

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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THE HOUSE OF FLYING ARROWS

Earlier this year I was approached by the film production company Fulwell73 to act as consultant to their latest project, a revealing insight into the sport of darts.



(Football fans amongst you may recall that Fulwell73 produced the film *The Class of '92* which told the tale of six 14-year-old working class lads from diverse backgrounds (David Beckham, Nicky Butt, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Phil and Gary Neville) coming together to play for the same club, Manchester United.)

When approached by Fulwell73 I did not hesitate. I agreed to their terms and, over a period of several months,

liaised closely with co-Director Daniel Harris, providing not just information about darts history but also the cultural and societal aspects of the sport.

The film includes a diversity of subject matter including important aspects of darts' development, such as 'The Split', interviews with PDC Chairman Barry Hearne, Sid Waddell's son Dan, plus a round-table discussions between Eric Bristow, Bobby George, Keith Deller, Rod Harrington and Bob Anderson, plus appearances from Wayne Mardle, Phil Taylor and others. All of these fascinating threads are held together by the production team interviewing and following the fortunes of Michael Van Gerwen and Gary Anderson as they progressed in the 2016 PDC World Championship finals at Alexandra Palace. Interviews with two top darts stars provided a fascinating insight into not only their approach to the sport but also revealed much about their personal lives.

It's an amazing and absorbing film.

My contract fulfilled, I was thrilled to be invited by Fulwell73 to an exclusive preview of the finished film *HOUSE OF FLYING ARROWS* at the Vue multiplex cinema in London's Leicester Square on Monday 17th October. It was an experience I shall never forget. My good friend Bobby George was at the reception afterwards with his wife Marie and I was able to chat to PDC Chairman Barry Hearne and meet and talk to the current PDC World Champion Gary Anderson for the first time.

The film was superb and will appeal to everyone who enjoys sport at its best. The film is released through Universal and will be available on DVD in time for the Christmas market.

DARTS IN IRAN

Here in the UK one of our national newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, runs a regular feature titled *Answers to Correspondents* where people write in asking questions about anything and everything. On 3rd September a questioner asked

Is it true darts has become one of the most popular sports in Iran, following a tour there by a British promoter?

Having been alerted to the question I researched the question and compiled the following reply which subsequently appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 12th October under the headline “What’s 180 in Persian?”

The Islamic Republic of Iran Darts Association was set up on 24th August 2004 with assistance from the English globe-trotting darts ambassador (and former owner of the International House of Darts, Bristol), Dr. Eddie Norman MBE, FFMsc.

Originally comprising organising committees in 22 of the 30 States in Iran and played in more than 200 ‘darts houses’, the sport has now expanded to cover all parts of that country involving the participation of players of all ages, able-bodied and disabled, from children to the elderly.



An IDA spokesman told me back in 2004 that ‘the promotion and development of the sport [of darts] is the best investment to create happiness and health in our society’. This, linked with organised training and coaching, has led to darts becoming one of the most popular sports in Iran, played regularly by in excess of 750,000 players. The Association is a proud member the World Darts Federation (WDF).

Iranian darts players play on both the traditional English bristle dartboard and the soft-tip/electronic darts machines.

The image (above, right), not included in the *Daily Mail* shows Iranian ladies playing darts circa 2010. (Image ©IDA. Used with permission.)

MARTIN ADAMS

At the end of September Martin Adams, the three-time British Darts Organisation (BDO) World Champion, revealed that he is being treated for prostate cancer.

‘Wolfie’, who is 60 years old, was diagnosed back in April and has already completed a course of radiotherapy. On 30th September he told BBC Radio Cambridgeshire:

I'm waiting for an appointment in November and hopefully that'll be the point the consultant says, "You're doing very well Mr. Adams, we'll see you in three months' time." What you don't want to hear is "Ah, we have a problem."



Due to his undergoing treatment, 'Wolfie' missed a number of tournaments during the summer but has continued to play occasional exhibition matches and is still No 5 in the BDO rankings. (The image, left, shows 'Wolfie' having won his third WINMAU World Masters in 2011.)

