

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 110

May 2019



LES FRANCE A LEGEND IN DARTS ORGANISATION

The one thing I will always remember about darts people is that, almost without exception, they are nice folk; people who love what they do in darts whether it is in playing, organising or just supporting the sport as fans.



Earlier this year one of the giants of darts organisation, Les France, (pictured left in the early days) passed away and, to my utter regret, although I had planned to feature Les' life in *DDN*, I singularly failed to do it. Another 'senior moment'? Possibly.

Therefore, to rectify matters I am featuring Les in this month's issue. The obituary that follows was compiled by Wayne Baker, a former key contributor to *Darts World*, who knew Les very well indeed. Wayne's tribute to Les originally appeared in the February issue of *Darts World* and is reproduced here with his permission. Wayne wrote:

"For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow....."

The Isle of Man Darts Festival celebrated its 30th birthday in 2015 and toasted the man responsible for the successful island tournament.

Ill health meant that octogenarian Les France was unable to travel to the event but it did not stop the island's tourist board from honouring the popular Swinton-based tournament organiser. They phoned him at home and everyone at the palatial sea-front Villa Marina playing venue burst into a spontaneous rendering of "for he's a jolly good fellow..."

Director of Tourism Robin Bishop said:

"This is the 30th one and we are very proud to support this international festival of darts, which has attracted players from the mainland UK as well as Russia, Switzerland, Holland and Belgium, plus this year for the first time, players from the World Disabled Darts Association.



[The photograph, above right, shows Les in 2010 receiving an award in recognition for his work by the Isle of Man Tourist Board. (Photo © Wayne Baker. Used with permission.)]

“Unfortunately one person could not be here – Les France. We are very disappointed that he could not be here for the 30th event. We appreciate his tremendous passion and enthusiasm for darts and this tournament,” he said. Previously Les had been presented with a letter of commendation from the Isle of Man’s Minister of Tourism and Leisure, the Hon. David Cretney.

The letter said: “May I, on behalf of the Department and the IoM Government thank you for your sterling efforts over the years. The darts festival really has become an important fixture in our events calendar and is seen by many as the kick-start to another season of sports events on the Island.” This was just one example of the esteem and high regard afforded to Lancashire-based Les France, who died over Christmas after a lengthy illness.

One of the most experienced and well-liked administrators, he had chalked up more than six decades in the sport. He became secretary of his local league – Swinton and Pendlebury – in 1948, holding the position for 28 years. Colin Evans, who was to become his partner in Lescol Promotions, became chairman of the league and a successful partnership was forged. Les, as chairman of the Lancashire National Darts Association met a young Olly Croft at one of the annual matches with London during the early 1970s. At the time there were just four counties – Lancashire, London, Warwickshire and Yorkshire.

Les recalled: “Lancashire were playing London at Tongue Ward Labour Club in Bolton. I was introduced to Olly who was quite surprised at the number of people who had turned out to watch a darts match. We had a chat and discussed the possibility of getting other counties to join together to form a league.

“I came across another person – Norman Byron from Congleton. Cheshire also liked the idea and after numerous phone calls it was decided that we would have the first of many meetings. This initial meeting was held at the Wharf Inn in Congleton and lasted until the early hours of the following morning!”

Later it was decided to start a new BDO [British Darts Organisation] league with 10 counties. This was in 1973-74. Les became Lancashire secretary, BDO director, England selector and inter counties secretary.

“As time passed, clubs and pubs became interested in having the top names for exhibitions. We worked with all the top names including Eric Bristow, John Lowe and also organised Jocky Wilson’s Strongbow Cider exhibitions.”

“Sometime later while chatting with Colin we decided to build a set of equipment – costs precluded us from buying new stuff. I designed the mimic board and the numerators and Colin and my son Steve did all the electrical work – the wiring and soldering.”

Les provided the behind-the-scenes know-how when the Modern Hotels Jersey Festival of Darts was launched in 1980 – won that year by Jocky Wilson. His “baby” though was the Isle of Man Festival of Darts. With Les at the helm of the popular island tournament blossomed and is still going strong after more than three decades on the darting calendar.

“A meeting was set up with Derek Mulhearn from the island’s tourist board, Ted Toohey of the Steam Packet and Jane Quayle who represented the Hilton Hotel. They all agreed to provide £1000 each and we managed to get trophies from the Sunday Mirror – the Manx darts tournament was born.”

Les and his team weathered the industrial recession, heavy snow, foot and mouth disease and “the split” in the mid-1990s to keep the Manx festival up and running, even attracting BDO rankings points.

