

DARTS HISTORY

(aka *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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SANDRA GREATBATCH – A TRIBUTE

DDN readers were made aware of the passing of Shaun ‘Nine-Dart’ Greatbatch when I published a tribute to him in the June issue (#147). Shaun had died on 6th June this year but less than a month previously, on 10th May, he had lost his mum, top lady darts player, Sandra.



Sandra Greatbatch was a Wales international and winner of numerous titles, including the BDO Gold Cup (1989) and the WDF Women’s World Cup (1992). (Sandra is shown above being presented with her trophy and cheque for winning the Gold Cup by Mike Sanders, Area Sales Manager for Embassy. © *Darts World/Steve Daszko*.)

Sandra Greatbatch was born on 26th February 1946 in Litcham, Norfolk but when I met her back in 2010, she lived in Lakenheath, Suffolk. Sandra’s mum and dad were Robert and Kathy Smith. She told me

“Dad was a pub landlord but busied himself with other work as a cobbler, bus driver and part-time fireman while mum ran the pub. I became interested in darts at a young age. I used to play in the pub when it was closed. At that age it was a fascination.”

Later Sandra played in a local darts league ‘with the men’ but gave up darts when she married. She had two children, son Shaun and daughter Sara. Sandra told me

“Before becoming a darts player I worked in administration until I moved to Suffolk. When the children came along it was get any job you can to keep the bills paid. I was never out of part-time work whilst they were at school.”

Once Shaun and Sara settled into middle school, Sandra returned to darts, going out one night a week playing darts with the local ladies’ team. Then

“I was asked to play super league, which I knew nothing about, and then it snowballed from there to County and Country.”

Sandra played for the Norfolk County team from 1980 to 1987 where she played 60 games. She then moved to Cambridgeshire in 1987 where up to the time of my interview in September 2010 she had played 208 games all in the ‘A’ team. Back in the early 1980s, when she was becoming seriously interested in darts, did Sandra have any personal goals in mind? She told me

“Not really. I just progressed through the stages enjoying it. Once you do not enjoy it it’s time to pack it up.”



When asked about role models, Sandra said

“I always admired Deta Hedman and Mandy Solomons for their professional attitude and Trina Gulliver for maintaining her consistency at the top. In my era it was Deta, Mandy and Sharon Colclough although I was consistently told I respected them too much when I played them.”

(The image, left, shows Mandy and Deta at a Hampshire v

Essex County match. Also featured is Rod Harrington and top referee, the late Freddie Williams. (Image © Sheila Handley.)

Despite too much ‘respect’, Sandra still managed to win a good number of top tournaments. When asked how she broke into the top flight, Sandra told me

“I won many County Opens plus the Gold Cup, Welsh Open and Classic but winning the British Open singles three consecutive years when it was best of three legs was probably my breakthrough.”

Of her long career in darts, the question had to be “What were your highlights?” Sandra replied

“Representing my County and Country, playing in the Ladies World Professional at Lakeside, losing in the semi-final, winning the British Open Singles and pairs, winning the Gold Cup Singles and also the Pairs. I have won Jersey and the Isle of Man Singles, the Welsh Open and Classic. But I will always be proud as a winner of the Europe Cup for Wales with my then partner Rhian Speed. My one regret is though I never won the [WINMAU] World Masters. Twice I had it in my hands in the final and let it slip.”

In 1989 Sandra had a memorable major win, claiming the Embassy Gold Cup held at the Trentham Gardens, Stoke-on-Trent. The *Darts World* report of the match stated merely that

‘The Women’s Singles went to Sandra Greatbatch (Suffolk) who had a 3-0 win over Jane Phillips (Hertfordshire) and a final leg completed in 17 darts. In the semi-finals Sandra beat Thelma Tolson (Ayrshire) 3-0 and Jane defeated Kent’s Olive de-Courcy 3-1.’

As Sandra mentioned above, she made it to the final of the WINMAU World Women’s Masters Singles final twice, 1992 and 1997. In 1992 Sandra had beaten the American darts ace Kathy Maloney 3-0 in the semi-final to set up a final against her Wales compatriot Leeanne Maddocks who was having the weekend of her life. Leanne defeated England’s Sue Edwards 3-1 in her semi-final. *Darts World* reported of the Final:

‘First-time doubles gave Sandra the edge and she took the first two legs and came close to the title, just missing a 119 checkout. Leanne took the third leg and then Sandra’s finishing power deserted her. A “no score” throw allowed the teenager to level and then come from behind in the “decider” to take her second World title of the day.’

The photograph, right, shows Sandra (runner-up) with WINMAU Managing Director Harry Kicks. (Image: PC/DW Archive. Used with permission.)

[Earlier Leeanne Maddocks had become the WINMAU World Youth Singles champion (when the girls and boys played together in the same tournament) when she had beaten German Youth Champion Christian Lechtken 3-1.]



The 1997 World Masters semi-final found Sandra pitched against the Netherlands dart ace, Francis Hoenselaar. *Darts World* reported

‘Hoenselaar notched a respectable 23.37 average against Greatbatch but the whoop of delight from the Welsh International told the story of her 3-2 win over the top seed.’

