

= The Hustler (film) =

The Hustler is a 1961 American drama film directed by Robert Rossen from Walter Tevis 's 1959 novel of the same name , adapted for the screen by Rossen and Sidney Carroll . It tells the story of small @-@ time pool hustler " Fast Eddie " Felson and his desire to break into the " major league " of professional hustling and high @-@ stakes wagering by high @-@ rollers that follows it . He throws his raw talent and ambition up against the best player in the country ; seeking to best the legendary pool player " Minnesota Fats . " After initially losing to Fats and getting involved with unscrupulous manager Bert Gordon , Eddie returns to try again , but only after paying a terrible personal price .

The film was shot on location in New York City . It stars Paul Newman as " Fast " Eddie Felson , Jackie Gleason as Minnesota Fats , Piper Laurie as Sarah , and George C. Scott as Bert .

The Hustler was a major critical and popular success , gaining a reputation as a modern classic . Its exploration of winning , losing , and character garnered a number of major awards ; it is also credited with helping to spark a resurgence in the popularity of pool . Real @-@ life pool player Rudolf Wanderone , known at the time as " New York Fats " and " Chicago Fats " , claimed to be the real life inspiration for Gleason 's character , Minnesota Fats , and adopted the name as his own .

= = Plot = =

Small @-@ time pool hustler " Fast Eddie " Felson travels cross @-@ country with his partner Charlie to challenge the legendary player " Minnesota Fats " . Arriving at Fats ' home pool hall , Eddie declares he will win \$ 10 @,@ 000 that night . Fats arrives and he and Eddie agree to play straight pool for \$ 200 a game . After initially falling behind , Eddie surges back to being \$ 1 @,@ 000 ahead and suggests raising the bet to \$ 1 @,@ 000 a game ; Fats agrees . He sends out a runner , Preacher , to Johnny 's Bar , ostensibly for whiskey , but really to get professional gambler Bert Gordon to the hall . Eddie gets ahead \$ 11 @,@ 000 and Charlie tries to convince him to quit , but Eddie insists the game will end only when Fats says it is over . Fats agrees to continue after Bert labels Eddie a " loser . " After 25 hours and an entire bottle of bourbon , Eddie is ahead over \$ 18 @,@ 000 , but loses it all along with all but \$ 200 of his original stake . At their hotel later , Eddie leaves half of the remaining stake with a sleeping Charlie and leaves .

Eddie stashes his belongings at the local bus terminal , where he meets Sarah Packard , an alcoholic who is supported by her father , attends college part @-@ time , and walks with a limp . He meets her again at a bar . They go back to her place but she refuses to let him in , saying he is " too hungry " . Eddie moves into a rooming house and starts hustling for small stakes . He finds Sarah again and this time she takes him in , but with reservations . Charlie finds Eddie at Sarah 's and tries to persuade him to go back out on the road . Eddie refuses and Charlie realizes he plans to challenge Fats again . Eddie realizes that Charlie held out his percentage and becomes enraged , believing that with that money he could have rebounded to beat Fats . Eddie dismisses Charlie as a scared old man and tells him to " go lie down and die " by himself .

At Johnny 's Bar , Eddie joins a poker game where Bert is playing , and loses \$ 20 . Afterward , Bert tells Eddie that he has talent as a pool player but no character . He figures that Eddie will need at least \$ 3 @,@ 000 to challenge Fats again . Bert calls him a " born loser " but nevertheless offers to stake him in return for 75 % of his winnings ; Eddie refuses .

Eddie humiliates a local pool shark , exposing himself as a hustler , and the other players punish him by breaking his thumbs . As he heals , Sarah cares for him and tells him she loves him , but he cannot say the words in return . When Eddie is ready to play , he agrees to Bert 's terms , deciding that a " 25 % slice of something big is better than a 100 % slice of nothing " .

Bert , Eddie , and Sarah travel to the Kentucky Derby , where Bert arranges a match for Eddie against a wealthy local socialite named Findley . The game turns out to be carom billiards , not pool . When Eddie loses badly , Bert refuses to keep staking him . Sarah pleads with Eddie to leave with her , saying that the world he is living in and its inhabitants are " perverted , twisted , and crippled " ; he refuses . Seeing Eddie 's anger , Bert agrees to let the match continue at \$ 1 @,@ 000 a game .

Eddie comes back to win \$ 12 @,@ 000 . He collects his \$ 3 @,@ 000 share and decides to walk back to the hotel . Bert arrives first and subjects Sarah to a humiliating sexual encounter . After , she scrawls " PERVERTED " , " TWISTED " , and " CRIPPLED " in lipstick on the bathroom mirror . Eddie arrives back at the hotel to learn that she has killed herself .

Eddie returns to challenge Fats again , putting up his entire \$ 3 @,@ 000 stake on a single game . He wins game after game , beating Fats so badly that Fats is forced to quit . Bert demands a share of Eddie 's winnings and threatens that Eddie will be injured unless he pays . But Eddie says that if he is not killed he will kill Bert when he recovers ; invoking the memory of Sarah , he shames Bert into giving up his claim . Instead , Bert orders Eddie never to walk into a big @-@ time pool hall again . Eddie and Fats compliment each other as players , and Eddie walks out .

