

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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GOODBYE TO 'THE VIKING'

The world of darts has lost 'The Viking', Andy Fordham, one of the most popular and loved English darts players and the BDO world champion in 2004, who died in July at the age of 59.



Born in Erith, Andy was the eldest of four children and had one brother and two sisters. He went to Charlton Manor Primary School and then on to Eaglesfield Secondary School. In his younger days he was a keen track-and-field athlete, his slight frame earning him the nickname of 'The Whippet'.

After school he would play football for *The Angerstein Hotel*, East Greenwich, training on Wednesdays, after which he and his mates would go to the pub for

refreshments, some of whom were involved with the pub darts team. As is so often in stories of how the famous became involved with darts, Andy was asked to play when the team was a man down. Andy recalled

"I was crap but really enjoyed it. The atmosphere was good. I had a few beers and a good laugh, so I kept at it."

In time, Andy's game improved beyond measure, so much so that he progressed to Super League and then to County level. Andy idolised 'The Crafty Cockney', five-time World Champion, Eric Bristow. It was not long before he began winning important titles and, perhaps more important, he met Jenny Vallely, a dental nurse, whom he married in 2000.

In October 1995 Andy won the British Matchplay championship held as part of the Haven Festival of Darts, at the Seashore Holiday Centre, Great Yarmouth.

In the quarterfinal he had powered his way through beating Welshman Sean Palfrey, hitting 11- and 12-dart games, with an average of 33.97. In the semi-finals Andy met Kevin Painter (Essex) winning 4-1 with more 11- and 12-dart legs.

However, the final was not as easy. Andy faced up to Dave Askew. *Darts World* reported:

With Fordham taking an early 3-1 set lead, Surrey's Dave Askew fought back to level the score with impressive checkouts including a 129. Fordham took the ninth set, but Askew, with advantage of the throw, once again levelled.

Fordham regained control of the game with an 81 game-shot to take the first leg and a first-time double eight gave him the title and £1,000 prize-money.

The photograph (right) shows Andy being awarded with his trophy and cheque from Tim Starbuck, the Seashore General Manager. (Image © DW/PC archive). During that same weekend Andy (together with England's Martin Adams and Sharon Colclough) won the Mixed Triples title, sharing a cheque for £450.

Also, during that same month, Andy beat Glamorgan's Derek Gunther 3-2 in the final of the Men's Singles at the Pontins Championships at Brean Sands, Somerset. Andy hit a 100 game-shot to win the match, Gunter having just missed his chance to take the title.



In addition to picking up the winner's cheque of £1,000, Andy shared £500 with England's Martin Adams when they won the Men's Pairs beating the pairing of Brian Bird and Gary Robson, 3-1. Andy also shared a semi-final cheque (£100) with Mandy Solomons in the Mixed Pairs.

In 1994 Andy had reached the last four of the prestigious WINMAU World Masters and repeated that feat in 1996 but never reached the final on either occasion in that most difficult and challenging of tournaments. But that changed in 1999.

Having reached the semi-final, Andy (seeded 15th) faced another England star, Mervyn King. According to *Darts World* in

A classic five-set clash, Fordham hit an 11-darter and a brace of 180s as he kicked King out of the competition – both players topping 31 averages.

Andy's fellow finalist was England Midlander Wayne Jones, yet it was clear from the crowd at the Lakeside that "The Viking" was the firm favourite with the crowd, who were keen to see Andy win his first World title. Andy started well, taking the opening set 2-0; Wayne not having a dart at a double. Described by *Darts World* as 'a lapse in concentration' by the Londoner, led to Wayne Jones levelling the match. Wayne Baker wrote

Fordham taking the opening leg of the next set, Jones replying with a 92 checkout (25, 17, bull), which received a murmur of approval from the knowledgeable crowd. The World Cup squad member hit double 19 with his first dart to move 2-1 ahead in the match. Jones immediately hit back, defending his throw in the first leg of the fourth set, his opponent levelling and then firing off with 180 in the next.



Two 140s steered the Black Country player to the double first but he missed “tops”. “The Viking” requiring 121, struck treble 20 with ease, switched for single 11 and then wired the bull for the match. Given a reprieve, Jones moved nervously to the oche and grimaced as he saw two match-saving attempts for double tops and then a remaining dart for double ten miss the intended target.

