

DARTS HISTORY

(aka Dr. Darts' Newsletter)

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ELKADART – A HISTORY



It is almost a decade since I tracked down Ben Drake, the co-founder of the former popular darts company ELKADART, at his home in Berkshire. Elkadart was a major dart brand from the 1970s and I wanted to learn more about it from the man himself. (Image of Ben with me taken in April 2014. © Moppix. Used with permission.)

Ben was born on 6th September 1940. His father, also Ben, was an engineer, and mother Bertha, known as 'Birdie,' a housewife. They later bought a small farm. However, Ben told me that, as far as he could recall, he had always been involved with darts.

Before setting up Elkadart, Ben was a self-employed toolmaker in an environment which provided "advantages of the environment" which enabled him to have access to all kinds of machines such as lathes, a milling machine, spark eroders, pantographs, etc. Ben told me:

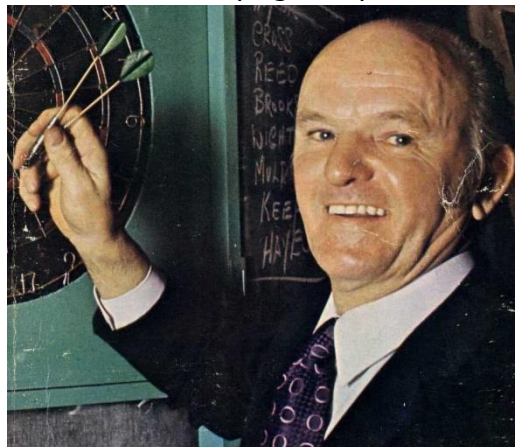
"The modern machine, spark eroder, makes forms in metal by using electrodes at Pantograph Precision, Slough. The boss was Latimer Hadleigh, called 'Lat.' One day, I said to him, "Can I buy some of this?" I paid him for the material and made Lat a set of darts: darts 3/8th tungsten 5/16th brass (26gm).

[The legendary] Tom Barrett [pictured, below, right when using his signature Unicorn, brass, feather flight darts, pre-tungsten circa 1973] used to have a set of pure tungsten; so hard, and take ages to make or sell. With the addition of copper, you could machine as easy as brass.

Tungsten alone is brittle. With copper it is more workable but obviously the density of the tungsten was the advantage.

At Lat Hadleigh's in London, I was using a sparky eroder and electrodes using an element called Elkanite [Which is a copper tungsten material] The Elkanite was fragile/soft but I/we added copper to it and that made it harder.

I made the first set of copper tungsten darts in about 1968 I took them down my local pub and played with them and it 'went ridiculous'; everybody wanted a set. No one had made copper tungsten darts before me. The whole of my local darts team had them and then people came knocking at the door and one of them was Tom Pope.



Tom had had a job finding him.

"Tom and I went into a patent agent in Slough. He rolled the dart back and forth and said 'That's just a dart.' If we'd have gone to London things might have been so much more different.

I had set myself up in my garage and employed five women making polyester flights and fibreglass shafts...crossed and packeted...folding them packing them...at the same time working with another company to make a special-purpose machine (one second per flight x five machines).

"Hancock's in London [Mill Street] was the first wholesaler we sold our products to [around 1971/1972]. Hancock's said they liked it and they wanted a two-weekly delivery. Everything you make. They said 'We'll take the lot.' They wanted exclusivity. I told them 'We can make a lot more than you're taking,' and two weeks later we were getting repeats. It went berserk."

At that time although working as a spark eroder, Ben had access to a centre lathe where he was making the darts. Working with LT Tool (Les Tucket and Brian Layton) and was extremely well paid. Ben had so many orders for darts that he said he was leaving. Les said, "You must be ****ing mad. I'll leave your job open for six weeks."

Ben never went back

"I ran off some darts for Tom [Barrett]. Then he came back again. Then I showed him the polyester flights I was pressing out by hand. The 'standard' shape was 'a number 2' also pear shape, Rab Smith shape, big one was a 'Number 5'.

That went berserk too. Tom and Ben bought a Rolls Royce each.

Ben also ran the Slough darts team and entered the London Super league where Ben told me

"We won it (I think) three times. Regularly beat Eric Bristow's lot. Our team included Geordie Lee, Tony Johnson, Peter Chapman, Barry Luckham, Alan Glazier., Cyril Hayes and

Bill Lennard, Cliff Lazarenko (Big Cliff), Bimbo James, Steve Brown, Ken Brown and Dennis Nutt. Ben stated that Alan Glazier was one of the first to foresee darts players becoming professional. Alan redecorated mum and dad's rooms in Hillingdon, as a favour."

ELKADART sponsored Peter Chapman (*News of the World* Champion in 1974) and produced 'signature' darts for him. Geordie Lee darts were produced with a 'special grip, shot blasted.' Alan Glazier signature darts were also produced and top darter Cyril Hayes worked for Ben.

Recently, former England player, Doug McCarthy, told me

"Ben made my first set of named darts. I was a rep for Ben's company Reading Darts Supplies (formed to supply pubs/cards) others included Tony Green ('Mr Bullseye') [who had introduced Doug to Ben.] I recall breaking the record in one week when I sold £16k worth of equipment."



