

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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MI9 THE 'BLITZKRIEG' AND 'GILBOARD' DARTBOARDS

It is always of interest to me what other darts researchers are into and the most interesting I discovered recently was David King's investigations into the use of dartboards during the Second World War for secretive purposes. And who better to report on those investigations than David himself? He writes:

Like Patrick, I like to research the history of the sport. However, the most intriguing part of the research is you never know where it may take you or indeed how long this may take.

Since early last year I have been delving into the history of two dartboards, the MI9 'Gilboard' that was supplied to Prisoners of War (PoWs) during World War Two, and the 'Blitzkrieg' Dartboard apparently supplied by ARP supplies

MI9 (Military Intelligence 19) was formed in 1939 and was part of a much wider British Intelligent group. Their aim was facilitating the escape of British prisoners of war (PoWs), and their return to the UK. They would train service personnel on escape and evasion techniques and help the morale of PoWs by remaining in contact with them during their captivity.

But what does this have to do with darts?

MI9 provided PoWs with games that contained contraband notably escape tools, maps, money and a fake ID. Companies such as Waddington's and toy suppliers Jacques of London were behind some of the 'Fake' invented covers created by MI9.

Waddington's, famous for the game Monopoly, constructed a version that contained a silk map under the normal playing surface. Money and cards also held concealments. The MI9 Monopoly board had a full stop at the end of place names to indicate to the trained that this board was not all it what it seemed.

Maps were smuggled into PoW war camps in many game's ludo, snakes and ladders, draughts, cribbage boards, chess sets, playing cards, pencils and even gramophone records. Sports equipment such as table tennis, cricket bats and balls and dartboards could also hold hidden maps, mini saws and other escape equipment.

The MI9 Gilboard was one item that held a lot of escape equipment. The boards were supplied by Jacques of London and contained saw blades, screwdrivers, files, Gigli saw, and other equipment.

The darts supplied with the boards also had a hidden feature. The darts barrel would split into two by means of a right-handed thread to conceal a compass. The dartboards were on some occasions, also accompanied by a dartboard cabinet which also gave MI9 more opportunity to conceal escape aids.

Below are some diagrams that show how the dartboard look and how the items were concealed.



Just in case Prison Warders became suspicious, MI9 also supplied dartboards and games that were entirely innocent, so should a warder break apart the game the likelihood was that the items would be genuine.

If you wish to read more about Mi9, the Gilboard dartboard and who was involved you can read more on my website Darts501.com: <https://darts501.com/wartime-dartboards.html>

The Blitzkrieg Dartboard

This dartboard seems to have become an enigma. I first came across it while watching an episode of 'Combat Dealer' on the Sky Discovery channel. Dealer Bruce Crompton pays a hefty £300 for this rare example, however, as yet I have not been able to find any additional details.

The board has a standard clock dartboard on one side and the 'Blitzkrieg' dartboard on the other. Since I have only been able to see this board via video, I have digitally recreated it in the hope someone can shed more light on the board, the game, rules etc.

Below is a graphic to show how the dartboard looks as readers will see this is a lot different than many they may have seen before.



There is a little more about the Blitzkrieg Dartboard on the Darts501.com website. But does any DDN reader have any information about this dartboard?

If anyone can, please contact me in the first instance on patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com and I will pass your information and details on to David.

Thanks, David, for a fascinating insight into these dartboards.

OBSURE NEWS OF THE WORLD FACT – SOME FOLLOW UP

Subscriber Chris Lovell responded to the 'obscure fact' I published in last month's issue. This was about the 1958 *News of the World* Grand Finals where a sticker across the front of the programme stated that comedian Ted Ray would present the prizes on the day as popular singer David Whitfield, who was originally billed to appear, was unable to.

Chris told me that he had that particular programme with the same sticker on yet it was signed by David Whitfield!

I have a programme for that event signed...I always wondered why it was stuck to the front of the Finals programme for that year. Also puzzling is that the Programme is signed David Whitfield next to his name in the programme! Was this even possible if Ted Ray replaced him?



Strange indeed but it is known that David Whitfield was a great darts fan and occasionally played so it has to be that he eventually turned up at the venue and was greeted by adoring fans who demanded his attention and autograph.

Ted Ray definitely presented the prizes as there is a photograph in the programme for the following year of him handing the cup to

Tommy Gibbons (the Yorkshire champion). That was the second time Gibbons had won the coveted trophy (the first to ever do so), his earlier victory being in 1952. (Image © *News of the World*. Used with permission.)

FEATHER FLIGHTS – FEEDBACK

Subscriber Paul Garratt had a serious point to make in relation to the feather flights article in last month's issue. He wrote

Thanks for another great DDN Patrick. I enjoyed the News of the World stats but was particularly interested in the article on the turkey flight feathers.

