

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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HARRY KICKS JNR (8.3.1945 – 6.8.2024)

I am indebted to Bobby and Marie George for telling me of the passing of Harry Kicks Jnr on 6th August.

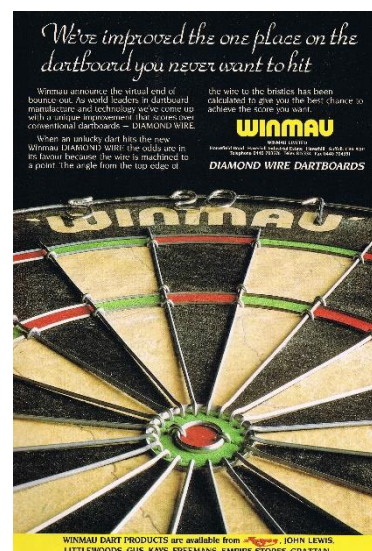


Probably not a name that immediately springs to the mind of today's darters but we all owe Harry a debt of gratitude for his life involvement in the darts and dartboard industry. I interviewed Harry more than a decade ago at his home in Suffolk and he was able to fill me in about some of the early history of WINMAU; initially called Kick Bros, so that I could add information to the article about the company which already existed on my website.

I found Harry a fascinating person to talk to. There was nothing about the dart business he didn't know.

Without Harry there would not be the dartboard we all see on display in all Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) tournaments; a board that had its foundation in Harry's Diamond Wire Dartboards.

Take a look at the advertisement (right), extracted from *Darts World* January 1990, where the board was designed to bring 'the virtual end of bounce out' where 'any unlucky dart hits the new Winmau DIAMOND WIRE the odds are in its favour because the wire is machined to a point' and the angle from the top edge of the wire to the bristles had been calculated to give players the best chance 'to achieve the score you want.'



Even if 'diamond wire,' is a distant memory for you, it is the famous WINMAU BLADE dartboard, which is now in its 6th form, which you recognise which was developed by Harry.

Bobby George, who knew Harry very well told me

'Harry was a good friend we had loads of laughs. A great engineer who invented the Blade board we play on today. Harry taught me everything about making dartboards – a great loss.'

Ian Flack, former Sales and Marketing Director at WINMAU told me

'I first met Harry when I joined Winmau in 1999. The company was owned by Accudart at the time, but the family legacy was there as Harry's brothers Ian and Steve worked for the company along with Ian's wife Joan and son Scott.'

Harry's dartboard manufacturing knowledge was incredible and he was instrumental in ensuring that the Winmau boards were of the highest quality. He was also very innovative and constantly created new ideas to continue the evolution of dartboard technology.

He was an easy guy to get along with and share a joke with and I am deeply saddened to hear of his passing. My thoughts are with his family and may you rest in peace Harry.'

RIP Harry.

NEWS OF THE WORLD – GRAND FINALS 1985



Back in June I received the following email

'Hi there. I was wondering if you have any pictures or information on a darts player called Billy Dunbar who reached the News of the World final in 1984/85.'

The message was from Billy's son, Lee.

I soon discovered that Billy won the London & Home Counties Divisional championship that year. He is shown here

(above left) participating in the Royal Hawaiian tournament in 1983) and below, right, being presented his divisional trophy by The Worshipful the Mayor of Wandsworth, Councillor Peter D. Donoghue.

The Grand Finals of the *News of the World* were held on Saturday 27th April 1985 at the Wembley Arena. ('Men on the Mark: 11.45 a.m.')

The programme notes revealed that Billy was a taxi driver who

'...has got the "knowledge" that this could be his year in our competition. A couple of months back, he'd have given himself no chance, but it all fell into place at the Divisional Finals at Battersea Town Hall.'

Billy, who used to practice 10 hours a day as a travelling tournament man, will have been up early this morning, giving a warm-up board a bashing before even leaving for Wembley.'