Talking on his local radio 'Wolfie' praised those treating him, saying,

The treatment is very good. Hats off to the oncology and radiology teams. Any question you have, no matter how small or major it is, if they don't know the answer, they going to find out.

I am sure you will all join me in wishing Martin well.

AND TALKING OF THE WORLD MASTERS...

Just a reminder that the WINMAU WORLD MASTERS is being held at Lakeside, Frimley Green, Surrey this year from 1st to 4th December. Players from across the globe (men, women, boys and girls) will gather there to participate in one of the longest-running prestigious darts tournaments. I'll be there on the 3rd and 4th so I hope to see you there too. Seek me out and we'll have a chat.



For full details go to Winmau.com or the BDO website.

WELSH PUB HISTORY AND AN IRISH CHAMPION OF WALES

As some of you may know, in addition to my darts research, I am also an avid researcher of British public houses; a natural progression I guess from the much narrower field of pub games. I belong to the Pub History Society (PHS) (www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk) and am currently Chairman of that society. I write regularly for the PHS quarterly *Newsletter* which is edited by my good friend and *DDN* subscriber Chris Murray.

In the spring issue of the PHS *Newsletter* Chris reviewed Peter Johnson and Catherine Jefferis' book *Conwy & District Pub* published earlier this year by Amberley Publishing. (Conwy is an historic market town on the north coast of Wales.) In his review Chris wrote of a discrepancy in the book:

I was unable to match up the assertion that the dart team from the Snowdon Hotel in Llandudno were “finalists in the News of the World darts competition” (in 1970) with reality. The News of the World Darts Championship was organised as a competition between individuals, though the dart player would be affiliated to a particular pub. I can find no mention of the pub in connection with any such competition (through the recourse of asking darts historian Patrick Chaplin!) so it is a bit of a mystery.

When Chris had consulted me I had assumed that, being a ‘team’, the pub would have entered *The People* Lord Lonsdale Team competition. But more recently, a letter from PHS member, darts memorabilia collector and good friend Bob Foster (who lives in Llandudno, Conwy), having read the review, wrote to me saying:

Regarding that ‘Conwy Pubs’ book review and the News of the World comp. the Snowdon was my local years ago (superb draught Bass) and I still pop in. I asked someone and he thought it was a player for the pub who got to the finals, a Mick (Mike?) McDermott. [Does he] Feature in any of your archives? Mid/late 1970s?

I had concentrated on the ‘team’ aspect. However, a subsequent search of my *News of the World* archive produced the answer. Mick McDermott, representing the *Snowdon Hotel* had won the *News of the World* Wales Divisional title in 1977. He travelled to London and then to the Alexandra Palace where he played in the grand finals on Saturday 30th April.



The name ‘McDermott’ doesn’t sound very Welsh does it? The grand finals programme reveals that Mick was ‘another one who has moved from his home to take up residence in another country.’ Mick was originally from Dublin but at the time of the *NoW* tournament was living in Llandudno, aged 36, married and playing darts in the *Snowden* (sic) *Hotel*. Even though he was a Dubliner the programme notes assured those present that McDermott would ‘put up a good show’ and ‘undoubtedly get the support of the usually exuberant crowd.’ (The photograph, above right, shows Mick McDermott being presented with the *News of the World* Wales Divisional trophy by Councillor G. E. Hughes, Mayor of Prestatyn.

One of the unusual things about the *News of the World* competition as it was expanding during the 1970s was that, due to the number of qualifiers (12), the first round of the tournament included *four* Byes; that is the four players who drew a Bye rather than an opponent were automatically through to the quarter-finals without throwing a dart. (I have always found this strange in such a major tournament if not *the* most important darts tournament at the time. Had they not heard of ‘wild cards’? Perhaps based on the four most impressive performances over the entire competition.)

Mick McDermott drew a Bye so was unable to experience the first round atmosphere of the Ally Pally. In the quarter-final he met the Yorkshire Divisional champion Bob Crosland (who had also drawn a Bye) so for Crosland too this was his ‘first round’. It was all over fairly quickly as Crosland beat McDermott 2-0 in the best of three tournament. Crosland then beat the North of England Divisional champion Jack Jones

2-1 to make the last two. There he met the London and Home Counties Divisional champion Mick Norris, the latter winning the match by a similar margin.