I've been thinking about darts' environmental impact for a while. I'm sure it's not huge but there must be a tremendous amount of plastic that has a very short life when it comes to flights and stems that will be going off to landfill.

I doubt we'll see feather flights coming back any time soon but are you (or any DDN readers) aware of any companies making more sustainable darts products? I'm sure there would be a market.



My guess is that every business in the world, including the darts industry, is (or should be) doing what they can to improve their sustainable design and manufacture credentials by, wherever possible and practical, utilising recyclable materials in their production chain.

However, the issue is so complex that, again, I would guess it would be very difficult to be specific as to when products become wholly environmentally friendly, leading possibly to accusations of being 'fake green'. Thus, much care is needed at every step.

VARSITY DARTS

New subscriber Geoff F. writes

Having very recently subscribed to your newsletter and looked through your fascinating website, I sorted out some memorabilia from my younger days that I thought might interest you.

In 1979 I played darts in what was, according to the Cherwell newspaper, the first Oxford v Cambridge varsity darts match. I represented St. Peter's College and ...helped to secure an Oxford victory.

The main newspaper cutting Geoff sent me, an article by reporter Greg Baxter, bore the headline 'FOREMAN IN CHARGE OF BOARD' and read

HISTORY WAS MADE last Friday [18th May] at Oxford City Supporters' Club when Oxford and Cambridge met in the first-ever Varsity darts match.

Jon Pickup of Lincoln, the OUDC president, captained a strong Oxford team with three players from St. Peter's, three from Queen's and one from St. John's. The Oxford team, with much more experience, threatened to overwhelm their opponents; they took the first six singles matches quite comfortably, leaving Cambridge to gain a small measure of consolation in the last two, their only victories of the evening. The final score was 10-2.

The outstanding player was undoubtedly Geoff Foreman of St. Peter's who deservedly took the Man of the Match Award. He won his singles match with considerable ease, and had the highest finish of the night with 170. The team as a whole played with great skill, and certainly the question of awarding half Blues to the University players should be looked into closely in the future.

One observer commented after the matches that Cambridge were fortunate to win even two singles. It is to be hoped that the fen country will rise more adequately to the occasion next year.

What a rout!

(In addition to Geoff Foreman, the other members of the victorious Oxford team were Steve King and Dave Williams.)

I can find no evidence thus far of the return match ever being played or that Varsity darts matches ever occurred before 1979. Geoff added

I have sometimes wondered if I should have received at least a half blue to mark the occasion and wondered if you knew if they are now awarded or, more to the point, if varsity darts became a tradition.

Geoff, I think you and your team should have received a half Blue in recognition of your achievement. For an explanation of how the half Blue (the highest honour granted to individual sportspeople at the University of Oxford) works go to <https://www.sport.ox.ac.uk/blues-awards>.

GEORGE SILBERZAHN – OBITUARY

To darts players in the UK, George Silberzahn may not be well known but in the USA he carved out a reputation as the man whose mission in life was to teach everyone to play darts.

Born in Gibbstown, New Jersey in September 1938, George joined his first local darts league in 1962. It was an American-style league of which he became President in 1965.



The following year he joined the Mount Royal American darts team and later, in 1972, became the first President of the South Jersey English Darts League. Between 1971 and 1980 George's employment changed to "field work" during which time he travelled extensively to many cities and states which provided him with the opportunity to play darts all over.

When I interviewed George in the early 2000s I asked him "What were your greatest achievements?" and he replied

Winning the International Darts Match tournament - U.S.A. versus Great Britain.

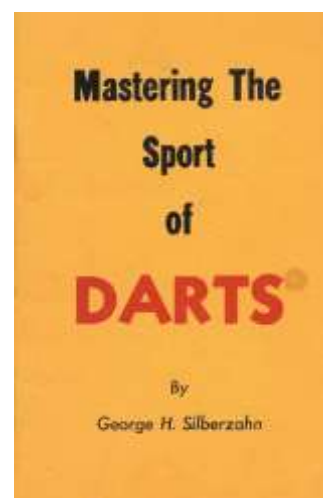
The team from Great Britain consisted of forty County and Country winners. These included the likes of Alan Evans, Willy Etherington, Paul Gosling, Doug Priestner,

Cliff Inglis, and Chic Love.

Then there was the ADO vs. BDO match held on the Queen Mary in Long Beach California where I out-scored Eric Bristow with just under 50% of scores being 100 or more.

(The photo above shows George in action in 1975. (Image PC Darts Archive.))

