

UPC Blog #2: 9 is the Magic Number



After 9 seasons as a club event, the UPC 9-Ball Pool Championships are moving-on to pastures new...

A curious thing I've noticed as I've read my ramblings back to myself before hitting the [Send](#) button to Olly [Dark, Executive Chair of UPC] is that I've referred to the [UPC] Board in the third person in this post. Consciously trying to analyse my sub-conscious, I don't know if this is because the Board made the decision to move the 9-Ball from the two pool halls in Liverpool to a hotel event in Telford before I actually joined them last summer or just simple force of habit – perhaps one of our psychology students could advise?!

Either way, the latter, together with: (a) a certain amount of knowledge of the process (the whole idea was first mooted nearly three years ago and, indeed, very nearly came to fruition in time for the 2012-2013 season's event); and (b) my own experiences of "hotel events" (as a former IPA/UK "tourist", world-championship referee and as the ex-Team Manager of England Students), probably put me in as good a position as anyone to try to give an appraisal of the situation.

Sooooooooooooo...

My initial reaction to the whole idea was one of surprise, maybe even mild shock. Surprise at such an "out there" idea in the context of intervarsity student pool, but moreover that it was considered that such an idea could be made financially workable for cash-strapped students.

What do people pay for their digs in Liverpool? £20 a night? £30? Most clubs/societies tended to travel to Liverpool on the Thursday and stayed for three nights, but if we say twenty-five and two nights then that's conservatively roughly fifty quid-a-head. Well, it's actually exactly fifty quid-a-head, but [you catch my drift](#). Maybe not. Showing my age there... 🙄

Anyway, a three-night stay at the Park Inn Hotel will cost £109.50 per person (based on two sharing and on a room-only basis), so we're looking at about sixty quid each more. I've been to university in my time (as have all the members of the Board – though some of them are even older than I am, tee hee!!), and I know full-well that sixty quid is a lot of money for a student. The key question then: is it worth it?

The answer to that question, of course, is that *there is no [objective] answer*, as the actual "extra" that you'll get for your money is largely unquantifiable and much more qualitative and, moreover, subjective. Enough big words; my days as an academic finished ten years ago! Let's take a look at the intangibles and then you can weigh them all up for yourselves...

First thing's first: getting to the event. Whether you travel by road or rail (or air as well in the case of the Northern Irish contingent), Telford should be at least as easy to get to as Liverpool. The Park Inn is located [literally right next to junction 5 of the M54 motorway](#), as-near-as-damn-it 33 miles from Birmingham in the heart of the country. There's plentiful free car-parking at the hotel, or if you're coming by train then Telford Central railway station is less than ½ mile away – easily walkable.

Liverpool was a little bit “out of the way” on the north-west coast. If you're anything like me then you'd have been paying not-insignificant car-parking charges at your hotels/B&Bs and the two pool venues, and/or multiple taxi fares from railway station to accommodation, accommodation to pool hall, moving between the two venues and finally when off out to the drinking establishments of an evening! 🍻🍻🍻

Aside from moving across a corridor from one function room to another, there will be no split venues at Telford, and the function rooms will obviously be in the same building as everyone's accommodation. The city centre (for “city centre”, read: bars and nightclubs) is also less than ½ mile away, so again that can easily be walked without the need for taxis.

It's obviously hard to comment on the quality of everyone's digs in Liverpool, but they're likely to have ranged from flea-pits to perfectly adequate for purpose. Tom Laycock described The University of Nottingham's £35 pppn accommodation as “a pretty nice hotel. No Renaissance [a reference to the Marriott establishment we stayed-in in Manchester last year in my final season as England Students team manager] but far from a hovel.”



The Park Inn Hotel, Telford

For those that don't know, [the Park Inn](#) is one of the Carlson Rezidor Group's [Radisson](#) hotels. It's not-long finished having a £3.5M renovation completed as well – including each and every one of its 153 bedrooms and *en suite* bathrooms. UPC has negotiated a 25% discount at the hotel bar on a draught lager, a draught bitter and a draught cider, specific bottled beers and ciders, house wine, house spirits and all soft drinks. A buffet-style full English breakfast will also be available for the surprisingly cheap add-on price of £4.50 pppn (so effectively £41.00 pppn for B&B). You can safely take it as “read” that I'll be taking them up on the offer! 🍻🍻

And so we move on to the pool! Not the swimming pool, no. Yes, there is one – but we'll come to that later. I'm talking about thunderbolt golden breaks, kamikaze clearances and mad one-nine combos...!!