= = Cast = =

Cast notes

Pool champion Willie Mosconi has a cameo appearance as Willie , who holds the stakes for Eddie and Fats 's games . Mosconi 's hands also appear in many of the closeup shots .

= = Production = =

The Tevis novel had been optioned several times , including by Frank Sinatra , but attempts to adapt it for the screen were unsuccessful . Director Rossen 's daughter Carol Rossen speculates that previous adaptations focused too much on the pool aspects of the story and not enough on the human interaction . Rossen , who had hustled pool himself as a youth and who had made an abortive attempt to write a pool @-@ themed play called Corner Pocket , optioned the book and teamed with Sidney Carroll to produce the script .

According to Bobby Darin 's agent , Martin Baum , Paul Newman 's agent turned down the part of Fast Eddie . Newman was originally unavailable to play Fast Eddie regardless , being committed to star opposite Elizabeth Taylor in the film Two for the Seesaw . Rossen offered Darin the part after seeing him on The Mike Wallace Interview . When Taylor was forced to drop out of Seesaw because of shooting overruns on Cleopatra , Newman was freed up to take the role , which he accepted after reading just half of the script . No one associated with the production officially notified Darin or his representatives that he had been replaced ; they found out from a member of the public at a charity horse race .

Rossen filmed The Hustler over six weeks , entirely in New York City . Much of the action was filmed at two now @-@ defunct pool halls , McGirr 's and Ames Billiard Academy . Other shooting locations included a townhouse on East 82nd Street , which served as the Louisville home of Murray Hamilton 's character Findley , and the Manhattan Greyhound bus terminal . The film crew built a dining area that was so realistic that confused passengers sat there and waited to place their orders . Willie Mosconi served as technical advisor on the film and shot a number of the trick shots in place of the actors . All of Gleason 's shots were his own ; they were filmed in wide @-@ angle to emphasize having the actor and the shot in the same frames . Rossen , in pursuit of the style he termed " neo @-@ neo @-@ realistic " , hired actual street thugs , enrolled them in the Screen Actors Guild and used them as extras . Scenes that were included in the shooting script but did not make it into the final film include a scene at Ames pool hall establishing that Eddie is on his way to town (originally slated to be the first scene of the film) and a longer scene of Preacher talking to Bert at Johnny 's Bar which establishes Preacher is a junkie .

Early shooting put more focus on the pool playing , but during filming Rossen made the decision to place more emphasis on the love story between Newman and Laurie 's characters . Despite the change in emphasis , Rossen still used the various pool games to show the strengthening of Eddie 's character and the evolution of his relationship to Bert and Sarah , through the positioning of the characters in the frame . For example , when Eddie is playing Findley , Eddie is positioned below Bert in a two shot but above Findley while still below Bert in a three shot . When Sarah enters the room , she is below Eddie in two shot while in a three shot Eddie is still below Bert . When Eddie is

kneeling over Sarah 's body , Bert again appears above him but Eddie attacks Bert , ending up on top of him . Eddie finally appears above Bert in two shot when Eddie returns to beat Fats .

= = Themes = =

The Hustler is fundamentally a story of what it means to be a human being , couched within the context of winning and losing . Describing the film , Robert Rossen said : " My protagonist , Fast Eddie , wants to become a great pool player , but the film is really about the obstacles he encounters in attempting to fulfill himself as a human being . He attains self @-@ awareness only after a terrible personal tragedy which he has caused ? and then he wins his pool game . " Roger Ebert concurs with this assessment , citing The Hustler as " one of the few American movies in which the hero wins by surrendering , by accepting reality instead of his dreams . "

The film was also somewhat autobiographical for Rossen , relating to his dealings with the House Un @-@ American Activities Committee . A screenwriter during the 1930s and ' 40s , he had been involved with the Communist Party in the 1930s and refused to name names at his first HUAC appearance . Ultimately he changed his mind and identified friends and colleagues as party members . Similarly , Felson sells his soul and betrays the one person who really knows and loves him in a Faustian pact to gain character .

Film and theatre historian Ethan Mordden has identified The Hustler as one of a handful of films from the early 1960s that re @-@ defined the relationship of films to their audiences . This new relationship , he writes , is " one of challenge rather than flattery , of doubt rather than certainty . " No film of the 1950s , Mordden asserts , " took such a brutal , clear look at the ego @-@ affirmation of the one @-@ on @-@ one contest , at the inhumanity of the winner or the castrated vulnerability of the loser . " Although some have suggested the resemblance of this film to classic film noir , Mordden rejects the comparison based on Rossen 's ultra @-@ realistic style , also noting that the film lacks noir 's " Treacherous Woman or its relish in discovering crime among the bourgeoisie , hungry bank clerks and lusty wives . " Mordden does note that while Fast Eddie " has a slight fifties ring " , the character " makes a decisive break with the extraordinarily feeling tough guys of the ' rebel ' era ... [b] ut he does end up seeking out his emotions " and telling Bert that he is a loser because he 's dead inside .

