

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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STEVE RETIRES AFTER 36 YEARS OF REPORTING DARTS

Steve Chapman, whose reports have appeared in *Darts World* and *DDN* over the years and for the *Plymouth Herald* for over three and a half decades, has announced his retirement from writing about the sport he loves. Steve is pictured below with his wife Margaret. He and I have never met but our passion for darts has meant that we have been friends (via email) for a good number of years.



The official public announcement about Steve's retirement was made in the *Herald* on Tuesday 5th May and that article is reproduced here, with permission.

After a span of 36 years, The Herald is sadly losing its darts correspondent due to his continuing poor health with stage four metastatic prostate cancer.

Steve Chapman, who will be 70 on New Year's Eve, has made the hard decision to put down his pen and relinquish his ties with the popular column that was first published on Tuesday, September 25, 1984.

He has though a link with the Herald that stretches back 53 years and began a five-year apprenticeship as a compositor on Monday, March 6, 1967.

Herald Sports Editor Stuart James said: "I am really saddened that Steve has taken the decision to step down, but his reasons for doing so are entirely understandable.

"Steve's columns would always arrive well in advance of deadline and always include pictures which, in the modern age, are so important.

"I must admit, I was unaware of just how far back Steve's association with the Herald stretches until he told me. But it is a mark of the man that he has provided such accurate and detailed reports throughout that time, always on time and without fail.

"I cannot speak highly enough of Steve. I thank him on behalf of the Herald and its Sports Editors throughout those 36 years and I wish him all the very best for the future".

It was as early as 1969 that Steve wrote his first darts report and several more followed over the years but it was not until 1984 that Steve got asked if he would be keen to have his own darts column by the sports editor at the time David Chapple.

Steve told me that he had the pleasure to cover three “darts dynastys” in Plymouth over the years.

The first included Cliff “Ticker” Inglis (pictured here in 1977) who was the first player to win the Winmau World Masters in 1974, Fred Pritchard who played in the city from 1953 to 1984 and was South West Area News of the World champion no fewer than 15 times.



The third player from that era was Timmy Green who began playing in 1966 and finished in the mid 80's and won the Golden Games at the Top Rank Suite on March 28, 1976, in front of a packed audience and the cameras of Westward Television. He defeated Eric Bristow to win the top prize of £500 which was a tidy sum in 1976.



The second darts era that Steve covered featured the likes of John Goves who did not start playing until he was 38 but in 1988, he was the winner of the Whitbread Dartsathlon from an entry of more than 650 players. John was also the inaugural winner of the much-coveted Champion of Champions tournament, he appeared in five finals in total and won the title on another two occasions.[The photo, left shows John being congratulated after his 1988 Dartsathlon win.]

Flynn Jones arrived in Plymouth in 1988 and won five Champion of Champions crowns as well as numerous individual titles while making up the trio from that era is Ralph Lancaster. Ralph began playing in 1967 and is still throwing at a very good standard today.

In 1989, Lancaster and Goves reached the semi-final of a very big national doubles event at the time called the John Bull Bitter Pairs.

More recently Maria O'Brien has carried the flag for both Plymouth and Devon across Europe and as well as winning an unparalleled number of individual trophies in her early years has also emerged the winner of the Romanian Classic and in 2018 was rewarded for her efforts when she was selected to represent her country.

Simon Stevenson, a winner of five Champion of Champions titles and the first Plymouth darts player to win a PDC Tour card and is still playing on the professional circuit.

Steve said the most recent player to come to the fore is Keelan Kay, who could go on to do wonders. He won his first darts title at the age of 14 and his rise to stardom has included him claiming the singles and doubles titles at the 2019 World Youth Championships.

Still only 18, Keelan is currently playing on the PDC Development Tour.

Steve is probably best known for starting the Champion of Champions darts tournament. It is played for every year for a local charity and Steve ran it for 27 years before first contracting prostate cancer in 2011.

Champion of Champions was born out of the Herald having a big publicity push for the Plymouth and District Leukaemia Fund in 1984. The Herald editor in chief at the time Alan Goode, asked Steve whether he could do any fund raising through his darts column for the charity and Champion of Champions was born.

Steve raised thousands of pounds over his 27-year tenure and included Plymouth charities like St Luke's Hospice, Jeremiah's Journey, Devon Air Ambulance, Plymouth Lifeboats, Guide Dogs for the Blind and various departments of Derriford Hospital including the Intensive Care Unit, Oncology Department and the Primrose Centre.