The last seed in the competition, displaying no trace of emotion, stepped up to the oche, took careful aim and planted his first dart outside the double eight wire – an ideal marker. The second landed in the target, the clenched fist pushed sky high, confirming Andy Fordham as the new darts master of world.

(Left: see cover of *Darts World*, January 2000 showing Andy and the women’s 1999 World Master, the Netherlands’ Frances Hoenselaar.)

After the match Andy told *Darts World*

“I have always had three goals in darts – the Pentathlon, the World Masters, which I have now won. Target number three is the Embassy.”

The final did not bring out the best in us, there was far too much respect for each other up on stage and that affected the way we played. Wayne is a good player.”

The runner-up, Wayne Jones, who picked up a cheque for £2,500, agreed that neither he nor the champion played their best darts, adding

“If I had reproduced the form of the previous night, I could have beaten Andy, but I didn’t – that’s darts for you. He is a nice guy and I am pleased for him.”

Andy won the winner’s cheque for £8,000.

With two out of his three goals achieved (he had won the Pentathlon in 1998), only the World Championship title remained.

Andy’s first appearance in the Embassy World Professional Darts Championship was in 1995 where he was seeded No. 6. and his world ranking at that time was also No. 6. The odds on a “Viking” win were 22-1.) The Embassy programme perfectly summed up “The Viking’s” career so far:

Andy is one of those darts players who began his career when the local side was a man short and who has gone on to beat the best. After his baptism eight years ago, he made his mark locally, winning the London Super League singles and pairs and the Kent Super League singles and pairs. Then he came near to his first national title in 1993 when he came runner-up in the British Pentathlon.

Makes the world top ten largely thanks to wins in the Finland Open and Swiss Open, each time beating Embassy rivals in the final. In Finland he beat Raymond Barneveld, and in Switzerland he beat Colin Monk. He also picked up ranking points in the British, Denmark and German Opens. One of his local darts haunts is the Old Oak at Hampstead and he plays for London at county level. His other hobbies include golf and fishing.

In the first round Andy met Nicky Turner, (pictured, right. Image © DW/PC Archive) a qualifier, making his first appearance in the competition. Nicky was a van driver and a fellow London County player so he and Andy would have known each other's game. Andy won the match 3-2 with an average of 29.57. His next opponent was Scotland's Ronnie Sharp who Andy beat 3-2 and the same average 29.57.



In the quarter-final Andy faced another England player, Paul Williams and was victorious 4-2. Wales's Ritchie Burnett, the No. 2 seed, was waiting for Andy in the semi-final and that was where his progress ceased: Ritchie beating 'The Viking' 5-2.

Andy returned to Lakeside in 1996 and again reached the semi-final. His journey to that point read, first round beating England's Chris Mason 3-0, second round Andy Jenkins (England) 3-2 and in the quarter-final, another Englishman, Colin Monk (4-1). Andy met Steve Beaton (his fourth Englishman during that tournament) but was beaten 5-3 by 'The Bronzed Adonis'.

In 1997 Marshall James (Wales) put paid to Andy's tournament that year in the second round 3-2. In 1998 Andy was stopped in the second round by Raymond (van) Barneveld (3-2). By 1999 Andy was back on form, reaching the semi-final where he went out 5-1 to England's Ronnie Baxter.

At the turn of the new millennium, in the 2000 tournament, Chris Mason gained his revenge on Andy for his knocking him out in the first round back in 1996, beating 'The Viking' 5-3 in the quarterfinal. The next year (2001) Andy made the semi-final once again, this time leaving Australia's Tony David, England's Wayne Jones and Kevin Painter in his wake. On this occasion Ted Hankey (England) was too good for Andy, beaten 5-2 by 'The Count'.

Andy didn't stay long in the championship in 2002, losing 3-0 to John Walton in the first round. In 2003 the furthest Andy reached was the second round. Having beaten the Swedish darts ace Stefan Nagy in the first round 3-0, it was a different story in the second round when Scotland's Gary Anderson beat Andy 3-1. But good times were on the way.

In 2004 the World Championships had a new sponsor in Lakeside and its owner Bob Potter as the Embassy had ceased due to HM Government banning tobacco sponsorship of sport.

