

DARTS HISTORY

(aka Dr. Darts' Newsletter)

Issue 173

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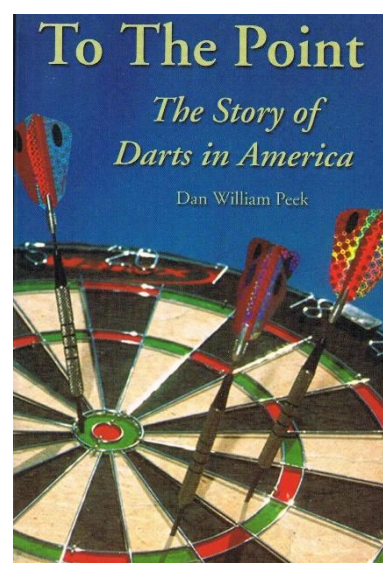


THE BEGINNING OF DARTS IN THE USA A PERSONAL VIEW

Over the past three decades, I have read whatever I can about the early development of darts in the USA. I believed that someone 'over the pond,' would have followed up the trailblazing work of the late Dan William Peek who published his extensive research in his book *To The Point – The Story of Darts in America* (Rocheport, Missouri: Pebble Publishing) in 2001, but, as far as I am aware, no one has taken on the Herculean task of researching, recording, and publishing his or her findings.

But I'm not surprised.

Dan found that there were different versions of the story of how 'British-style' darts was introduced into the then existing darts culture in Philadelphia and elsewhere. Mike Matthews of Trenton, New Jersey, recently wrote



Dear Dr Chaplin,

Just to say thank you for the June Darts History. A truly wonderful edition which I really appreciated receiving.

It was really great to see the photograph of Leighton Rees in the magazine, I had the pleasure of meeting Leighton and his manager Eddie in Chicago many years ago; two wonderful gentlemen; Eddie [Norman] who talked darts all night and Leighton who played darts for beers all night. Leighton with his wonderful Welsh accent, and Eddie his manager, with that famous West Country drawl, who helped to grow the sport of darts in the USA.

Fondest memories of darts in the USA and thanks to you Dr, Chaplin and Darts History those wonderful names from the past bring back wonderful vintage memories of our sport to us old timers of the sport. Hopefully you may include a few more old photographs in later editions of players of the past which are always great to read about.

A wonderful magazine. Thank you.

Subsequently, Mike and I exchanged emails, chatting about darts in the USA and how it all began over there.

It was clear from my previous research that, for many years, darts was regarded as a child's game in the USA and that our game only began to develop across the pond after the Second World War when American (and Canadian) allies serving over in England played the game in local pubs and then, after the war was over, they returned home and took darts with them.

However, darts took its time to become popular in the USA and here I now publish Mike's personal view of how the game really caught fire more than half a century later.

"Patrick, you are very welcome to include any of my feedback in Darts History. I was never a brilliant player, just a keen club player who just liked to shoot darts and enjoy a Budweiser in the background at tournaments and now an aged player of 86 but still love to follow the darts of which I have many lasting memories."

The beginning in my own humble, personal, opinion of darts in the USA was 1970.

In the USA we have had several great players and my favourite player was known as 'The Ice Man' (the original 'Ice Man') and he ran a pub in Philadelphia. His name - Al Lippman. [Pictured, right.]

In the US, Al Lippman was a legend and, in my opinion, the greatest US player ever. Al beat the great Leighton Rees 2-0 at the News of the World in London in 1974. A magic moment when I played him once and was soundly beaten for five dollars a challenge.

Al won the US Open in 1974 beating the great Dan Valletto in the final: a match to remember.

Then there was Joe Baltadonis who represented the US with Jody Simpkins at the first World Masters in London in 1974. Joe lost to Doug Melander of Sweden. [Jody was beaten 3-1 in the Preliminary Round by London representative, Barry Luckham.]

I would love to see a photo of Al 'The Ice Man' and Joe in Darts History. Joe won the North American open in 1974. [Mike: For Al see above, right. I'm still looking for a photo of Jody.]

In my opinion, six people have done more to promote steel tip darts in the USA than anyone else. [Firstly], Bob McLeod who ran the US Open in New York.

A memory from the team talk before the match Bob arranged and sponsored the first USA versus Great Britain match in New York. Bob had invited friends including myself to the locker room. The Locker room turned out to be Suite 7 at the hotel where the match was played. A long table was set up in the center of the room with Jamieson Irish Whiskey bottles, ice, and beer. Smoke filled the room. Stood next to me was my own special guest Eddie from the UK.

