

# DARTS HISTORY

(aka *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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## BOB POTTER OBE

(27<sup>th</sup> November 1928 – 14<sup>th</sup> April 2023)

Of all Bob Potter's achievements over his ninety-four years, (fully recorded in his autobiography, *One Man's Dream – The Life and Times of Bob Potter O.B.E.* (2012) as far as the sport of darts concerned it was his meeting with Olly Croft of the British Darts



Organisation (BDO) and referee and commentator Tony Green at the Lakeside Country Club in 1985.

The World Championships had been held at *Jollies*, a nightclub in Stoke-on-Trent from 1979-1985, but that was due to close so Olly needed a replacement quickly for 1986. Thus, the approach to Bob Potter.

(Bob is featured here photographed with me at Lakeside in 2010 as we met to discuss the darts section of his forthcoming autobiography. Image: © Chippix.)

But when darts was mentioned to Bob as something he would entertain being staged at Lakeside he recalled,

*"When I was first approached to hold the Embassy World Professional Darts Championship at Lakeside, I didn't want to know. I thought that darts was a pub game - [Which thankfully it still is.] – always rowdy, full of 'boozers' and definitely not right for my club. I did tell them that it would be okay for one of my ballrooms but they [Olly and Tony] didn't take me up on it...*

*...They had a look around the complex and came and asked me again if I would consider letting them use the club. I told them that I was sorry but darts wasn't right for Lakeside. It was the wrong image.'*

Olly and Tony left, thinking that that was that.

However, after they had gone, Shirley Sharman, Bob's Personal Assistant and the Company Director, told him that he was wrong. Shirley pointed out to Bob that the period after the New Year's party night was always 'dead' and that he should give the darts a go after all, he'd never know unless he did.

It took Bob a while to come round to the idea but eventually he went back to Olly Croft and told him that he'd try it for one year but only on the condition that Bob employed his own

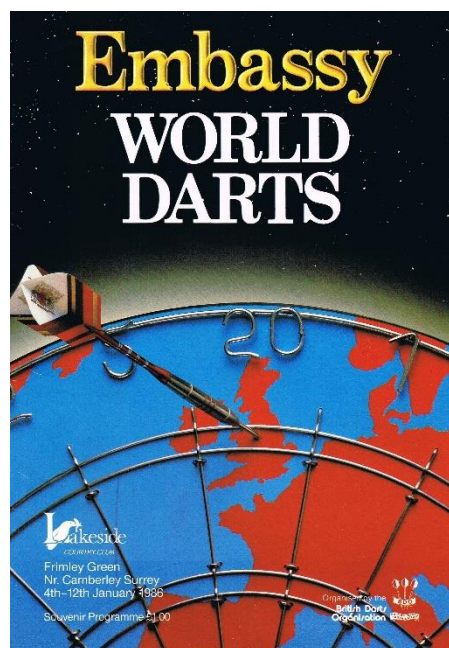
‘disciplinary rulings,’ and that people couldn’t come to the Lakeside directly from the pubs. They would have to be at Lakeside for the whole day. Olly Croft agreed and the ninth Embassy World Professional Darts Championships arrived at Lakeside.

In his message to darts fans in the 1986 tournament programme, Olly said of Bob

*‘...my thanks must go to Bob Potter, the owner of the club. He has done everything we have asked of him to make or settling-in as easy as possible. I hope our stay will be a happy one and a long one. We do not wish to move again.’*

Since the first World Professional Darts Championships held in 1978 it had been sponsored by Imperial Tobacco but this, by law, came to an end when legislation made tobacco sponsorship of sports events illegal. They had no choice but to pull out of darts.

Darts on TV (or rather *not* on TV) was going through to tough time and the BDO approached several potential sponsors but no company was prepared to put up the amount needed to keep the event going.



After realising that he thoroughly enjoyed the event, it was Bob who stepped up to the oche (or the bar), offering to sponsor the World Championship, putting in the same amount as Imperial Tobacco, ‘for one year.’ It was then renamed the Lakeside World Darts Championship for 2004.

In 2012 Bob had been asked “What is the future of darts at Lakeside?” At that time Bob replied

*“My involvement with darts at Lakeside is unlikely to end. Here the BDO and Lakeside staff together deliver the best in darts. World darts is now the top Lakeside attraction and darts fans are never disappointed.”*

The close association with the BDO and Lakeside even continued after Olly was ousted from the organisation in 2011 whilst he and Bob could only watch over the next decade as the BDO collapsed and eventually went into liquidation in 2020. However, after Covid and the defunct BDO, Bob was able to welcome world darts back to ‘The Home of World Darts’ where he liaised with the World Darts Federation (WDF) until his death this year on 14<sup>th</sup> April aged 94.

