

DARTS HISTORY

(aka *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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THE FIRST NATIONAL DARTS TEAMS TOURNAMENT – THE PEOPLE



When the *News of the World* Sunday newspaper launched its individual darts competition for the Metropolitan Area of London in 1927 it had no real idea how much it would grow.

The *News of the World* grew in the London Area until the 1935-36 season when it was expanded to embrace the Home Counties. In 1936-37 a Wales Division was added, with the Lancashire Division following in 1937-38. Much progress was made over the next twelve months when in 1938-39 there were six separate divisions, London and the South, Wales, Lancashire & Cheshire, Yorkshire, the North of England, and Midland Counties.

The newspaper always intended to extend the competition to a Grand Final where all the six Divisional Champions would meet in London to

fight it out for the title of National Champion. But despite their best efforts, it did not happen. The *News of the World* did not manage to achieve a *national* champion because the varying conditions and rules under which darts was being played in different parts of the country made organisation difficult; an indication that the executive of the National Darts Association (NDA) still had some way to go in their programme of standardisation of the game.

Towards the end of the 1930s the organisers of the *News of the World* competition met to consider how to move forward with the concept of a national competition. Then the war intervened and the 'challenge of unification' had to be abandoned.

However, at the offices of the *News of the World's* key competitor for Sunday readers, *The People* achieved where its rival had failed but for **TEAMS**. In 1938/39 *The People* launched its National Darts Teams Championship of England and Wales for the Lord Lonsdale trophy. (Readers must remember that back then 'national' meant England and Wales, and did not include Scotland or Northern Ireland.)

In early 1938, *The People* announced the launch of its National Darts Team Championship and from that time until the Grand Final on 27th May 1939, "Fairflight" (R. Ingham) told readers that he had 'visited every English and Welsh county and travelled 25,000 by road on its business.' "Fairflight" wrote

“What better proof could I give of the truly national character of this Lonsdale Trophy Contest of ours – the first national teams contest ever to be staged.

The eight teams here tonight can always boast: “We played in the first final of the first national darts teams championships of England and Wales.”

The Final held on 27th May 1939 at the Empress Hall, Earls Court, London, was played under *The People* conditions which meant a 9ft throw with the board hung at 5ft 8ins. The games were played 1,001- up, straight start, finish with a double.

“Fairflight” was keen to point out that

“Yet in their own localities and leagues many of the teams play from the short throw to a board hung at varying heights. But you will hear no complaints; there have been none from the start, although there might easily have been.”

Clearly, whatever “Fairflight” had achieved had overcome any problems that seemed to be bugging the *News of the World*. “Fairflight” added

“This willing to play under “The People” rules leads me to hope that soon the rules of darts may be nationalised. The cricket pitch is 22 yds., no matter where you play. So should the “throw” at darts be nationalised. “A national contest and national rules” is our motto.”



But, of course, standardising cricket was easy. It was played in a field with plenty of space and nothing to hinder the match but darts was played *indoors* where on occasion the space in which to play was restricted, such as a low ceiling.

“Fairflight” was not worrying about the fact that the *News of the World* already had its own ‘rules’ and that its individual tournaments were organised under the auspices of the National Darts Association (NDA) (established 1924) after all, *The People* was a team event.

In his introduction to the first National Teams programme, “Fairflight” was proud of the thousands of players he had met and the numerous friends he had made during his tour of the nation during which he visited every county in England and Wales. He had seen darts being played ‘under all kinds of queer conditions’ and ‘viewed with interest some of the finest scenery in the world, particularly in North and Mid Wales.’

The 1938-39 County Finals of the Teams began at Bedford on February 24th May, and ended at Swansea on 12th April. There were twenty-eight County finals in all. “Fairflight” was impressed by them all but the County final held in Southampton on 27th March particularly stayed in his mind. He wrote

“...the team from the White Hart Inn, East Cowes, Isle of Wight, only arrived just in time to play their first match. They had been delayed in crossing to the mainland owing to the motor boat breaking down in mid-channel and it was drifting helplessly for over an hour until seen by a fishing boat.

A hurried consultation, the team taken back to Cowes, a fresh boat chartered, this time in a speed boat. No room for spectators, only for the eight players, a dash to Southampton and on

the stage. They won the County final, too, after this alarming experience. Alas! They got beaten in the Area final (Southern Home Counties) by the “Tigers” of Croydon.