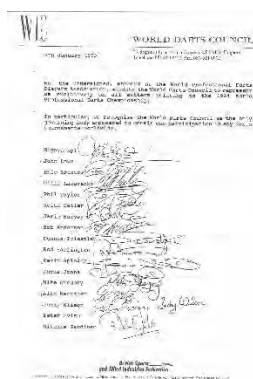
Les’ files of players travelling and playing in the Manx tournament were a work of art and testament to his professionalism, which was extended to his stage crew who were meticulously turned out in matching coloured polo shirts and jumpers – strictly no jeans. Although he failed to embrace the modern world of technology his desire was always “to put on the best darts tournament we can.”

One of the sport’s great characters and administrators, Les like those players he worked with – Jocky Wilson, Eric Bristow and Lancashireman Bill Lennard – will be sadly missed. RIP Les.

I first met Les at the WINMAU World Masters at Bridlington about a decade ago and was enthralled by the man, his knowledge, his love of darts and his dedication to organisation, particularly his beloved Isle of Man tournament, was impressive indeed. We talked for ages and the following year Les brought several albums of cuttings to show me. We sat going through them, a process that, as you can imagine, taking us a fair time. The photograph here shows Les and me at the Masters in 2010. (Image © Moppix International. Used with permission.)



Les presented me with photocopies of newspaper cuttings from the *New York Times* from 1974 which celebrated the defeat of a British Darts Organisation darts team to the United States Darting Association’s team led by the legendary Al Lippman. The event was sponsored by Bob McLeod of Darts Unlimited. The headline read ‘*They’ll Be Crying in Their Pub Beer As British Are Upset by U.S. in Darts*. Indeed the Brits were.



But perhaps the most interesting document from an historical perspective that Les gave me was a photocopy of a statement issued by the World Darts Council (WDC) (later to become the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC)). It was dated 4th January 1993 and read as follows:

We, the undersigned, members of the World Professional Darts Players Association, mandate the World Darts Council to represent us exclusively on all matters relating to the 1994 World Professional Darts Championship.

In particular, we recognise the World Darts Council as the only governing body empowered to commit our participation in any darts tournament worldwide.

The statement (shown, above, left) was signed by the sixteen so-called 'rebels'. In order of signing they were John Lowe, Eric Bristow, Cliff Lazarenko, Phil Taylor, Keith Deller, Jamie Harvey, Bob Anderson, Dennis Priestley, Rod Harrington, Kevin Spiolek, Chris Johns, Mike Gregory, Alan Warriner, Jocky Wilson, Peter Evison and Ritchie Gardiner.

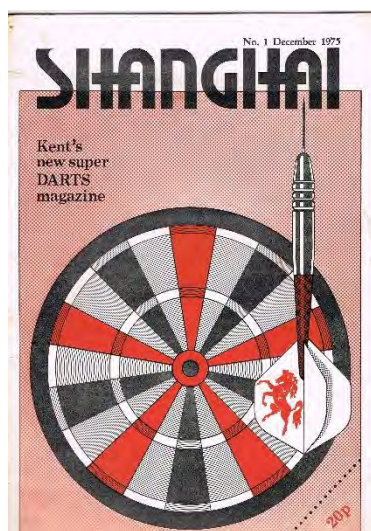
Les told me back in 2003, "At the time of the split I was asked to another meeting with the top 16 players, who all signed, along with Dick Allix and Tommy Cox [*of the WDC*] to join them but I stayed loyal to the BDO. Now I do regret this..."

How the WDC, the emergent PDC would have benefitted from Les' knowledge, experience and organisational know-how is inestimable.

RIP Les.

SHANGHAI – THE MAGAZINE

I am indebted to subscriber Phil Barrow for sending me an original copy of the very first issue of the darts magazine *Shanghai* which was published in the UK in December 1975.



The magazine was sub-titled 'Kent's new super DARTS magazine' (thus primarily for the County of Kent here in England). It was launched by Vera Love Enterprises; Vera (pictured right), from Chatham, Kent, being the editor and her colleague Lilly Roger the Advertising Manager.

The first issue contained the usual plea from the editor of any magazine, that "We need your help to make it a success" and that she could be contacted by phone with any news and views and items of interest 'up until midnight'. Vera

added a request that all secretaries and organisers of darts leagues 'including ladies' send her details of their matches so that such information would "not only...tell us just how many darts leagues there are in Kent but [*also*] when future competitions are arranged, only the leagues we know about, can be included." Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, Vera added, "I have asked this before without much success."