Bob’s many achievements have been recorded in detail in his autobiography *One Man’s Dream* (2012) and in his earlier book *The Story of Lakeside* (c. 1982) and doubtless in the many obituaries produced in the national press since his passing. But darts fans will always remember him as the man who ‘saved the Embassy,’ who loved his darts and turned the Lakeside complex into ‘The Home of World Darts.’

RIP Bob.

## NEWLY DISCOVERED DARTS ASSOCIATION FILLS THE GAP – A SPECIAL DARTS HISTORY REPORT



Has the ‘missing link’ been discovered in this English building?

When the National Darts Association (NDA) was set up in London in 1924, I had no idea how many darts associations would have existed between that date and the creation of the PDC (formerly the WDC) in 1992.

Just before the beginning of the Second World War, the British Darts Council (BDC) was created by Ted Leggatt (founder of NODOR) and others, as a

breakaway organisation from the NDA; a sort of 1930s ‘split’.

After the war, although the NDA was still in existence it was a spent force and the All-England Darts Association (AEDA) stepped up to take over the control of game and the NDA faded away. But sadly, the AEDA lasted only a few years, followed by the British Darts and Dominoes Association (BDDA), which functioned only during 1948. Thus, by 1949, the sport had no organisation to guide and oversee darts into the future.

This changed in 1953 when *The People* Sunday newspaper joined forces with darts organisers throughout the country and set up the National Darts Organisation of Great Britain (NDAGB) which governed the game until the early 1970s when they were eventually crushed by the juggernaut that was to become the British Darts Organisation (BDO). The United Kingdom Darts Federation (UKDF) temporarily popped its head over the parapet in 1976 but was no match for the ‘power’ of the BDO.

The BDO ruled the sport until its embarrassing demise in the 2000s, having been overrun by the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) during its setting up in the early 1990s.

So, since 1924 there remained only 1949-1952 when the game of darts was not governed by an organisation or two. But that was until last week.

At the beginning of April 2023, during the demolition of the former Upsadaisy Village Men’s Club building, an amazing darts discovery was made. The photograph, above left, shows the Upsadaisy club shortly before demolition (to be replaced by a roundabout) with Club Stewards Eddie and Ethel Bistrow removing their last possessions from the premises before being evicted. (Eddie is also pictured (above, right) drafting the Rules.)



Whilst emptying the building with his working team, member of the Club executive and darts player Phil Toiler found, behind a cupboard that he had pulled away from a wall, a sheath of papers comprising scribbled notes detailing the proposed constitution and rules for the New All-National Darts Council (NANDC) together with several photographs which had captions inked on the reverse which proved very helpful.



The drafted NANDC rules were not dissimilar to those extant nationally in league play and resembled in many ways those of the *News of the World*. The only differences identifiable were Rule 4 (1.16) (Footwear) *Hob-nailed boots must not be worn on the hockey*, Rule 6 (4.23) (Language) which read *No bl\*\*dy swearing on the hockey*, and Rule 8 (3.10) (Behaviour) *No drinking, smoking, or spitting on the stage or at the referee or officials* which was surely way ahead of its time.

One of the most fascinating photographs found in the bundle of papers is the one (left) which shows Herbert Ewol. The reverse of this photograph informs us that Herbert was *'The most popular and one of the best dart players in the NANDC team. He is also an exhibition player whose top act is to 'puff' darts through his trumpet at selected numbers on the dartboard.'*

This chance discovery has thus filled the gap between 1949 and 1953 to prove that the game of darts has had a governing body (or more than one) continuously from 1924 to date.

## DO YOU RECOGNISE THESE DARTS?

Darts fan Paddy Arnold emailed me recently asking what I know about the set of darts (pictured right). To be honest, I'd seen the *shape* before but with the lack any brand or trade mark on the barrels and a lack of a box didn't help.

I told Paddy that I would ask around but that with thousands upon thousands of brands I can't hold out much chance.