This was to be the 'Year of The Viking'.

After dispatching England's Brian Derbyshire 3-0 in the first round and Tony West (3-0) in the second round, the work became harder for The Viking. The quarter-finals pitched him against his England team mate, Darryl Fitton, Andy edging it by 5-4.

In the semi-final Andy played Holland's Raymond van Barneveld, an already three-time Embassy World Champion, 1998, 1999 and looking to retain his 2003 title. RvB hit his stride immediately. Wayne Baker reported

When champion and 5-4 favourite Barneveld sped into a 3-0 lead, punishing missed doubles, "The Viking's", title aspirations appeared to have been plundered. But the big man produced the game of his life to level. Barney hit 11- and 12-darters to lead the eighth but back came Andy to level, and despite difficulty finding the winning double, finally triumphed on double two with his sixth throw in the fourth leg of the ninth set to reach his first final – having failed at the last hurdle on four occasions before.

Andy took the semi-final 5-4 to reach his first World Championship. He was to meet England's Mervyn King who had beaten Tony O'Shea (England) 5-1 in the other semi.

Wayne Baker opined that

The final was always going to struggle to match the Fordham/Barneveld clash for drama and what developed was a two-hour battle of emotion with both players desperately searching for top gear.

And thus was the case. Wayne wrote

It will not go down as a classic final – there was too much at stake for both players – but the final featured 12 x 180s..., two 11-darters and 101 and 139 checkouts.



After what *Darts World* described as 'a 120-minute slog' played in front of a capacity crowd at Lakeside and live on BBC TV, Andy beat Mervyn 6-3. Andy was clearly delighted by his win, telling Wayne

The title victory will not change me. I'll still be the same old big friendly giant. What you see is what you get.

This is the biggest win of my life. I just tried to take each game as it came, including the final, although I lost concentration on a couple of occasions. I knew I had won the title when I hit double eight. Now I would just love to go down the Den and up to Ibrox to show off my trophy. [References to Andy's support of football teams, Millwall and Glasgow Rangers.]

The defeated finalist, England's Mervyn King, was disconsolate, telling Wayne Baker

It was not a fantastic game. I played like a pub player. Andy played well. He was rock solid as normal.

Andy received the winners' cheque for £50,000 whilst Mervyn received £25,000.

Andy was to return to the Lakeside to defend his title in 2005 but lost in the first round 3-2 to Dutchman Vincent van de Voort. Visits in 2006 and 2007 matched him against Simon Whitlock, Andy losing on both occasions (3-0) to the Australian star.

After Andy had won the Lakeside world title in 2004, there were immediate calls for a showdown between him and the 'alternative' World Champion Phil 'The Power' Taylor. By towards the end of the year 'The Showdown' (a best of 13 sets challenge) was set for Sunday 21st November at the Circus Tavern, Purfleet, Essex with an 'undercard' of John Lowe v Eric Bristow and Wayne Mardle v Dutchman Roland Scholten.

In the 'undercard' Roland Scholten came from 4-1 down to beat Wayne Mardle 6-5 whilst, in their Legends Challenge, Eric Bristow outplayed John Lowe, winning 6-1. Thus, the stage was set for the widely anticipated £100,000 'Showdown'. The photograph, below shows Andy in action with Taylor watching on, during the early phase of the Showdown. (Photo © Lawrence Lustig/PDC. Used with permission.)

Sadly, the match was awarded to Phil Taylor when he led 5-2, Andy being unable to continue because of heat and exhaustion. *The Sun* reported, as everyone could see, that Andy was

labouring under the relentless heat of TV lights and a sell-out crowd packed into the tiny Essex arena. ... He was ushered outside into the night air after going 5-2 down and wrapped cold towels around his neck, while concerned officials used an air-conditioning pipe to try and beat the heat.



Promoter, Barry Hearn, made it clear to Sky's Dave Clark, that even though Andy had intimated that, given time, he could recover sufficiently well to continue, it would be unwise for him to allow that to happen. Barry Hearn said

"Andy must be allowed the dignity to retire on his stool, so to speak. I cannot take the risk of him returning only for something more serious to happen. We must take the bigger view."

