

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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RAB SMITH (1948 – 2026)

Once again, I am having to report the death of a top darter. This time it is my duty to report the passing, on 17th May, of the Scottish darts star Rab Smith.

Back in the early 2000s, I was fortunate enough to talk to Rab and exchange emails which eventually became a draft article for *Dr. Darts Newsletter*. However, as far as I can ascertain, that article never made it into print.

Today I change all that.

In the late 1970s a Scottish national team without Rab Smith was unthinkable.

Within the space of two years, Dumfries' Rab had won the *Sunday Mail* Masters (1976) and became the 1976 National Darts Association of Great Britain (NDAGB) Scottish Champion.

In 1977 he became the Evo-Stik "Golden Darts" winner and, amongst other successes, won the prestigious British Pentathlon and the Ladbrokes British Matchplay. When the world rankings were announced in early 1978, Rab Smith was in fourth place. If he had won just one more major tournament during 1977, he would have been Number One.

Robert 'Rab' Smith was born 29th May 1948 at Moniaive, Dumfriesshire, the only son of Robert (a dairyman) and Kathleen Smith. Rab also has a sister, Kathleen. Rab is married to Doreen and they had two children Kathleen and Robert.

After leaving school (the Wallace Hall Academy) in 1963, Rab was employed in the timber trade, in forestry, as a woodcutter. In 1981 darts writer Derek Brown (author of *The Guinness Book of Darts*) described Rab as 'only 5ft 7in (1.70m) and is wiry with a muscular build one might expect of a woodcutter.'

In 1993 he changed career and became a crane operator until he retired in 2011.

A future champion and Scottish international, Rab was introduced to darts by his father Robert when he was nine or ten years old. Rab loved the game. He told me, "The family lived in a big house in the country and I used to practice and practice."

His childhood passion for darts took a serious turn when he was 16-17 years old. He joined a pub league in Dumfries; the *Dumfries Arms*. Rab recalled that his role model was not



someone on the professional scene at the time but a local player at *The Hole I' The Wa' (The Hole in the Wall)* pub, Dumfries, named Joe Little.

Rab told me, "From the age of sixteen I would go into town to play darts. I met Joe Little in the pub and we played darts and he beat me. I kept going back and he kept beating me. I *really* wanted to beat him. I practiced and practiced and worked on my game, mostly on Saturday lunchtimes and at night because I worked all day. I also practiced 12-1 most days as well... practice, practice, practice. Then all the practice paid off and I beat him."

Rab was later to reveal the secret of his success as being a combination of 'regular practice' and being 100% dedicated to the sport.

As a Dumfries' County player, playing right-handed and throwing 21 gram tungsten darts, his success was soon recognised by the newly-formed Scottish Darts Association (SDA) and Rab was selected to play for Scotland for the first time in the 1973 Home Internationals; Rab continuing to be selected to play for his country until 1982, the year he withdrew from the professional game. For five of those years Rab captained his country having taken over from George Nicol.

According to Derek Brown in 1974 Rab was on the bus out of Dumfries heading for the second Home International series when he was taken ill. Derek wrote that 'Rab had a stomach disorder and this lasted for two years before vanishing as unaccountably as it had appeared.' Rab was later to tell me that the 'disorder' was actually diagnosed as ulcers and that the condition soon cleared up.

Rab's first major breakthrough on the tournament scene was winning the *Sunday Mail* Masters in 1976. Thereafter he took the world of darts by storm; seemingly omnipresent wherever there was a major tournament to win. He became the NDAGB Scottish Champion that same year and NDAGB British Champion in 1977. In the latter match Rab played the north-west's Eric Barlow in the final; Barlow having earlier brought off the shock of the tournament by knocking out the world number one, John Lowe. Rab was not fazed by this and won the title 2-0.



During 1977 Rab decided to go professional whilst title followed title as he appeared to be virtually unstoppable.

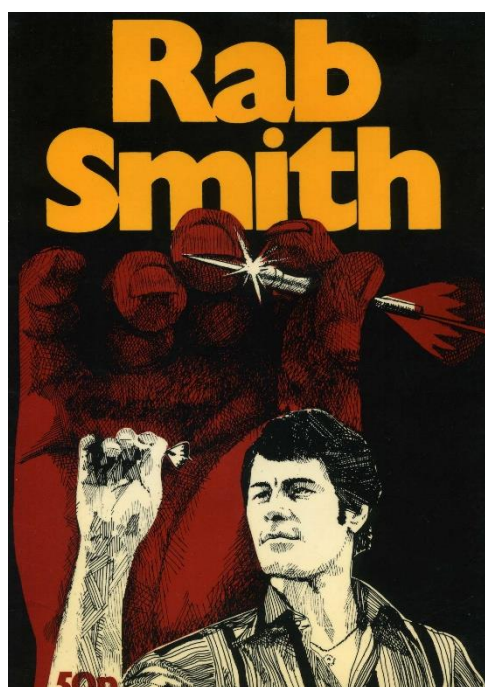
When asked what his finest moment in darts was, Rab chose three, not surprisingly perhaps all from that same year. He told me that winning the Queen's Silver Jubilee 3's International Classic in March 1977 with fellow countrymen George Nicol and Eric McLean at the West Centre Hotel, Fulham, London was very special.