BUT I didn't reckon on the accumulated knowledge of Dr. Eddie Norman who has been in the darts business since the 1960s, but I should have done... Eddie replied:

*Patrick. Thanks for sending on the darts photo.*

*Very recognisable barrels these are called "scallop" darts. The scallop barrel darts came in various shapes and had a concave or convex section in the thumb index finger grip.*

*The weight distribution could be front or centre while the grip zone could be centre rear, centre front or rear centre depending on what design you chose. Scallop darts are still made by Red Dragon and Retriever Sports.*



*Originally, Trevor Griffiths and Gordon Smith, owners of Falcon Darts in Woking in the late 1970's made scallop darts for House of Darts International but they got took over by Retriever Sports (Tom Pope). I believe Unicorn may have also made a scallop dart as well but not 100% certain.*

*They were quite a popular design. First out in the late 1970's/early 1980s. Still sold as I say today particularly at Red Dragon but newer better designs than in the photo.*

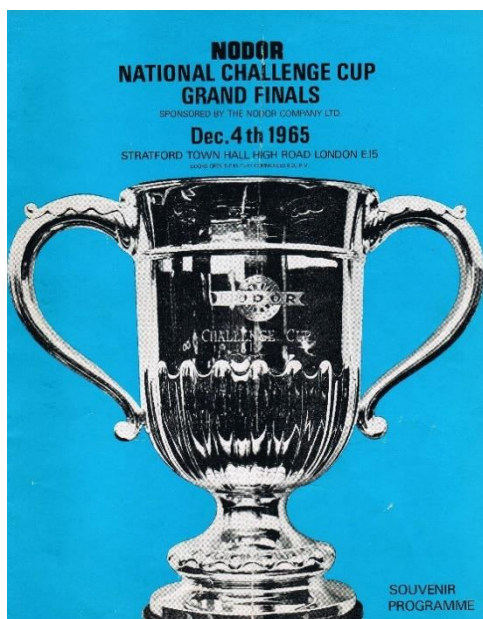
*I am not sure what model is of the photo that you sent me but it could be a Retriever, Red Dragon or even a Falcon Darts model. They were all very similar at the time. Today there are some extraordinary models and styles (and prices).*

*The canes/shafts in the barrels in the photo are not original, as they have a lip on them that suggests Unicorn canes/shafts are being used in the darts. The normal thread on the canes/shafts of most firms was 2BA or ¼ BSF but Unicorn do a 3/16th thread (unique to Unicorn) that overhang the normal darts barrel.*

Yet with all that information from Eddie and other notes received from others, we are unable to pin-point the exact brand of the darts and I doubt we ever will...unless you can help us.

## **A DARTS HISTORY SPECIAL**

### **THE NODOR FOURS - THE NODOR CHALLENGE CUP – PART ONE**



As many of you may recall, I mentioned some years ago that I planned to produce another darts book that would follow on from where *Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history* (2009) left off. However, when reviewing the situation recently, it seems that I will be unlikely to achieve this.

Thus, I have decided that several sections of the chapters I have already drafted need to see the light of day, so I will publish these in a series of 'specials' that will appear from time to time in *Darts History*.

The first of this series was the lead article in the April issue (*The*

*People* teams championship) and for this month I am charting the history of the NODOR Fours (officially called the NODOR Challenge Cup) which was competed for between 1957 and 1981.

It was all begun by a man named John Ross (pictured right in the 1970s). (Image © Chippix. Used with permission.)



John Ross, a darts organiser, and former member of the *News of the World* Team of Darts Champions, joined NODOR, a long-established darts and dartboard company then based in Stratford, east London in December 1956 as a sales representative.

Ross's enthusiasm for darts and his organisational abilities were immediately recognised by the directors who, in 1957, agreed to 'put a bit of cash into darts' and, as an experiment, put their collective toes in the water with the running of the first NODOR Fours competition (for the County of Essex only).

(Essex at that time was much larger administratively than it is today and included such towns as Ilford, Romford, Dagenham, Hornchurch, and Barking, all of which were reorganised as parts of the new London Boroughs that were created under the Local Government Act 1963 and came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1965.)

Each team could nominate five players. The format for each match was the best of three legs, 801-up, start and finish on a double.

This inaugural event, held at the *Doctor Johnson* pub in Ilford, was won by the team from the *Hare and Hounds*, Braintree. At this point of time, I am unable to trace the name of the runner-up.)

Such was the success of this event that, in 1958, London, Surrey and Sussex were added and that year the trophy was contested at the *Old Red Lion*, 640 High Road, Leytonstone, London E.11. The winners that year were the *Old Queen's Head*, the London County Champions.

