

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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DR. DARTS DOES FLIGHT CLUB TWICE

Although I have been assisting the owners of Flight Club in London with information and memorabilia for a year or so it was only in July that I was able to visit not one but two of these amazing venues. Flight Club is a new club concept promising 'social darts'.

The clubs do not look like any other club. They feature all you would expect of a club in the capital but with the addition of several superb oches each with a standard, quality bristle dartboard and that special something else... (The photo below shows the main bar at the Bloomsbury Flight Club.)



You don't have to play darts while you're there. It's not compulsory but then how can you go to Flight Club and not be drawn into playing the second most popular indoor pursuit ever? You won't find anyone playing anything vaguely complicated like 501 or American Cricket (our Tactics) and you don't have to start or finish on a double. The games devised at Flight Club are all straightforward and easy to learn. They include 'Demolition' (counting down from 180), 'Shanghai' (a familiar game to us all) and 'Quack Shot' (which concentrates on the bull and 25 but you are penalised if you hit a treble or anything outside the treble ring). All of these games are great levellers and can be played if you play every week, every so often, or haven't ever thrown a dart in your life.

Part of the fun is having your photograph taken by computer and your nickname added and then projected on to the screen above the dartboard. When all players have been recorded that way and the game you want to play selected all you do is throw your darts. There is no need to score. No chalk. No electronic scoreboard. (But this is **not** soft-tip.) It's all done for you by technology that I simply do not understand.

As soon as your dart hits the dartboard the score is recorded and shown on a screen above the board. All the scores for each dart thrown are recorded using hi-tech. Even with a large group you don't have to argue over whose turn it is next. The screen above the board tells you whose turn it is. When the winning dart is thrown the legend 'Let's see that again' appears on the screen above the board and you see yourself – the winner – celebrating that magic dart.



My wife Maureen and I were invited to the Shoreditch Flight Club in early July by co-founders Paul Barham and Steve Moore and experienced Flight Club for the first time. (The photo, left, shows (left to right) Paul Barham, yours truly, Steve Moore and Maureen.)

Over recent months I have provided a great deal of darts memorabilia that now bedecks not only the two London clubs but also the newly-opened one in Chicago. At the Bloomsbury Club one wall is covered

with framed front pages of *Darts World* magazine, some stretching back over 40 years.

I have to say both Maureen and I were *very* impressed. (The staff were excellent too.) Maureen hardly ever plays darts and I only play once a week or so these days. The four of us played darts but I am too much of a gentleman to say who actually won the games. Flight Club is not a Club aimed at the hardened traditionalist although of course they are welcomed with open arms just like anyone else. Indeed the oches are set in the floor at 'Rookie' (about six feet), 'Regular' (a standard oche length) and 'Pro', a foot or so back, the latter designed to ensure that any professional, or simply very good, players throw their darts from an oche that was actually standard in the *News of the World* tournament pre-1939.

A couple of weeks after Maureen and my visit to Shoreditch I was back at Flight Club; this time to the Bloomsbury club as part of a Gentlemen's Evening; all nine of us celebrating the forthcoming nuptials of my best friend Colin's son Chris. Chris, who is less than half my age, chose the venue...and what a choice! (The photo, right, shows me taking point at our reserved table before battle commenced. (Image © Martin Driver)



Playing with the warmth of alcohol in my brain, I foolishly threw, for whatever reason, from the Pro line (I really am not *that* good) which resulted in the saddest darts I have ever thrown in my life! But what a night! Next to us a group of young ladies were having the time of their lives possibly sampling 'social darts' for the first time then possibly not.

Flight Club is for *all*. (Trust me. I'm a doctor.)

Paul and Steve and their design teams have managed to combine the atmosphere and ambiance of a first class club with a darts theme very successfully; a theme that runs throughout their establishments to great effect whether you are a fan of darts or not. But don't take more word for it. Visit Flight Club yourselves and tell them 'Dr. Darts' sent you, but first check out all three Clubs by going to flightclubdarts.com and then let me know what you think.

