

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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LUKE 'THE NUKE' MAKES DARTS HISTORY (AGAIN)

Following his journey to the PDC World Championships final last year, it was widely expected that Luke Littler would return to the 2025 Final and lift the title. All in darts were not disappointed.



Many fans, including me, were hoping that it would be a repeat of the 2024 event, where after a well-fought match, it was 'Cool Hand' Luke Humphries who was victorious, but that this year Luke Littler would have learned any lessons he needed to during the past twelve months and meet his destiny.

The repeat was never to be as Luke Humphries fell to Peter Wright 4-1 in the fourth round but that still left the possibility of 'The Nuke' reaching the Final and meeting three-times World Champion Michael van Gerwen and such was the case.

Littler went 4-0 up before MvG realised where he was and, by then, it was, surely, too late. And it was. 'The Nuke' ran to a well-deserved victory, 7-3. (The above photo, © PDC and used with permission, encapsulates the feel "It's mine!")

A PDC insider told me after the match,

“What a star Luke is, such a talent but also down to earth and great to work with! He’s changing all our lives and particularly his and his family’s.”

The ‘Nuke Effect’ is being felt around the world and, in the darts industry, companies are reporting a 100% or more increase in business!

Has darts ever been in such a strong place? I doubt it.

Even my local darts leagues are seeing an increase in interest and memberships. That after years of decline in numbers. Luckily, when the changes in pub culture where so many dartboards were removed and the space refilled by tables and chairs for customers asking for food other than darts.

Never before has the world reacted to one young darts player as they have to ‘The Nuke.’ I am certain that any areas of the planet that had not been aware of darts are now.

I guess ‘The Nuke’ has few other countries to conquer. So where does he go from here? Simple. He goes over the whole lot again and goes back to collect the titles he missed during his first year as a professional.

He’s already talking of beating Phil ‘The Power’ Taylor’s record of 16 World Championships wins! (Image, right, shows ‘The Power’ with the 2013 World Championship trophy (Image © PDC. Used with permission.)



With the sport in such a strong place now, there will be many, many, hungry good dart players queuing up to take his crown. With at least four decades of playing ahead of him, let’s sit back and see how he does. I wish him well.

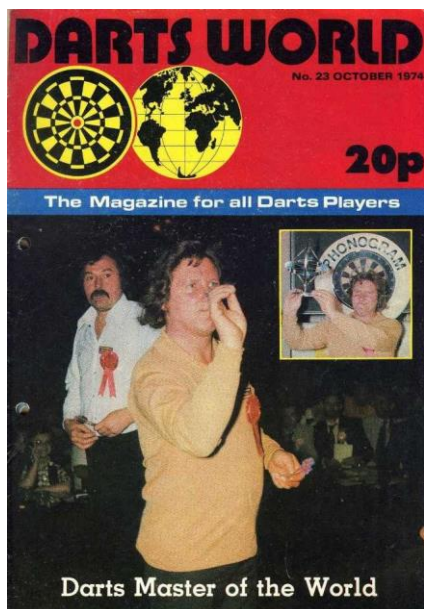
THE FIRST **WINMAU** WORLD MASTERS

Back in #176 (November 2024) I greeted the news that, just before going to press, the news was confirmed that the famous WINMAU World Masters is to return ‘in style.’

In that issue, I recalled that, as many of you knew, back in 1974, darts fans were treated to the first World Masters which was sponsored, not by WINMAU, but by the record company Phonogram, whose stars were as diverse as Peters & Lee, Nana Mouskouri, Freddie Starr, Status Quo, Lena Zavaroni, and Rod Stewart! Of course, Phonogram, stated that “They all record for Phonogram and their records and tapes are available from all good music shops.”

[Those were the days. No CDs yet and certainly no downloading!]

The winner of the very first (1974) World Masters was England's Cliff Inglis (see below, left) who beat Scotland's Harry Heenan in the Final. The following year the second Phonogram World Masters saw Wales' Alan Evans (playing out of Stockport, England) beat his Welsh countryman, David Rocky Jones.