Perhaps the most important point Vera makes in her initial 'Welcome' column is that anyone writing in with the details of their league should state whether their league plays on the 'Single or Treble board'. Kent was (and to an extent still is) one of the few counties where you can still, in addition to the ubiquitous trebles dartboard, and if you look hard enough, find leagues which use the 'singles' (no trebles) black dartboard where the scoring surface goes

right up to the edge of the board with the numbers on a separate surround or part of the darts cabinet.

I have no idea how long *Shanghai* lasted (perhaps *DDN* readers can help me on this) but what is known is that a new darts magazine titled *Darts International* was launched in February 1979 and the editor was the former editor of *Shanghai*, Vera Love. In her editorial for issue 2 (March 1979) Vera wrote

Ever since I began reporting about darts back in 1975, there have been many changes. Even on the local scene. Many leagues have now changed to the National treble board, and have followed with the National throwing distance of 7ft 9¼ in. Progress indeed!

Vera added

I was invited to attend the first meeting of the World Darts Federation on Sunday, 21st March with fifteen countries present. Now it has grown to eighteen member countries. There is no doubt that television is at last recognising darts as a top sport, with vast viewing potential.

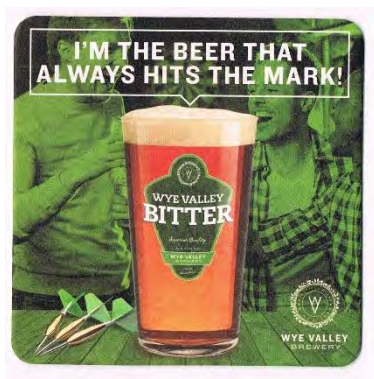
Darts has certainly come a long way in the past 40 years! From the few copies of *Darts International* I have in my archive I can tell that the magazine lasted into the 1980s; the last issue on my file being Vol. 4 No. 4 (April 1982) (pictured, right). If any *DDN* readers can help in finding out when *Shanghai* and *Darts International* published their last issues please contact me on patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.



I would also be interested in purchasing (or having donated) back issues of these and other regional darts magazines and newspapers of that period for my archive: anything except *Darts World* and its sister publication *Darts News* as I have a full set of those. I look forward to hearing from you.

DARTS ON BEERMATS

As you all know, over the years I have collected all kinds of darts ephemera be it darts, flights, advertisements, stamps (Yes. Darts do appear on one or two stamps.), postcards and beermats.



My substantial collection of beermats seemed to have stalled but, on holiday recently in Herefordshire, I was pleased to find that **Wye Valley**, one of the best local breweries, has included darts as part of a series of sports-related beermats.

I found the beer mat (see image) when my wife Maureen and I stopped off at the legendary *Sun Inn* in Leintwardine, Herefordshire, one of the Campaign for Real Ale's (CAMRA) National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors. The inside front of the pub has been preserved in its original form, as a 'parlour pub' whilst Hobson's, the brewery that owns the premises, has

extended the building out the back in order to cater for the increased trade attracted to this relic of the past. (Visit it if you can.)

Wye Valley Bitter is considered by the brewery to be 'the cornerstone of our family of real ales' where their brewers aim 'to create a classic superior quality ale with a delicate hoppy aroma, full malty flavour and clean bitter finish.'

The blurb on the reverse of the beer mat continues, 'And by combining Maris Otter and Crystal malts with locally grown Goldings and (aptly named) **Target** hops, **they've truly hit the bullseye...**' I don't think that the company took too long to come up with that phrase or the one on the front of the mat, '**always hits the mark**'. It was also pleasing to see that the company uses brass darts as part of the illustration rather than tungstens.

GLYDA DARTS AND UNICORN'S 'UNIPLUME'

Ian F. e-mailed me via my website www.patrickchaplin.com asking about some darts he had purchased. He wrote:

I recently bought two sets of darts at a second hand market and was wondering if you can give me some information on them if possible. One set are Glyda Darts - Brass with feather flights in a plastic case. The second set are Unicorn darts - Brass fitted with Uniplume flights in the original cardboard box. Inside the box it says 'Fitted with Uniplume flights. Patent and design applications pending. Also on the outside and inside it says 119 which I think could be the weight. (Not in Grams.)