World Number One, England’s Mandy Solomons, whitewashed her England compatriot, ‘a nervous’ Crissy Howat, 3-0 in the other semi-final.

Darts World reported the Final:

‘Was there to be a fairytale success for Greatbatch, runner-up in 1992? The tense opening three legs went with the darts, Solomons producing a superb third leg 114 checkout and going out to victory with her fourth throw for the winning double, after the red and green shirted Welsh player missed five doubles to save the match.’

Sandra's only appearance in the Ladies World Professional Championship was at the Lakeside in 2002. She beat England's Crissy Manley [née Howat] 2-0 in the quarterfinals but was defeated by the same score when she came up against Netherland's Francis Hoenselaar in the semi-final.

Back in 1992 Sandra had started the year in the way she meant to go on when, at the Ramada Inn West London she not only won the Woman's Singles in the British Open but also the Ladies Pairs. In the Singles, in the semi-finals, Sandra defeated Netherland's Kitty van de Vliet in 'three excellent games' completed in 19, 21 and 14 darts. Hampshire's Mandy Solomons, who joined Sandra in the final had a much more difficult match in her semi-final, against Belgium's Vicki Pruim, eventually winning through 3-2.

Darts World reported on the Final as follows:

'Mandy took the first leg in the final before Sandra got into her stride with the next three for a 3-1 championship victory which earned her the top women's prize of £1,200.'

But Sandra wasn't finished with winning that day. *Darts World* reported:

'Sandra's form didn't desert her in the Women's Pairs when, with partner Rhian Speed, she defeated Lil Coombes and Sue Talbot [England] 3-0 in the final.'

Rhian and Sandra shared the top prize of £600.

In October that same year the Wales pairing of Greatbatch and Speed lifted another title when the Wales ladies team lifted the Women's Cup in Europe Cup VIII held at Planet Funfun, Kerava, Finland. In the ladies' singles, Sandra beat Frances Hoenselaar (Netherlands) 4-2 in the first round, England's Sharon Colclough (4-1) in the second, Lene Mikkelsen (Denmark) (4-0) in the quarter-finals led to her meeting Astrid Kamm (Germany) in the semi-final.

Sandra whitewashed Astrid 4-0 whilst, sadly, her Wales compatriot Rhian Speed lost the other semi-final, falling 4-3 to the German darts ace Heike Ernst. The outcome of the Final was reported briefly in *Darts World*:

'Heike then became the first continental player to take the Ladies' Singles title with a 4-1 victory over Sandra.'

But not all was lost.

In their semi-final in the Ladies' Pairs, Sandra and Rhian Speed (Wales) whitewashed the usual tough Dutch pairing of Frances Hoenselaar and Kitty van der Vliet (4-0). Winners of the other semi-final were the Wales teams' old adversaries from England, Sharon Colclough and Sue Edwards but Sharon and Sue were no match for Sandra and Rhian on the day. They



beat them 4-1 to win the title. (The photo above shows Sandra and Rhian lifting the Women's trophy. (© Darts World/PC Archive/Steve Daszko.)

Although the England Men's team won the Men's Cup (and England won Europe Cup VIII overall) the Wales team won the Women's Cup (and the gold medal) with 55 points with Germany in second place (37 points) and England in third with 29 points.

Sandra passed away on 10th May 2022 at the age of 76.

In a tribute in the *Daily Star* Sandra was described as 'a trailblazer of women's darts' and 'an absolute darting legend'.

Announcing her death on Twitter, her son, Shaun, who was himself to die within a month of his mum's passing, said

'It is heartbreaking for me to announce that last night at 9.30 p.m. my mum left the oche for the last time. She taught me so much about darts and I will miss her so much...'



(Sandra with her son, Shaun, shown together here at home in Lakenheath, Suffolk in 2010. (Image © 2010 Chiphotos. Used with permission.))

Amongst numerous tributes, Wayne Mardle tweeted

'Another absolute darting legend has left us. Sandra Greatbatch was one of the very best for over four decades. The darting world will miss her greatly. A wonderful lady. My thoughts are with all her family.'

PDC major winner, Kevin Painter, posted

'Very sorry for your loss Shaun. Sandra was a lovely lady and a great player. Condolences to you and the family mate.'

Jamie Caven also Tweeted

'So sorry to see this Shaun. Always had a friendly face and [I] learned so much from Sandra during the turn of the millennium when I was at Cambs. [Cambridgeshire] Very sad day for darts. Condolences to you all xxx.'

A very sad day for darts indeed. RIP Sandra.

PUFFING THE DART – RONDART - FEEDBACK

In response to my RONDART article in last month's issue, I received the following email:

'Hello Patrick. Jason Carter here again from across the pond...

Great edition of DDN per usual. I found your particular piece on Ronald Tomlinson considerably interesting. For such the fact that Wayne Mardle also "blows" or "puffs" darts out of his mouth with amazing accuracy. How is this done? Do any of your readers care to chime in on the secret?'