Jenny, Andy's wife, was to say later

"Andy was playing okay at the start of the game against Phil, but, as the camera went close-up on his face, you could see he was sweating heavily and his eyes were red and bloodshot. He looked terrible...After a while they went for a break and it was announced that Andy would not be coming out again, as he was ill. I went to see what was wrong, and I found him sitting out at the back of the venue. People were putting ice on his head and back to try to

cool him down. He was grey and we tried to get him to go to hospital, but he wouldn't. All he was worried about was letting people down..."

Phil Taylor's victory was naturally tempered by the way the match had to end. Taylor said that although Andy was "a great player and a good bloke", he really needed to concentrate on losing weight. Taylor added

"I'm overweight and intend to do something about it, but Andy, with great respect, makes me look slim. I hope he takes heed."

Despite not having won a major title since the Lakeside World Professional Darts Championship in 2004, 'The Viking' continued to lead a life that held the British public's interest and kept the tabloid press supplied with stories of his struggle to stay in the top flight of darts, his deteriorating health, dietary problems and his fight against drink.

Andy fought his health problems, with Jenny always by his side. These included a life-saving bowel operation in 2020. At the beginning of 2021 Andy was diagnosed with Covid-19. Andy died on 15 July.

On news of Andy's death, darts players played tribute to 'The Viking'. These included Chris Dobey who said, "It was an absolute pleasure to have worked and shared a stage with a true gent," whilst Bobby George said "He was a gentle giant and loved by all." Former World Champion, Steve Beaton, tweeted that Andy was "not only a great friend but a sporting legend" and Kevin Painter described Andy as "one of the nicest guys on the planet."

Sixteen-times World Champion Phil "The Power" Taylor was reported as being "devastated" by the news of Andy's passing, Phil saying

"When you think of the brightest stars to light up the oche, none of us shone brighter than Andy. He was one of the biggest characters. I can't believe we will never see the big man in a major tournament again."

Ian Flack, Sales Director of the WINMAU Dartboard Co., the company that sponsored Andy wrote

I am absolutely heartbroken that my good mate Fordy has passed away. "Legend" is a word that is frequently used but in Andy's case it doesn't come close to describing not only a superb dart player but the most genuine, warm-hearted person I've ever met.

I was lucky enough to be in the crowd when he won the World Championship, and it remains the best atmosphere and reaction to a win that I've seen in 21 years in darts.

Andy had an amazing sense of humour and we had so many laughs over the years. Not all can be printed, but I remember when Fordy joined me at a soft-tip tournament in China and we went to a restaurant where the waiters didn't speak English so we ended up ordering our food by pointing at nice looking dishes that were being delivered to other tables!

My thoughts go to Jenny and the family and I know they will stay strong and support each other.

RIP big man. I love ya, Flacky x

And from DDN subscriber Bill Bell comes a personal memory of meeting ‘the gentle giant. Bill wrote

Me and a few of our darts team went up to Crawley to watch a darts exhibition at the K2 in Crawley.



Eric Bristow, Wayne Mardle, Scott Mitchell, Darryl Fitton, Tony O'Shea and the Viking were all playing. John Gwynne was on the mic. They had a knock-out competition between them, and Andy Fordham won it.

During the night I sat down and had a chat with him about how his form was coming back and how he was getting used to playing sober. He was a great bloke and very friendly. I was playing with a set of his darts at the time and I got a photo with him pointing at his/my arrows!!

He made his Grand Slam debut 2x months later playing Adrian Lewis and hit a 180 with his first three darts!!!

The photo was taken in September 2015...he qualified for the Grand Slam of darts in October, then made his debut in November, hitting that 180 with his first 3x darts!!

Great player...

And Mick Simpson wrote simply

“It’s just so sad that a young man, a great ambassador for darts, is no longer here. R.I.P. Andy Fordham.”

I met Andy on a number of times and I always found him to be the same person as I had met the time before. What you saw was what you got and his demeanour never changed. He was always happy and prepared to talk about darts (and anything else) and tell some of the funniest jokes around. My wife Maureen and I loved the guy and it is still difficult to comprehend that, over a month since his death, that the “The Viking” has actually gone.

R.I.P. Andy.