By the time George 'retired' from darts in 1982 he had built up a reputation Stateside for championship darts shooting and in "retirement" found that he had the ability to articulate what it takes to attain the skills necessary for success in our sport. To this end, during the 1980s, George wrote two darts instruction manuals, "Beginning the Game of Darts" and "Mastering the Game of Darts". Two decades later these formed the foundation of his publication, in 2004 of "How to Master the Sport of Darts"; a Second Edition being published in 2008.



Up until the publication of 'How to Master the Sport of Darts' there had been numerous darts books which claimed to be tutorials. Some achieved their aim whilst others appeared to hinder rather than help. In my view George Silberzahn went beyond them all. Over and above the "mastering" of darts, more than half the book was devoted to mini-biographies of a number of US darting legends (both male and female); a great help to me as a darts researcher trying to learn about darts players 'across the pond.' After publication of

‘Mastering...’ George produced an excellent darts tuition website www.howtodarts.com and subsequently created his famous ‘Flight School’ from which new and experienced darts players could learn the skills, tactics and techniques of our sport.



George reached his 70th birthday in September 2008. The photograph, reproduced here (courtesy of his ‘personal publicity manager, critic, number one fan and surprise birthday party giver’; his loving wife Sandie), shows George with a special cake (the design of which is based on the cover of ‘How to Master...’) produced especially for the occasion by – Who else? – but his personal publicity manager, cake maker, etc. etc., - Sandie.

For his contribution to darts, George was inducted into the USA National Darts Hall of Fame (‘Player/Behind the Scenes’ category) in 2011.

George passed away peacefully on 14th January 2021 aged 82. He will be remembered for those matches against ‘The Brits’ in the early 1970s and, later, for his ‘Flight School’ tutorial which helped many budding and experienced darts players improve their game.

RIP George.

WORKING FOR PEANUTS

There is a popular phrase you probably all know where, if you do something for little or no money, you are said to be ‘working for peanuts.’ Well, believe it or not there was an occasion when I literally did.

About half my lifetime ago, I was approached by snack giant ‘Big D’. (You may recognise the name as the company used to occasionally sponsor major darts tournaments, the most well-known of which was the promotion of the last-ever *News of the World* in 1997.)

‘Big D’ were looking for someone to write a four-page colour booklet about darts. They required four pages packed with fascinating facts; something that could be distributed for free in pubs and clubs up and down the UK.

Before agreeing to anything, I asked the company if they proposed to pay me for the work. The representative said “Sadly, no,” and added “But we can provide you with some product with our thanks.” I agreed and the work was done.



Shortly after publication of the leaflet, there was a knock at the door and there was Mr. Postman with a package for me. A box packets of various of their brands of peanuts! (Photo © Moppix)

‘BREWERY DIRECTOR TAKES A KEEN INTEREST IN DARTS’

Thus read a headline in *The Brewer and Wine Merchant* dated March 1939.

The interwar years saw the first major ‘boom’ in the popularity of darts, perhaps greater in terms of its reach to the middle and upper classes than the ‘boom’ of the 1970s and 1980s. Brewers became involved in a big way with darts and darts leagues from about 1924 onwards. The National Darts Association (NDA) was formed in 1925 and soon became involved with the promotion of darts, especially in London and surrounding areas, with the major brewers. Whitbread was no exception and, as this article shows, they became formally involved with the NDA. The article stated



Mr. Gilbert K. K. Dunning, [pictured, left] a director of Whitbread & Co., has accepted the presidency of the Licensees Charity Cup Committee of the National Darts Association.

The invitation to do so was conveyed to him by a deputation which waited for him at the brewery in Chiswell Street, E.C., on February 16th. The deputation comprised Messrs. John Cooper (chairman), A.C. Mansfield (vice-chairman), E. Travis (treasurer), A.H. Janes (secretary), R.B. Tillcock and R.W. Paul.

We are sure that Mr. Dunning will prove a very energetic president, and with the support of his firm and his trade friends should prove a great success during the ensuing year.

Mr. John Cooper and his fellow members of the committee have worked hard in the cause ever since 1925, [the year of the establishment of the NDA] with the result that the three trade charities have benefited to the extent of over £4,000, of which £900 was raised last year; therefore, they are deserving of the warmest praise for their splendid efforts.

Mr. Dunning, with whom was Mr. C.E. Smith, received the deputation in a very cordial manner, and Mr. Cooper, in explaining the nature of the competition promoted by the Licensees' Charity Cup Committee, said that it was open to any licensed victualler or beerhouse keeper, his wife, sons, and or daughters, if wholly employed in the business, and to managers, provided they were directly employed by a company or licensee, and were responsible for the conduct of the house, although not holding the licence.

