

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Thank you to everyone who sent me emails and other messages wishing me well when they heard that I had been taken to hospital with a stroke at the end of February.

Thanks to the excellent care I received in hospital and that I am receiving through occupational therapy healthcare professionals both at home and over the phone, I feel that I am on the way to recovery. Although I am feeling so much better, I know that it will be a while before I'm back to the old me.

As part of my recovery, one of my tests has been to perform work-related tasks that I was doing before the stroke changed things. One is to write the next *DDN* to see if I am still capable of producing it in the same way: producing articles, searching out information, compiling the pages and adding photos as required.

So, this is issue 133 produced post-stroke. Let me know what you think.

'IN AT THE BIRTH OF DARTS'

I am indebted to friend and subscriber Chris Kelly for providing me with a cutting relating to a gentleman named George Gurr (pictured) who claimed to have been 'in at the birth of darts.' The cutting is undated and the source newspaper not identified but the reporters' name was Dave Lacey. Dave wrote



*The weekly darts match is something of an institution in Sussex pubs and clubs, but how many of today's players realise that the first darts league in the county was formed only at the end of the 1920's... The man who played a major part in the birth of this competition, the Mid-Sussex Darts League is 66-year-old **George Gurr**, of Horsted Keynes.*

For many years a stalwart of Horsted Keynes British Legion, George told me how he became a darts pioneer.

"Before I was married – that was in 1919 – I couldn't throw a dart," said George. "But my wife, Florence, comes from Kent – they have been playing darts there for donkey's years – and I used to go down to Canterbury and play there."

First league

Eventually, I introduced it to our British Legion Club here in Horsted Keynes."

Interest in the game spread, and eventually the Mid-Sussex Darts League was formed in 1928. "We were the first league in Sussex," said Mr. Gurr, who has been chairman since 1939.

The Mid-Sussex League started with half-a-dozen teams. Now it runs two sections with 17 teams in each.

Before darts really caught on "rings" and shove ha'penny were the favourite games. "I think we wanted something fresh," said Mr. Gurr. "The social side of darts appealed to us."

George Gurr, has lived in his trim, white-walled cottage for 22 years, and in the parish for more than 50 years. Born in Uckfield, he was driving a horse-drawn milk-cart at 16, and later became an ostler at the Cricketers in Brighton's Black Lion-street.

When World War 1 broke out he joined the Army and was drafted into the Sussex Yeomanry, serving in France and Flanders. "I was orderly to three brigadier-generals," he said, "and a runner at Ypres for Lt.-Col. R. V. Gwynne – now Lt.-Col. Sir Roland Gwynne. I pulled him out of a shellhole and was with him when he won the D.S.O."

Retiring a year ago, George Gurr became a member of Horsted Keynes parish council almost at once. "They had been trying to get me on it for years." He devotes a lot of time to his British Legion activities, but at the moment is concentrating on modernising his cottage.

Still plays

Most of his many relatives live in and around Horsted Keynes. Earlier this year the British Legion team was made up entirely of Gurrs.

George still plays occasionally himself. "I like to start on a double 17 and finish on double 16. At one time I could guarantee to get either in three darts."

He once had a game with darts star Joe Hitchcock the man who could get a double-top with [a] 6in. nail. "Of course I didn't stand a chance, but it was worth the experience." smiled George.

Note: As regards the reporter 'Dave Lacey', I did track down a David Lacey, a former journalist for the *Guardian*, who worked for other national newspapers. When interviewed in 2012 what his first job in journalism was, replied "Cub reporter for the *Brighton Evening Argus*."

So, this might well be the man and the paper. I also calculate, from the facts given in the article that it was published circa 1965-1970, but that's just a guess.

LAKESIDE MEMORIES

In response to my question in the February issue "What are your best memories of the Embassy/Lakeside World Championships, only the usual suspects replied but, as usual, they provided me with some great copy.