Although Ian did not send a photograph of the darts, I am able to show readers a set of Glyda Darts from my own collection (see above, right). I told Ian

Glyda Darts were not expensive; a budget line in darts. First with turkey feather flights and then later with plastic stems and flights. The company was part of the NODOR group, when it was based in Stratford, east London in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time the Glyda production facility was based in Staffordshire. The brand name later became a registered trade mark of Unicorn Products when they purchased the company from NODOR. Unicorn purchased the Glyda name and all the stock and did offer a range of darts and equipment under the Glyda brand for many years.



As regards the 'Uniplume' set of brass darts, I consulted Stanley Lowy MBE of Unicorn and he replied as follows:

*There is no mystery in the name devised by my father Frank Lowy for what we believe is the first commercial plastic dart flight. It is an ingenious combination of part UNICORN and Plume to give **Uniplume**, 'Plume' being a word for a large feather or bunch of feathers in both the English and French languages! Uniplume must have been introduced as a trade mark about 1945 when the polythene flight first appeared.*

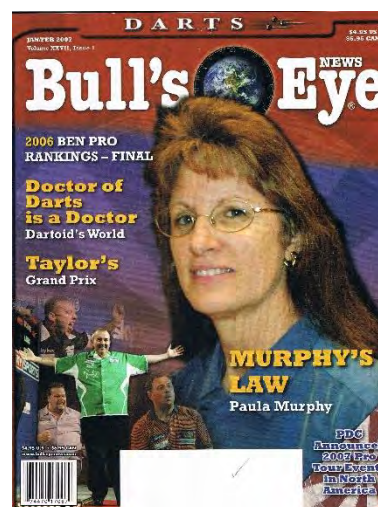
The number 119 quoted by Ian F. does not refer to the weight but to the Pattern Number. In this case the number refers to a 24 grams Medium, Long Smooth Single Grooved darts whereas the set shown here from my own collection is Pattern number 145, indicating that they are 16 grams, semi-medium, Light Taper Nose Rear Knurl darts.

I'll be talking about some more unusual Unicorn darts later on in this issue.

AMBIDEXTROUS DARTERS

Although, when I compiled the April *DDN* I could not think of anyone who can throw darts effectively with either hand, the following story from Lori, a recent new subscriber from the USA, is inspiring. She wrote:

I haven't played darts in 15 years but had been involved for about 10 years prior to blowing my right shoulder out and having to give it up due to the pain. At that time, I lived in Jacksonville, FL USA and had the pleasure of playing with Paula Murphy (now one of our nation's best) [pictured, right, on the front cover of Bull's Eye News – January/February 2007 issue] 6-7 times a week at tournaments. She was already then one of our city and state's best and she asked me to be her partner in a number of tournaments – which was truly an honor.



Unfortunately those days are long gone. After my shoulder issues, I spent the next 14 years working 18 hours a day at my business to keep me from whining over my pain (of not being able to play). About a year ago, I relocated to Belleville, IL (outside of St. Louis, MO)...and have recently decided to learn how to throw darts again, but this time, using my left arm.

I actually think I'm doing better than the typical newbie, as I occasionally fall into a 6 mark or so! However, truth be told, I've only played in about five tournaments as they are not as popular here as they were back when I played before. Seems that leagues are the big thing these days. In fact, I have already started the first one and...joined a different league on Monday nights. So I guess we'll see, as at least this will be a great way to ensure I get my practices in. Not that I don't enjoy practicing, but it is way too easy to procrastinate while I'm sitting on the computer or watching TV!

What a great story! I wish Lori every success.

More on ambidextrous darters next time.

JOCKY WILSON – FEEDBACK

I've received some fascinating feedback from readers in relation to Jocky Wilson. It seems that my article in the March issue about my being interviewed by BBC Scotland about Jocky struck a chord with some of you.

Mick C, who has been involved with darts in England for more than 30 years recalled the time that he hired Jocky for an exhibition night back in 1989 which was then cancelled by

Mick as it clashed with a boxing event. Jocky's agent at the time was contacted and the exhibition cancelled...or so Mick thought.

On the night – Yes, you've guessed it – Jocky turned up. He had travelled down to the venue by train from Kirkcaldy and was ready for action. Mick hurriedly organised about 30 players to come and watch and even play against Jocky at the *Seven Stars* pub. Mick told me, "Jocky enjoyed it so much he stayed on for another day and a half!"

Thanks too to contributor Derek Dobbs who raised, once again, the hoary old question, "Is it true that, in a match against England's Dave Whitcombe, Jocky was so drunk he fell off the stage?"