He and his colleagues were present that day to ask Mr. Dunning to take the presidential chair during the ensuing year. ... [The] money [£4,000 [equivalent to approximately £200,000 in 2020] had been distributed among the Licensed Victualler' School, the Licensed Victuallers' Benevolent Institution, and the Metropolitan Beer and Wine Trade Asylum. Last year the sum of just over £900 [about £61,000 in today's money] had been raised, which he considered was a wonderful achievement.

The main object of the competition was to help the charities associated with the licensed trade, while secondly, it might be said, it aimed to bring licensees together and enabling them to know each other better. By this method it is hoped to create a spirit of comradeship which might not otherwise be obtained.

Certainly, one of the declared aims of the NDA was ‘To assist to promote the social side of the game...’ and where better to start than with a competition between proper licensees and managers (both male and female); those upon whom The Trade depended. A little later a general individual darts competition was introduced.

The official rules of the Licensees Charity Cup, originally published in the *Morning Advertiser* (an official organ of The Trade) in January 1926, were as follows:

1. The game will be 301 up, finish only on a double.
2. That all matches under the jurisdiction of the NDA be played on a standard [i.e. Clock] dart board.
3. That the board be 5ft 8in high from the floor to the centre, and the throw 9ft in a plumb line from the centre of the board.
4. That the throw-off line (or hockey) be permanently shown in some distinctive manner.
5. That all competition matches be started by the toss of a coin, the gentleman winning to throw first in the first, and, if played, third games, but his opponent shall throw first in the second game.
6. That all competition matches finish on a double. ‘50’ shall count as double ‘25’.
7. The onus of forwarding the result, win or lose, rests with the home licensee.

So, the first ‘official’ rules of darts play were introduced, most of which exist until this very day, 75 years on. The NDA introduced their official rules for league and cup (teams) play in the *Morning Advertiser* on 22nd April 1926. Hopefully there will be an opportunity to reproduced those rules in a future *DDN*. Now, back to the approach to Mr. Dunning:

Mr. Dunning, in reply, said he would be delighted to accept the presidential chair, not only for himself but also on behalf of the firm of Whitbread, which he represented. They might know that he was inexperienced in the trade, but he hoped to learn more about it as the years went by.

He felt rather like a recruit among a lot of old, hardened campaigners, but if he lacked experience he would try to make up for it in keenness for the job, and with the knowledge that Mr. Cooper and other members of the deputation would give him every support. He would be hoping for that support, and he would ask them not to be afraid of pushing him on from behind in order to promote the objects they had in view. He was indeed thankful for the offer of the presidential chair, and hoped he would be able to make a success of the position.

Mr. Cooper said that not only himself but every member of the deputation was grateful to Mr. Dunning for accepting their invitation, and he could safely promise that they would do all in their power to make his presidency a success. He would also like to thank Mr. C.E. Smith, a member of the firm of Whitbread, whom he was glad to see present that day, for the courteous aid which he had already given them. [The oil painting shown here by Sir Alfred Munnings, P.P.R.A. shows the North Yard of the Whitbread Brewery in 1938.]



The members of the deputation were later taken on a tour of Messrs. Whitbread's brewery, and then entertained by Mr. C.E. Smith to luncheon at the Manchester Hotel.

So, as far as the officers of the NDA were concerned, it was ‘mission accomplished’. Clearly, the new president of the charity cup committee had much to learn about The Trade and indeed about darts, but the experts of the NDA promised to help him in any way they could. But Mr. Dunning had nothing to worry at all as in September 1939 Britain was at war. The NDA and the charities cup were abandoned for the duration.

Also, during early 1939 the NDA had fought off a bid of a new organisation, the British Darts Council (BDC), which had tried to take over but had failed. The NDA was by far as stronger of the two organisations and was expected to survive the war and then carry on its role as the key association for the organisation and control of darts. This it not be not happen.

Although a number of NDA officials emerged after the Second World War, the organisation had become too fragmented, possibly because some had perished in the conflict. Whatever the case, the NDA committees were never reconvened. The so-called *News of the World* rules (which had originated with the NDA and now claimed by the NoW as their own) becoming ‘standard’.

Two or three new darts organisations were tried out during the 1940s but failed. It wasn’t until 1954 when the National Darts Association of Great Britain (NDAGB) was formed by *The People* Sunday newspaper in league with county darts associations from around the country: an organisation that led darts through the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s until challenged by the British Darts Organisation (BDO).

The latter was to become the top darts organisation for at least two decades, many of the sponsors for its top tournaments and county teams coming from national and local breweries. This may well have been the ultimate aim of the NDA back in March 1939 when Mr. Dunning accepted the job of president of the licensees’ charity cup and then the NDA to seek sponsorship from Whitbread.

We will never know if it was the NDA’s intention.

MY RESEARCH IS SPONSORED BY



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