Eight finalists made it to the Empress Hall, Earls Court, London, on Saturday 27th May 1939. Played in Stages each game was the best of three, 1,001-up, straight start. To ensure fair play ‘scoring will be shown by subtraction and scores will be checked at the end of each round’. In addition, ‘The captain of a team may inform a player the double he requires to finish the game, but only if asked.’

As for ‘modern technology’ it was reported that

During play two men held long white sticks with light bulbs on the end, and they put the bulbs on the appropriate part of a large indicator board every time a dart was thrown.

In Stage 1 of the Grand Finals, the team representing the *Brown Cow Inn*, York (Champions of the Northern Counties) was pitched against the *Royal Oak Inn*, Pontnewynydd, Pontypool, Monmouthshire, (Champions of the Western Counties). The *Royal Oak* team came out winners 2-0.



Stage 2 was contested between the *Hercules*, Aldgate, London E. 1 (Champions of London) and the *Osborne Arms*, Cambridge (Champions of the Eastern Counties).

In his notes earlier, “Fairflight” had recalled

“I remember the finals in London at Manor Place Baths, when the East End team, “The Hercules,” beat the famous “Weavers Arms” team of Mildmay Park by two legs to nil in the final. ‘Ee what a to-do it was to “Jack King,” the landlord of the losers!”

In its Stage 2 match against the *Osborne Arms*, the *Hercules* went on to win, also 2-0.

In the Stage 3 quarterfinals, the Champions of the Southern Home Counties (the *Prince Albert ‘Tigers’*) met the on-form Champions of the Northern Home Counties, the *King Harold*, Waltham Cross, who won through to the semi-finals.

In the last of the four stages, the *Hearsall Inn ‘A’* from Coventry (Champions of the Midland Counties) beat the Champions of Wales, *Cornacia’s Team* of Swansea 2-1.

In the first semi-final the *Royal Oak Inn* of Pontypool met the *Hercules* and was beaten 2-0 whilst in the second semi-final the *King Harold* (Waltham Cross) beat the *Hearsall Inn ‘A’*, Coventry 2-1.

In the Grand Final the *Hercules* beat the *King Harold* to become the first winners of *The People National Darts Teams Championship*. The famous radio personality Tommy Handley, star of ‘ITMA’ (‘It’s That Man Again’), presented the magnificent Lord Lonsdale Trophy to the victorious team and their Captain Billy Marchant.

I like to think that the *Hercules* winning the title went some way to appease Jack King when his team had been beaten by the now winner.

At the beginning of 1938, 10,225 teams had entered the competition and then had gradually played each other until only eight were left. In the finals programme “Fairflight” paid tribute to the 10,217 who did not make the Empress Hall, Earl’s Court, writing

“Without them the Lonsdale Trophy Contest could not have begun and to them I extend my warmest and deepest thanks.”

So, the first national team tournament was over and the *Hercules* had won and “Fairflight” looked forward to the 1939-40 contest, as he considered darts was “certainly on the map after what you have witnessed to-night.”

But, of course, Adolf Hitler had other ideas. Not only did his action bring the competition to an abrupt halt but the Luftwaffe very nearly destroyed the magnificent Lord Lonsdale Trophy which the championship winners received and held for a year. Sports journalist, Derek Brown wrote in 1981:

During the Blitz it was being kept in Fleet Street when a bomb flattened the building. But the Lord Lonsdale Trophy is with us still, as the inscription on the plinth explains. It reads:



‘This trophy was recovered from the debris of The People premises at La Belle Sauvage, London - burned out in the great fire raid on the night of May 10th 1941 - Though protected by the thick steel walls of the safe in which it was contained, the trophy was blackened and bent by the fierce heat, and of the plinth only the ashes remained – The skill of the craftsman has removed its scars and restored its beauty – and it remains a symbol of pride in a great achievement.’

This most handsome trophy was 3ft 3 in (0.99 m) of solid silver was estimated by Derek Brown (in his book *Guinness Book of Darts* (1981)) to be worth ‘about £5,000 today’ which equates to £25,550 in 2023.

(The best photograph I can find of the Lord Lonsdale Trophy which demonstrates its size is, left, showing George Russell captain of the Eyres Monsell team, Leicester who won the title in 1978.)

