DARTS HISTORY

(aka *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

Issue 148 **www.patrickchaplin.com** **July 2022**

RONDART IS GOING TO HAVE HIS OWN 'SHOW'

RONALD TOMLINSON – 'RONDART' – 1929-2005

In the world of darts, Ronald Tomlinson was unique yet, as far as I am aware, never toed the oche. Not in a serious way anyway. Many darts players consider themselves entertainers. Well, Ron was exactly that.

Ron was also unique in the world of variety. When comedian, actor and variety historian Roy Hudd wrote in 1998, "We had 'em all in Variety" he *was* talking about Ron.

Born in 1929 in West Auckland, County Durham, Ron was taught to 'puff' darts for amusement by his father at the age of eight. But it did not stop there. When Ron came out of the RAF in 1949, he went into variety utilising his dart-puffing skills on stage and named his act 'RONDART.' (How long it took him to come up with that is not known!)

Nobody had seen an act like it.

Described by Roy Hudd simply as 'a novelty act with darts', RONDART impressed crowds all over the world on both stage and screen for many years. Ron blew darts with his mouth with such accuracy that he could pierce a cigarette, burst balloons around the head of his lovely assistant Cristina as she stood in front of the 'Scotts' dartboard, propel a dart into the neck of a bottle from no less than *15 feet* and, as the closing feat of the act, cut thin strands of cotton with a puffed dart to reveal a 'That's all folks' banner.

Ron passed away peacefully on Friday 28th January 2005.

In November 2020 I was contacted by Elaine Vizor who told me

Patrick, I read your article on Rondart and wonder if you could give me any ideas of where I could donate them to preserve them.

I live in the town where Ron grew up alongside my dad's family and friends. Rondart gave the pieces I have to my dad and my uncle, over the years, as they remained friends.
I feel they are important pieces of social, local, dart, and variety history and I would love

them to be displayed somewhere to preserve them. I don't have masses of 'stuff' but…I have some spanning from 1950s and 1943 on the business card.

Over recent months I have corresponded with Elaine and helped where I could. Elaine was hoping that Rondart had appeared at the Blackpool Tower but could not find any evidence. To have found that he had would have meant that the Blackpool archive would consider including Ron on their role of honour.

But Elaine continued researching Rondart and recently emailed me to say:

Just a quick note to let you know that I've just had a fantastic meeting with Caitlin at the Darlington Hippodrome and Rondart will be installed on 2nd November and stay right through Panto season. Caitlin is so enthusiastic about it, I'm blown over. The glass display cabinet will be fab and seen by thousands while it's there.

That's great news.

If any readers ever saw Rondart in action or has any memories of his unusual darts act, please let me know at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

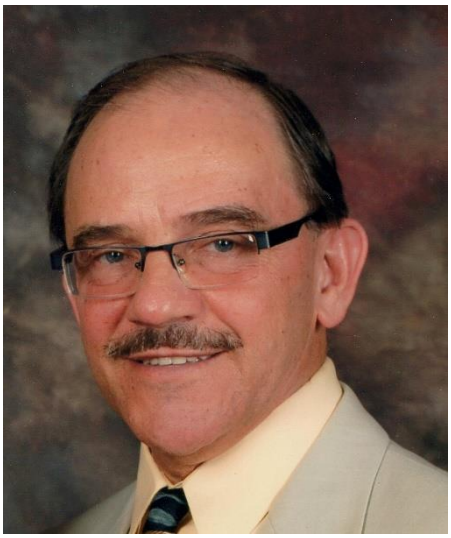
MIKE GREGORY – FEEDBACK

Brian H. writes

Thank you for another touching DDN & a fitting tribute to Mike Gregory. Sad, in one way, that you seem to be featuring so many darting greats we have lost...but nice, in another, that you're remembering their achievements & contributions to the game & bringing their feats to many of us who may not have known or forgotten. Looking forward to your next offering already!

Thanks Brian. That's life I'm afraid. What upsets me is that we are also tending to be losing a number of those who were comparatively young.