Elkadart also sponsored major darts tournaments including the Nations Cup (See left, Ben presenting trophies in the Nation Triples in 1978 to the Australian team, (left to right) Ben, Tim Brown, Matt Banovich and Terry O'Dea. Ben's support of the sport carried on right up until the end of the 1970s.

At that time, Tom Pope wanted to sell the company so reluctantly, eventually, Ben agreed. Tom called his new company Retriever.

By our meeting in 2014, Ben was long retired from the darts business and was running a fishery near Newbury. He told me, "Fishing was always a passion; ever since I was a boy...", but still looked affectionally back at his involvement in darts and ELKADART.

HALVE IT – FEEDBACK

Andrew Bryan wrote to me late last year about the game Halve It. (Image, right © Bill Bell.)

Hi Patrick. I'm a relatively new subscriber and am enjoying your newsletters very much - thank you.

In the Jim Clark Part 2 section in the current edition, [#163 – October 2023] James mentions the game 'Halve it' and implies that many may not be familiar with it. Well, my Wanderers team in Hornchurch play it from time to time, mostly when we have a 'free night' with no league fixture or competition and can't bear to have a week without darts.



As James says, best with a large number (maybe ten - it's a good way of getting everyone playing at the same time) all putting 50p in the pot for the winner's prize. The rules are as he describes but, in our version, as well as having a list of numbers to hit there will be several much trickier rounds, such as a specific treble, or hitting three different colours (harder than it sounds), or scoring less than fifteen using three different numbers, and always finishing with the bull's eye.

Thanks Andrew. I'm sure there will be many other readers out there who played or still play Halve It for the exact reasons you gave.

NEWS OF THE WORLD – HAROLD BRYAN

At the same time Andrew Bryan wrote to me about Halve It he added:

The reason I stumbled upon your website and newsletter was during a search for information on my grandfather Harold Bryan of Banstead, Surrey, who I sadly never met but apparently was a pretty good darts player - indeed family history holds that he even won the News of the World trophy!

I'm pretty sure he wasn't quite that good but I've searched a bit online and know that there were regional competitions in the early days (this would have been some time in the 1920s or 1930s). So, I wondered if you know of anyone who holds competition records from those days.

After a search of my archive, I replied

As regards, your grandfather, Harold Bryan, I don't have much information regarding the 1920s and 1930s relating to the News of the World. All I can tell you is that the tournament was London Area only until 1935/36 season then changed to London & Home Counties in 1936/37 and changed again to London and the South in 1938/39 season. They would have only the years that your grandfather might have entered. I have checked the winners and runners-up for those years and, unfortunately, he's not there.

What I can do, is turn your question into a short article and feature it in the February or March issue.



I later turned up my copy of the London and the South of England 1938-39 Final programme (see left) but, sadly, Harold Bryan is not mentioned. The Surrey Division winner that year was J. Yarham, who played out of the *Elm Tree*, Guildford, with P. Weedon of the *Red Lion*, Cheam being the losing runner-up.

I am sure that Harold was a great darts player who played in the earlier rounds of the tournament, success that was not formally acknowledged in the local press or the *News of the World* at the time. So, can YOU help?

I know that there are a number of readers who have many more records about the *News of the World* tournament than I hold. So, here's the challenge. Do you have any copies of the

London and the South of England *Area* programme for 1938-39 and, if so, do they mention Harold Bryan? Indeed, if they do, please contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

Let's try and make Andrew's day.

LUKE v LUKE – FEEDBACK FROM #166

I guess it was no surprise to anyone that I devoted so much of the January *Darts History* was devoted to the emergence of Luke Littler as a new darts 'star' due to the way he played during and so nearly won the PDC World Darts Championship at the age of 16.

Of course, it is important to remember that he didn't win the title; that going, of course, to the World Number One Luke Humphries.



Regular Mick Simpson said

Morning Patrick. Great read as ever. I think Luke Littler is a great, very natural, player with a great future but I think that's as long as the media leave him alone. Also, once he starts drinking properly this could also affect him. I look forward to watching him play for a long time if he keeps his head in the right place. I think he will do great things. I personally backed Luke Humphries to win the worlds so was well pleased with him.

Brian H. wrote

Once again, thanks for another great read & excellent summary of the Luke v Luke World championship.

I personally wanted Humphries to win to cap off a great season for him but I wouldn't have begrudged Littler the title (which he looked at one stage to be taking) as he came across as a level headed, very sporting, lad.

The extra media attention was a double-edged sword: good publicity, but annoying when people comment who really have no knowledge or real interest in the game or seem to use the public interest for their own ends. I'm thinking the likes of Rishi Sunak adding his two ha'penny's worth. Maybe, I'm being too cynical!

Anyway, looking forward to part 2 of early darts broadcasts & the Elkadart story. Cheers.

[As you will have already seen, the Elkadart story is featured in this issue but, apologies again to Brian (and others) that, 'Darts broadcasts – TV' has been delayed *again* and WILL appear in the March edition.]

