was the only way to manage my career, and that I had to keep playing snooker. I wanted to be there as much as I could with the children and as a family man, but in my mind the most important thing was that I went to work and did as well as I could just to support my family.

My relationship with Jo broke down and I began to feel useless as a dad. There came a time when even running couldn't sort out my mind. I felt defeated. I wanted to be at home with my family, I wanted to be able to go to work; I was in a fortunate position and I should have been enjoying all those things, but it just wasn't happening.

Ever since I was a kid it had been instilled in me that you have to give your everything to your job and my job was snooker. So the idea that I could only enjoy the family side of life if I gave up on the professional side was always going to be something I struggled with.

I was putting off the inevitable, which was that we would split up. I just thought if I stuck around I saw through the bad times, things would turn around. With Taylor I felt I'd done the wrong thing. I wished I'd been part of her life, and there was guilt there. I didn't want to break a family up. I always remember when I was younger and Mum and Dad would have an argument and he'd go away for four or five days and then he'd pick me up on Saturday to go to football. I'd always be crying, knowing that I wasn't going to see him for a week or so. I didn't want to put my family through that, too. In my

heart I just wanted to be there and not separate the family.

Anytime I wasn't playing snooker I wanted to do something with Lily. Sometimes I'd take her over to the cross-country races. I'd wrap her up, keep her nice and warm, put her in the pram and off we go. I expected that would be how it panned out – when I was playing Jo would look after the kids when I wasn't I assumed I'd come in and take over. Even though in lots of ways the life of a sportsman is uncompromising and inflexible, in other ways there are huge pluses. If you're working regular nine to five you're not going to be able to call for the kids from school, but in my job there was plenty of opportunity for stuff like that.

The first two months after Lily was born were great. We were both ecstatic about having a baby, but it wasn't long before it went sour again and we were living separate lives. Then Jo told me she was pregnant again, and I was delighted. I thought another kid would help us and I'd always wanted two anyway.

Eighteen months after Lily was born little Ronnie came along. His was a natural birth, and it seemed to go on for ever and ever. He was born at Harlow hospital. When I was there for Lily's birth, the feeling was unbelievable; ecstatic, shared, beautiful. I'd not been there for the birth of Taylor, so that was the first time I'd seen it. By the time little Ronnie was born, I was more prepared for it; I'd been through the emotions, so it didn't have quite the same impact. But it was great to have two kids. I always felt that when Lily was born we have to have another – it was only fair for her to have a brother or sister. I didn't want her to be an only child.

When Lily was born she was so aware; she looked as if she knew everything that was going on. Little Ronnie was quieter, a bit more away with the fairies. They were very different children, and still are. Ronnie is much more laid back, Lily is more talkative and outgoing. Yet Lily is shyer than Ronnie when she first meets people. He just stays the same whoever he's with. Little Ronnie is probably more like me.

It was such a buzz taking the babies to see Dad for the first time. He was at Long Lartin when Lily was born. Dad was excited for me – and for himself. Then, when Jo was pregnant for the second time I told Dad she was expecting a boy.

'You've got to call him Ronnie,' he said.

'Yeah, I suppose so,' I said.

The name was pretty much decided. Three generations of Ronnie: Ronnie Senior, Ronnie Junior and little Ronnie. Mum has a brilliant way of distinguishing the three Ronnies. You can always tell who she's talking to. 'Ro-*nnnnnie*', gentle and loving and going up at the end – that would be for little Ronnie. 'Ronnnnie', still fairly gentle and loving but more grown up – that would be for me. And then the bark: 'Ron!' That's for my dad.

We went to see this marriage guidance counsellor called Jerry, who suggested that I was too close to my mum, and it might help our relationship if there was more distance between us. It crossed my mind that things might improve if we moved away from Chigwell, where I'd always lived, and where Mum, Dad and Danielle all lived within a mile of me.

We were having the house done up in Manor Road in Chig-well, and Jo said, let's move out. So I said, great, go and look for somewhere for us to live, and she came back and said, I've found a place in Ongar, which is 15 to 20 miles away in the sticks. I didn't fancy it, to be honest, but I thought, let's give it a go. It was probably the worst thing we could have done. It alienated us both – she was stuck out there, I'd travel back to Chigwell to play my snooker and then, when I got back home, there was nowhere to go.

I ended up getting on well with Jerry, the counsellor. He was into this Indian guru called Osho and always went on about the path to inner peace, and I said: 'You know what? I get that every time I go to play snooker. I know exactly what you're talking about. I get lost in what I'm doing, and it's

fantastic feeling.' Jerry was trying to attain this spiritual enlightenment through the Osho buzz, and explained to him that snooker wasn't just a game or a job to me, it was more than that. I told him that was all I'd done since the age of seven, that I was a perfectionist and I wanted to be the best player I could possibly be. And we had a fair bit of common ground.

I think Jerry was fascinated by how passionate I was about my sport. He was almost a guru in his own right. I enjoyed my sessions with him. He wasn't there just for the money – sometimes he didn't even charge me. I went to see him five or six times, and I enjoyed my one-to-ones with him because I knew he wasn't spinning me bullshit.

I've tried a number of religions and gurus in my time, including Buddhism, but ultimately they didn't do as much for my peace of mind as snooker. There were moments when these faiths and spiritual paths held me together, but it was always only ever briefly. I discovered ways of switching from a bad place to a good place, and gaining peace, but they were only temporary solutions. Every time I tried something new, my gut instinct told me I was running out of ideas; that I was desperate.