One of Steve's proudest moments came in 2011 when he was awarded the Herald and First Devon and Cornwall Gold Star award for his charity work in November of that year.

The Herald Editor, Bill Martin said at the time: "Steve has been familiar to the paper for many, many years. His commitment to this enjoyable but time-consuming tournament shows real spirit and its people like him, plugging away in the background to raise funds for charity, who most deserve to be recognised. Well done Steve and all the best for the future".

That award was made one month before he relinquished the reins of Champion of Champions to James Cook who has since carried on the good work with aplomb that was inaugurated by Steve all those years ago.

In the eight years that the tournament has been under James's custody, he has raised over £30,000.

James said "Steve's passion and commitment, as well as his unique journalistic style, brought about exposure and innovation that players would not have received without his input.

"The weekly darts round-up has made household names, with players concerning themselves not only with winning points as a team but scoring enough tons or 180s to get a mention by Steve the following Tuesday.

"Coupled with this, the two most prominent changes in our game over the last 40 years came about as the brain-child of Steve Chapman.

"Fast forward a couple of decades from the Champion of Champion inauguration to 2008 and he was at it again with the implementation of the 501 Top 20 League.

"Before this point almost all leagues played a single leg, 1001 format in the individual phase of play. This league was a real trailblazer with its more professional best of five, 501 format in the singles and this appealed to players across the city. Nowadays, almost all of the top leagues have adopted a similar format.

“Over the years there has also been a marked increase in players achieving county selection with some even joining the professional ranks. In at least some part, those achievements can be attributed to the shift in philosophy brought about by Steve”.

It will probably come as no surprise to the city’s darting family that The Herald are delighted to announce that James Cook will be our new darts correspondent, once the world returns to some sort of normality following the current Covid 19 pandemic.

After accepting the post, James said: “On a personal note I have mixed emotions about taking over from my friend, Steve Chapman. It’s obviously an incredible honour but also a little daunting to try to fill the shoes of someone so influential, prominent and seemingly everlasting.

“This announcement for me personally, is tinged with sadness because he is in my eyes ‘Mr Plymouth Darts’. Not having Steve involved just doesn’t seem right at all”.

Steve told me that it was with a heavy heart and only after a lot of soul-searching that he relinquished his post at the *Herald*. He added

The response from local darts players as well as from Cornwall and Exeter based county players has been heart-warming. Among all the personal tributes that were paid to me on social media, I received this from the current England No.1 lady player Maria O’Brien, which was quite touching and really means a lot to me. [Image of Maria courtesy of Steve Chapman.]

Maria’s post reads

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank Steve Chapman, who announced his retirement today due to his health reasons, for all the publicity he has given me via the Herald and social media posts from my first local title right up until where we are now in my darting career. You have travelled this journey with me and made sure all my family and friends are kept up to date with where in the world I am every other weekend! I can’t thank you enough and I hope you carry on fighting hard love you lots xx



When darts resumes Steve says he *may* continue with his website www.threeinthebed.co.uk but that he will make that decision when the time comes. Best wishes to you both.

JACK AMBLER

Subscriber Steve Cook contacted me recently thanking me for his *DDN*, providing me with some feedback and asking if I knew anything about a darts player named Jack Ambler. Steve wrote

Absolutely brilliant. Thanks for your reply and time. I am now down in Hampshire having taught here all my career, but originally from Ramsgate, Mick Norris territory. Looking

through your News of the World section, I also note sadly that The Earl St Vincent and King of Denmark where he was registered for both finals are now flats and a Chinese restaurant. Ah well.

It is with regret that so many pubs, and not only darts pubs, have fallen by the wayside. Covid-19 will doubtless accelerate these closures with the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) newspaper *What's Brewing* predicted a massive 40,000 Covid-related closures in future months in the UK alone unless the Government provides urgent and immediate support to the Trade.

Come to think of it, if Mick Norris (winner of the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship in 1977) had been a well-known local poet or writer, he'd have had a blue plaque on a wall (somewhere) surely. By the way, it's easy for closed pubs to become small supermarkets or Chinese or Indian restaurants as they were already licensed premises so few objections in that respect could be raised.

I digress. Steve Cook continued

If incidentally you have a pictures, info on Jack Ambler, particularly the darts he threw I would be most grateful. I was talking to Bob Livingstone who played for London and Middlesex in the late 70s and his name came up. I have scoured my vast collection of Darts World but can't find anything...yet.