Canada's Bob Sinnaeve and his wife Judy wrote

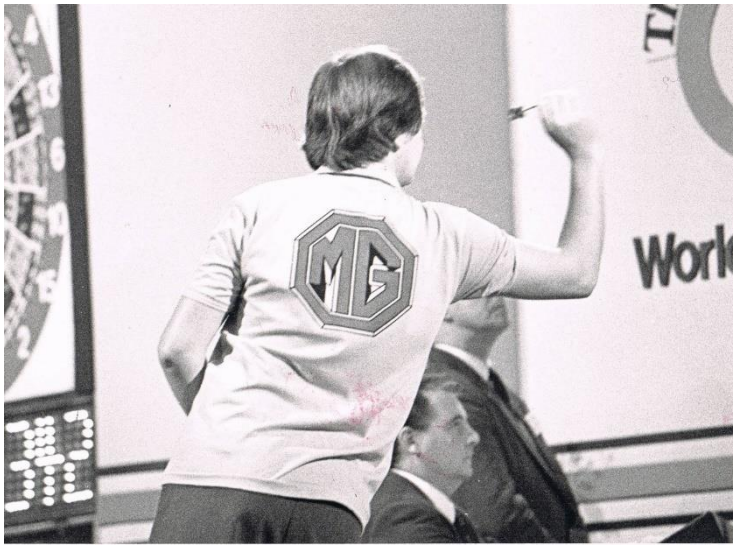


Hi Patrick. Hope you continue to be well. Enjoyed your Mike Gregory features. Bob (pictured here in 2010) *recalls playing Mike and losing in what he recalls to be the Butlins in 1986 right after he lost to Bob Anderson in the World Masters the same week. Things are not as clear as back then. Bob did say there was a fight that happened in the back of the venue during the match but he heard none of it on stage. I was with him but saw the match from the players' room. He doesn't recall clearly at what position it was but he did go a distance.*

Sad that we are losing all these great players of our era.

Thanks to Judy and Bob. Best wishes to you both.

MIKE GREGORY – TRIBUTE – PART 3



In this final part of my tribute to Mike Gregory, I take a look at his other victories and important matches he appeared in over the years. The excellent website www.dartsdatabase.co.uk provides this list of Mike's 'Best Major Results'. This includes his appearance in the 1992 Embassy World final, his two World Master finals in 1983 and 1992 and his *News of the World* wins in 1987 and 1988 plus these major victories (with runner-up English unless stated):

British Matchplay 1984 (Runner-up Keith Deller) (*To make the Final Mike had beaten Jocky Wilson (Scotland) in the quarterfinal and Eric Bristow in the semi-final.)*
British Professional 1984 (R/up – John Lowe)
Butlins Grand Masters 1984 (R/up – Bob Anderson)
MFI World Matchplay 1986 (R/up – Jocky Wilson (Scotland))
WDF Europe Cup Singles 1988 (R/up – Trevor Nurse (Scotland))
Embassy Gold Cup 1994 – (R/up Fran Lynch (England)

adding these other titles (in date order) with each runner-up shown (England unless stated):

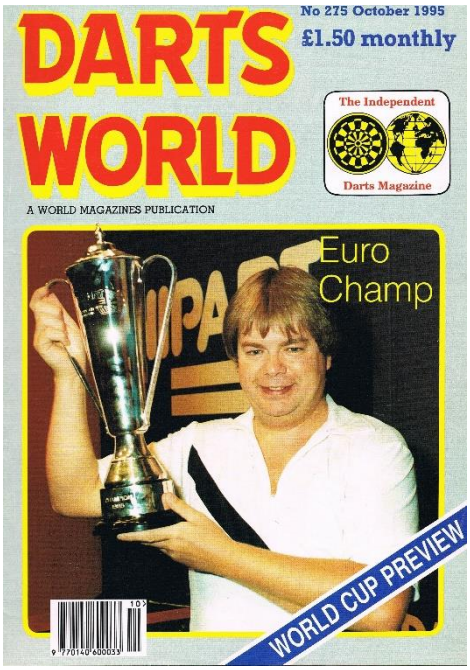
Finnish Open 1984 (Runner-up – Colin Baker) and 1987 (R/up – Bob Anderson)