HOARY OLD DARTS QUIZ QUESTION

In what year did the King of Denmark win the *News of the World* darts trophy? (I'll reveal the answer in next month's issue.)

CHAMPION'S CHOICE – SOME FOLLOW-UP

Dr. Eddie Norman has been in touch again; this time in relation to the article in #78 relating to the Champions Choice dartboard. He wrote:

Hi Patrick, Thank you for DDN. As always a really great edition. I was intrigued by the article on the 'Champions Choice Dartboards'.



In 1970 when the photo (left) was taken, I was General Secretary of the West of England Darts Organisation (before the BDO) and we originally played The West Of England Super League on a Tuesday night at The Gloucestershire County Cricket Club in Bristol, before moving to The Patchway Sports and Social Club in Patchway, Bristol, as too many people were turning up on a Tuesday. The Super League was formed in 1969.

On a Tuesday night eight teams played in the Super League consisting of eight players in each team. The league was sponsored by Berni Inns and Watneys [a London brewer]. The teams all played in eight different coloured shirts, supplied by Watneys.

One team, captained by Ken Shaw, included [amongst its members] Welsh internationals, Leighton Rees, Alan Evans, Rocky Jones, Tony Ridler, David Porter, all of whom travelled sixty-odd miles every Tuesday to play.

Other teams consisted of England Internationals, Doug Priestner, Cyril Hayes, Alan Cooper, Kim Brown, Steve Rollings and Roger Smith and Irish Internationals Bill Mateer and Peter Lally to name but a few. Later players included Cliff Inglis and even Tommy O'Regan travelled from London to make guest appearances.

There was a draw to play in groups of eight, and each of the eight team managers had to put a player from his team in each of the eight bags for the draw. Matches were best of three legs of 501.

A large buffet and barrel of Watneys beer was always put on each Tuesday by the sponsors who also paid player's travel/petrol expenses to anyone travelling more than fifteen miles. Each group played down to one and then there was a draw from the quarter finals to final. Winner received eight points for his respective team and

also himself, runner up six, quarter-finalists four points. In the group stages, winning one game got one point, winning two games got two points.

Played over sixteen weeks, the singles champion was the one with the most points, (any ties were decided by the most legs for and against) and the winning team was the team with the most points. The final and semi-finals were always played on stage and matches called by the top MC at the time Jack Price who later became the permanent caller for all British Darts Organisation (BDO) television matches. A one point bonus and £10 was awarded to team and player for every 180 hit. Each Tuesday 250-300 people turned up to play or watch.

The point with the West of England Super League, was that it played on the Champions Choice dartboard from its inauguration in 1969. So the Champions Choice dated back to, at least, 1969. [My company] The House of Darts International, which sponsored the league, had been stocking Champion Choice dartboards several years before that date.

The boards every Tuesday after the matches were sold off cheaply to eagerly waiting players to practise on. The saying was that playing on a normal treble board after the Champions Choice made the doubles look as big as buckets.

The Champion Choice Dartboards were exported to the USA, Australia and many other countries from the late 1960's by The House of Darts International so they do go back a long way.

Thanks Eddie. Informative and constructive as always.

I also received feedback on this item from Chris Murray (mentioned earlier regarding the Pub History Society). He wrote:

I had a Champion's Choice dartboard back in the day. It was a fantastic sharpener. At first I couldn't hit the treble 20 regularly at all but after a while I could really see my shots improve and the difficulty involved spurred me on to hit high scores. Mind you this was in my bedroom!

DDN also triggered another memory for Chris...

When the landlord of the Eagle at Snaresbrook East London (my local) got involved with the darts team his first act was to soak the match board. Unfortunately it was a bristle board. He was rather old school. He didn't live that down for a long while.

Although the 'Bristle' dartboard was patented by NODOR in 1932, from the beginning it had problems due (a) to the cost and (b) darters were loath to replace their elm boards with the

Thousands of darts everyday

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newcomer. Things changed in the 1970s when Dutch elm disease decimated those trees in the UK.