Success can always be measured in terms of popularity and an increasing demand for more. To this end Steve and Paul have plans for a third Flight Club in the capital at Victoria, coming soon. Look out too for the first Flight Club in the UK outside of London, coming to Manchester in the not too distant future.

My view?

'Social Darts' *really* works.

(Other photos © Flight Club. Used with permission.)

OBITUARY - TONY SONTAG

As you will know from #101, just as that *DDN* was being finalised I received the sad news from Bobby George that Tony Sontag (pictured), a long-time member of London county darts and who was selected a number of times to play for England during the 1970s and 1980s, had passed away. He was a great friend of the George family. Tony died of cancer on 24th July at the age of only 62.



Tony was described in 1981 by Derek Brown, darts journalist of the *Daily Mirror*, as a 'curly-haired, muscular young man' whose 'biceps...suggest that he hurls something much heavier than darts' and that Tony 'forced his way on to the [*darts*] scene with a long, unbeaten run with London, mixed with tournament success.'

According to Roger Nickson's book *The History of the Greater London Darts Organisation 1966-1991* in the late 1970s Tony played for the highly successful London 'A' County darts team which included such luminaries as Eric Bristow, Tony Brown and Charlie Ellix. He played 62 times for London, winning on 39 occasions.

During the late 1970s success followed success for Tony. He won the Herts Open and Middlesex Open during 1977. In 1978 he was a losing semi-finalist in the British Open men's singles but won the British Open Pairs and the California Golden Gate Fours; his team mates in the latter win being Eric Bristow, Leighton Rees and Bobby George.

That same year Tony made it through to the semi-finals of the WINMAU World Masters. Of the semi-final *Darts World* reported that Tony looked all set to win against Kent and England star Tony Brown as he took the first set 2-0 and the first game in the second set. (The Masters semi-final was played the best of three sets, each set comprising three games of 501.) But it was not to be. *Darts World* reported

Brown's facility for dragging himself out of tight corners was not lost. Sontag allowed himself the luxury of three 40 scores and Brown didn't miss the opportunity to draw level in the second set. A 14-dart game...gave Brown the second set.

The deciding set was a tale of near-misses. Needing 136 in the first game Sontag hit two 60s only to miss double eight. Brown finished the game before Sontag had another chance.

So close yet so far...

Tony Sontag's performance in the WINMAU World Masters was followed by selection for England and that same year (1978) he won the first BBC2 *Bullseye* tournament (not to be confused with the later Central TV quiz show of the same name). 1979 saw Tony's successes continuing with a win in the Essex Open Pairs and a great run in the Butlins/MY Darts tournaments winning in the Triples and Pairs and being runner-up in the Men's singles. This on-going success found Tony on the front page of the November 1979 issue of *Darts World*. (Pictured left.)

Tony also won the 1980 Swedish Open but, according to Derek Brown, the BDO made him forfeit his world-ranking points 'because he had used what they adjudged to be a non-standard dart'; the Staymaster spring-loaded darts. However, Brown added, 'by then Sontag was part of the darts scene and there were no hard feelings.'

Knowing that, back then, Keith Deller used spring-loaded darts, I e-mailed him and he replied

Hi Patrick. The first time I used spring loaded darts, Tony asked me to go to America and throw those darts. I won two tournaments and when I came back the people with the spring-loaded dart asked me to go and play in the Los Angeles Open with the big boys and I won that. The win got me a play off in London to qualify for the world championships. I qualified and won the world title with the spring-loaded darts. I really owe a lot to Tony for asking me to go to the States. Tony was a great guy. RIP Tony mate.

Tony Sontag continued to be part of the darts scene into the 1980s after which he continued with his full-time job; his own roofing business. He had property in Spain and spent much of his spare time there with his wife and family.

After hearing of Tony's death Bobby George told me, "Tony and me were great mates and enjoyed many wins playing pairs together in the States. He was a very gentle and caring person and a wind-up merchant! I'll never forget Tony's 'Cheshire Cat' grin especially when,



some years ago, he saved me from drowning. After a few drinks we both jumped into a swimming pool fully clothed and we laughed so much that I started drinking the water!”