(Photograph © *The People*)

FEEDBACK – THE TOAST OF TOWCESTER

I have received two responses about ‘The Toast of Towcester’ article last month. John T. recalled the ‘*Wheatsheaf Boys*’ and wrote

Hi Patrick, thanks for the latest issue and plug. You are to be congratulated on your in-depth research. Good work. Well done. I saw the Wheatsheaf boys in a pub in Stony Stratford High Street. I don’t know if it is still there. There used to be over 20 drinking places in that small town. Not now of course. Hope all is well with you and your family.

And Brian H. emailed me:

Morning Patrick. Hope you and your staff are well!

Thanks for another great read. Particularly liked the story of the team from Towcester & their journey to London for the Lord Lonsdale Trophy final. It's great to see these old photos which conjure up a different era in the world of darts, like on the cover of your book Darts in England. [Still available.]

I always like to see images like these from the past; seeing the way they dressed to play, the shot of the bar, dartboard & darts or posing proudly with the trophy. There's a nostalgia for the time I played myself in the 70s & 80s but also to glimpse how my dad & grandad may have played.

As always, your efforts in bringing the past to life is very much appreciated!

Take care.

Thanks Brian.



Here's a photo of how they dressed back then: the finalists of the Colchester (Essex) Area, *News of the World* in 1937.

The gentleman with the dicky-bow (front row, second from the right) is no other than Mr. Charles Garner, Honorary Secretary of the National Darts Association (NDA) which organised the *News of the World* events. Note also the promotional poster for the *News of the World* 'Signature Tune.'

PAXMAN – FEEDBACK

Keeping with Brian for the moment, he added

I also remember the Paxman darts. There was an indoor market stall in Newcastle that printed photos and also sold darts...and they had a dartboard set up to try sets (which was very rare at the time).

I remember trying a set of Paxmans even though there was no way I could afford them! They seemed like the high end of the market at the time. Happy days!

I found this undated Trade Price List for Paxman Precision Darts in my archive, probably about 1975 when Peter Lally and Kim Brown darts were being produced. 'Postal' is mentioned and, of course, VAT was extra.

And Mick Simpson recalled

PAXMAN PRECISION DARTS		
TRADE PRICE LIST		
	£	p
✓ / JUPITER HEAVY	7.50	10.95
JUPITER MEDIUM	7.00	10.45
✓ / JUPITER SLIM	6.50	9.95
✓ / APOLLO HEAVY	7.50	10.95
APOLLO MEDIUM	7.50	10.95
✓ / APOLLO SLIM	6.50	9.95
PRESIDENT	7.50	10.95
PRESIDENT JUNIOR	7.00	10.45
PRESIDENT SLIM	6.50	9.95
✓ / SATURN HEAVY	8.00	11.45
✓ / SATURN JUNIOR	7.00	10.45
✓ / ROMA	7.50	10.95
SLIM JIM (Knurled)	6.50	9.95
SLIM JIM	6.50	9.95
JENNY	7.00	10.45
EROS	6.50	9.95
CAPPILLA HEAVY	7.50	10.95
CAPPILLA JUNIOR	7.00	10.45
KIM BROWN	8.50	
PETER LALLY	8.50	
All Prices Listed are Subject to V.A.T.		

Paxman darts. I bought a set, back in the 70 s. Mine were called Saturn Junior. [See trade list above.] I still have them. Obviously, they were copper tungsten back then. Was not cheap darts at the time. Mine were £22 and my wages then were £36; so very expensive.

Thanks Mick. Finally, many thanks to two readers who confirmed that Geoff Paxman left Harrows a few years ago.

FEEDBACK FROM NOVA SCOTIA

Doug H. from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia writes

There is never an issue where I do not find something very interesting, or unusual. The things you find and write about is simply amazing. Whether you are a dart player, fan or just like to read your articles there is always something that catches your interest. Over the several years I have been reading your newsletters I can honestly state I look forward to receiving your emails but most importantly reading them. Well done, Patrick.

TRINA'S SURPRISE



I trust that many of you watched the Senior's Champion of Champions tournament over the last weekend of March and the amazing performance of USA's Leonard Gates winning the title. He qualified via the intense competition to win the 'Golden Ticket' and then beat Phil Taylor in the semi-final and Martin Adams in the final. Let's see where Leonard goes next.