Although three players in the Grand Final were given 'byes,' Billy, playing out of the *Woolwich Infant* pub, Plumstead, London S. E. 18, was not amongst them, so his challenge began at the First Round. There Billy met the Eire representative Anthony ('Anto') Turner who played out of the *Red Hackle Bar*, Dublin.

Darts World (June 1985) reported

'It's always been a doubtful privilege drawing the first game on stage [especially in front of the TV cameras] and it was an understandably hesitant Billy Dunbar of London and the Home Counties, who threw the first three darts to total a less than modest 37. Ireland's Anto Turner felt no such restraint and promptly registered a 133.'

Twelve darts later Turner was down to a double. But caution proved his downfall. With 50 on the board, he decided to hit 18, double 16. But the doubles just wouldn't come. Two throws later he still required 8 and Dunbar snatched the leg.

Odds were once again in Turner's favour in the second leg with first throw and a 140 to start, but Dunbar's 20th dart found its mark.'

Billy had despatched Anto 2-0 and then moved into the quarter-finals where he played Ron Peel, the Lancashire and Cheshire Divisional Champion, who was playing out of the Gordon Club, Morecambe.

According to *Darts World*, Peel versus Dunbar was 'a lack-lustre' contest that

'...had both players missing their chances. When Peel "busted" on 38, Dunbar stepped in to take the first leg.'

However,

'Peel recovered from a first-score throw of 13 to take the second leg in 20 darts but the decider had both players in difficulties. With Peel missing a double 18, Dunbar's first-dart double 5 settled matters.'

Billy had beaten Ron 2-1 and then moved on.

In the semi-finals Glenn Brooksbank stood in Billy's way. Glenn was the Yorkshire Divisional Champion, playing out of the *Golden Lion*, Romanby, Northallerton, and had beaten the Midland Counties champion, Sandy Miller, 2-1 in the previous round.

The semi-final, Dunbar versus Brooksbank, also failed to set the Wembley Arena alight. *Darts World* reported that Glenn Brooksbank and Billy Dunbar

'...were involved in the longest games of the day when nerves brought low scores and missed opportunities. Dunbar took the first leg in 37 darts after unbelievably "busting" three times.'

Former England player, Ken Brown, commented at the time:

'Hearts must have bled among millions of darts lovers when Londoner Billy Dunbar and Yorkshireman Glen[n] Brooksbank got themselves in a dreadful nervous tangle over a double in the first leg of their semi-final of the 1985 News of the World tournament...

*Even worse, it happened on TV. With the live coverage, no way this nerve-wracking, eventually won by Dunbar in 37 arrows, could be edited out. **But hasn't it happened to us all?** [Indeed, it has Ken.]*

And Messrs Dunbar and Brooksbank, who must be outstanding players to reach that stage of the NoW, can console themselves that plenty of very grand sportspersons have made mighty mugs of themselves on the box...But don't fret Bill and Glenn. It could have been a lot worse.'

The second leg went to Dunbar in 24 darts. Billy won over Glenn by 2-1 which meant he was through to the Grand Final.

There Billy was to meet the Wales Divisional champion, Dave Lee.



Dave had spent a good number of years playing for London before moving down to Wales. He was second favourite to win the title in 1985; England's Dave Whitcombe being the bookie's favourite. However, Whitcombe took an early bath when he lost 2-1 to Canada's Bob Sinnaeve (pictured left) in the first round.

Dave Lee's journey to the Grand Final read like an international darts *Who's Who*? In the first round he had beaten the Swedish champion, Jan-Erik Paulsen (of the Swedish Darts Association) 2-0, then in the quarterfinals he defeated the U.S.A. champion, Dan Valletto (of the United States Darting Association) and, in the semi-final, he was able to overcome the All-Canada Dart Association's champion, Bob

Sinnaeve 2-1.

In what, inevitably, became known as the "Cockney Final," Dave Lee, the 29-year-old darts professional, by then based in Gwent, and the 33-year-old taxi driver Billy Dunbar took the stage 'to a roar of approval' from the 8,000-strong crowd. *Darts World* reported that

'...it was Lee who was to show that he had mastered his nerves and was determined to take the crown. Hitting four "tons," he took the first leg in 21 darts with Dunbar stranded and still needing 224.