= = Reception = =

The Hustler had its world premiere in Washington , D.C. on September 25 , 1961 . Prior to the premiere , Richard Burton hosted a midnight screening of the film for the casts of the season 's Broadway shows , which generated a great deal of positive word of mouth . Initially reluctant to publicize the film , 20th Century Fox responded by stepping up its promotional activities .

The film was well received by critics , although with the occasional caveat . Variety praised the performances of the entire main cast but felt that the " sordid aspects " of the story prevented the film from achieving the " goal of being pure entertainment . " Variety also felt the film was far too long . Stanley Kauffmann , writing for The New Republic , concurred in part with this assessment . Kauffmann strongly praised the principal cast , calling Newman " first @-@ rate " and writing that Scott 's was " his most credible performance to date . " Laurie , he writes , gives her part " movingly anguished touches " (although he also mildly criticizes her for over @-@ reliance on Method acting) . While he found that the script " strains hard to give an air of menace and criminality to the pool hall " and also declares it " full of pseudo @-@ meaning " , Kauffmann lauds Rossen 's " sure , economical " direction , especially in regard to Gleason who , he says , does not so much act as " [pose] for a number of pictures which are well arranged by Rossen . It is the best use of a manikin by a director since Kazan photographed Burl Ives as Big Daddy . " The New York Times , despite finding that the film " strays a bit " and that the romance between Newman and Laurie 's characters " seems a mite far @-@ fetched " , nonetheless found that The Hustler " speaks powerfully in a universal language that spellbinds and reveals bitter truths . "

The Hustler received nine Academy Award nominations . The film won two , for Best Art Direction

@-@ Set Decoration , Black @-@ and @-@ White (Harry Horner and Gene Callahan) and Best Cinematography , Black @-@ and @-@ White (Eugen Schüfftan) . The film was also nominated for Best Picture and Newman was nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role . Gleason and Scott were both nominated for Best Actor in a Supporting Role ; Scott refused the nomination . Laurie was nominated for Best Actress in a Leading Role . Rossen received nominations for Best Director and , with Carroll , for Best Writing , Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium .

Newman was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Actor . Gleason and Scott were each nominated for Best Supporting Actor and Scott was also nominated as Best New Star of the Year . At the 1962 BAFTA Awards , The Hustler tied with the Soviet film *Ballad of a Soldier* for Best Film from Any Source . Newman won for Best Foreign Actor and Piper Laurie was nominated for Best Foreign Actress . Gleason was honored as Best Supporting Actor by the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures and the film was named among the Board 's ten best films of 1961 . Rossen was named Best Director by the New York Film Critics Circle Awards and Rossen and Carroll shared the Writers Guild of America Award for Best Written Drama .

American Film Institute Lists

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Movies - Nominated

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Thrills - Nominated

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Heroes and Villains :

Bert Gordon - Nominated Villain

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Movie Quotes :

" Eddie , you 're a born loser . " - Nominated

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Movies (10th Anniversary Edition) - Nominated

AFI 's 10 Top 10 - # 6 Sports Film

= = Legacy = =

In the decades since its release , The Hustler has cemented its reputation as a classic . Roger Ebert , echoing earlier praise for the performances , direction , and cinematography and adding laurels for editor Dede Allen , cites the film as " one of those films where scenes have such psychic weight that they grow in our memories . " He further cites Fast Eddie Felson as one of " only a handful of movie characters so real that the audience refers to them as touchstones . " TV Guide calls the film a " dark stunner " offering " a grim world whose only bright spot is the top of the pool table , yet [with] characters [who] maintain a shabby nobility and grace . " The four leads are again lavishly praised for their performances and the film is summed up as " not to be missed . "

Paul Newman reprised his role as Fast Eddie Felson in the 1986 film *The Color of Money* , for which he won the Academy Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role . A number of observers and critics have suggested that this Oscar was in belated recognition for his performance in *The Hustler* . In 1997 , the Library of Congress selected *The Hustler* for preservation in the United States National Film Registry as " culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant . " Carroll and Rossen 's screenplay was selected by the Writers Guild of America in 2006 as the 96th best motion picture screenplay of all time . In June 2008 , AFI released its " Ten top Ten " ? the best ten films in ten " classic " American film genres ? after polling over 1 @, @ 500 people from the creative community . *The Hustler* was acknowledged as the sixth best film in the sports genre .

The Hustler is credited with sparking a resurgence in the popularity of pool in the United States , which had been on the decline for decades . The film also brought recognition to Willie Mosconi , who , despite having won multiple world championships , was virtually unknown to the general public . Perhaps the greatest beneficiary of the film 's popularity was a real @-@ life pool hustler named Rudolf Wanderone . Mosconi claimed in an interview at the time of the film 's release that the character of Minnesota Fats was based on Wanderone , who at the time was known as " New York Fatty " . Wanderone immediately adopted the Minnesota Fats nickname and parlayed his association with the film into book and television deals and other ventures . Author Walter Tevis denied for the rest of his life that Wanderone had played any role in the creation of the character . Other players would claim , with greater or lesser degrees of credibility , to have served as models

for Fast Eddie , including Ronnie Allen , Ed Taylor , Ed Parker , and Eddie Pelkey .