During the first half of 1976, Phonogram withdrew their support of the event so the British Darts Organisation (BDO), now the formal organisers of the event, sought a new sponsor. They did not have to look very far.

From the very beginning of the establishment of the BDO, the dartboard company, H. A. Kicks & Sons, Ltd., based in Haverhill, Suffolk, had been linked with the organisers, and, of course, BDO Managing Director, Olly Croft.

[The advertisement, below, featured in the November 1975 of *Darts World*, is the first one I can find where the name "WINMAU" (a contraction of WINifred MAUd, the name of Harry Kicks, Senior's wife) was introduced to define the dartboard but the Kicks trading name remained. It was not until later, in 1976, that the company name was altered permanently to the WINMAU Dartboard Co. Ltd.]

In June 1976, *Darts World* announced new sponsors had been found for two major events in the darts calendar and stated that

'The World Masters on November 20 is to be sponsored by the Winmau Dartboard Company who are taking over from Phonogram, who have financed the event for the past two years.'

As in the past, the finals of the World Masters will be held at the West Centre Hotel, Fulham, and will be partly by invitation and partly by competition.'

[The other major event benefitting from a new sponsor at this time was the British Open Pairs Championship which was held in conjunction with the Watneys British Open Singles was to be sponsored by MY Darts.]

By November 1976, *Darts World* was able to announce that the

'WINMAU World Masters is almost certain to be televised on November 20. Negotiations are being held with I.T.V.'s World of Sport to show the actual final "live" and tele-recorded previous rounds.' [NOTE: 'almost' became actuality when ITV attended.]

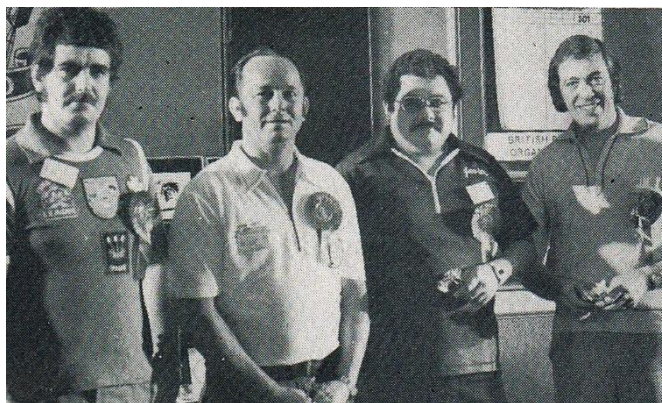




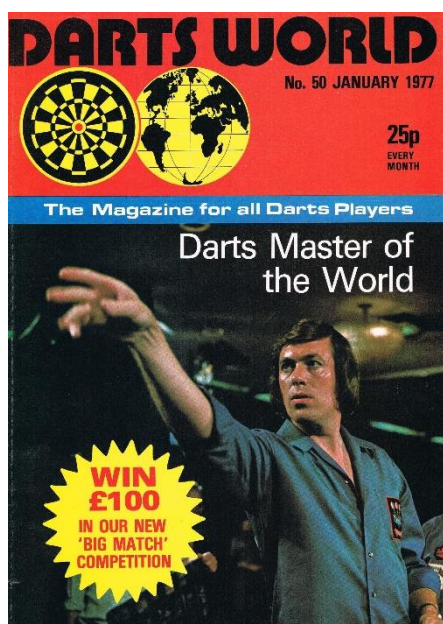
The same issue included the headline, 'London greets the World' which greeted its readers with the news that the number of countries represented had increased to 13: Australia had recently been included. Indeed, no less than *three* Australian darts players would be making the trip to the West Centre Hotel, namely George Foster and Kevin White (the reigning Unicorn World Pairs champions, see left) and John Kelly, who, at that time, was the All-Australian Individual Champion.