"The Brits knees are knocking fellows," said McLeod to the US team. He went on, "There has been nothing like this since 1959 when the crew of the SS United States beat the crew of



HMS Queen Elizabeth at the Market Diner on 12th Avenue. Eddie smiled that smile that said 'No way were the Brits going to lose' - but they did.

They did indeed. That was in March 1974 when a US Select 15, including Nicky Virachkul, Danny Valetto and Al Lippman (the first American to play in the *News of the World* Grand Finals) played a Great Britain Select 15 (including Leighton Rees, Ken Brown, Alan Evans and Alan Glazier) and beat them 9-6.



For several years Eddie Norman went to New York to help Bob McLeod run the US Open.

Tom Fleetwood was the second great organiser who helped promote darts in the USA and worked closely with Eddie Norman on the North American Open Championship. Eddie invited Tom and his wife Della to arrange to send a player to the first World Masters in 1974 and they arranged a play off and Jody Simpkins won the event. I would like to see a photo of Tom Fleetwood in Darts History if possible. [Your wish is granted here Mike. See left.]

The West of England Darts team were guests of Bob Martel at Mothers, in Inglewood, Southern California, for a week promoting the game of darts in 1974, while Eddie Norman lectured on the game.

Last but not least, I would include in the list of people who put darts on the map in the USA Jack Curry who ran the Prince of Wales pub at 106E 25th Avenue in San Mateo (now closed) This was the home of darts in North California and where, in 1975, Eddie Norman took his famous West of England Darts Team to play the Americans and start the great revolution of darts in the USA rolling.

Jack Curry served the Habanero Burger at the Prince of Wales which was claimed to be the World's Spiciest Sandwich Thrill - those trying it had to sign a liability release before digging in. His pub also had a choice of 3000 [!] beers from around the world and if you tried all 3000 you won a trip to England for the World Masters. Jack ran the pub from 1974 until it closed.

These were the forerunners of darts in the USA; the people that actually did the groundwork and hard work for others to tag on today and stand on the shoulders of these past giants of the sport of darts in the USA:

Players: Al Lippman, Joe Baltadonis, Jack Curry

Organisers: Bob McLeod, Eddie Norman, Tom Fleetwood

Without these six pioneers, darts in the USA may never really have happened.

Now 86 years young, I fondly look back and admire what these pioneers did over 50 years ago.

Kindest Regards Patrick from a very sunny USA: Mike Matthews,,Trenton. New Jersey, USA

DARTS HISTORY REACHES SURINAME

I always welcome every new subscriber to *Darts History*.

Most recently, darts history fans have joined us from Germany and elsewhere in Europe, and from within the UK but, a while ago, when Ray V. wrote and subscribed, he became the first person from Suriname to do so. Suriname was formerly known as Dutch Guiana (northern South America) and gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1975.



Ray wrote:

'Hello Sir, Could I please ask if you could put me on your list for your monthly darts mag? An English friend gave me your address. I love reading the history of darts. Thank You. Ray V., Paramaribo, Suriname.'

Adding a 'new' country to my ever-growing list of subscribers (*Darts History* now has readers in over 120 countries) I received a further email from Ray. He said

'Thank you very much sending the two editions of your great Darts History magazine, I loved them both they were great and I will circulate them here.'

Suriname is the smallest country in South America with the smallest population. Our country is a rich, middle-class country. Suriname exports crude oil, gold, bananas, fish, rice, and timber amongst other exports. The country used to be called Dutch Guinea and the Dutch Language is the mother language spoken here. My mother was American. Hence, I speak English as well as Dutch.

Darts is very small here but we are trying to get more people interested. I saw the game whilst visiting the USA and I wrote to the British Embassy in Brazil, our neighbouring country, for any details of the game and they put me in touch with Dr. Eddie Norman, a darts ambassador from England.



He referred me to your magazine, and sent us a made-up dartboard in Suriname colours [see left] and also arranged to send us two 'normal' dartboards from Guyana which he paid for and we appreciated. So, we are small but getting people excited about the game. When Eddie next comes to Brazil or Guyana he has promised to visit us. With kindest regards...'

Ray also told me that he would always be pleased to pay for *Darts History* should it be chargeable in the future.

As you all know, I have *never* charged anything for *Darts History*, or its predecessor *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*, and I don't intend to start now. The method I use of ensuring that subscribers are genuinely interested in the history of darts (usually by personal

recommendation or via my website) has worked thus far. No advertisements. No fees. The only other access via the 'net, is through WINMAU's (my sponsors) website.

WAS THE NEWS OF THE WORLD TELEVISED BEFORE 1972?