First I referred to Derek Brown's *Guinness Book of Darts* (1981) and discovered the following:

Ambler, Jack (b. 21 Oct. 1935) is the elder statesman of the London County side. The only man to have played every season in the Greater London Super League since it began in 1966. Was brought up on money matches, won the National Teams championship with the Brown Bear, Hanworth back in 1964, and began 1981 with 48 first-team wins for London. One of the game's great characters.

I found a couple of photos in my archive. The one of Jack (right) actually bears a caption (sadly not dated) on the reverse which states:

Jack Ambler pictured after winning his 50th 'A' Team game for London from 70 appearances. His luckless opponent this time was Jack Routledge of the West Midlands who could only stand by and watch as Ambler leading 2-0 took the match with a brilliant 13 dart leg – 100-135-180-46-40 (game shot). Jack played in the very first B.D.O. fixture for London and since 1973 has missed only two games. Before the formation of the B.D.O. Jack made several appearances for the London representative side and is the only player to have played in the London Super League every season since its inception in 1966.



During my research I also discovered this undated photograph of Jack (above) throwing nails. The caption on the back of the photo states 'Former England International Jackie Ambler performing an exhibition with 4" nails at the Maxilla Club.'

No other information is provided.

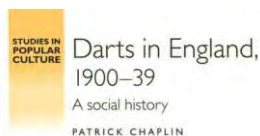
THANKS DDN AND “WHY YOUR LAST BOOK?”

My thanks to Robert D. from the US who recently wrote:

Given everything that is going on in the world, I wanted to take the time to thank you for these newsletters and everything else you have contributed to the darts universe. Also, why would "The Sport of Pints" be your last book? And would you like another set of eyes on it as you work through it? I'd be happy to offer any sort of help that you might need or want.

I replied

That's very kind of you Robert. Positive feedback like that tends to spur me on to another issue. The Sport of Pints will be my last book on darts, unless that book becomes too unwieldy and has to be split into two. It'll be my ninth book on the sport, including those co-authored with John Lowe (2), Bobby George and Trina Gulliver. I'm also getting on a bit so need to slow down.



Since replying to Robert, it does look like the period *The Sport of Pints* is scheduled to cover (1939 to 2000) will have to be split into two; either that or I bring the ‘end date’ forward to, say, 1973 and then leave it up to others to write the history of darts in the first ‘modern era’, from the establishment of the British Darts Organisation (BDO) onwards.

For those who want to read about the history of the sport of darts pre-1939 then I suggest you consider buying my previous work (based on my PhD) *Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history* which is still available in paperback from the Manchester University Press priced at £16.99 (excluding postage and packing). The link is

<https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/search-results/?contributor=Patrick+Chaplin>

LIMERICK COMPETITION

Thanks to everyone who entered the limerick competition featured in last month's *DDN*. In the end I couldn't make my mind up out of two excellent ideas (one being ‘snail’ (suggested by ‘Markio’; the other being ‘gallon of’ submitted by Chris K.) so I decided to send both of them some sets of my exclusive ‘DR. DARTS’ flights. Well done guys. Your flights should be with you at any moment.

And talking of flights...

THE S-A FLIGHT (AND THE STORY OF THE FLIGHT)

Stephen L. emailed me to ask if I recognised the flight shown below (left). He was looking for information for a friend and hoped that I would be able to find them for him.



But, I have to admit, it had me foxed completely so I contacted various friends in the darts business and, as always, one of the came up trumps: Stanley Lowy MBE of UNICORN.

Stanley told me

S-A was a sort of brand, but they were mostly referred to as 'Unicorn Self Adhesive Flights'. We called the shape 'Special'... [and] made them in about 1980 for two or three years only. They are not still available.

Stanley was then good enough to incorporate in his response a full history of the dart flight in relation to the eventual production and subsequent cessation of the S-A flight. He told me

The paper flight was originally just that. A folded stiffish square piece of paper folded in such a way that it could be inserted into a cane split to accept it. The improvement was to a) heavily gum the paper so a user could lick it when the fold had been established and secure the four wings formed b) printing stripes in colour that would mimic the feather of which more expensive dart flights were made or printed with an advertising slogan such as beer brands. The popular brand were called Abbey Stripes by the Abbey Dart Company a competitor in the early days of Unicorn. We called ours Unistripe Flights and sold them until about 1984.



[The example shown here is the Unicorn 'Comet' gummed paper flight. (My personal collection.)]