Thanks to all readers who pointed out that I made a few errors in my *Luke v Luke* report last month relating to the new World Champion's surname. I certainly confused Dartoid who wrote

Hey Patrick. GREAT write up on the Lukes! I am puzzled, I really am. Which is correct: Humphries or Humphreys? When I edit for Howie Reed I always "correct" his use of Humphreys to Humphries. But dammit, you spell it both ways! My mind is now mush! (Well, it long has been but now it's mushier!) Paul.

Of course it is Humphries.

Then Ross Hampton, General Manager of the Dart Players Middle East FZ LLC, wrote

Great issue as always. Page 3 para 6, is it not Matt Campbell?

Indeed. Ross was the first and only reader to spot that it should have read Campbell *not* Hamilton. (Where 'Hamilton' came from will remain forever a mystery to me.)

All corrected now. I have amended issue #166 so if anyone would like the revised version, please let me know.

My thanks to my friend Chris M. for providing this cartoon (right) of me having been sent into the naughty corner. (© 2010 Chris Murray)



Regular contributor, Bill Bell said

*Hello Pat. Great DH. Brilliant write up on the PDC World Championship. You must have enjoyed it as you don't normally do a big piece like that on it. It was a bl**dy good one though.*

As you know, I backed Littler at 66/1 but I always had a feeling that Humphries would win it, as he had a couple of scares and gradually got better and better.



Mick Browne commented

Your article was spot on ...with Cool Hand it was a matter of time. Early promise, battle with 'anxiety'...but having spoken to him and seeing his immediate network of support...Number One was always a real possibility.

I've followed him for a while and have met him on a few occasions. Real nice young man. Coping with 'target on your back' will be something he'll manage. I'm seeing him at an exhibition in Stevenage so really looking forward to congratulating him in person.

(Image shows Mick with 'Cool Hand' at the Jocky Wilson Memorial tournament last December. © Mick Browne.)

Mick added

Littler IF managed properly will win his fair share and I wish him continued success....

DARTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

When writing earlier Ross Hampton, of the Dart Players Middle East FZ LLC, shared the news that

Darts is still growing in the Middle East. We recently had PDC Asia tour 1-3 which was a great success. I was over in Bahrain for the PDC World Series which was a great event and amazing to see a live nine-darter from Luke Littler. Also, they had an Arab tournament the week after, organized by the head of the Egyptian darts federation which was well received.

Keep up the great efforts. It's very well received 😊

Thanks Ross. Like most of the world I am keeping an eye on the situation(s) in the Middle East and hope that they will be resolved in due time.

RUSS BRAY RETIRES FROM CALLING THE WORLD DARTS CHAMPIONSHIP

Russ's calling of the 2024 PDC World Championship (Luke v Luke) Final could not have provided a more appropriate 'farewell' to 'The Voice of Darts.' It was the 28th world championship final with him in charge.

(Image, right, Russ receives his trophy for entering the Hall of Fame, 2023. © PDC. Used with permission.)



If he had planned it himself in advance, it would, I guess, have been exactly the same: the best-ever world championship final.

Interviewed in 2001 Russ explained to Pete Nichols of *The Guardian* that his main responsibilities were to see fair play, call the score correctly and to check the marker and "make sure that he's written the right score and deducted it properly." He added,

"The players can ask me two questions: what's scored and what's left. People say it's easy, but as a referee you've got to concentrate on everything, not just a single score. There's pressure – if you do stand there and make a cock-up in this event, [the World Championship] you've got a 30 million audience - in Asia, Australia and the US as well as Britain – watching it live."

Back then, Russ cited a match between John Lowe and Phil Taylor as the finest he had ever seen:

"Taylor won by three sets to one, and 18 legs were thrown. I called "One hundred and eighty!" 17 times in those 18 legs, nine to John and eight to Phil."

Looking back 23 years later after that interview, Russ cited Raymond van Barneveld's final 7-6 triumph over Phil 'The Power' Taylor at the Circus Tavern, Essex, in 2007. However, he

admitted that Luke Littler's run this year had been something special too. And what a final! Russ was finishing at the very top.

The Barneveld v Taylor 2007 final was released by the PDC/Matchroom Sport on DVD in 2010 and I would not be surprised to see the Luke v Luke 2024 final to be similarly released in due course, and, of course, featuring 'The Voice' throughout.

But, of course, Russ has not ended his career with the PDC. Although being described as 'in semi-retirement' by some journalists, was in error. Russ had already been undertaking his new duties as an ambassador for the PDC and had indeed been recorded in my local



newspaper attending the Elmwood Primary School, South Woodham Ferrers (a view miles from my home) to educate youngsters about the game and its benefits in learning and/or improving their maths. Such work has doubtless increased for him after the incredible run that Luke Littler (only 16 years old at the time) made in the World Championships; someone that children can relate to.

Who best to teach them, Russ the man who has seen it all.

After the announcement of his 'retirement' Russ appeared on GB News TV, having a fascinating interview with Nigel Farage, the well-known politician. A first for a darts referee.

I wish Russ every success with his continued involvement with the PDC and the sport he loves.

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