With everything equal between the finalists (England and Scotland), the teams chose Rab and Eric Bristow to represent them in the deciding match. Bristow was way ahead after twelve darts but experienced 'double trouble' which allowed Rab, who according to one report 'had stolen up like a black cat in the night,' to shoot out on 72 to secure a memorable victory over the 'auld enemy'. (The image, above, left (courtesy of Rab

Smith) shows Rab celebrating those winning darts whilst ‘Big Cliff’ and ‘Old Stoneface’ watch, unable to do anything to prevent the Scottish win.)

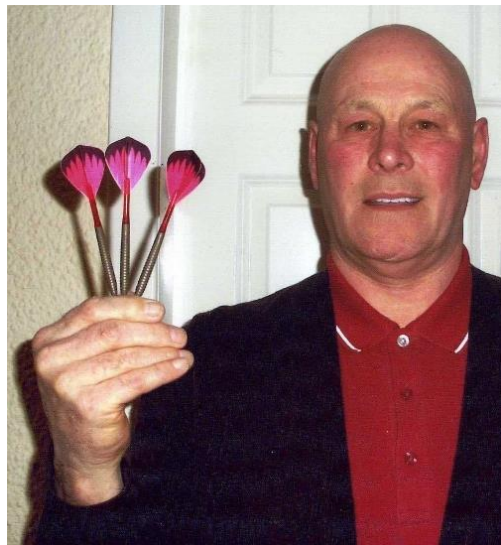
Rab’s second ‘best memory’ was beating Eric Bristow (again) this time in the Ladbrokes British Matchplay final. With the final level at 3-3, Rab stood at the oche with only 36 points left between him and victory. Bristow seemed to know what was to happen next as ‘The Crafty Cockney’ put his darts down on the table and Rab hit single 18 then double 9. Rab had hit four maximum 180s during that final.

Victory in the Evo-Stik Golden Darts tournament that same year concludes Rab’s ‘best moments’ of an illustrious darts career. Having beaten Belgium’s Andre Declercq and Wales’ Alan Evans in earlier rounds, Rab was to meet England’s John Lowe in the final which the Scotsman won. In addition to the winning cheque of £1,000, Rab was also awarded a set of 18ct Golden Darts’ plus a special prize of ‘a mere quarter ounce gold nugget’ for scoring 180. Rab told me that he later gave the ‘golden darts’ to his grandson Rory on his first birthday in 2007.



John Lowe was able to exact his revenge later when he beat Rab 2-1 in the semi-final of the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship at Wembley Arena in 1981. Rab recalled, “I was on double four with John back on 140 or 160. He threw and left double top. In my next throw I clipped the top wire of double four *three times*. Then John hit double top.”

Another key moment in Rab’s career was being selected to represent his country at the inaugural Embassy World Professional Darts Championship in 1978. He beat Ireland’s Pat Clifford 6-0 but was then beaten in the quarter finals by Stefan Lord 6-3.



Rab Smith.)

By the early 1980s Rab was still at the top of his game but by 1982 by his own admission he had ‘had enough.’ Rab told me in 2011, “The kids were young and I was never at home; sometimes being away six days a week. I didn’t want to lose my family life so I gave up.” During that year Rab also ceased playing for his county, Dumfries.

When asked if he had any regrets about leaving the professional darts circuit whilst still relatively young, Rab told me, “Not really. There was always too much travel: hundreds of miles,” then paused and added, “I think I might have organised exhibitions better.” (The photo of Rab, left, was taken in 2013. ©

Asked about the then coming of the ‘modern era of darts’, Rab told me, “Darts has changed now. You used to have a wee drink and a smoke on stage. It’s getting very serious with big money now. I don’t know what will happen. The crowds are very loud these days.”

Shortly afterwards, Rab took early retirement. He told me that he now does anything that takes his fancy and nothing. However, he ensures that he sees his grandson Rory every week.

I was aware that Rab had been diagnosed with lung cancer yet it still came as a great shock to learn that he had died in May this year, only a couple of weeks after his great friend Eric McLean, another Scottish darts champion.

Rest is peace Rab.

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HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY DARTS!

Justin Irwin, author of *Murder on the Darts Board* (2008) and owner of the Capital Darts website, recently publicised something I should have picked up myself. Justin wrote:

“The first darts tournament to be played under standardised rules took place 100 years ago on 1st June 1926, in Wandsworth, South London.