The other major factor was the insistence of the BDO from practically their beginning that County leagues and all BDO-organised events should be played on a bristle dartboard made of African sisal.

The NODOR bristle dartboard advertisement (above, right) was featured in the November 1953 issue of *The Brewers' Guardian*. Nearly two decades from the year the bristle board was patented, the company was *still* having to remind purchasers that 'NO SOAKING' was required. Some years after that the landlord of the *Eagle* (cited above) had clearly not seen the advertisement or read the reverse of the dartboard, so he tried to soak his...

170 CERTIFICATE

Following on from the articles on the *News of the World* 180 Certificate I received an e-mail from Jerry Feather (one of my many subscribers in the USA) asking about another certificate of darts merit that players received when they achieved a 170 finish; the highest outshot possible with three darts. Jerry wrote:



Have you been much research on the 170 certificate? Attached is a copy of one of the best lady player in the late 70's through the 90's, Karen Allias, now Karen Russell. Keep up the good work!

I delved into my archive and found that this very question had been asked of me some time ago by a Welsh darter, Brian P. who asked about the '170 Club that ran back in the 1980s' adding 'I was number 171 and I believe Eric Bristow was

number 177.' The enquirer also mentioned that members received 'free sticks and flights' *for life!*

The 'Albatross 170 Game Shot Club' was promoted by Harrows Darts Technology. That company's Sales and Marketing Director, Robert Pringle told me:

We used to have a separate flight division called Albatross - "Unsurpassed in flight"! We merged this with Harrows in about 1983; Harrows taking over the club. Members received a certificate, special flights, a branded wallet and a badge or tie. No 'sticks' unfortunately! I think the 'stick' may have been a sticker. Latterly I think we may have substituted the woven badge for a sticker. It was devilishly hard work to administer as we had to verify every claimants claim. You had to achieve 170 check out in a league match or higher. We closed it in about 1994.

During my research I found that Eric Bristow was not 'number 177' and that 'for life', quite naturally, meant for the period of existence of the Club.

ALWYN MULLINS – NEWS OF THE WORLD CHAMPION 1957

In the October *DDN*, following an enquiry from Brian H., I promised to reveal the outcome of my research into the 1957 *News of the World* darts champion *Alwyn Mullins* who had made the *NoW* finals as the Yorkshire Divisional Champion. The photograph below left shows Mullins being awarded the Divisional trophy by Alderman W. Fox, the Deputy Mayor of Hull.)



Alwyn Mullins was a 34-year-old building worker and played for the *Traveller's Rest Hotel*, Tickhill, near Doncaster. The finals that year were held at the Empress Hall, Earl's Court, London, on Saturday 27th April 1957.

In the first round/quarter-finals Mullins was drawn against Len Cox the Western Counties Divisional title holder who represented the *Railway Tavern*, Pensford, Somerset and who the programme informed darts fans 'comes from a family of champions'; his elder brother being 'a champion hedger' and his younger brother rode for Bristol speedway. Despite this Mullins defeated Cox 2-1 and moved forward to the semi-finals. There he met Jim Gibbons, the Midland Counties Divisional Champion, who played out of the *Open Hearth Hotel*, Corby, Northamptonshire. Mullins beat the 41-year-old steelworker 2-1.

Waiting for him in the last two was 28-year-old lorry driver Len Baker, the Wales Divisional champion. On his route to the final Baker has beaten Lancashire Divisional champion Herbie Morris (representing the *Golden Lion Hotel*, Congleton, Cheshire) described in the programme as 'the most consistently successful darts player ever to enter the *News of the World* tournament' who had reached the grand finals twice before, in 1952 and 1956. His third appearance in the finals had never been achieved before and thus Len Baker was strongly fancied to win the title.

Mullins beat Baker 2-0.

(An interesting fact for darts fans is that Jim Pike, the London Area *NoW* champion, 1939 and one of the best known names in darts, was on that night in 1957 controlling the 'Electric Score Board' which was used to show the massive audience where each and every dart landed.)