(*Mike told me in 2011, that until the Finnish Open, he had never flown before. He sat between Dave Lee and Cliff Lazarenko on the plane and roomed with Dave Lee. "And I won it."*)

Australian Grand Masters 1986 (R/up – Horrie Sedan (Australia) and 1992 (Runner-up Brian Bigham (Australia))
Dry Blackthorn Cider Masters 1988 – (R/up - Mike Manning)
Swedish Open 1989 (R/up – Eric Bristow) and 1992 (Dennis Priestley)
British Open 1991 (R/up – John Lowe)
Canadian Open 1991 (R/up – Bob Anderson)
PDC Lada UK Masters 1992 (R/up – Dennis Priestley and 1993 (R/up – Bob Anderson)
Antwerp Open 1993 (R/up – Jozef Scheyltjens (Belgium))
Norway Open 1994 (R/up – Stefan Eeckelaert (Belgium))
Belgium Open 1994 (R/up – Stefan Eeckelaert (Belgium) and 1995 (R/up - Pascal Rabu (Belgium))
Swiss Open 1995 (R/up – Andy Fordham)
Unipart European Darts Masters 1995 (R/up - Peter Manley)

In my interview with Mike in 2011 he told me that he had been able to make a full-time living out of darts up until 1995 but then his personal life changed. He recalled that his last

BDO title was the Unipart European Masters against Peter Manley at Lakeside in 1995. His victory is pictured here on the front page of *Darts World* (issue 275, October 1995).



For that tournament *Darts World* magazine (Issue 274, September 1995) reported that Mike was the 6-1 third favourite behind Steve Beaton (England) (5-1) and Ritchie Burnett (Wales) (5-2 favourite).

In addition, Mike succeeded in winning the Legrand WDF Europe Grand Prix in 1995. Over the season a total of 107 men from 13 countries earned Grand Prix points and it was Mike who narrowly won the top prize of £900, with 28 points, with his England colleagues Andy Fordham and Colin Monk sharing joint runner-up place and prize money of £450 each. (England's Deta Hedman won the Ladies' title.)

Any top darts player would be proud of a record like this.

Of course, in addition to winning many titles, Mike played in hundreds of exhibition events over the years in pubs, clubs and other venues up and down the nation. In 2011 he recalled the Embassy Roadshows and Bass nights:

"The Embassy Road Show (with Tony Green) were forty nights (for nine years). Involved ten challenges from players and then Tony did a 'Bullseye' quiz. Bass was 250 nights (for 12 years). I only ever failed to turn out for one exhibition. It was at the Trinity Club, Dorchester. Four foot of snow!" He added "I still do a few [exhibitions] *but am planning to do more."*

Did Mike ever hit a perfect nine-dart 501?

He told me

"Not in a tournament. During my period with Bass one of the 20-night head-to-heads against Steve Beaton (Bass/Daily Star). On the first leg back after a 45 minutes break I got a nine-darter. The 'Yuppies' from Bass were there and were very pleased."