Funnily enough that was one of the questions the Producer of the BBC Scotland documentary asked me when the crew visited me back in February. I was certain it was a myth. Sadly, Jocky is no longer around to ask so I did the next best thing. I asked Dave Whitcombe. He told me

Jocky wasn't [drunk]. That was an assumption. It was at Lakeside, semi-final when he went 4-1 up but I still won... He threw himself to the floor as a joke as if in a mock faint and as the camera couldn't find him [commentator] Tony Green said he'd fallen off the stage. People who were [actually] there later said he fell off the stage!!

It just goes to show how a myth turns into a fact because it's repeated time and again and people reject what they saw and adopt the lie. At one point even I started to believe it!

The tournament Dave referred to was the semi-final of the 1984 Embassy World Professional Darts Championship, held at Jollees, Stoke-on-Trent. *Darts World* reporter Wayne Baker wrote of that semi-final at the time

...the second [semi-final]...between stablemates Jocky Wilson and Dave Whitcombe provided material for a best seller. In an epic Scotland versus England encounter, Wilson, the 1982 champion, raced into a 4-2 lead only to see the bespectacled Whitcombe level the scores and ease into a slender lead. Sweating profusely in the tie-breaking 11th set the Scot's challenge and championships hopes disintegrated under the Kent player's barrage of shots.



Nowhere in Wayne's article or the accompanying piece 'Behind the scenes...' did he refer to any incident involving either Jocky or Dave. All included in that feature was a photograph of the two players bearing the caption, 'Sharing the agony. Dave Whitcombe and Jocky Wilson in sombre mood.' (Image © PC/DW Archive.)

NEWS OF THE WORLD – JOHN ZIMNOWODA

Now there's a surname to conjure with.

I was researching something else in back issues of *Darts World* magazine dating back to the late 1970s when I noticed a report titled 'John's ticket to Wembley' concerning the USA *News of the World* qualifier for 1978, John Zimnawoda.



Having never heard of this obviously talented US darter, I decided to find out more about John (pictured, left) and his road to the *News of the World* finals.

Certainly John's qualification for the *NoW* was deemed important enough to deserve a

mention in 16th January 1978 issue of *The New York Times*. The report, simply titled *Zimnawoda Wins Darts*, recorded that

John Zimnawoda of Baltimore, a 33-year old carpenter who was competing in his second United States open darts championship, won the singles crown, \$3,600 [approximately £2,000] in prize money and a trip to England, yesterday, at the Biltmore Hotel.

Zimnawoda, who reached the round of 32 last year before being eliminated, this time won 10 straight matches, including a 2-0 triumph over Don Kessler Jnr, of Roebling, New Jersey., in the final.

John's visit to London would be sponsored by the United States Darting Association (USDA), the *New York Times* informing its readers that 'the winner...will receive a new automobile.' What John Zimnawoda and his US supporters would have thought about winning a British Leyland Mini 1000 (see programme cover, right) is not recorded!



Darts World also carried the story of John's in the April 1978 issue, calling Zimnawoda a 'relatively unknown' and added

The event, held on the 19th floor ballroom of the Biltmore Hotel, New York, attracted 700 entries from 38 states. To win his title in the "sudden death" knockout, John won ten straight matches.

All matches were 'best of three' 501, bull set at 5ft 8in and an 8ft throw as per the usual *News of the World* rules.

The programme notes for the *News of the World* 'International Championship' held at the Empire Pool, Wembley on Saturday 29th April 1978 added little to our knowledge of the player except that he was 'from Glen Burnie, Maryland.'



Come the competition for real, John was drawn in the first round to play the UK's Western Counties Divisional Champion, Roger Smith (representing The Three Firms Club, Midsomer Norton, Avon), pictured left with his *News of the World* Divisional trophy. *Darts World* reported briefly on the match played in front of an 8,000 partisan crowd stating

Chosen to compete in the first match were Roger Smith...and America's John Zimnawoda. It is a spot dreaded by even the most hardened champions, and Zimnawoda just couldn't get into his stride, losing in two straight sets.

His prize for making the prestigious final? A 'Valnova' brand suitcase...

So John's visit to London and his appearance in the *News of the World* final were brief but what an experience for the 'relatively unknown' US darter!

That's really where my research into John Zimnawoda seems to end. I can find little more about this American darts ace but perhaps one or more of my US readers might be able to help. If so, please contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

SIZE – IS IT IMPORTANT?

My thanks to Bob F. from Llandudno, Wales who, in February, notified me of a large Unicorn dart that was being auctioned on eBay.