Chris Kelly wrote:

Thanks, as always, for the latest DDN. I was especially interested in the best matches from Lakeside. I can think of so many and don't think I could choose one in particular. Martin Adams was always one player who seemed to be involved in close matches that ran late into the night.

Another I recall is Martin Phillips being 4-0 down against Gary Robson and coming back to win 5-4. I had bet £500 on Phillips so that one sticks in my memory. It's such a shame that it [Lakeside] has gone. But I guess nothing lasts for ever. I wonder how the actual complex is getting on at the moment with hotels, bars, entertainment complexes taking a hammering and the BDO folding. Bob Potter isn't getting any younger. You wonder if it'll survive.

Mick S. remembered that BDO World Championships when the stripper ran across the stage. Mick stated "It was well one of my most memorable moments. I was right at the front and blimey what a sight."

Thanks Mick for your 'best moment' at the Lakeside. I wasn't there like you but I did see it on Co Stompe's *Let's Play Darts* DVD. Didn't MC Martin Fitzmaurice say something like "That young lady will be thrown out of the venue because no-one is allowed on stage without a badge"? Or something like that.

Bill Bell told me

"One of my favourites was watching Wayne Mardle when he was known as 'the mouth from the south.' When he ever hit a 180, the camera always went to his dad, Billy Mardle, in the audience and he always did a little spin of his finger in the air. (That's what my memory is telling me, anyway. I could have it completely wrong)!!!"



Bill's team photo; Left to right, back row: Ian Walker, Chris Didcott snr, Bill Bell, Chrissy Hunt, Terry Orford; front row Fitzroy Benjamin (looking at 'Little' Richard Ashdown and thinking "Bloody hell. You're very short!").

Bill also recalled

Phil Taylor v Mike Gregory was the first match I remember. I was 17, living at home and got a dartboard for Xmas that came with an Eric Bristow book. I got my mate Steve McMahon into the darts and he used to come round and we'd play 401 while watching the Lakeside. He wanted Gregory to win and I was on Taylor. What a match.

I also watched the entire 1992 Embassy from the comfort of my own home. Brilliant! In fact, I viewed (and probably videoed) every day.

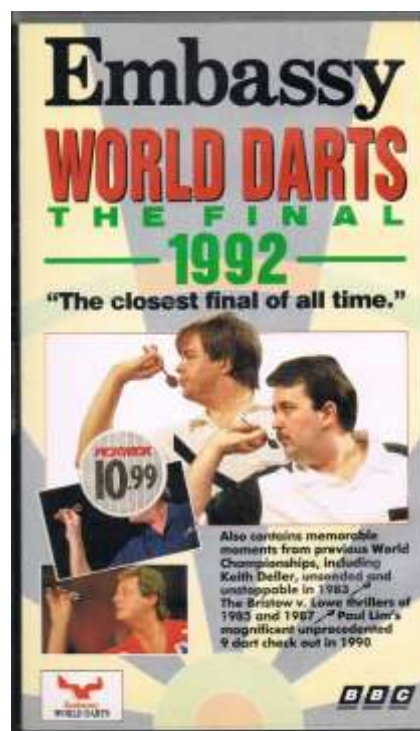
Six of the thirty finalists that year were previous winners: legends like Eric Bristow (five-times winner), Jocky Wilson and twice winner John Lowe, Bob Anderson, the Number One seed Phil Taylor and defending champion, Dennis Priestley. Mike Gregory and Australia's Keith Sullivan completed the seedings.

I recall that, in the final, Gregory and Taylor slugged out maximum against maximum. Then Mike Gregory blew no less than **six** chances to win the match. Taylor then snatched the title – the closest final of all time up until then.

For the first time ever, the BBC released a 120-minute darts VHS video. In addition to the Taylor v Gregory final was included Keith Deller's defeat of Bristow in 1983 final, the Bristow and Lowe's battles in the Embassy's in 1985 and 1987 and Paul Lim's magnificent, unprecedented nine-dart check out in 1990; not to mention his £52,000 pay day.

