

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

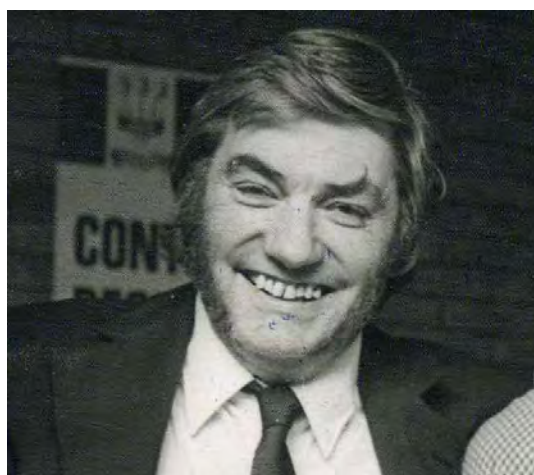
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OLLY CROFT O.B.E.

For in excess of four decades there has been no more charismatic, dedicated or controversial character in world darts than Olly Croft OBE. Sadly Olly passed away last November at the grand old age of 90. The world of darts just won't be the same without him.



I was privileged to have met Olly on a number of occasions and always found him to be very amenable and helpful. He and his colleagues on the BDO transformed darts during the 1970s and we who love the game of darts should all be extremely grateful.

When Olly first joined a darts team in the London Super League in 1967 he was hooked and soon became involved with the organisation of the league. At that time darts was in the doldrums and although there was an extant national darts association it was floundering and becoming ineffective. Olly, a self-made businessman, visualised the potential of darts and set about changing the game forever. He had 'massive aspirations' for darts locally, nationally and globally and he was to achieve them all.

After several meetings with interested parties during 1971 and 1972, Olly invited darts organisers from across the country to meet at his home in Muswell Hill in north London in January 1973 to formally discuss the setting up of a new national darts organisation. The British Darts Organisation (BDO) was established and from that day forth the game of darts was transformed, first into a national and subsequently, by the establishment of the World Darts Federation (WDF) in 1977, a world sport. Darts was no longer confined to the public house. It was all around, at live venues and on television.

Players who had only previously played in pubs for money found themselves thrust on stage in front of the television cameras at major BDO-organised events; some, such as Eric Bristow, John Lowe and Jocky Wilson, becoming household names.

It seemed that nothing could stop the darts juggernaut, ruthlessly driven by Olly and the men and women of the BDO and beside him at all times at the wheel was his beloved wife Lorna. There have been some challenges to and criticisms of the BDO over the years but these were all overcome. Everyone toed the BDO line. Darts was Olly Croft and Olly Croft was darts.

But when the key terrestrial TV companies changed tack in the mid-to-late 1980s and more or less completely ceased broadcasting darts, the BDO seemed unable or perhaps unwilling to maintain the momentum and there was grumbling in the growing ranks of professional

players. This resulted in what has become known as ‘The Split’ where sixteen so-called ‘rebel’ professionals, in company with their managers and some members of the darts industry, broke away from the BDO and formed the World Darts Council (WDC) later to become known as the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC). Darts now had two organising bodies so the legal wrangling began.

Olly remained at the head of the BDO through good times and not so good times until 2011 when he was unceremoniously relieved of his position within the organisation by people he had always considered his friends; something that Olly had much difficulty coming to terms with.

His 40-year association with the BDO had ended but his love of darts never waned and he kept an eye on all that was going on with the ‘new’ BDO and indeed with the progress of the PDC.



I met Olly on a number of occasions (the meeting shown here was at the BDO Teenage Open held at Towerlands, Braintree, Essex in 2010). We would discuss everything to do with darts. In fact we did have a couple of meetings at his home in Muswell Hill during which we talked about Olly writing his side of the story. Regrettably, that project was ultimately shelved. What a story that would have been!

Sadly, the legend that is Olly Croft passed away on 23rd November 2019. My sincere condolences to his family and friends.

OLLY AND THE WINMAU DARTBOARD COMPANY

Olly Croft and the BDO have for many years (in fact until 2019) been directly connected to that of my sponsor, the WINMAU Dartboard Company. What follows is my version of that association that in 1973.