The image, right, (© the unknown seller) shows the dart the size of which is compared to a Diet Coke tin. To obtain more information about this Unicorn product, I contacted my key contact at the company, Stanley Lowy, MBE and he told me



The dart illustrated is one of our Trophy Darts described on page 60 of the 1959 Unicorn Book of Darts details of which you can see by reference to the link and paging through to page 60. These Trophy darts were very popular for many years. The plinth could be engraved with a winner's name and other relevant information. [Click on the link below and find page 60.]

<http://www.unicornsartboard.com/media/wysiwyg/pdfs/UnicornBooksOfDarts/Unicorn%20Book%20of%20Darts%201959.pdf>

The Unicorn Trophy Darts were exact replicas of Patterns 102 (25 gm, Medium, Semi-long Knurled Barrel), 155 (24 gm, Medium, Semi-long Torpedo, four grooves), 189 (18 gm, Semi-medium, Semi-long close ridge knurl) and 192 (20 gm, Semi-medium, Semi-long smooth

beaded) on a larger scale. The description of the Trophy Dart in the 1959 *Unicorn Book of Darts* states as follows



Approx. 11" high, mounted in black plastic plinth, they are the ideal Darts Prize and make attractive centre pieces for window display. Chrome, Silver or pure Gold Plate. Plinth can be engraved or engraved silver plaque can be readily affixed to it if trophy is required for prize.

That image of the Trophy Dart made me think of a photograph or newspaper cutting I saw many years ago, featuring John Lowe with a much, much larger dart, again, produced by Unicorn. The photo of the great man with the great dart (left) is dated 1988 and appeared in the *Daily Mirror* that year. Stanley Lowy of Unicorn commented as follows:

On the same page 60 is mentioned the dart with which John Lowe was photographed. That exhibition dart which stands today in the vestibule of our Edenbridge, Kent offices is a ten-times replica of our 192 barrel. The latter was made for a Sports Trade Exhibition where we held amongst our visitors a 'guess-the-weight of the dart' competition. Subsequently that dart travelled all over the UK and indeed to many countries of the world.

Indeed, the *Book of Darts* back in 1959 described this 'Giant Dart Display' as

A wonderful attraction for special window display, similar to Trophy, but stands approx. 4' 0" high, solid brass, chromium-plated, in exact proportion

to standard darts. Can be loaned out to distributors.

PAT FLETCHER

In last month's issue, under the article titled **Badge Collecting**, I mentioned the South Pacific Darts Federation run by Pat Fletcher in Sydney, Australia in the late 1970s. I asked *DDN* readers if they could help track Pat down. Sad to report that Pat is no longer with us. Connie Spinks of the Australian Legends wrote to Dr. Eddie Norman as follows:

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news but Pat passed away 2 years ago. He loved darts and worked to the end fostering goodwill in darts. He was a driving force behind Australian Legends Darts, an over 45 age group, which has over 1000 members. He is sadly missed in the darting community.

On hearing the news Eddie Norman told me

It was indeed sad to hear about Pat Fletcher. Pat was a good friend of mine, who I dealt with in business and on my travels. I last saw Pat about five years ago in Australia, and he gave me a Bullseye Bully sat on the Aussie Flag, beats me where he ever got it from, but he insisted I have it as 'the worst darts player in the sport'. A lot of people do say that. Pat organised several trips to Australia for Leighton with me and for Alan Evans.

Eddie added

The badge you have for 1977 [shown on page 8 of DDN #109], Leighton went on to New Zealand after that tour and there were very limited badges for that leg of the tour as well. The New Zealand tour in 1977 was organised by John McCormick (RIP) owner of Puma Darts, the firm is now run by his son and daughter.

Leighton then went to Fiji for three exhibitions in 1977. We had only 30 Badges made for that leg of the tour (Fiji) so I think they would indeed be rare.

Pat ran the South Pacific Darts Federation and affiliated it to the United Kingdom Darts Federation hence 'banned by the BDO'. But Pat, like myself, was a free spirit and we remained friends. [Note: At that time any darts organisation that was set up effectively in opposition to the BDO was outlawed and their registered players banned from playing in any BDO tournaments.]

As you know he was joint organiser of The Over 45 years old legends, which is still going strong. Connie who gave me the sad news on Pat is the New South Wales secretary of the Legends. I had hoped to catch up with Pat this year.

APOLOGIES - My sincere apologies if my story about darts post-Brexit fooled anyone. Of course, #109 was sent out on 1st April and thus regular readers would have been looking for something that was trying to catch them out. Subscriber George Hakim said of the Perspex screen gag, "Patrick. I saw right through it." (Yes. Thank you George.)

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