In 2008 Bobby commented “Tony can still throw a mean dart. He should be in the Legends.” Unfortunately Tony didn’t make the League of Legends but to many players he remains a legend of English darts.

Tony Sontag (b. 2nd March 1956 d. 24th July 2018) leaves his wife Maura and three sons, Richard, Martin and Jake.

AL FRESCO DARTS – FEEDBACK

The article in #101 about playing darts outside (*al fresco*) brought back memories for some readers. David King told me

I threw my first darts at a paper dartboard hung on a garden shed wall. Not hung at the correct height as I was only seven years old and I couldn’t reach the top height of a correct set-up board. I played my Nan who played league darts in Stourport and I won. She didn’t like that one bit! She claimed the board was too low and of course it was...for her anyway!

Similarly regular contributor Mick Simpson remembered

Outdoor play as a boy. We used to play on our back gate. My mum, dad and brothers played on an old paper board as dad could not afford a better board. I was the youngest of six children.

The article sparked even more memories for Brian H. He told me

Thanks for another great issue. You always seem to strike a chord with my darting past. In this case it is the Darts al fresco.



Back in 1980 me and a couple of mates went back-packing in Europe on an Inter Rail ticket and one essential we had to take was a dartboard!

It wasn’t full size but a 10” toy one made of compressed paper with an archery target on the back. I have enclosed a photo [of me] playing on a campsite at Agia Trias, in northern Greece.

[It’s] not very clear but I hope you can see the dartboard pinned to a tree! I think it was the only chance we got to use it but it’s a fond memory of the lengths we went to keep up with our practice.

And from across the pond, Scott Harrison wrote with a similar memory:

Patrick. In my younger days I used to participate in organized camping trips to open areas available for the purpose here in Texas in the US and would usually take my solid wood log-end dartboard with me and hang it on a tree. I had to carry it in a container filled with water

to keep it from cracking and falling apart. I don't have it any longer but have seen them advertised recently and am considering obtaining another.

In the previous issue of *DDN* I mentioned Richard Phillipson and the Embsay & Eastby Garage Darts League. Richard and his teammates were thrilled with their inclusion in that issue. Richard wrote

Thanks for the extensive coverage in DDN #101 - an unexpected but pleasant surprise! Our latest "Open" Open is due to take place on 16th August on a wooden bridge across a local stream. I'll send photos once complete.

And, as promised, and just in time for this *DDN* Richard sent me photos of that event held on a bridge. The photo included here shows Robin Towler aka 'The Towler Inferno' who Richard describes as a fine Superleague player and multiple E&EGDL champion. On the right in the orange shirt is Mark Jarvie who went on to win this year's E&EDL "Open" Open.



Richard tells me that he is already planning next year's league & cup programme. He told me

We'll soon be purchasing the Vogelpik board from the contact you gave me, meaning next season will be our biggest yet with 14 weeks of league fixtures on a standard trebles board, interspersed with 6 cup weeks - all on a different board! (Quadro 240, Manchester log-end, London wide 5s, Lincoln, Yorkshire & Vogelpik). Can't wait! I also produce a "Garage Guide" each year for the league which takes a tongue-in-cheek look at each venue. We now have a grand total of 27 trophies to hand out on Presentation Night (Sept. 21st.)!

Marvellous stuff! Do any other *DDN* readers engage in this sort of dart multi-tasking?

OBITUARY - ALISTAIR FORRESTER



Upon receiving *DDN* #101, subscriber and long-time darts contact James Hope e-mailed me to tell me that sadly his old friend, former Scottish International Alistair Forrester (pictured), passed away on the 26th May at the age of 67 following a long battle with cancer.

During a discussion with fellow Glaswegian James Hope in 2007, Alistair gave some indication of his early success in darts. James wrote to me about it saying that

[Alistair] told me that when he was a 14-year-old he won his first darts tournament in his area in Glasgow back in 1964 beating people who were a good

bit older than himself. He had special permission from the landlady of the pub the tournament was held in to play in it, as she was a friend of Alistair's family. [He also told me that] in 1966 he won his first Scottish tournament which was a six-a-side event.