FEEDBACK – TERRY O’DEA TRIBUTE

I am so pleased that my tribute to the Australian darts legend, Terry O’Dea, in last month’s DDN was well-received especially by Betty Walsh, Terry’s long-time partner, who wrote

Thank you very much for that wonderful article you wrote on Terry. If he’s watching over us, he would be tickled pink. Thank you once again.

Mick S. wrote

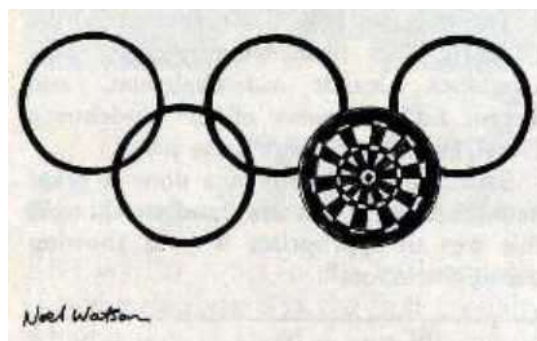
What a fantastic write up about one of the best players ever to come out of Australia. He always played to the highest standards and was a great bloke as well.

Whilst reader 'Sam' said

Great work on the Terry O'Dea obituary. Brilliantly written. For a young (ish!) 30-year-old, DDN is a fascinating insight in to the darts world of yesteryear.

DARTS AND THE OLYMPICS

With Olympics in news in recent weeks it was always going to raise the question again of darts as an Olympic sport. 'Coach Gross' investigated my article about the subject on my website at <https://patrickchaplin.com/?s=Olympic> and wrote the following:



Dear Mr. Chaplin,

While I have read your book on darts and numerous columns regarding the sport, enjoying all, I have to disagree with you on this topic. As you well know, darts is trying to clean up its image with more professional tournaments and venues. A spot in the Olympics would do wonders and show the world it has gone from the tavern to a professional stage setting! What used to be a beer sport here was Softball but you now see professional leagues and it has made the Olympics. The Olympics would also help the sport spread across the globe.

Archery has been in the Olympics. They do pull the arrow back, but with sights used it seems that surely darts would qualify as a sport. You do have to throw the darts and use your eyes to aim. As time has seen evolution, so too has the sport of darts. Players are now trying to be more fit and train for stamina. Playing long formats and standing for lengths of time is not easy. I coach basketball here in the States and to just stand or walk a bit on the sidelines causes my back to endure pain. When I played the game, running and jumping didn't leave me as sore. I played until I was 60. So, endurance is a factor and tiring can lead to a defeat as in any sport.

Now while I can see your views and understand them, I really feel the inclusion in the Olympics may generate more positivity to help younger players become involved and boost attendance in local leagues as well as tournaments whether it be participating or viewing. As for the image of drinking as a spectator, let's face it, every pro sport has beer sold at its games!

So, with all being said, and more to come, I still feel the sport would get a much-needed boost from an Olympic appearance!

Keep up your excellent articles on the sport and the passion darters have for it. Stay well.

My thanks to Coach Gross for his comments. ('Olympic' image © 1972/73 Noel Watson/DW/PC Archive.)

‘FLACKY’ ON TO PASTURES NEW

When I first became involved with the WINMAU Dartboard Company, then based in Haverhill, Suffolk, I met Ian ‘Flacky’ Flack for the first time and we became firm friends.



As the Sales Director of WINMAU he and I worked together on some projects. It was he who introduced me to Trina Gulliver which led to my ghosting Trina’s book *Golden Girl*. Without his help, the book may never have been published. (The photo, left, of Flacky with Trina shows them in the players bar at Lakeside in 2015. © 2015 Chippix. Used with permission.)

We talked and emailed regularly and he was in part responsible for me being sponsored by the company after I was awarded my PhD in 2007. We had more than a few great times at the

World Masters which included Ian’s notorious ‘on stage’ performance at Bridlington when he took lead vocals fronting the band *Here’s Jonny* with his version of the Kings of Leon, ‘Sex on Fire’. The boy really knew how to let his hair down!

It seems strange that Ian won’t be on the end of the phone or responding to my emails after this month. After a couple of decades with WINMAU Ian is moving on to pastures new. I recently interviewed ‘Flacky’ about his time at WINMAU and he said

Mate. I can’t recall exactly when we first met but I started at Winmau in October 1999 and so it would have been 2000.