But, for me, one of the best moments was when, just after she had been closely beaten by Martin in the quarter-final, the proceedings were interrupted by Trina being presented with the BDO Ladies World Championship trophy which had been won in an auction by a sponsor/fan who then presented it to Trina to keep forever she having lifted that title 10 times over the years. The image, above left (© Sue Gulliver) shows Trina with the trophy in 2016 whilst the screen grab, above, right, shows Trina (with Helen Chamberlain) being reunited with her world trophy; so well-deserved.



SELLING THE FAMILY SILVER

Like many others, I was disappointed that the BDO trophies (or most of them) were put up for auction at the end of March but pleased that many went to collectors. These included the Men's World Professional trophy (£20,050), the Ladies World Professional trophy (£8,000) and WINMAU Master's (Mens) (£10,550) and WINMAU Ladies Masters (£5,000).

John Lowe told *Darts From The Past* recently

Well, the BDO trophies and all useable items have gone. I guess this is the final end of a massive part of darting history, we could say evolution of the sport. Many would disagree. I



have been a part of the progression of the sport, from the NDAGB back in the 60's, the BDO, and then the present PDC. My first National Title and the winners' prize can be seen left.

Ironically it was Eric [Bristow] who I beat in the final, one of the many times we shared the oche over the next 40 years. Eric no longer with us, but I feel sure he would be pleased if I thanked the BDO on behalf of us both for giving us the opportunity to progress into being World Champions and the professional players we became.

THE END OF AN ERA

Having visited *The Dew Drop* pub at Peacehaven, on the south coast and met the guys there at subscriber Bill Bell's 40th birthday 'do' a few years ago *and* having met Jerry the landlord, it was sad news I heard that Jerry and his wife Lynne decided to finally retire in February and left on 2nd February. Bill, below with Jerry and team member Neil Kempster, right) told me:

'Jerry & Lynne have now left the Dewdrop. We held the Sutton Cup in there last Thursday night. We got flowers, chocs and a huge photo card of us all in there through the years.

We had the last cheese 'n' onion sandwiches too 😊

*But it was a good night and a good turnout. Ollie Armfield won the Cup and played bloody well. Yours truly was knocked out in the first round 2-1. Steve, who I played, hit a bl**dy 131 to kick me out -T17, double top, double bl**dy top!!! Couldn't believe it...Great finish.*

Jerry has been slowly selling all the bits and bobs from the pub to whoever wants it... I ended up spending £70 over a few weeks! He kept the darts wooden spoon from the local league, dating back to 1938!



Me and my mate went in for the last night, last Sunday... and stayed for last orders. Very sad. We bought the last drinks in there...2 x Jack Daniels and cokes.

End of an era.'

Thanks for your report Bill. Much appreciated.

They certainly enjoy their darts in the *Dewdrop Inn* and I even won one game when I visited.

(The photo, above left, shows me and my 'research assistant' outside the pub when we visited to celebrate Bill Bell's *fortieth* birthday. (Image © Eel Snaps)

Such pubs are becoming rare and landlords and landladies like Jerry and Lynne even rarer. I wish Jerry and Lynne all the very best in their retirement.

OLIVER NUNN – STUDYING ‘THE SPLIT’ – 30 YEARS ON

Early last month I received an enquiry from a student named Oliver Nunn (pictured right) who emailed me

Dear Dr Chaplin. I hope you are doing well.

My name is Oliver. I am a student journalist from the University of Sheffield (and a big darts fan!).

I am currently working on a project, due at the end of March, on the 30th anniversary of the split in darts. I was wondering if it would be possible to have an interview with you to discuss the split and how you think darts has changed since. If this is something you would be interested in, please get in touch. Look forward to hearing from you.



Oliver and I made contact and chatted for quite some time and from that Oliver was able to complete his project. He wrote later:

Patrick. I've got the article done now. The 1,000-word limit was a bit frustrating as it meant I couldn't include lots of the interesting things we talked about! Oh well, I could always work on a longer piece later after my Uni work is done. Here's a link if you want to have a read:

<https://uosjournalism.shorthandstories.com/the-split-in-darts-30-years-on/index.html>

Thanks again for all your help, I couldn't have got the article done without it!

It's a splendid article which I hope you will all be able to find time to read.

As readers know, I am always ready to spare my time and my knowledge with any student who has chosen darts for a project at Uni. I must say that Oliver's project is one of the best I have read in many a year.

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