After researching the 1972 *News of the World* Finals and having published my report in *Darts History* #172, which confirmed that that Final was the first to be broadcast live to TV viewers, I came across this excellent photograph (right) in my archive of the crowd at the 1956 Finals held at the Empress Hall, Earl's Court, London S.W.5 on Saturday 28th April. (Image © *News of the World*. Used with permission.)



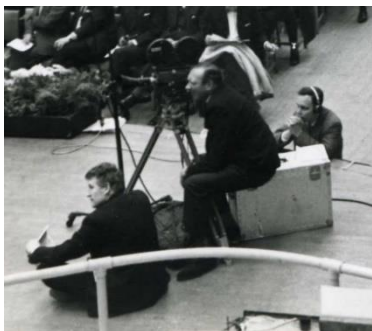
More than sixty years ago, this capacity audience, paid nothing for their tickets. Free tickets were allocated on a first-come, first-served basis via an entry form available from and completed and submitted to the *News of the World* organiser by 'your club secretary or licensee.' Here, the fans are sitting calmly, awaiting the 'Men on the Mark' at 7.30 p.m. There is no screaming or shouting and no sign of a group of men and women dressed up as bananas and no concealed '180' cards ready to be whipped out and waved vigorously.

The only 'security team' I can see are two uniformed gentlemen, one in each aisle, standing in front of a small barrier which divided the general public from the VIPs and special guests in the reserved seats. They would have had the best view of the huge electronic scoreboard which, for that evening, was under the control of none other than Jim Pike and Johnny Ross, members of the *News of the World* Team of Darts Champions during the Second World War; Jim having been their Captain. In 1939, Jim Pike had also been the London Area champion who in the London & Home Counties Divisional (there was no national final before the war) Final lost 2-1 to Marmaduke 'Dukey' Breckon.

Given that the electronic scoreboard was high-tech for its day, I can confirm that it was provided for the Final by Messrs. Signcrafts Ltd., of Cobourg Wharf, London, S.E.5. But still, those members at the back of the auditorium must have had to strain to see the scoreboard, let alone the scores but, as the backup, the powerful voice of the Master of Ceremonies, Albert V. Tabor Esq., from the *Scarbro Arms*, Doncaster, would have been projected via a microphone to every corner of the venue.

To complete the supporting team on that occasion, the Compere was George Glover, Esq., from the Granada Hotel, Southsea; the actual scorers being W. Harris, Esq., of Romford and A. M. Roberts, Esq., of Portsmouth.

But why, you ask, have I included this photo of the 1956 crowd?



Well, I haven't done it because of the audience. Remember, in #172, I emphasised how the 1972 Final was the first to be televised 'live.' I am glad that I did not state that it was the first *filming* of a *News of the World* Final. Look (left) at the extract of the 1956 photo and at the group, on the right.



They are filming!

Thanks to John Plews of Ovation Productions (to whom I will return in the September issue), and through his contacts I am told that the camera featured in the *News of the World* photo (and right) above is a WALL 35mm 'single system' optical sound camera.

It was robust with four lenses and was designed for mainly *newsreel* work such as Movietone News and Pathé but **not** the BBC. This type of camera first appeared in the mid-1920s and a sound version in 1935. The camera continued in use until the late 1970s.

I must admit that I have not investigated the possibility of this 1956 recording, either by Movietone or Pathé, having appeared on YouTube. It's one of many items on my 'To Do' list, unless someone has already done it. (Let me know.)

FEATHER FLIGHTS (Remember them?)

I am indebted to my friend Wullie Burness who recently uncovered the wonderful photograph, right, titled 'Sorting out the turkey feathers to make dart flights in 1965.'

On further enquiry Wullie provided the full description of the image:

'Cherie Gardener, 21, works as a feather sorter at Sports Feathers Ltd in Bloxwich, Staffordshire. Every year she helps in the sorting of several million turkey feathers imported from the United States. The firm produces 16,095 gross of darts flights a year and a high percentage is exported.'



Many years ago, 1950s/1960s, there used to be a programme on BBC Television here in the UK, titled 'What's My Line?' where a panel of personalities had to guess the occupation of members of the public who stood in front of them and 'mimed' what they did for a living. I don't recall Cherie ever appearing in the programme but surely 'Feather sorter' would have foxed the entire panel!

As my good friend Dr. Eddie Norman has an incredible memory for all things darts, having set up his business around about the early 1960s and is still spreading the word of darts across

the world to this day, I asked him about the suppliers of feathers for feather flights. Eddie replied

Silvertrim and Kwiz were the main feather flights dealers but they bought them in, not manufactured them, from the same person we did.'