In 1959 eight counties (London, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, and Staffordshire) participated at the Grand Final which took place at Stratford Town Hall, London E. 15. In accordance with notes made in the programme for that year the final featured the *Dorset Arms*, the London county champions and the *Castle Inn*, Alton (the Hampshire Champions) with the *Dorset Arms* coming out the winners.

However, in Derek Brown's *The Guinness Book of Darts* (1981), the *Gloucester Arms*, Kingston (the Surrey Champions) is listed as the winners and are indeed listed as so in all programmes that followed.

Unlike the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship, where reports were published in that Sunday newspaper every week during the season, reports of the NODOR Fours, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, were rare indeed. Research opportunities relating to this important team darts tournament were (and remain) few and far between. Derek Brown experienced problems with certain results when compiling *The Guinness Book of Darts*.



However, not even Derek's excellent research or indeed of my own efforts had ever discovered any single story of the teams that took part. But that all changed in 2012 when I received an e-mail from Surrey darter Colin Woolman who wrote

*'I have some darts history on the winners of the NODOR Fours which I would like to share with you. My dad Bob (pictured above, left. Image © Colin Woolman. Used with permission.). Bob is on the left in the photo.) won the trophy back in 1959.*

*My dad captained a team from Surbiton, Surrey to victory called the Gloucester Arms. I recall him telling the story that he had won the trophy but he was not the most informative father about his past.'*

[Bob's surname was misspelt in the programme as 'W. Walman'.]

It was not until Colin's father (Robert Ernest, b. 1929, d. 2006) had passed away that Colin undertook some research of his own by examining back issues of his local newspaper, the *Surrey Comet*; research based on what little he remembered his father telling him. Colin said

*'We always knew dad was a good darts player from the stories my mum told us and by the many trophies indoors. People we met would mention him.'*

According to Colin his father always needed a few beers before telling the family of his many darts victories. Colin added

*'In the 1950's dad played a lot of darts; mum said five nights a week! He worked as a milkman for United Dairies (UD) and it was while playing for UD that he won the All-London Individual Singles Championship three years running, 1957, 1958 and 1959.'*

It was about the time Bob met and played with some of the great darts players of that era, including Tom Barrett, Chris Barker, and Bert Norman from the famous *Brown Bear* darts team. (Colin's mother always recalled Tom Barrett being 'a gentleman of darts.') Colin's father also played for the *Jenny Lind* pub in Hampton Hill with Ron Glazier, the brother of left-handed darts legend Alan Glazier.

Bob Woolman also played against the famous London darter Joe Hitchcock, nicknamed 'The Marathon Marvel' (pictured right) in an exhibition match. Colin recalled

*'In those days they played a game called 'Marathon 3001' and it was in one of those games that dad beat him. Joe called dad back up at the end of night and said to the crowd, "This man was lucky to beat me earlier in the evening and I would like to play him again." So, he did and dad beat the great man again.'*

After that Joe became a friend of Colin's father and he would often accompany Joe and other top players and do some 'warm ups' on exhibition nights. In return Joe taught Bob to throw nails and do other trick shots.



In 1959 the NODOR Fours became an eight-county contest as Hampshire, Staffordshire, Oxfordshire, and Warwickshire came on board and it was in this year that the *Gloucester Arms* team made the finals of the tournament and won, beating the *Four Ways Inn*, Cradley Heath, Staffordshire. The photo (below, left)) shows Bob with his *Gloucester Arms* team-

mates with some of their numerous trophies. (Image © Colin Woolman. Used with permission.) Clearly a team to be reckoned with!

Colin Woolman recalled that his father had to work on that Saturday morning delivering milk in his 'horse and cart' but then,



*'Dad told me he had to get his a\*sse over to east London [Stratford Town Hall] with the other three lads as quick as he could. His biggest moan was they only managed to get one pint in before they had to play their first game. All the rest of the finalists had been put up by NODOR due to the distances they had to travel.'*

Bob told his son how lucky he had been to meet and, as Captain of the Gloucester Arms team, be presented

with the cup by former England football captain Billy Wright, CBE. Colin's mother remembered meeting Billy Wright's wife Joy (one of the famous 1950s/1960s vocal group, The Beverley Sisters). Colin's mother had no interest in darts but felt lucky to have had 'a rare night out.'

In *Darts History* #159, Part Two will conclude the NODOR FOURS story, with an unexpected twist.

## A REMINDER

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