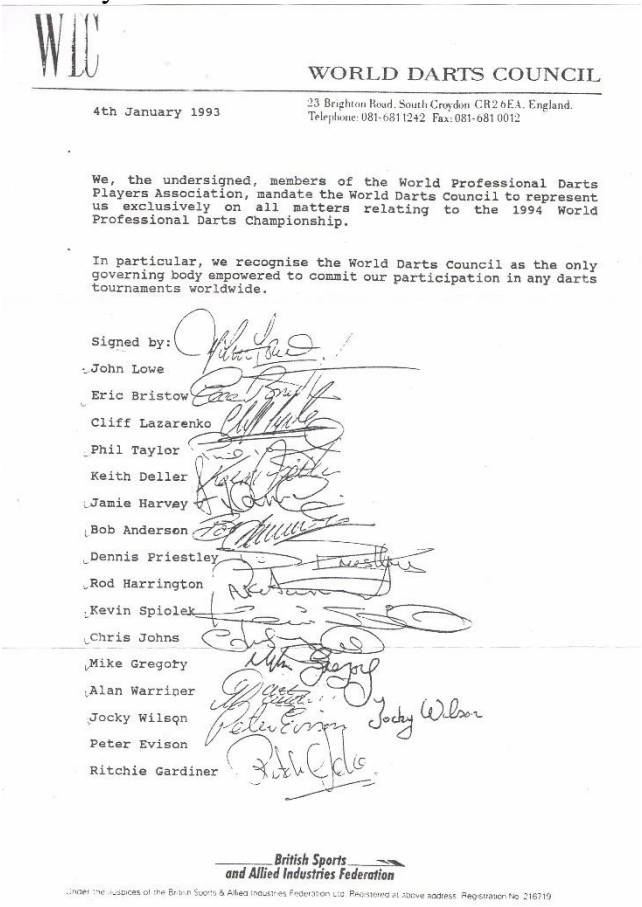
It should not be forgotten that Mike was selected to play for England. He told me

"*Something like 28 caps. It was a strange feeling playing for your country. The first time I had to follow Bristow. "You ain't world number four for nothing," he told me, "Go out there and win" and I did."*

[In fact, Mike's record for England was played 27: won 18.]

And, of course, the whole world of darts was sent into chaos when the World Darts Council (WDC) (later the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC)) and its sixteen 'rebel' professionals broke away from the BDO (British Darts Organisation). Mike told me that he was unaware of what was happening. He said "I wasn't there when the WDC badges were worn at the

Embassy." But Mike knew that there had been 'a big row' led mainly by the fact that "There was not enough money" in darts at that time.



WORLD DARTS COUNCIL

4th January 1993

23 Brighton Road, South Croydon CR2 6EA, England.
Telephone: 081-6811242 Fax: 081-681 0012

We, the undersigned, members of the World Professional Darts Players Association, mandate the World Darts Council to represent us exclusively on all matters relating to the 1994 World Professional Darts Championship.

In particular, we recognise the World Darts Council as the only governing body empowered to commit our participation in any darts tournaments worldwide.

Signed by:
John Lowe
Eric Bristow
Cliff Lazarenko
Phil Taylor
Keith Deller
Jamie Harvey
Bob Anderson
Dennis Priestley
Rod Harrington
Kevin Spiolek
Chris Johns
Mike Gregory
Alan Warriner
Jocky Wilson
Peter Evison
Ritchie Gardiner

British Sports and Allied Industries Federation

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Mike agreed to stand up and be counted (see signature on WDC statement (left) and joined the WDC and, to begin with everything went well, although the WDC was in ongoing legal battles with the BDO.

To begin with, everything went well for him. Mike won the first, PDC (the name had been changed from WDC) major, the Lada UK Masters1992, held in Norwich played under 'equal darts' rules, beating Dennis Priestley in the final.

Mike then returned in 1993 to regain his title, defeating Bob Anderson in the final. But then things changed for Mike.

In 1994, Mike returned to the BDO, his main reason being that he feared the potential negative financial impact on him and his family if the legal processes of 'The Split' went against the PDC and its members.

He told me

"I sat down with my wife Carol and we agreed that it wasn't worth the risk. We had a mortgage and, at that time, two children."

Looking back at those times, I asked Mike in 2011 whether he had any regrets. He replied

"If I'd have known what was going to happen, I would have stayed with the WDC. I think the PDC has done it really good but I think the BDO should have taken up Barry Hearn's offer. Everything in one house. Hindsight is a wonderful thing but I'm still enjoying life."

As for the future, at the end of our interview in 2011, Mike (pictured here in 2011) said

"I'm quite happy as I am. I passed my motorbike test in 2006 and have had numerous bikes including a 2.3 engine Triumph Rocket. Always loved motorbikes but you

couldn't whilst playing. I'm very happy. That's all I want to be. I'm enjoying life with San. No stress."

Mike passed away on 19th April 2022 having finally lost his brave battle against dementia.