Stanley continued

Then came the polyester flight which sold under the brand name Polyflite, which although a Unicorn Registered Trade Mark, has become generic for flights made of polyester! But the original polyester flights were plain colours or hot foil stamped and some players hankered after the flexibility of the paper flight but desired the durability of polyester. So we developed the flight shown in your photograph.

They were our S-A Flights meaning Self Adhesive flights; they were soft and could carry much better printing than polyester flights at the time. They were constructed in the same way as the old gummed paper flights but they were factory folded and supplied ready to use. Shortly improvements were made to the polyester available and it was possible to produce colourful flights with printed designs of all types and the demand for Self Adhesive waned.

Thank you Stanley. As always your advice and guidance is much appreciated.

DETACH-O-POINT – HAVE YOU SEEN THESE BEFORE?

That's the question asked of me by Darren; the legend who is Darts Nutz.



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Darren sent me several images of the 'Detach-O-Point' darts (see photo © Darts Review Channel) but, try as I may, I cannot find any information about them. The company name is simply 'LL' which I have never seen before. My guess is that they are 1950s but that, as I say, is only a guess.

The darts unique feature is the 'adjuster'; like a miniature spanner that is used to fit, remove, or replace the points of the dart. Although Detach-O-Point not the first darts to have removable point, these were probably revolutionary in their time.

Darren told me

I don't seem to have the skill like you of finding info about them. [Nor do I Darren in this particular case!] I did a quick search of the patent number but I am either searching in the wrong places or it's not online.

Would be great if you have any info to share on them though and if so I can probably do a quick update some time. I had three sets but two are the same; it's just one is chrome and the other brass. I have had a message from a guy on Facebook who bought a different model recently; just waiting to hear back from him if it has a number. Other than what's on the box though I can't seem to find much more about them. Where the best is place to search for these patent numbers and are records kept for everything that's been patented?

Tracing Patent Numbers can be extremely difficult. I told Darren

As regards Patent Nos, you've probably checked them through the Patent Office, now the Intellectual Property Office, at <https://www.ipso.gov.uk/p-ipsom.htm>. Adding 'Darts' to the IPO search engine should bring you hundreds of darts-related patents.

*The trouble is that so many patent numbers were **provisional**, that is before the actual number was allocated. 'Pat. Pend' is so often seen on darts products and was a temporary number allocated to ensure that a company's or individuals' idea was protected. It also enabled the product to be quickly put on the market until the Patent No. proper was allocated.*

The provisional and the actual don't ever seem to have been the same. Knowing the name of the patentee always helps but there's no indication on any of the boxes of who owns the company; which is rare anyway.

To learn more about these darts (and to meet Darren) just click on the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcluDdmyt8w>

If anyone can help provide further information about Detach-O-Point darts or what the 'LL' company name actually stands for and where it was based please contact me direct on patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

A TIMELY REMINDER

Welcome back to the fold, Colin Mackay. Colin recently contacted me to say

I'm...from Sunderland who, like yourself, has a great love for the game of darts. I was included on your mailing list for a number of years but changed email address and forgot to request an update. I've just come across a draft e-mail I intended to send you which prompted me. I always loved your newsletters and look forward to receiving them again. Keep up the good work.

Colin, it's a pleasure to have you back on board.

Colin's request serves as a timely reminder to all subscribers that, if you change your email address and still want to receive DDN then please let know.

“TWICE AS BUSY” – OCKEYSRUS

In the last *DDN* I reported that, even during lockdown, the darts industry is doing fine. This has been reaffirmed by at least one entrepreneur, Barry Steptoe at OckeyRus.com.

Barry wrote *Thank you for another excellent issue.*

Just thought I would drop you a line (not done it before, don't know why). I was reading your intro in DDN about the Covid 19 virus etc. and people being forced to stay away from the pub and we are now playing darts at home a lot more. I can back that up because I am twice as busy making my oches than I have ever been (not complaining).



That's great news Barry. Subscribers can find out more at OckeyRus.com. (There are of course other portable oches on the market.)

FEEDBACK – APRIL FOOL -

Apologies to everyone who was caught out by my April Fool story in #121. One subscriber from the USA, who will remain anonymous, wrote

“Great read, thank you! I must admit tho', I am unclear on what you meant by the “non-story.” Is that just an April Fools one-liner or did I miss something?”

I then informed him that he'd missed it and that it was on pages 5 & 6. The 'New Organisation' piece was a hoax to which he replied

“Ha! I hope it doesn't speak ill of me that I swallowed that whole. It seemed like something a Brit would do, no offense.”

He was right. On re-reading it, it *did* seem a terribly British thing to do!

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