Since just after the Second World War the company had been known as H. A. Kicks & Sons. In 1973 Kicks’ became the first dartboard company to introduce silk-screen printing on the face of their dartboards but, more importantly, that year was to prove a major breakthrough for the company when Harry Kicks (senior) forged a vital deal with Olly to supply top quality dartboards to all of the major BDO events.

From then on, the Kicks dartboards would be the official dartboards of the BDO and be allowed to carry that organisation’s logo on its advertising as it was ‘Officially recognised and supplied’ to the BDO for nation-wide tournaments and, shortly afterwards through the World Darts Federation (WDF) numerous international contests. The strength of the Winmau/BDO relationship was reinforced when in 1976 the company’s advertising included alongside the Winmau logo, that of the BDO.

In 1975 when the recording company Phonogram ended their two-year sponsorship of the World Masters darts tournament, Olly spoke to Harry snr suggesting that perhaps he might consider putting his company name to and money into the Masters. (The advertisement from



the November 1975 issue of *Darts World* (see left) shows the company name and the “WINMAU” branded dartboard.) It was during these discussions that Olly suggested changing the actual company name to WINMAU. Harry took Olly’s suggestion on board and in early 1976 the name of the company was changed permanently. An advertisement similar to the one shown here featured in the April 1976 issue of *Darts World* showing the new name followed by

‘(formerly H. A. Kicks & Sons)’

Thus the WINMAU World Masters was born as was a decades-long partnership; a sponsorship that lasted until 2018.

Over the years a fantastic working relationship was witnessed and many long-term friendships forged between WINMAU and the BDO and particularly between the company and Olly Croft.

On receiving news of Olly’s passing the company posted

We are incredibly saddened to hear that Olly Croft OBE has passed away at the age of 90. We can’t put into words the love, passion, dedication and hard work that Olly brought to the sport of darts, and everyone involved owes him the biggest thank you for taking the game out of the pub and bringing it to huge television audiences.

Ian Flack, Sales and Marketing Director, at WINMAU added

“I am heartbroken today. I’ve known Olly for 20 years and consider him and his family to be close friends of myself and the company. Olly was one of our biggest supporters and there is no doubt that he has contributed towards our success and was the visionary that helped propel darts into the public limelight. Olly was an all-round great guy... Our thoughts are with Olly’s family, friends and all that knew him. I will miss him deeply and will always love and respect him as a friend and a businessman.”

W.R. LOFTUS LTD. – FEEDBACK

In last month’s issue (#117) I wrote, in response to an enquiry from Denis Baker about his set of ‘Loftus’ brass darts. Subscriber Chris Murray, who also happens to be a colleague of mine on the committee of the Pub History Society (www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk) recognised the name and wrote

Thanks for another good read. Regarding W R Loftus Ltd of Tottenham Court Road, they did indeed stamp their name on everything!

They were much involved in the cocktail craze of the 1920s and 30s in terms of manufacturing shakers, jigger measures as well as mugs, beer engines and other pewter ware.

...and, as was shown last month, they gave away (or sold) sets of darts to promote their business. Thanks Chris.

MEMORIES OF JOCKY WILSON – PART FOUR

In this fourth instalments of stories about the legendary Jocky Wilson recounted to freelance journalist Eddie Reid by the former Scottish No. 1. Rab Smith, Rab recalls Jocky in the bathroom...

Rab can't remember the exact venue at which this next episode occurred nor indeed the year. However, he said that it was definitely in England. The Scotland team was Rab (Captain), Jocky and Angus Ross, so it was probably a Home International match against England. The Scotland Manager at the time was Alastair Petrie.



[Alastair Petrie (pictured left) was Scotland's Team Manager from 1977 to 1983 and then again from 1988-1990.] The match Rab recalls was, I suggest, during that initial period.

When free time was available prior to a tournament, Rab and Angus used it to shower, relax and prepare mentally for the upcoming event. Jocky, however, had his own pre-tournament regime. Firstly, he would skip the shower part of it and would go out looking for a pub, in order to put in some extra 'practise time'.

On this occasion, it became obvious to Alastair Petrie that Jocky had been missing more than one shower. He took Rab aside and said, "When he (Jocky) comes back, have a word with him and make sure that he has a shower before he goes on that stage tomorrow." Rab promised that he would do his best. Jocky eventually came back, slightly the worse for wear, so Rab decided to leave their chat until the following day.