In addition, darts fans may know that Paul Starr included a chat with Mike with Steve Brown and Peter Manley in Paul's feature *Behind the Bar* which can be found at this link: https://dartsplanet.tv/mike-gregory-steve-brown-peter-manley-join-paul-behind-the-bar/

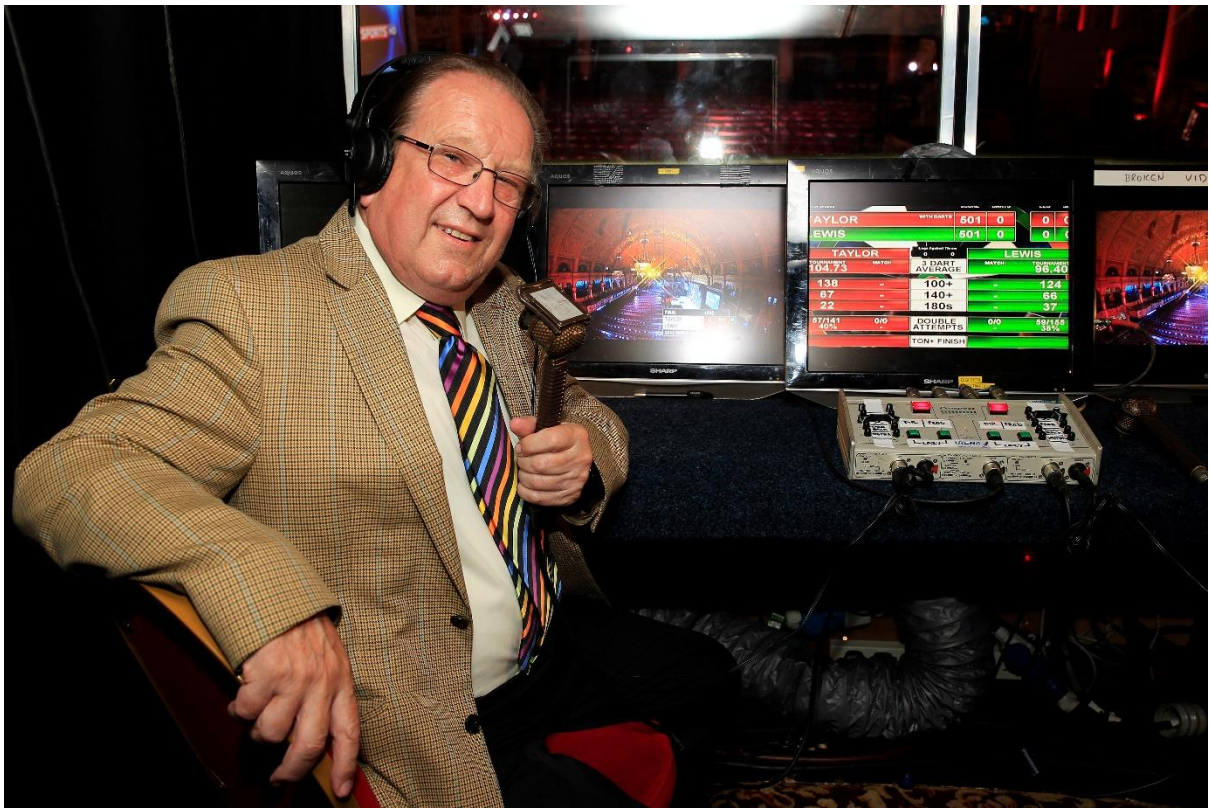
RIP Mike.

BROADCASTING GIANT JOHN GWYNNE PASSES AWAY

I was very sad to read of the death of commentator and friend John Gwynne on Saturday 9th July. We had met on a number of occasions over the years and I found him always cheerful, knowledgeable, not only with regard to darts but also the many other sports that he was interested, and life in general.

With thanks to the PDC I reproduce their tribute to John (the main photo being credited to "Lawrence Lustig/PDC".

The Professional Darts Corporation is saddened to learn that Hall of Fame member John Gwynne passed away on Saturday morning following his battle with cancer.