Unable to find the treble 20 mark, Dunbar soon found himself trailing Lee in the second leg, but now it was Lee's turn to miss his doubles. With 46 to find, Dunbar hit 6 – only to watch in disbelief as his second dart veered into the single 5 segment.

It was one mistake too many and Lee threw a marker just outside the double 5 and then punched the air in delight as the second dart found the mark.'

Dave Lee was awarded with the magnificent Challenge Trophy (which would be housed in his local pub for a year) plus his own replica to keep. Dave won £5,000 and his pub would receive a permanent commemorative plaque 'to denote the achievement of their darts player.'



Dave also had the privilege of being presented the Challenge Trophy by *The Sun* newspaper's, 'Page 3 Girl of the Year,' Samatha Fox (see left).

For being the runner-up, Billy Dunbar received a cheque for £1,000, a trophy and 'commiserations and encouragement to try again next year!'



Billy Dunbar never made it through to the *News of the World* Grand Finals again but it must have been an experience playing up on stage at the Wembley Area in front of thousands of darts fans and with millions more watching on television. Doubtless it was 'nerves' that affected him during his matches but his darts were good enough to take him to the runner-up position in 1985 *News of the World*.

Dave Lee, who had been knocked out of the Finals the previous year in the First Round 2-0 by the Eastern Counties Divisional champion George Corke had returned in 1985 to take the title.

DORWIN DARTS – A QUESTION



Tom F., emailed me recently, asking about two sets of vintage darts he has in his possession. I am aware that many *Darts History* readers collect such sets so publish Tom's enquiry here in full. He wrote

Hi Patrick. Firstly, thank you for creating such great and insightful content. I love history and darts and you bring the two together beautifully.

I have two sets of vintage darts (see left) and I wondered if you would help me pinpoint the history and if you knew of anyone educated in darts history who could value them. One in

particular is the blue set which fit your articles description of the 60s era Darwin true balance.

But they state they are property of St. Dunstons which I want to find out if it's the college in London (they were my great uncles who was a fireman in the war and beyond, so likely!)

Any help is very much appreciated. If they are the colleges they may even be interested in having them back! Regards.

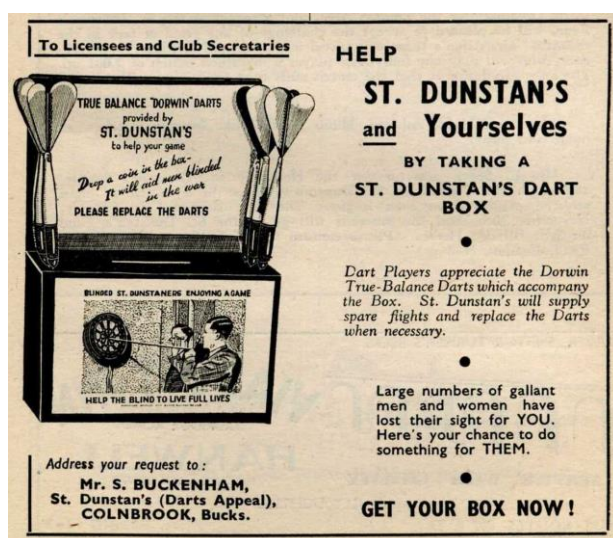
I replied

Thanks for your email Tom and for your kind remarks about my work.

As regards your questions, the darts company was DORWIN, not Darwin, the name being created in the late 1930s/early 1940s from the first names of the owners wife DORothy WINifred.

The blue set of darts you show are definitely from the 1960s. DORWIN, similar to yours but advertising my local sports goods shop, was one of the first sets of darts I purchased when I was a lot younger! (I still have them.)

[The other set shown in Tom's photo are not DORWINs but Unicorn Torpedoes, an extremely popular darts at the time with feather flights, as was the standard back then.]