I have many memorable moments (like Fordy’s World Championship win and Trina’s 10th World title), but the one that stands out the most is the inaugural Winmau WDDA World Masters in 2014 (won by Ricky Chilton). We’d worked so hard with the WDDA to make this happen and it gave disability darts global exposure and showcased what great players there are on this side of the sport. I watched the final with tears in my eyes and it was amazing to see the springboard that this tournament gave the players. (Image, right, of Flacky on stage with Ricky (centre) in 2014. © 2014 PC Darts Archive.)



The sport has given me countless amazing memories and I’ve made so many friends (yourself and Maureen included of course!) and I will always be grateful for the time I spent in the industry. I’d love to list some of the great people I’ve known, but there are honestly too many and I know I’ll stay in touch with everyone that has been a friend and helped me over the years. Working within the Winmau Group has been a fantastic experience and I’ve

learned so much in 21 years that I'd need another 21 to try and recount it all! The Group and the sport is in a great place and the future looks very bright with the continued superb work of the PDC and the future plans of the WDF and MAD (as well as the national organisations).

Thanks again Ian and all the best for you and your family in the future from Maureen and me.

“MY FAMILY’S HISTORY AROUND THE GAME OF DARTS”

Having visited my website www.patrickchaplin.com, a man named Chris decided to write to me about what he remembers of his family playing darts. Chris wrote

Dear Patrick,

My grandfather was born in 1909 and grew up when darts were very popular in pubs.

He and his friends could not afford darts and would use three sharpened six-inch nails thrown from a nine-foot oche. The dartboards were made of wood. His local pub had two dartboards; one soaking in a tub of water out the back and one in use and would be swapped daily (hence why darts was never played at home). Living in Barking, Essex, which is now part of Greater London, I presume at this distance it was a London 5's board.



When he could eventually afford a set of darts, he owned a set of brass ‘bombs’ weighting roughly around 43g with split cane shafts and paper flights. They were kept with the points stuck in an old wine bottle cork so they could easily be carried around in his inside jacket pocket.

When my father bought a set of darts in the early sixties, again, they were roughly the same weight as my grandfathers but with feather flights. Back then darts were not sold by weight only light, medium or heavy sets.

My father bought me a child’s dart board and darts when I was around eight years old in the late sixties, the board was made of coiled paper with a yellow plastic surround around fifteen inches in width. The darts were a small set with plastic flights made by Unicorn in a clear plastic case.

I purchased my first set of darts in the early seventies by saving birthday and pocket money. These were medium weight with aluminium shafts and plastic flights and were quite expensive back then. [In]1981 I bought my first set of tungsten darts they were a set of Eric Bristow darts and cost me £19.95; a lot of money back then when you consider a pint of beer was around 27p.

My own children when growing up, and still today, prefer playing video games than learning the skill of throwing three arrows.

This is my family’s history around the game of darts, and I found your article on the history of darts very interesting.

I replied Chris as follows:

Thank you so much for writing about your family's history around darts. I found it fascinating.

I loved the point you made about your grandfather not being able to afford darts so used nails. I had often wondered how the art of nail-throwing ended up in the pub. I had always thought that it was just something used for trick shots on exhibition nights but now I know!

You mentioned soaking the dartboard - one on the wall, the other in soak. They would have been of elm or poplar wood; soaked to maintain the boards' subtleness. Being living in Barking, you'd be right in presuming that the board back then would be a Fives and the oche/hockey at nine feet.

Back then many players used wooden 'French' darts and then later, when they could afford it, buy a set of brass. 43 gram 'bombs' such as you mentioned would not have been uncommon with, as you said, split canes and paper flights, the latter sometimes given free by the pub landlord to players, often advertising cigarettes or tobacco or simply made by the player out of card, often from cigarette cards.



The coiled paper board was probably named 'Keep Drye'; the name reminding the players that the dartboard did not need to be 'dunked' in water after play.

£19.95 was a huge amount for a set of darts back in the 80's; the equivalent of £85-£90 in today's money. A couple of darts manufacturers believed that tungsten would never become popular for that very reason. But they were, of course, wrong. Very wrong!

Fortunately, there are still a good number of young people who play and follow darts but, I agree with you, they'd much prefer playing video games. Their loss I reckon.

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