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From the pencil-thin tungsten dart with nylon shafts and extra strong polyester flights to the well-proven brass-barrelled range with nickel-plated points and hand-made feather flights—all interchangeable. Every dart a 'crack' piece of playing

equipment. Precision engineered and carefully styled for dependable performance and a better throw.

Kwiz Darts made and designed by darts players for darts players. See the whole Kwiz range at any good sports dealer or department store. There's a game to be won with a Kwiz Dart and there's one just right for you.

KWIZ DARTS

Kwiz Darts Ltd, Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4TE

[The advertisement, left, for Kwiz darts, shows the variation of colours and shapes of feather flights (and designs of brass barrels) still available in 1975 even though the 'Tungsten Revolution' was already underway. Three tungsten darts can be spotted 'On Parade.'] Eddie continues

'All the feathers came from a Mrs. Weston who had them as a cottage industry in the West Midlands, loads of young girls including her daughters sticking feathers on to stalks and dying them various colours after school. (I wonder what happened to her?)

We took every feather in the end she made, thousands and thousands, two thread sizes and two lengths and six colours. All our feathers went mainly to a Darts Distributor in Milwaukee and several other USA firms, for the soft tip market, not steel tip, and black or white was the most favourite colour.'

Interestingly Leighton Rees was sponsored by Kwiz and was asked by the company to try feather flights but without success.

However, it wasn't important to the sponsorship advertisement as Kwiz had been developing its own range of tungsten darts. (See advertisement, right featuring Leighton.)

Eddie added

Leighton occasionally played with feathers and soft tips in the USA but not to my knowledge with steel tip darts. So, you may find a photo of him playing with feathers in USA at a soft tip competition. He was still cutting his own canes to play with until the end...

Thanks Eddie.

We are looking for Dart-players who are looking for Price and Quality by announcing the Kwiz range of Darts for 1982

LEIGHTON REES

- * LRV Darts Nickel Tungsten 80/20 18-30 gr Complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- * LRS Darts Nickel Silver Complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- * LRB Darts Brass Complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- * LRT Special Kwikzonic Flights

SPECIALS

- * KC CONQUEROR NICKEL TUNGSTEN 80/20 18-30 gr Complete Flight Shaft & Wallet Standard Patterns Diamond Cut
- * KBS BLACK SHADOW RANGE 18-30 gr * Kwikzonic Flights

STANDARD RANGE

- KC Galaxy Nickel Tungsten 80/20 18-30 gr complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- KS Darts Nickel Silver complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- KB Darts Brass complete Arrow Flights
- KB Darts Brass complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- KB Darts Brass complete Flight Shaft & Wallet
- KB Darts Brass complete Plastic Flights

ACCESSORIES

FLIGHTS

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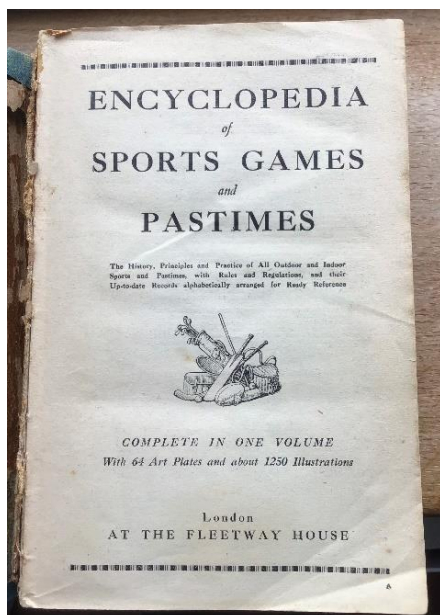
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BOB ANDERSON AND THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF SPORTS, GAMES AND PASTIMES



Many thanks to Bob Anderson who dropped me a line recently to say, “Patrick. I found this but sadly there is no date.”

As far as I can ascertain, Bob had found one of the earliest sports encyclopaedias in the UK that featured all the details you ever needed to know about the game of darts.

The copy held by the Cambridge University Library dates it as ‘circa 1934’ so pre-dates Rupert Croft-Cooke’s book *Darts* totally devoted to the game by a couple of years.

Sandwiched between ‘Dancing’ and ‘Davis Cup’ (pages 220-221) the encyclopaedia introduces DARTS as a

‘Game played indoors with a wall target or board and small darts. It is one of the finest games of skill ever invented and demands a keen eye, a steady hand, mental judgement and a head for figures. Fostering such qualities it thus takes its place among the great pastimes...’

The thrower, ‘*in his correct position,*’ stands nine feet away from the board and many darts matches often found, at the venue/pub ‘*attract[ed] more spectators than can be accommodated*’ and insisted that ‘*No village club or inn would be worthy of the name without its dart-board.*’

Thanks Bob.

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