In 1981 Derek Brown, author of *The Guinness Book of Darts* wrote that Alistair was

from Glasgow, came to the fore as a top-of-the-order Scotland international with his performances in the Unipart World matchplay and the Europe Cup in the autumn of 1980. Stands 6ft 3in (1.91m), plays for Greater Glasgow, and there is little in that part of the world that he has not won.

Scottish darts player, organiser and researcher Jim MacNeil told me

Alistair played most of his Inter County career for Greater Glasgow and played for his country on 23 occasions, winning nine. In the 1980 Europe Cup, played in Wales, Alistair was partnered by Rab Smith and they reached the semi-final. And again, in the 1982 World Cup in New Zealand, Alistair and Rab Smith reached the semi-finals of the Pairs.



Alistair qualified twice to play in the Embassy World Professional Darts Championship, but lost on both occasions. He was beaten 0-2 by Bobby George in the 1981 Championship and 1-2 by the Belgian player Luc Marreel in the 1982 Championship. He also lost in the first round at the 1981 British Professional, losing 0-3 to Alan Evans and in the 1989 WINMAU World Masters to Per Skau. [The photo above shows the four Scottish qualifiers for the WINMAU World Masters in 1989 (left to right Jamie Harvey, Dave McFadden, Alistair and Peter MacDonald.) He also lost in the final of the SDA Doubles in 1983 with Jim Forrest representing the Cambuslang league.

There was no disgrace in any of those results as, clearly, Alistair was drawn against some of the top international players of the day. James Hope also told me that Alistair's funeral was held on May 31st and that, by way of a tribute, there the Alistair Forrester Memorial Singles tournament was held in the *Old Oak* pub in Burnside, Rutherglen on 25th August.

NEWS OF THE WORLD DOUBLE CHAMPION TOM BARRETT AND THE FRASERBURGH LIFEBOAT DISASTER

Way, way, way back in early 2016 I received an enquiry via my website from Rodger Whyte Wilken and only now can I reveal the outcome of my research. Rodger wrote

Greetings Patrick. I'm collecting info from a variety of sources concerning the connection between Tom Barrett, the News of the World trophy and the Fraserburgh and District Darts leagues. Back in the 90's I was the proud winner of the Tom Barrett trophy. Venue: The

Forbes Arms, Rosehearty, Aberdeenshire. I believe it currently resides in the trophy cabinet at the Fraserburgh British Legion. Can you shed any further light on this? Thank you!!

All the information I needed was there in front of me all the time. I could have done it earlier but recently I reached for *Darts* written by Tom Barrett (with Harry Weaver) *Darts* and published in London by Pan Books Ltd., in 1973). Tom wrote

It is only natural to have a special affection for certain places. I have one for the town of Fraserburgh in North-east Scotland. I first went there, by invitation, shortly after the tragic lifeboat disaster in which five men perished in January 1970. The men of Fraserburgh are darts fanatics, and the idea was to raise money for the dependents of the lost men by means of a darts match and display. It was held before an audience of three hundred and fifty people in the ballroom of the Station Hotel. First I played their champion, Bill Ritchie, then another of the Fraserburgh boys, using nails while he used darts, and followed the two matches up with my William Tell act.

During my stay I paid a visit of respect to the graves of the victims. I also met the widows, all very brave, and I was glad to know that darts, true to its traditions of being generous to those in need, had raised quite a useful sum of money for those sorrowing families. I made a lot of good friends on that first trip, which has become an annual event as the Fraserburgh Darts Association has done me the honour of making me their honorary president. In return, I was happy to give them the silver cup, awarded to me for winning the News of the World tournament in 1964, and another trophy, both to be competed for annually.

They are known as the Tom Barrett Cup and the Brown Bear Cup. I am particularly pleased about the second name for, just as I am writing this chapter, I have heard that the Brown Bear, which has had so much success and played such a large part in my darts life, is to be pulled down. It's nice to know its name will live on in that distant corner of Scotland.

[THIS AMAZING STORY IS TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.]

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