At that time, the famous Unicorn company produced 'name' darts for sale to *News of the World* winners for sale to



the general public. I contacted Stanley Lowy, Chairman Unicorn Products Limited, about Alwyn Mullins and the 'Alwyn Mullins' dart. Stanley told me:

I met Alwyn at the Final... He was supported by a number of friends and in particular by Harry Depledge, the landlord of The Travellers Rest. Alwyn Mullins was using our pattern 165 brass dart with plastic flights that he had modified to reduce the wing width. This had the effect of making his darts 'lie down' that is enter the board at below the horizontal which left the space above more visible for a following dart.

With Alwyn's input Unicorn refined the design and released the Alwyn Mullins flight later in 1957. It first appeared in the Unicorn Book of Darts 1959 and remained popular in our range for 8-10 years.

Alwyn was well known and respected in the darts fraternity. He attended a number of events for us including the 1957 Sports Trade Show in a London hotel. There he demonstrated his awesome skill for four or five days. I was surprised after the show to observe that the knurl on his dart barrels had become smooth through use in that short time. The moisture in the fingers with the handling had clearly a corrosive effect.

We started to offer commercially a replica of the darts used by Champions with the Tommy Gibbons dart and followed up with many more. Particularly popular for many years was the Tom Barrett - the first player to win the News of the World two years running. I hope this helps your correspondent.

Indeed it does Stanley. Thank you for your help.

[The photograph of the Unicorn Alwyn Mullins darts shown on the previous page appears courtesy of subscriber Bill Bell. After seeing the photograph, Stanley Lowy told me, "Bill, I confirm, has an early example of the Alwyn Mullins darts as sold about 1957."]

THE PROBLEMS OF RESEARCHING DARTS

As you will all be aware, I receive numerous darts-related enquiries every year from all over the world but mostly from the UK, Europe and the USA. I manage to answer most of the questions either directly from my archive or via my important network of specialist contacts but some (a few) are impossible to answer.

A recent enquiry from darts fan Mark Williams is a case in point which I will use to demonstrate how difficult some queries are to respond to. Mark wrote:

Hi Patrick, I was wondering if you can throw some light onto something for me, I was a eager darter in my youth but I gave up many years ago when my family where young. I am still an eager follower of darts and the history of darts. Today while in an antique shop in Wotton Woven just outside Solihull I came across a couple of heavy plated tankards the first one was engraved, 'The Birmingham Mail Sports Final. Midlands Open Darts. Team Championship. 1962. Mitchells and Butlers Ltd. Individual House Award.' On the second tankard, which is of the same design, it just says '1962. Doubles Winner. J Fermor.'

Can you help with the name 'J. Fermor' or shed and light on these items? I purchased the items as they are beautiful and someone has done well to win these items and maybe they should be given back to the family of J Fermor.

Researching the history of darts, especially during the period 1945 to the end of the Sixties, is always difficult as, apart from the *News of the World* championship, very few darts matches were recorded in national or even local newspapers even though we know that there were millions of men and women playing darts in UK pubs and many were contesting hundreds if not thousands of tournaments nationally. So reporting and recording darts matches were rare and there certainly were not any darts-related newspapers or magazines published in Britain from the mid-1950s until *Darts World* was begun in late 1972.

In Mark's case, my archive revealed nothing about the tournaments he mentioned but I did suggest that he checked the archives of the *Birmingham Mail* newspaper for 1962 as that source would surely hold something about the competition. However, without the pub name to go by, it might not prove very fruitful as Mark simply wouldn't know what team or pub he was looking for!

The *Mail* tankard Mark has is for an 'individual house award' so it would have been awarded very early on in the competition, being fought for a pub level, that is, several teams would have competed against each other in a single evening and the winning team would then have progressed to (probably) an Area tournament and then on to the Divisional finals and thence to the Grand Finals.

As for 'J. Fermor', I could find no trace of a darts player of that name and it would be an impossible task, for Mark or me, to trace him or indeed the competition he contested as the engraving on the tankard reveals very little information that would aid our search. (I did look at the Midland Counties Divisional programmes for the *News of the World* darts championship for the period 1960-1965 but there is no mention of Mr. Fermor.)

As regards Mark's idea of returning the tankard(s) to J. Fermor's family, I suggested that he shouldn't worry too much about that because the player's family probably sold the tankards to the antique shop in the first place!

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