Sadly, the St. Dunstan's named on the darts has nothing to do, as far as I am aware, with the college of your great uncle. The charity organisation established after WW2 was titled St. Dunstan's for Men and Women Blinded on War Service, based in London, later renamed Blind Veterans.

The 'Property of...' darts were displayed in pubs in a collection box (see 1940s such box, left). Punters wanting to play darts and have not brought their own, put money in the slot/box which allowed them to borrow the darts for the duration of their stay playing, at which time the darts were

returned to the box. Clearly this did not happen every time. Thus the 'Property of...' label shown within the barrel of your example, helped to prevent theft.

As for 'having them back,' Blind Veterans might be interested. However, as far as I am aware, it is unlikely as I doubt they would be aware of the history of the St. Dunstan's Four or the origins of the collection boxes.

[I did write a piece about the St. Dunstan's Four, captained by Joe Hitchcock, for the St. Dunstan's Review for their October 1989 issue. That, I guess, is all the organisation would hold on the team. The DORWIN darts were also promoted by the St. Dunstan Four, sets of

the darts being given away at exhibition matches to those players who played well against, or beat, the team our individual matches against Joe.]

As regards value, I probably know more about the DORWIN darts than anyone else. However, I never give valuations. The market is so fluid. DORWINs vary so much in style and age. Any value would depend on the age and condition of the darts, if there is a box (always important and must be in top condition) and, with earlier types, if the inserts or price lists exist, etc., etc. The 1960s Dorwin, with the transparent barrel were often used by companies for advertising purposes. The best thing to do is check out eBay or other auction sites to see what people are asking for your type of Dorwin.

As for the other ‘green’ set, they would not be of great value as they are ‘well-loved’ and have no box, which is a vital element required by serious collectors.

DARTS IN PARADISE – BAD NEWS!

I have mentioned this event in *Darts History* on a couple of occasions over recent months. However, Dartoid has issued the following:

Tuesday, August 27, 2024 - Column 669

The Darts in Paradise tournament and festival will not take place as planned and promoted for June 2025 in Cancun.

After a few weeks of uncertainty, my partner was asked by text on August 17th if the tournament was cancelled – the response was “Yes.” Then, on August 19th I received this: “... I think we must place the current event on hold....” I have since been informed that full reimbursements will be sent to any player who made a payment.



Of course, I wish I had better news – but as disappointing as this is, for now, I remain hopeful that the tournament will eventually be held. I will keep the darts community updated as I learn more. I sincerely appreciate the support from everyone involved and am thankful for the interest shown by so many friends and players.

From the Field, Dartoid.

DARTS HISTORY – FEEDBACK ON THE AUGUST ISSUE

David J. Mason wrote of #173

Hello Patrick. A brief line to say thank you for a great August Issue of Darts History.

I loved the article on the News of the World and what a wonderful photo of the crowd. As was said in the article, no banana men, no 180 cards waved about, and no drunks trying to get on the television in the audience People actually going to darts to watch the darts

The article on the origin of darts in the USA was also a superb article and one often wonders who put in the hard work to get darts off the ground and your article certainly helps to illustrate that in the USA. Before my time but well done to all those mentioned in the article,

Congratulations. Darts History gets better every month and always a fantastic read

Thanks David. There will be more feedback about the forefathers of darts in the USA in the October issue.

And Brian H. emailed to say



Thanks for your latest offering. As always, a great read.

Particularly liked the great photograph (see left) of the 1956 News of the World finals & your comments about the lack of fancy dress & screaming & shouting! I know the genie is out of the bottle as far as the razzmatazz of the modern game goes but there's something respectful of the players & the game about the decorum shown here.

Also: intriguing to think there may be footage of those finals hidden away somewhere. Keep up the great work, Patrick.

AMAZING DARTS HISTORY READERS

Jerry Feather writes

'Patrick. You & your friends around the world amaze me. The quote from the Bob Anderson book was truly a perfect definition of Darts.'

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