A highly-respected sports broadcaster, Gwynne was part of the Sky Sports commentary team at the WDC's first World Championship in 1992-93, having previously reported on the sport for radio and "Darts Phone Line Commentary" after moving from his original career as a schoolteacher.

He would be part of the Sky Sports team for the next two decades, fittingly retiring in 2013 after covering 20 World Championships and 20 World Matchplays.

Gwynne also wrote for Darts World magazine and worked with the Darts Regulation Authority, as well as championing the Log-End format of the sport - popular in his native Manchester - and working as an exhibition MC and referee.

His work with Sky Sports had seen him report on football for the "Soccer Saturday" programme, and he subsequently wrote his "Soccer Satisfied" book which was published in 2020 and details his experiences in the sport.

He also broadcasted on cricket, rugby league and speedway, and was inducted into the PDC Hall of Fame in 2014.

"John was a respected and popular figure in darts and across sports media and this is a sad time for all who knew him," said PDC Chief Executive Matt Porter.

"As part of the original Sky Sports commentary team alongside Sid Waddell and Dave Lanning, John's distinctive voice was part of the soundtrack to the PDC's formative years and they formed an iconic trio.

"John was hugely passionate about the sport of darts and made a great contribution at all levels during his career.

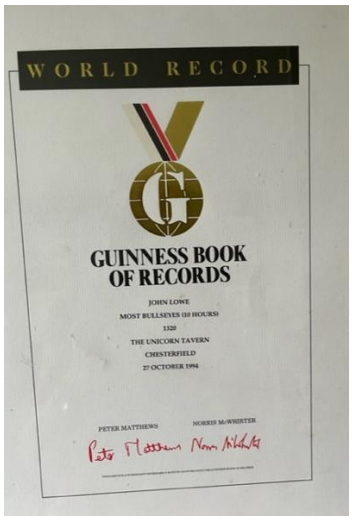
"We send our condolences and sympathies to John's family and friends."

So, I am sure, are many darts fans. RIP John.

JOHN LOWE MBE – WORLD RECORD

A few weeks ago, a member of the Darts from the Past Facebook group asked

"I seem to recall that back in the mid-late 70s seeing John Lowe (on a few occasions) in exhibition going for the world record of hitting as many 'ton-plusses' as possible in 15 minutes. There was usually a big clock placed on the stage so that the audience could see the time counting down. I seem to remember the record being improved by John from 34 to 48 at the time. Anybody else remember this ?"



So, who best to clarify the query than 'Old Stoneface' himself? Here's what he told me:

'I may be getting a little older but I cannot recall doing that. I think it must have been someone else, the only record I still hold in the Guinness Book of World Records, is 1320 Centre Bullseyes in 10 hours, (pic attached).'

Thank you John.

DORWIN DARTS QUESTION I CANNOT ANSWER

Anne Murphy has enquired, via my website www.patrickchaplin.com. She wrote:

I have a set (3) including extra paper flights of Dorwin Darts. I believe these were made in '40s. On the Box it says VOCAB. no. 782, Pat. No. 546079, Prov. Pat. No. 7912, Reg. T.M. No. 609777. I read your post but was hoping to understand what the VOCAB no. means or where I could search for information on the Patent and TM numbers?

Anne then sent me the legend that can be found on the darts box (see above) and I replied:

Hi Anne. As regards the numbers, I would suggest that the 'Pat. no.' should be investigated at the Patent Office. The other are 'Prov. Pat.' which would have been a provisional patent number allocated up until the final Pat. no. (Patent Number) was awarded. 'Reg. T.M.' as you probably guessed is the Registered Trade Mark, DORWIN..

'Although I have been unable to ascertain the meaning of 'VOCAB', I am certain that the number 782 refers to the model number of the darts. For example, one example I have to hand (but from the 1960s) states 'No. 722 Heavy".

But, if right, what do the letters 'VOCAB' represent? Any ideas anyone? Drop me a line at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.

NEXT MONTH: The much-delayed tribute to Sandra Greatbatch *will* appear.

MY RESEARCH IS SPONSORED BY

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