[Incidentally, Kelly's title was shown in the *Darts World* as *Austrian* – which made me smile. Clearly a typing error. No Austrian darter entered the Masters that year.]

Although the first WINMAU World Masters took place on 20th November, it was too late for the editor of *Darts World*, Tony Wood, to report anything in the December issue, except the winner, John Lowe (England), the runner-up, Wales' Phil Obbard, (who John had beaten 3-0 in the final) and the third and fourth placed players namely Javier Gopar (USA) and Australia's Kevin White (all pictured right, left to right, Obbard, White, Gopar and Lowe) and that John had won £1,000.



Indeed, the report that appeared in the January 1977 issue did not provide fans any more information except stating that John had become



'...the new Darts Master of the World [and] is joining the growing band of professional players on the world exhibition circuit.'

adding

'His latest success in the Winmau World Masters has given him an international reputation that could earn him £20,000 a year.'

It was a good job then that an anonymous reporter (I think of the *Evening News*) reported on the event. His report, I naturally assume he was a 'he,' in the issue of the newspaper dated 22nd November 1976, titled *Piercing experience* began

'There was an incongruous touch about the whole day. For a start the venue, in dusty, down-at-heel West London, was a posh-impersonal, glittery new, Hilton-type hotel. Then, after a Musak-march

through the hushing foyer, a hangar of a banqueting suite was as jost[1]ingly, laughingly, brown-ale full as a Butlin's ballroom in August.

It was the Wold [sic] Masters Darts Championship: 40 players from 13 countries egged on by an uninhibited throng of 2,000 people. Andy Capp and Florrie [Working class Northern cartoon characters extremely popular through the UK featured in the Daily Mirror] was the first feeling, but it was quickly dispelled when we got down to the challenge. A lovely day. And though ITV, the people's choice, covered the riveting climax live, the only activity in the Press Room was me with the brown ale and the frenzied scribbling of the gossip columnist from "Double Top."

[Although my archive holds a few copies of *Double Top* newspaper, I do not have the copy which would feature the report for this Masters event. I would love to learn what he scribbled. Can anyone help?]

The anonymous, assumed, *Evening News* reporter said of the scribbler from *Double Top* that

'He had a lot to write home about. The winner was John Lowe, from Clay Cross in Derbyshire, a toothy hunk of a fellow who looked like an amiable extra for Coronation Street. But, by golly, he could play darts all right. And subtract from 501 like an IBM computer.

Time and time again he had finished a game with a quick-fire 17-6-double-3-or-whatever before the poor scorer could shout out what was needed. You have got to be good at maths to play darts. And that's not a throwaway line.

Leighton Rees told the *EN* reporter

'A good player who can count can always beat a brilliant player who can't. He doesn't have to stop and lose concentration.'

Good advice then and still good advice today fifty years on.

The *EN* reporter then wrote:

'In the final, which Lowe won 3-0, he reduced another Welshman, Phillip Obbard, who looked like Gerald Davies [a well-known Welsh Rugby Union player] and started with an equally confident dash, to tears. Obbard, like most of the players, was decked out in multi-coloured badges like the back window of a fourth-hand Cortina.

Lowe played in a badgeless fawn British Home Stores shirt with a zipper down the front. Between each clutch of darts, he blew gently on the end of his fingers like Jimmy Connors. [sic] But he smiled like Tommy Steel[e] at the end.'

For the fashion conscious, the *Darts World* cover for January 1977 (on the previous page shows Lowe, the 'Darts Master of the World,' not wearing his BHS shirt (presumably taken earlier in the tournament), but see Page 4 image.

[**Note:** 'Jimmy Connors' – Correction - Jimmy Connors (USA) – Top tennis player at the time. No. 1 in the ATP rankings 1974-1978 but not, as far as I am aware, interested in darts.

‘Tommy Steel[e]’ = British singer and actor, who started in the late 1950s as a pop star, then developing into an all-round entertainer.]