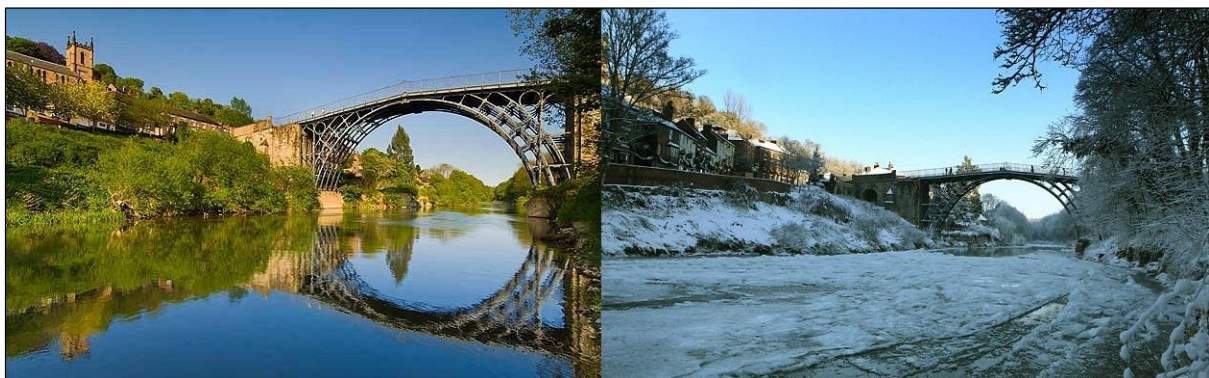
It's probably fair to say that the playing conditions in Liverpool weren't perfect. Some of the tables rolled-off, others had dead cushions or holes in cloths, incorrectly-marked spots or walls and other obstructions a bit close to them, and the pool balls had certainly seen better days too. In Telford we'll have the use of all the equipment of the [GB9 Tour](#), including their tournament-quality [Magno Pro](#) 9-ball tables -all fitted with [Simonis 860](#) professional cloth- and Aramith [Pro Cup TV](#) balls.

And even if you do get a bad run of the balls (I can't really use the phrase "rub of the green" when we're talking about American pool, can I?!), you can always go and take your frustration out at the [Innaction](#) health and fitness club – free-of-charge for all hotel guests. It includes that swimming pool we got onto earlier -heated and indoor, by the way- as well as a Jacuzzi, steam room, brand-new sauna and spa, and a fully-equipped fitness centre. You'll see me in there attempting to mitigate that gut-buster breakfast I polished-off earlier, I should imagine – not to mention the ten pints of 25%-off lager from the bar...



The [Innaction](#) health and fitness club at the Park Inn Hotel, Telford

If all that's not enough, then how about a spot of team-building with a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage site at [Ironbridge Gorge](#), roughly five miles away from the hotel? Possibly a bit cold for that in December, but you never know!



Ironbridge Gorge, 5.2 miles' walk from the Park Inn Hotel

So, back to that question about whether it's worth an extra sixty quid each. Well, I guess it depends upon your motives for attending the tournament...

If you're going there to try to do the best you possibly can on the pool table, whatever that might be for you personally, then I'd imagine you're probably going to say yes in a heartbeat. I always used to urge my England Students players to travel to the Student Home Internationals the night before the event actually began so as to get checked into their rooms, have a good night's sleep and then a hearty breakfast and proper shower, and basically give themselves every possible chance of playing their best pool right from the word "go". And whilst it was never compulsory, in seven seasons of managing the team only one player ever decided against it.

Likewise, if you're just looking for a decent weekend away with a good bit of pool thrown in then the whole package should tick every box really. Very nice hotel without costing the Earth, in an accessible and picturesque part of the country, and with a first-class pool tournament and facilities.

If all you're after is a pure drinking weekend and you're not really all that bothered about the pool then unfortunately the chances are the extra sixty quid *is* going to put you off. Truth be told though, you can have a weekend away on the lash any time without there having to be a pool tournament involved...



Referee Martyn Royce in action on the GB9 Tour

Those who know me will know that I'm no real fan of "American pool". Don't get me wrong, I like the actual game of 9-ball and I quite often play it on an English pool table with 2" spots and stripes; I'm just not a fan of American equipment. That said, I'm absolutely buzzing about this new development for the 9-Ball Championships, and I can't wait for it to come round to be honest.

The UPC 9-Ball Championships will finally be able to sit alongside the 8-Ball (and the Student Home Internationals, for those that are lucky enough to qualify) as a truly premium event. If anything, and through slightly jealous and gritted teeth as a die-hard 8-ball man, it's actually going to *better* than the 8-Ball.

Here's to crossing my fingers that I'm rotaed-on to staff the 9-Ball next season – hint hint, Olly! I promise I won't snore*.

**Disclaimer: The above statement may not be true...* 