From the UK, Geoff Foreman wrote

'Many thanks as always for the newsletter, Patrick. I think you might have seen this already, but I hadn't, so thanks for sharing the information about Rondart.'

Geoff's 'this' is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzVJUL1F6uU> .Wayne Mardle 'puffin'.



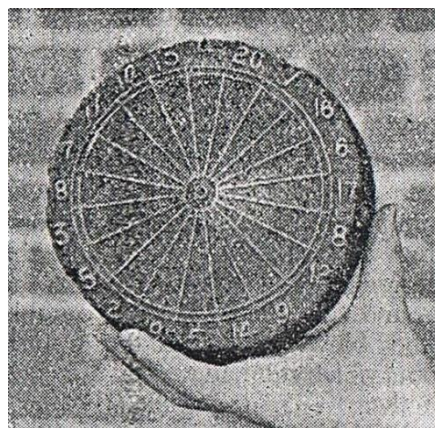
The photo (left) was sent to me some years ago by RONDART himself in later life demonstrating his own 'puffing' style. (Photo: © Ronald Tomlinson and PC Archive.)

In addition, Bill Bell thought at first that the RONDART article was a wind-up. He wrote:

'Never heard of Rondart before...I thought it was one of your April Fools jokes. I always thought Puff and Dart originated in Sussex?'

Now that's an interesting point Bill makes. When I first began researching darts history back in the 1980s, I came across, purely by chance, the Winter 1947 issue of *The Countryman* which featured a letter submitted by M. W. Inman titled, 'SUSSEX DART BOARD', accompanied by the above photo.

Mr. Inman wrote:



'This little board [see above] was used in the game of puff darts in Sussex inns about sixty years ago. The dart, about an inch in length, was blown through a fine three-foot tube.'

Although readers of my book *Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history* (still available) will know that 'puff and dart' can be traced back to the 15th century (and is a predecessor of our modern dart game) what is interesting about Mr. Inman's letter is that it pins down 'puff darts' as still being played in Sussex in the 1880's. This was still a time pre-modern darts.

What is curious about this little, hand-sized, dartboard is that the numbers are *not* what we would regard today as 'standard' BUT are those recognised as featured on the Manchester Board.

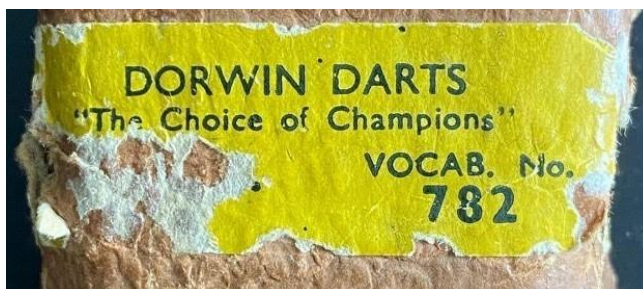
The only company that was manufacturing such boards back in the nineteenth century was a Manchester-based firm of Perrigo. They made those boards, for adult play, with a ten-inch diameter, which found their way to pubs in the Manchester area and surrounds. Although Perrigo no longer exist, I believe Manchester Boards are available today from another source.

My guess is that Perrigo always made these tiny boards to meet a demand in England where puff-darts was still popular with children. However, I have never managed to confirm this.

DORWIN DARTS - FEEDBACK

Thanks to David King who responded to my query in #148 about the word 'VOCAB' as seen on the box of a set of DORWIN's (right). David wrote

'Hi Pat, ... VOCAB is just an abbreviation of Vocabulary. i.e., in the context of the darts, it is a style vocab, VOCAB. No 782....'



Fellow DDN reader, Chris Lovell emailed

'Hi Pat. Another Great DDN. I believe this means its Catalogue or Book number VOCAB being short for vocabulary.'

And Ashley Dell wrote

Hi Patrick. I think the Vocab number refers to a stock number that retailers would use to re-order an item. Keep up the good work...'

FEEDBACK FROM NOVA SCOTIA

Doug Haney from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada writes

Patrick. Your research is just fascinating to me. Where you find all this information never ceases to amaze me when I read your articles. I look forward to receiving your email. I thank you once again for all your interesting articles, keep up the good work and keep safe.

I replied

‘Thanks Doug. It’s great to hear from you. Thank you for your comments. They are much appreciated.

Now. Where do I find the information?

As you may know, I have been researching darts for more than 35 years, so much of it pre-dates Google searches, of course. My archive here at home provides much of the information I need plus, of course, feedback from DDN subscribers.

[The photo, right, taken at the end of July shows a *fragment* of the information I hold and does not reveal my collection of darts and darts ephemera.]



I am proud that DDN/Darts History remains ‘subscriber-only’ by email and is not available on-line. That ensures my information goes to darts fans, like you, who care about the history of our great game.’

Doug’s email acts as a timely reminder to me that DDN also relies on you the readers helping me with answers I cannot provide (such as ‘VOCAB’ above).

Thanks to you all.

MY RESEARCH IS SPONSORED BY

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