The Licensee’s Cup was staged at The Red Lion in Wandsworth, with a clear set of rules – using the London (or Trebles dartboard), three darts per throw, counting down from 301 points (five times around a cribbage board), and starting and ending with a double. Although the scores has since increased and the throw line shortened, the fundamental rules were now in place.

I know about the Red Lion from Arthur Taylor’s *Played at the Pub*, which, in common with pretty much every piece of darts history, is indebted to the work of Dr Darts, Patrick Chaplin. Pat’s recent newsletters and his social history of darts describe how there were several brewery and other dart leagues in existence prior to 1926, but that rules and notably boards were varied, with no central organisation – until in early 1925 when an Association was set up following, typically for British sport, a meeting in an office in London.



Quite why it took another year to confirm the rules, I have no idea, but then sports administrators are a special breed, and I don’t want to find out right now, just in case it stops me from, today, saying Happy 100th Birthday to darts – and congratulating whoever has arranged this Blue Plaque, in just about the right place.

The Red Lion was at 412 York Road just near the Ram Brewery, but by the time the road turned into Ram Street the pub seems to have long been eaten up by a one-way system.

For a proper history of darts read Patrick Chaplin's Darts in England 1900-39, or sign up to his lovely Newsletter at <https://patrickchaplin.com/newsletter/>.

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My thanks to Justin for alerting me not only to this event but also to his article. The full story about the origins of the National Darts Association can be found in my book *Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history* which is still available from Manchester University Press.

DAVE KELLY

Thanks, and memories from Rick Briscoe of the USA about darts star Dave Kelly, who was featured in *DDN* some time ago but whose name Rick picked up from the article I transferred to my website. Rick wrote:

"Dr. Darts,

So glad that I ran into your note about Dave Kelly, US Dart player /champion.

I'm retired (81 y-o) originally from Kansas City where I started playing Darts in the early 70's for a German Restaurant/Pub called Meierhoffs. The owner of the establishment was from Boston. I was in Medical Sales, which took me all over the United States. I happened to tell him that I was heading to Boston on a sales trip, and mentioned that he had a good friend, Dave Kelly. He told me that he played in a pub called 'The Old English Ale House' close to Harvard Square, and that I should try and get in touch. [Image of Dave Kelly, right, © Darts World and PC Archive. Used with permission.)



So, I made it out to Boston, and went to the Pub. It happened to be DARTS TOURNAMENT NIGHT. I introduced myself to the bartender, and told him that I was there to meet Dave Kelly. He said that he was playing and would let him know that I was there.

Maybe half an hour later Dave came over and introduced himself. Told him my K.C. story, and he asked if I wanted to play for a beer. So, I agreed and we played 501 straight in, double out. We diddled for the middle, and Dave went first.

I didn't play poorly but he truly almost threw a perfect 9-Darter for the first time. I realized that I was deep in it, and suggested we just have some beers!!

I've told this story many times to Darts friends here in Dallas. I didn't realize he had passed, and saddened by that. Had a really good time reading your story. Thanks."

Thanks Rick. I am always pleased to read when any of my articles trigger memories for darts fans and am pleased that my piece about Dave (who passed away on 1st June 2020) brought

some back for Rick. If anyone wants to find out more about Dave Kelly please check out: <https://patrickchaplin.com/2020/06/14/dave-kelly-us-darts-ace/>.

AND MORE FROM THE USA – “GET IT WHILE IT’S HOT!”

I know that the market for darts-related memorabilia has gone mad due to the Littler-effect but nothing has surprised me more than the revelation recently about what must be the highest price ever demanded for a single darts book. In his article, #715, issued on 12th May 2026, Dartoid (Paul Seigel) told us:

“I went hunting the other day...

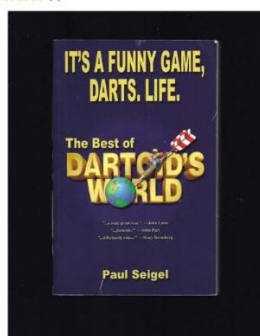
Not for trouble (though that has a way of finding me), and not for a d16 (though that continues to elude me), but for a book by my late friend George Silberzahn - a man whose words, like a well-thrown dart, tended to land exactly where they were supposed to.

Somewhere along the winding backroads of eBay, where a grilled cheese sandwich allegedly bearing the image of the Virgin Mary once sold for \$28,000 and a lock of Justin Bieber’s hair sold for \$40,668, I stumbled across something that made me stop mid-scroll, squint, and think HOLY CRAP!

Paul Seigel

It's a Funny Game, Darts. Life: The Best of Dartoid's Wo

5.0 ★★★★★ (1)



There it was. A paperback of one of my books: *It's a Funny Game, