

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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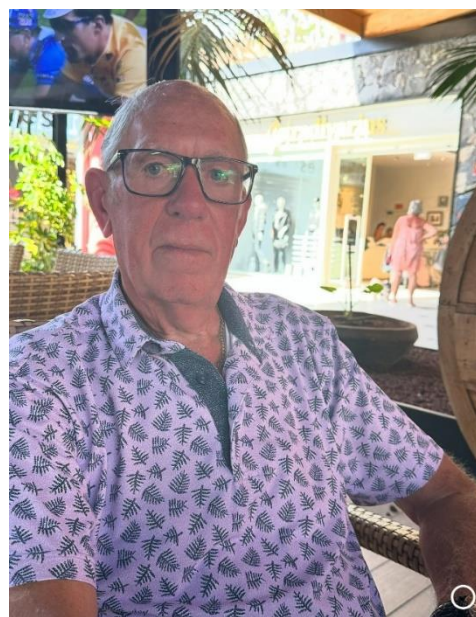


50 GLORIOUS YEARS - OLD STONEFACE REACHES 80!

As one of the best-known darts players ever reaches his 80th birthday on 21st July (one day before my 75th) my good friend John Lowe MBE (pictured below) agreed to answer a few questions about his fifty years on the oche.

What are the highlights of your life in Darts?

"I am fortunate to have enjoyed more highs than lows. My life in darts spans 59 years; fifty of those being a professional player. My first major win was the NDAGB (National Darts Association of Great Britain) singles; the last one the China Open played on the soft-tip board, the first watched by 300 people; the last by a TV audience of 29 million. In between there have been three World Championship titles, literally every major title the world had to offer, and, of course, the first nine-dart game of 501 on TV, all capped by a visit to Buckingham Palace to receive my MBE.



What are you doing now?

Well, at the age of 80 you would expect me to be enjoying a much slower kind of living. The exhibitions have almost stopped but personal appearances are now a bigger part. With so many years on the oche and so many places visited, I do have plenty to talk about. Aside from darts, I play golf three times a week, weather permitting!

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?



I think with hindsight there are a few things I would not have done and also a few things I should definitely have done but looking back over so many years, I feel I have accomplished more than I expected. I do have one thing that haunts me now and again.

Did I make the right decision to not defend my world title?

I was World Champion when the split came, the BDO [*British Darts Organisation*], in reality, stopped us playing in all events unless we reversed our decision. I was offered an exhibition tour by Embassy (Peter Dyke). This was an attempt to get me back on side. This may have been the deciding factor that broke the resolve. I said no. I decided to stay with the other players. This meant I would not be able to defend my BDO World title at Lakeside. We went to the Circus

Tavern [*Purfleet, Essex*] in what became the first championship of the now PDC. Should I have stayed with the BDO and looked after Number One? Interesting thoughts.

I hope one day I will be able to truthfully answer.

(Image of John, above, left, with his third World Championship © *Darts World/PC Archive*.)

You have been sponsored by Unicorn for a long time. Has that helped you become the player you are?

I have been so fortunate to have been a part of the Unicorn team for 50 years. Without their support in all departments, and their point-of-sale advertising of one John Lowe, I would not be known in the far corners of the Globe.

Unicorn's outstanding ability to manufacture to the very highest standard, is second to none. I have not only thrown the darts but have also designed them. I rate myself a 'trying perfectionist.' My latest dart model, coming out later in the year, is without doubt the finest I have ever designed and they keep me throwing; always trying to improve. Darts is for everyone, certainly for me.

(Image of John with the giant Unicorn dart and dartboard (1988) © *Darts World*.)



How does the modern game compare with 'the old days.'?

Not in any order: 14% bigger target areas since the introduction of razor wires and no staples; Better lighting. No shadows; Better LED scoring; Better viewing for the large audiences with giant screens; Overall a better work and playing place for amateurs and professional players alike. The 'old days' had none of the above. Today things are just superb.

Would you have preferred to have been playing darts in the 1970's or the 2020's?

That's a tough question to answer. I am proud to have been what I call a 'War Baby,' born in 1945 and, apart from darts, the 60's and 70's were great times to be a part of. I also feel that without the contribution of players like myself, Eric Bristow, and many more made in the early transformation from darts, the game played in the pub, to the sport watched by millions on TV, the sport would not be where it is today. That is self-rewarding for sure.

I am happy with the past and certainly with the present. I can watch the two Luke's play at a very high level and understand what they are going through. Been there. Done that.

Where do you think darts is heading today?

If I had been asked that in 1993, I would have said, "Back to where it started. In the pub." But thankfully, knowledgeable people came along with a business plan. That plan nearly

collapsed in the early stages of the PDC [*Professional Darts Corporation*] but it overcame all the teething problems and the adversities it faced to be what it is today: a successful money-making express that does not have any signs of slowing down.

The sport of Darts is safe, secure, and here to stay.

After sending the draft of this article to John before publication, John replied:

“Patrick. I fully approve. I think it says it all. I always read *Darts History*, and many times I realise how many players I have met when reading about them. Long may you continue to tell the story, the journey, to your many readers.”

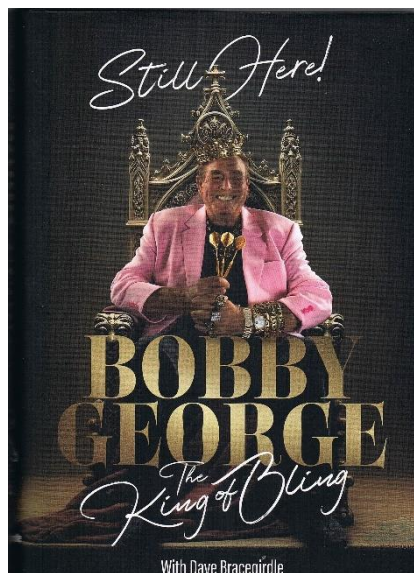
‘WHOLESOME’ *DARTS HISTORY*

Warren Ackary writes from Australia:

Hi Patrick. Thank you for bringing out DDN 183! Your newsletters have more wholesome content and articles than most online blogs of today. Keep up the good work 🏆

BOOK REVIEW - *STILL HERE – THE KING OF BLING* – BOBBY GEORGE (with Dave Bracegirdle)

Still Here – The King of Bling is Bobby George’s second volume of autobiography following on from *Bobby Dazzler – My Story* which was released on to the darting public - Can you believe it? - 18 years ago, and, according to his latest Introduction, has only just sold out. So, how coincidental is the appearance of *Still Here* which, of course, picks up where *Bobby Dazzler* left off.



In any second volume of autobiography, you cannot blame the writer (Bobby, of course, ably assisted by Dave Bracegirdle) for looking back and reminding his fans of how he rose to darting fame, throwing his first darts in an Irish pub, the outrageous weather outside having forced him indoors, how he broke his back, how he met the love of his life, and recalling all the actions, associations, influences, and characters who helped fashion him into the legend, some would say ‘national treasure,’ he is today.

Whilst Bobby re-recalls his time with and memories of Eric Bristow, Alan Evans, and John Lowe, and other ‘names,’ he also remembers with affection another ‘late bloomer’ ‘like myself,’ ladies’ darts star Lil Coombes who didn’t take up darts until she was 55. She was ‘a very independent woman’ and ‘when she was on the oche she was quite feisty and wanted to beat everyone up.’ It is great to find someone who recognises and appreciated players like Lil rather than, like others, forever name-checking the known stars. Bobby’s memories of Lil being ‘the best around’ are to be cherished as are his memories of his late, great darting friend Tony Sontag. Real friends. Real memories.

Of three-time world champion John Lowe, Bobby reveals that ‘He and I never really got on,’ which surprised me, Bobby adding ‘but that’s not surprising’ because ‘everything that you associate with me, he was totally against it.’ Bobby expands on this in the chapter ‘In Bed With The Arrow’ so I won’t give anything else away here.

Whilst looking back for a second time does work for *Still Here* but what has always appealed me about Bobby, something that at times makes him head and shoulders above all other dart players, past and present, is his ability to, so to speak, spread himself about a bit: on TV, radio, and on film. It was his decision not to join the World Darts Council (later the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC)); a decision that has turned out very well, thank you very much. Diversification worked for Bobby because of his natural ability to entertain.

Of his TV work, Bobby’s memories of being part of *The Real Marigold Hotel* series and spin-offs are fascinating as are the collection of stars who accompanied him. His appearances in TV series are numerous and recalled with affection and, in *Still Here*, take us seamlessly away from darts if only for a while. Bobby’s reaction on meeting Pete Burns, lead singer of Dead or Alive, for the first time when he hosted *Come Dine With Me* is priceless and his disappointment at not being recognised by the panel (“the thickest bunch around”) in *Who’s Doing The Dishes* is clear.

Occasionally, Bobby goes into reflective mode. For example, on one of his trips, in Japan, at a Buddhist temple, he drank the natural spring water “in the hope I’ll live for another 60 years.” After drinking he declared “The older I get, the happier I am that I didn’t die young: in fact, the only time I feel old is when I look in a mirror.”

As I’ve stated, Bobby’s secret is diversification but, be assured, he is never far away from darts. His exhibitions are still in great demand yet he keeps an eye on the Senior’s tour, giving his thoughts on their tournaments; clearly something he still enjoys. He is also very clear that “Darts is in a great place right now.” But would he like to still be playing competitively? Bobby writes:

“You can’t turn the clock back, it would have been playing for bigger prize money, but I’m proud of my career and glad to have played and done what I did, when I did.”

I found *Still Here* as good a read as *Bobby Dazzler*. *Still Here* indicates the way in which Bobby’s working life has embraced so many other things, especially TV and film, whilst being guided through the changes by his wife Marie, without whom...

...and he’s still here.

If the professional players of today reach their 70’s and look back at their lives in darts as Bobby has been able to in *Still Here*, I can tell you, it would never be as colourful, eventful, honest or as interesting, as Bobby’s and I doubt they would ever be able to fill two volumes of autobiography.

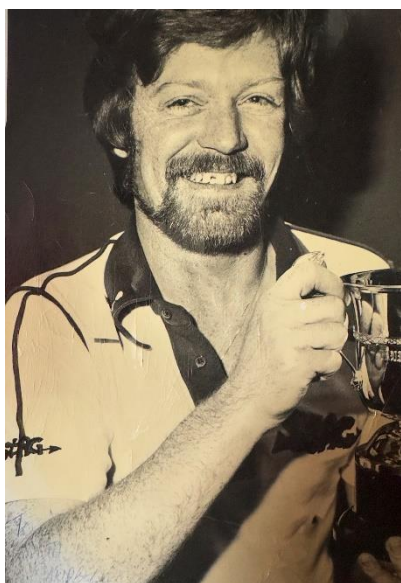
Whatever next for Bobby? My guess is that he will keep on working and enjoying life with Marie and his family; never missing an opportunity to entertain *anyone*. My idea. Why not a book about fishing?

I thoroughly enjoyed *Still Here* and you will too.

STILL HERE - The King of Bling - Bobby George with Dave Bracegirdle. Hardcover: 256 pages. Publisher: Pitch Publishing Ltd. ISBN-10: 1836801599 ISBN-13: 9781836801597 RRP: £25.00

STAG DARTS – FEEDBACK

Reacting to my article about Stag Darts in #183, former Scotland champion and international, Neil Campbell Adams (pictured below left) wrote



“Patrick, I remember Stag Darts from the late 70’s at that time I was the Scotland “News of the World” champion and a member of the international squad.

Jim Yuill contacted me and discussed a sponsorship deal using his new “Stag” darts. I played with them for a while and, to me, I just couldn’t get a good grip on the barrel. The darts were beautiful but, sadly, I had difficulty with the grip. Also, I wasn’t a fan of metal shafts.

During the Scottish Masters in 1979, I decided half way thru the tournament to change my darts and went back to the old darts. I won the Masters that day and sadly I informed Jim of my decision not to use them again. I am sure other players had more success than myself when using these darts. The enclosed 46-year-old photo shows me with the cup and

wearing the Stag darts shirt.”

Having heard from Neil, who moved to the USA in June 2005 and then moved to Texas in 2013, I decided to find out a little more about the Scotland champion. I needed to look no further than the work undertaken by the late Scotland darts historian, Jim MacNeil.

In 1977 Neil was Scotland’s *News of the World* ‘International Championship’ Champion (pictured below, right, with the Divisional trophy (Image © *News of the World*. Used with permission.) and so attended the Grand Finals at the Alexandra Palace on Saturday 30th April that year. Jim McNeil recorded what the *News of the World* programme for that year said about the Scotland Divisional champion:

Our [Scotland’s] representative today is Campbell Adams a 30-year-old civil engineering agent from Uddingston. He had some great opposition in the Divisional Finals, including his own doubles partner, Tommy James, [in the quarter finals] and the defending champion, Joe McKay [in the last four] Campbell, who plays for the Noggin [Uddingston, Glasgow], reckons he has a great chance of taking the trophy north of the border for the first time. News of the World champion for 1977 is Neil Campbell Adams from the Noggin, Uddingston.

Jim MacNeil recorded the following report from *Darts World* (April 1977, #53):

Neil has had previous experience in London, winning his way through to the World Masters 1975, and the Scotland Finals of the Unicorn World Championships of the same year. He was also runner-up for the Scottish Individual Championship last year.

In the Final, Neil defeated Jim Taylor (The Glen Tavern, Cowdenbeath), in two straight legs, coming from behind in the first leg to finish in 18 darts with 100, and 114 game shot.

Doing well again this year was Joe McKay, the 1976 Scottish News of the World Champion, losing in the semi-final to Adams, after producing a 16-dart best of the night leg.

Neil was the most consistent player of the evening, and deserved the chance to represent Scotland in the Grand Finals on April 30. The runner-up, Jim Taylor produced most of the high scores during the evening, with five of the eight 140s scored, and ten of the 43 three-figure scores but too often punctuated these with low scores.



Results

Quarter Finals

Dave Forbes (Swan Bar, Aberdeen) beat Alex Black (The Murray, Polbeith) 2-1.
 Jim Taylor (Glen Tavern, Cowdenbeath) beat David Ward (Labour Club, Dumfries) 2 – 0.
 Campbell Adams (Noggin, Uddingston) beat Tommy James (Brit Soc. Club, Coatbridge) 2-0.
 Joe McKay (Royal British Legion, Port Glasgow) beat John Cron (Golf Inn, Prestwick) 2-0

Semi Finals

Jim Taylor beat Dave Forbes 2-1; Campbell Adams beat Joe McKay 2-1

Final

Campbell Adams beat Jim Taylor 2-0

In the 1977 Grand Finals of the *News of the World*, Neil Campbell Adams drew England's John Lowe, the Midland Counties Divisional champion (playing out of the *Prince of Wales*, Clay Cross, Derbyshire) in the First Round. Lowe was on form and won 2-0. *Darts World* (June 1977, #55) recorded their match:

Scotland's Neil Campbell Adams (The Noggin, Uddingston) had the misfortune to face an in-form John Lowe (Prince of Wales, Clay Cross), who was both the bookmakers' and the crowd's favourite to make the News of the World title his third major tournament win this season.

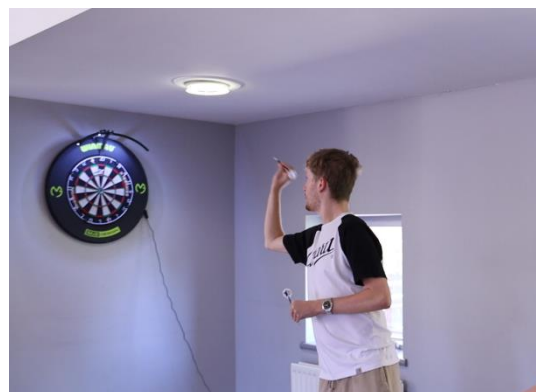
Lowe looked well set for the crown when his first throw registered a 180, his second a 140 and he went on to hit a best-equal 14-dart finish with 180, 140, 85, 60, 36 game shot. He also took the second game with Campbell Adams needing more time to get into his stride.

[John Lowe had been the bookies' favourite but he fell short when he was beaten 2-0 in the semi-finals by the eventual *News of the World* champion, Mick Norris (the London & Home Counties Divisional champion, representing *The King of Denmark*, Ramsgate, Kent).]

My thanks to Neil Campbell Adams and the late Jim MacNeil.

THE LUKE LITTLER EFFECT: HOW 'THE NUKE' HAS EXPLODED UK DARTS

In the June issue I ran an item titled 'A Student enquires' - Alfie Howlett from Gloucestershire University. Thanks to everyone who provided feedback to the questions he set and the responses I gave. His project now completed and titled as above; Alfie, pictured in practice, right, provided me with a final copy which he has given me permission to publish. Enjoy.



'Darts was once a game played by Medieval soldiers throwing spearheads at trees and wine casks. [Not sure I told you that Alfie but we'll move on.] It then later became a pub pastime, before Bristow and Co took it to the main stage. Phil Taylor and Co introduced darts to lucrative Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) prize money, they walked so that Luke Littler could run. Along the way 'The Nuke' has taken the whole of the UK in his stride.

Darts Historian Dr Patrick Chaplin further explains the 'Littler effect':

"The 'Littler Effect' took hold in 2024 when he reached the finals of the PDC World Championship. His age and his undoubted skills were attracted not only to the national newspapers/websites/platforms that normally followed darts (like The Sun, Daily Mirror, and Daily Star) but also by the heavyweight dailies like Daily Mail, Daily Express, even the Financial Times but also The Observer. Everyone - all media - was fascinated by this 'new boy' and wanted to know more about him."

This media trend replicated a national clamour to marvel in Littler's genius. Oscar Hegarty plays for the University of Gloucestershire's Darts Team. He said,

"It's massive now, my uncle, dad, and brother, all watch darts now, and they never did, and because of Littler and the social media impact he has, darts has grown."

Dr Patrick Chaplin adds to this,

"Darts has never seen anything like this, ever, even in the 1980s famous players like Eric Bristow and John Lowe, never received such attention - it's very important to remember that, back then, there was no internet."

The interest has certainly stretched as far as ticket sales. In fact, tickets for the 2025 darts World Championship sold out in the first 30 minutes of presale before they even made it on to general sale. Suddenly, a ticket for the darts is like gold dust, with many now missing out: a feeling which the University of Gloucestershire's Darts Society President, Alfie Element, can only joke about:

"I'm not a fan of the Littler movement personally," he laughs before explaining, "I've always wanted to go and watch the World Championship's, or the Premier League, but now you can't get tickets. It's impossible, unless you're best mates with Luke Littler!"

People don't just want to watch. They want to play too. The most transformative aspect of the 'Littler effect' is still brewing. The origins of UK darts can be traced back to the pub, where adults locked horns over a few pints. It was always considered unthinkable to have a 17-year-old champion, with many players not playing consistently or competitively until the age of 18, when they could drink in a pub.

Luke Littler's famous journey started at just 18 months. 'The Nuke' went on to be nurtured in darting academies. His success has inspired a new generation and opened up a route which traditionally appeared unconventional. The number of Junior Darts Corporation (JDC) academies doubled in 2024, with record demand for JDC Advanced Tour spots. Dr. Chaplin said:

"What Littler has done is bring the game to a whole new audience – the young, thus forever removing the pub from people's imagination of darts, no longer do you have to learn to play darts in the pub - the huge increase in darts academies is due to Littler,"

The ripples of the 'Littler effect' have reached The University of Gloucestershire Darts Society, with membership doubling in the 2024/25 academic year compared to the previous. Alfie Element explains more about the society:

"Some societies in other universities, such as Birmingham, have four teams with 120 members, and we're here as a small university with 40 members. Come here on a weeknight and all you'll hear about is darts. It has become that big it's all there is to talk about".

With Luke Littler the same age as a number of university students, people want to emulate the superstar's success. Alfie shares the impact on the University of Gloucestershire's Darts Society by saying that "tournaments are filling up fast, people are really interested, it's definitely a sport which people want to play." Alfie goes on to add, "I feel like it's just going to keep growing, Luke Littler has influenced it massively." © 2025 Alfie Howlett

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