In the two previous years (at least) the BBC had included extracts from the 1990 and 1991 Embassy World championships in the series 'BBC Video World'. The 1990 edition featured the 'gripping event, with a David and Goliath final' that pitted Eric Bristow against his protégé, Phil Taylor 'and more', whilst the 1991 video featured 'a highly predictable championship' where Dennis Priestley hammered Eric Bristow by 6-0.

I would be interested to know if any Embassy world championships had been featured in BBC videos before 1990. Let me know at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.



WHO WAS THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL DARTS PLAYER?

This subject has been discussed often in issues of *DDN* and I am sure that most fans' votes come down in favour of England's Alan Glazier.

So, it is always refreshing that someone puts another name in the hat, especially if it is Plymouth darts journalist Steve Chapman. Steve wrote the following piece on the Facebook 'Darts from the Past' on 14th February 2021 and has given me permission to record it here. I am also sure that all of the fans of the *News of the World* Individual Darts tournament will find this article of particular interest.

FRED PRITCHARD – PLYMOUTH DARTS STAR

IN response to an earlier thread with regards to the question “Who was the first professional darts player?” I know that Plymouth’s Fred Pritchard was offered a contract by Unicorn in 1958 so contracts were available before the Alan Glazier era.

Fred was the South West area News of the World champion 15 times, from his first title in 1953 right through to 1984.



He competed in the 1956 grand finals at Earls Court where he got through to the semi-finals before being edged out 2-1 by Derbyshire’s Tom Reddington, who went on to win the title.

Pritchard made Earls Court again in 1958 and once more progressed to the semi-finals but sadly with the same result.

His opponent was Ernie Burrup, the Welsh champion from Newport, Monmouthshire and again Pritchard went out 2-1, after missing the double in the decider.

Following his impressive showings at Earls Court, Pritchard was offered a contract by Unicorn to turn professional and with it came a

house in London, a full exhibition diary and a wage.

His wife Doreen had only months before given birth to their daughter Maureen and after a lot of deliberation, Fred declined the offer and spent the remainder of his working life in Devonport Dockyard.

Fred Pritchard sadly died on July 31, 2011, at the age of 85, but will be fondly remembered as one of Plymouth’s all-time great darts players.

(Text and photograph © Steve Chapman)

NATIONAL DARTS ASSOCIATION (NDA)

It’s not often that I feature enquiries relating to the original National Darts Association (NDA) so I was thrilled to receive an email from ‘Sue’.

Hello Patrick, I have been looking on your very interesting site and wonder if you may have any knowledge you could share with me about the NDA 1926 Championship, or know where I might be able to find anything out?

My grandfather E. Whatmough (Ted) was the 1926 NDA singles darts champion and "Grandads Cup" has become a bit of a family heirloom. My 91-year-old Mum is the current keeper and has childhood memories of sharing a cleaning rota for it with her brother but apart from that, and the belief that it was the first of the News of The World tournaments.

I replied to Sue,

Many thanks for your email. I am so very pleased to hear from you.

*You are right. There is little or nothing about the NDA online. However, during the late 1990s and early 2000s (when researching my PhD) I was the first to discover the establishment and background history of the NDA. [My book *Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history* reveals the history of the NDA.]*

The National Darts Association (NDA) was formed in London in 1925 and began to organise tournaments, mainly in the London area, in 1926. Their first tournament was the NDA Licensees Charity Cup for which the first round was played in January 1926 with an all-male entry. This may or may not be the cup your granddad won. (Was he a licensee? If not, then it must have been an individual men's tournament that was started the same year.)



The cup is not related to the News of the World as that did not start (again in the London area only) until the 1926/27 season so the cup would have been awarded in 1927. However, it is true that the officials of the NDA did organise the NoW 'darts test' (as the newspaper called it) from the beginning until 1939. (The NDA did not survive the war.)

I would be grateful if you could confirm the exact wording on the cup and, if your mum agrees, to send me a photograph of it. (I have never seen an image of any official NDA cup.)