After the kids were born I was thinking of giving up the game so that I could be a better family man. In the end, though, I decided I was too young to, and that it would destroy me; that however much pain it caused me, not playing it would cause me more. I accepted that I wasn't easy to live with. Sometimes I go into myself and shut down. I come home and don't talk, and I would imagine that must be hard for most women. Often I feel my mind is not here, present; it's on other things – ridiculous stuff like why can't I pot a ball, why am I struggling with this shot – and I shut out everything else. Everything else becomes unimportant, but that doesn't mean I don't care. I don't think I'm a nasty person. I get angry with myself, I get frustrated with myself and with the game. Even now, as I'm working on the book, part of me is replaying shots, asking why my arm isn't connected to my body, and fidgeting about. I wish I could forget about it, just get on with what I'm doing, but I can't. That's me. And I reckon that's probably the most difficult thing for people around me to handle – my inability to switch off.

But in other ways you could do worse than me as a partner. I was happy to settle down and be a dad. I wasn't out trying to get other girls – I was too interested in my snooker and my running to do that, and I was faithful. But in the end Jo and I ran out of patience and options. We were simply incompatible. I was desperately sad that we couldn't make it work, but for me it's much sadder when you see couples stay together when it's obvious that they no longer have a relationship. And I believe that can be awful for the kids, too – the last thing you want as a parent is for your children to see you rowing all the time.

In the end I moved out after we'd had a big row. I got my bags and lived out of the boot of a car for about a month – sleeping on people's settees. I had my mate in Ongar, Chrisy Flight, and I'd go round to his house at night, and he had all these old snooker books that I hadn't read. One night I picked up this Joe Davis book; he was never beaten at the old-style World Championship and won it a record 11 times between 1927 and 1946 and scored the first ever maximum. I'd never read anything about him. To be honest, I'd never even read a coaching book. And I thought, blimey this is good.

It took me back to basics because I've often struggled with my game, and I thought I'd see what I had to say, and my game improved. Joe stressed the importance of being still on the shot, get my cue nice and parallel because I was always jacking up at the back, get my bridge hand a bit lower, get my cue going nice and straight along my chest, get my feet nice and solid, get my body bolted down, and basically I was away. The game came easy again. I ended up hitting the ball really well, I couldn't miss – that season 2007–8 I won the UK and World Championships. It was one of my best years and it was all because I was reading the Joe Davis book. I was as fit as a fiddle, too, running an unbelievable amount – I weighed 11½ and was doing 10 kilometres in 34 minutes. I was too skinny really, but I felt great.

I'd come about 25th in the Essex cross-country championship, and that's when I decided I was prepared to give everything up if I could just get into the Essex running team. As I've said, you had to get into the top six to make the team and I thought I could do it. I looked at the fellas ahead of me and thought, they're fit and fast, but with my obsession and dedication if I put my mind to it I could achieve it. In hindsight, there was no way I was going to do it because I would have had to give up so much family-wise for the running, and I wasn't prepared to do that.

Having said that, apart from the kids running was then the most important thing in my life. I was putting off snooker tournaments if there was a race I could have competed in instead. The running gave me an outlet that made me feel good. I enjoyed the social side of the running, looked forward to the cross-countries at the weekend, I loved it all.

And perhaps, most importantly, it was helping my head. The first five or ten minutes are hard, but once you've got a sweat on it's impossible not to feel better than you did beforehand. Running really is pure serotonin. I hate to think what state I'd be in if I'd not found running. I might be four or five stone overweight because I do like my food, and I am prone to laziness. Running gave me a sense of professionalism and purpose. It made me want to get out of bed in the morning; it made me want to take care of my appearance; it made me have a bit of respect for myself and that all helped me on snooker.

At the time I could easily have gone the other way. In fact, there were times when I did. I went through a period when, once a week, I did have a little release. Well, not so little, actually. I'd go out on the booze with my mates and not get in till seven or eight in the morning. It was always on Thursday; we'd play backgammon, have a few drinks, have a few joints. I'd get home for early morning, go to bed till early afternoon, then go out for a six- or seven-mile run when I woke up. I feel like shit when I got back and just sit on the settee, but by Friday I felt okay, so I'd do another seven- to eight-mile run, then, come Saturday afternoon, I was flying. The benders lasted about six months – drink, drugs, and backgammon. We'd start about 9 or 10 p.m. and just go on through the night. Vodka was my drink. It's the one drink I know I don't feel bad on. Beer gasses me up and bloats me out. Vodka is just smooth.

I'd fall asleep on the fella's settee, wake up then get a cab home; or sometimes I'd just run home. That was that fit. I'd have my big leather boots on, my top, big cardigan, and jeans. One day I was stuck in a jam in a cab, and I had to be home for Lily's birthday. So I told the cabby I was going to get out and run because it was quicker, and he said, but it's three miles, and I said, look I can do three miles in 15 minutes, and I'll get there quicker than in the cab. So with all my clobber on I just ran home, which turned out to be a pretty good way of coming off my bender. I was so fit that three miles was nothing.

I eventually gave up on the Thursday nights. I knew I was an addict, and I couldn't keep on doing it. So I said to myself, get to the other end and once you've stopped keep away from those people and those places, and get your head down. I learnt that about myself when I went in the Priory. I knew that however much I wanted to continue caning it, I couldn't. It was the one road I couldn't go down. It was difficult because I needed escapism at the time, I needed some fun in my life. But after six months I just said that's it; end of.

Even though I had been smashing it once a week I had my best year on the snooker table, so how does that add up? Joe Davis's advice was stronger than the drink, the drugs and the backgammon. It got me through. Running and Joe Davis will conquer any drug! (Well, any drug in moderation.) Everybody was saying to me, when you stop drinking and taking drugs your life gets better and it does in some ways, but that brilliant year professionally was when I was having my weekly benders and my private life was in bits.



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