Next morning, Rab assumed his Captain's role and rallied his troops. He said, "Right lads, we're going to be at our very best today and we are going to start by freshening up with each of us having a shower. You're first, Jocky!" And he threw him a fresh bath-towel. Jocky, who was still bleary-eyed, didn't even question his Captain's instruction. He took the towel and obediently trundled off to the bathroom.

When Jocky emerged from the bathroom with the towel wrapped around him, Rab went into the bathroom for his shower. The first thing he noticed was that the shower basin was bone dry and the shower head was cold. The sink, however had droplets of water in it.

Rab smiled...and consoled himself that Jocky had at least made some effort.

© 2019 Eddie Reid and Rab Smith. Reproduced here with permission. Image courtesy of the PC/DW Archive and with thanks to Jim MacNeil.]

AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES – WHO’S NEXT? – FEEDBACK

Brian Bishton of South Wales has replied to my question in last month’s *DDN*, (which was also posed in a recent edition of *Darts World* magazine) “Which darts player would you like to see write his or her auto/biography who hasn’t already done so?”

Brian did not actually suggest any specific person but thought I might like to consider writing a “Where are they now?”-type of book tracing the careers of the sixteen so-called ‘rebels’ who left the British Darts Organisation (BDO) in 1993 to form the World Darts Council (WDC) which, of course, we all know later became the Professional Darts Council (PDC).

I suggested to Brian that, if such a book was to be written, a great deal of the information needed would be found in the auto/biographies already published by those who were amongst the ‘rebels’, John Lowe (*Old Stoneface*, 2005), Eric Bristow (*The Crafty Cockney*, 2008) and Phil Taylor (*The Power*, 2003) and not forgetting the chronicler of modern darts Sid Waddell (*Bellies and Bullseyes*, 2007). To bring some balance Bobby George, who remained with the BDO, had his own views (*Bobby Dazzler – My Story*, 2006).

As far as I am aware, none of the other surviving rebels is considering writing his life story. If seeking information then culling national and some local newspaper’s articles about ‘The Split’ and the immediate aftermath might produce some indicators but, like most key stories in darts, they only hold the interest of the press for a short while. Such was the case with ‘The Split’.

Of those players who haven’t as yet put pen to paper (or digits to keyboard), I’d like Cliff Lazarenko to have a go if only for the reason that, when I met him about 20 years ago, he told me that any book he wrote would include “stories you would not believe.”

I believe him.

Returning to Brian’s idea for the book, I think we know where many of the ‘rebels’ are as they are either still playing or are closely involved with darts in another way. These include Keith Deller, Jamie Harvey, Bob Anderson, Dennis Priestley, Rod Harrington, Mike Gregory, Alan Warriner (-Little) and Peter Evison. Sadly, of course we lost Jocky Wilson back in 2012 and Eric in 2018.

That leaves Ritchie Gardner, Kevin Spiolek and Chris Johns. Both Ritchie and Kevin are shown online to be ‘retired’ as indeed is Chris Johns (pictured, right). Chris we know was a ‘returner’ to the BDO (as was Mike Gregory) but where is *he* now?

What a story he must have to tell.

(Image: PC Darts Archive. Used with permission.)



DR. EDDIE NORMAN – THE RETIREMENT

Another man, very much still with us, who was there at the very beginning is Dr. Eddie Norman. Indeed he has been in the darts business for nearly sixty years but early in 2019, having initially retired in 2003, announced that he was fully retiring from this month.

An enthusiast and amateur player long before he saw the business potential of darts, Eddie promoted and supported the sport across the globe whilst, at the same time, raising thousands of pounds for various charities.



Eddie, pictured here in the 1970s, founded The House of Darts International in Bristol in September 1961 and on the fourth day of that month sent his first parcel of darts overseas to Queensland, Australia. From these small beginnings The House of Darts International went from strength to strength. Every year 98% of their products were sold to overseas markets and the company served more than 90 countries with their diverse darts-related products.

Eddie, ever a trailblazer, even managed to sell his products to countries where the sport of darts had previously been unknown such as Fiji, Guatemala and Ecuador. Where Eddie Norman led other British darts firms followed. Recognising these new export opportunities created by Eddie and The House of Darts International for the UK competitors moved into the newly-created international markets.