In the meantime, I will look deeper into my extensive archive to see if I can trace any record of your granddad's achievements. Fingers crossed!

My research into this fascinating correspondence was stopped because of my stroke but will restart as soon as possible.

MISSING SOMETHING?

If you have missed any issue over the last couple of months please let me know at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com and I'll send you a copy.

BOB, JOHN AND HEIKE

Whilst working through a large file of darts photos I came across one with Bob Anderson and John Lowe enjoying a drink and sharing a copy of the German darts magazine *Dart Ech*. I am

not sure that either speak or read German or whether this was a promotional opportunity for the magazine with two world champions.



On the front cover of that issue of *Dart Ech* was a photograph shown of a lady German darts champion who I did not recognise from that photo. However, I soon found that the player was **Heike Ernst** (now Heike Jenkins) one of the greatest German lady darters of all time.

My dear friend Charis Mutschler was very helpful and quickly provided me with some information. Charis wrote:

Hi Patrick. Good to hear you are getting better!

I've never heard about a magazine Dart Ech but perhaps Jürgen Schmitz could help you with this. As far as I can remember he always was hunting for old German darts magazines.

But at least I can tell you a little bit about Heike Ernst who is now Heike Jenkins. I know she started to play darts around 1983 and soon joined the 1. DSC Bochum where her first husband Dietmar Ernst and her brothers already played.

In 1986 she took part for the first time in a DDV ranking event. She ended as runner-up. Only a few months later, in January 1987, she won her first ranking event and from that time dominated the women's sport of darts in Germany. Until 2006 she took part in every ranking event. Since then, Heike has only played for fun and no longer in the national team. In 2013 she appears the last time as runner-up in a ranking event in Nürnberg – I couldn't find a later mention of her name in the winners lists.

Heike was 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005 German Champion, 11 times she won the Dortmund Open. From 1988 – 1997 she was the number 1 woman in Germany, in the '90s she was for a few years the number 2 of the WDF. She played for many years with the men in the "Bundesliga" and took part probably 18 times in the Winmau World Masters. 1992 she won the WDF Europe Cup singles, 1996 she was runner-up in the World Masters.



My records show that Heike's best WINMAU performance in 1996 included her beating England's Trina Gulliver 3-1 in the semi-final. Sharon Douglas of Scotland (Fife) overcame England's Sharon Colclough 3-2 in the second semi-final and then went on to beat Heike 3-1 in the final. Sharon Douglas became the first Scotland lady to win the prestigious WINMAU Masters title.

Charis tells me that, today, Heike is 'the chairwoman of the 1. DSC Bochum and one-time women's coach of the German National Team. Our German national coach...) is by the way Roland Scholten.'

As regards the German darts magazine *DART ECH*, I would like to know when it was published. In my archive I have only three issues 1991/1992. If you have any information, please contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

It never ceases to amaze me the number of darts magazines there have been published over the years. Just looking through my collection, and looking just



through those that have appeared in Germany, I have found, in addition *Dart Ech* also *Dart-Time* (1986), *Game Shot* (1987), *NDV Dart in Niedersachsen* (1987), *bv News* (1988), *Hamburger Darts nachrichten* (1988), *Dart Report* (1988-90) *Liga info* (1989), *Dart Magazin* (1990), *Dartline* (1990-91), *NDV Info* (1991) and *ddz deutsche dartsport Zeitung* (circa early 1997 - June 2009).



Twelve magazines from Germany; but only those I have copies of in my archive. The dates shown in brackets are those of issues in my collection. I do not know how long they were published. I would be happy to receive any information about these magazines or others that may have been published.

NOTE: Please note that I do not speak the German language but do enjoy looking at the photos!

AND FINALLY:

This issue of *DDN* has been possible a lot earlier than I ever anticipated thanks to the care I have been given by occupational therapy healthcare carers, Joanne, Lydia and Alison.

MY RESEARCH IS SPONSORED BY

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