Another anonymous newspaper cutting in my archive states that Lowe beat Obbard

‘...with a devastating and irresistible display. He needed but 15 darts to win the final 501 up game, finishing with triple eighteen and double 12.’

adding

‘But his victory before lunch against reigning champion Alan Evans [Wales] must have made him very confident.’

Evans (seen here, right, after winning the World Masters in 1975) had his chances against Lowe in that semi-final but was beaten 3-2...

‘...in the most compelling match of all. Evans, squat and scarlet-shirted like a centre three-quarter from the valleys, Cuban-heeled like a disco bouncer, had his chances but ultimately cringed in the face of Lowe’s unerringly calm aim.’

The recorded scores were

Quarter-finals:

Phil Obbard (Wales) beat Glyn Greenaway (Wales) 3-0
 Kevin White (Australia) beat Maurice Cook (England) 3-2
 Javier Gopar (USA) beat Terry James (Wales) 3-1
 John Lowe beat Tommy O’Regan (Ireland) 3-2

Semi-finals:

Obbard beat White 3-2
 Lowe beat Gopar 3-0

Final:

Lowe beat Obbard 3-0

Lowe took the first prize of £1,000, which led one reporter to write

‘As a professional, he [Lowe] might be able to multiply that by ten in the 12 months [that follow], playing exhibitions, asking appearance money and endorsing the suddenly booming darts industry.’

As for the future of the game, the reporter wrote

‘Darts is pulling itself out of the pubs and into big business. These championships were sponsored by Winmau, who make dartboards. But representatives of far bigger companies



were lurking around on Saturday. It is a natural for tobacco and brewery men to start with...

And so it would be, with the Embassy World Professional Championship sponsored by W.D. & H.O. Wills leading the way. But WINMAU was to become *the* 'big business' sponsoring the World Masters until 2018 and in 2022 announcing an official partnership with the PDC (Professional Darts Corporation) tournaments and, thus, *the* dartboards of choice for discerned darts players and indeed all players on the planet. (See #143, February 2022.)

And for the winner's future...

'The thought that John Lowe might one day be Sportsman of the Year is quaint but, when you think of it, not all that unreasonable.'

In 2024, Luke 'The Nuke' Littler not only won the award of Young Sports Personality of the Year in the annual sport BBC awards but also was runner-up in the main Sports Personality of the Year. Not unreasonable at all.

Also, not unreasonable, would have been the idea that John could later be awarded an MBE.

For a brief history of the tournament see <https://patrickchaplin.com/2019/05/22/winmau-masters-a-brief-history/>.

OH DEAR! WHAT AGAIN?

When Luke Littler blew darts wide open in January 2024 and then reinforced that this year, the news media always rushed around for new ideas for their captions. But how easily they forget. (Well, some of them!)

The prize this year goes to the *Daily Mail* who in their haste wrote this on their front page on Saturday 4th January:



How quickly they forget! (But we don't Luke H.)

WE MUST NEVER FORGET THE PIONEERS



Roger Nickson (front row third from right) who has been connected with organising darts seemingly for ever, recently posted this photograph on *Darts from the Past* taken nearly forty years ago.

Roger wrote:

“Every December/ January when the World Championships come along, I think back to January 1986 when this meeting of the World Professional Dart Players Association [WPDPA] took place at Lakeside.

At that time, we had signed up 38 of the world’s leading men and women. The basics of what were required for the professional game were laid out and over the next 7 years after I retired from the post of General Secretary, laborious efforts were made by Dick Allix, John Markovic, Tommy Cox, and others to further the cause. Eventually in 1993, the split from the B.D.O. [British Darts Organisation] sent those brave players on a separate path and the World Darts Council was formed with Barry Hearn securing TV coverage and from there the organisation became what it is today, the Professional Darts Corporation. I doubt if any of the current pros know or care of the “Pioneers” efforts.”

Do they know or care? (Discuss) Can you name the pioneers? (Text © Roger Nickson)

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