Eddie Norman retired from the House of Darts International in May 2003 but not from business or darts. He set himself up as a one-man firm – as an International Darts and Small Business Consultant. Using his knowledge of the overseas darts markets his consultancy provided market research feedback to (undisclosed) British darts firms. In addition Eddie spoke on their behalf at sports conferences, exhibitions and darts tournaments around the world, basically marrying up and introducing an overseas distributor to British darts suppliers.

Eddie was one of the men who helped set up the BDO back in 1973 and thus gave new life to darts. Now after more than five and a half decades he has decided to retire *properly*.

As an historian I cannot emphasise enough the role that Eddie has played throughout the decades to make darts what it is today: a global sport. Through his individual work he has taken darts to the furthestmost corners of the world even to places where they thought they didn't even know they wanted to play it! Eddie's enthusiasm always won them over.

Eddie told me recently

I have had a good run and have been expecting this day for many years but still a little sad...I have trailed my personal dartboard and darts (gifts from NODOR) several times around the world and recently took down copies of certificates from the Queen from my USA office which were always a great talking point to visitors.

I definitely will not be doing any more lectures...although I may possibly turn up merely as a spectator at some darts events, but definitely no more living on planes, airport meals and living out of a suitcase. No more preparing speeches, no more twenty four hour flights to Australia. No more three flights in one day across the USA and Canada.

(The photo here shows Eddie 'on tour' in Columbia in early 2018.)

When I finally unpack my suitcase in a few weeks as far as darts lectures are concerned that is it. I think then that I have done my share to spread the sport of darts across the globe and that there is not much of the planet I have not put down my feet on. Whether others will follow in my footsteps I do not know.



A well-deserved retirement for a man who has done so much for darts.

From a personal point of view Eddie has been an incredible help to me with my research over the years for which I am eternally grateful. He has helped promote my work through his lectures and increased the number of subscribers to my *Dr. Darts' Newsletter (DDN)* merely by mentioning it to those who came to hear him. Needless to say, his extensive knowledge has helped me immeasurably in my research. I am hoping that after 1st January I will still be allowed to pick his brains about darts and the part he played in its global development.

I wish Eddie a long and very happy retirement.

DARTS ON TV AND FILM

Following my publishing a link to a brewery advertisement in #117 subscriber Brian H. writes



Hi Patrick. Just managed to check out the link for the Vaux advert. Always great to see darts on film, however briefly!

It reminded me I watched "The Cruel Sea" not long ago & there was a scene where (I think) an ARP warden is playing a policeman between raids. Interesting to see the board and the darts and flights they're using.

Brian and I had earlier exchanged e-mails relating to the film *It Always Rains On A Sunday* which featured the legendary Jim Pike and his *News of the World* Team of Champions' colleague Leo Newstead (the latter pictured, left, in 1949).

Brian added

I was wondering if you knew of any similar British war-time or post war films that feature darts in the background. Maybe your readers can remember some? If so, it would be interesting to check them out.

I replied

I enjoyed that brief Vaux advert too. It was also significant for me as a pub historian as the pub in question was demolished soon afterwards.

Coincidentally, I received an e-mail from one of my USA subscribers talking about darts on film. I replied saying that I seemed to recall years ago that there was a discrete website where people could report 'spotting' a dartboard or darts-playing on film or TV. The list was endless and this was a couple of decades ago.

That subscriber was Sharon Huffman of the Southside Darts League, Chicago and I told her that my wife Maureen and I both look out for darts and dartboard anywhere on TV and film. One film that sprang to mind was the remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* starring Donald Sutherland where a dart is used as a weapon. More recently on TV, Tyrone in *Coronation Street* [a long-running soap here in the UK] hung a WINMAU dartboard on his wall. Dartboards regularly appear in apartments in the US TV drama *NCIS*. I also told Sharon that I am fascinated by the height at which some of the dartboards are hung.

Do *you* remember the website I referred to above that featured a seemingly endless list of darts-playing and dartboards featured (or at least just hanging on the walls) in films and on TV.

AND FINALLY...

A very Happy New Year to you all.

Patrick

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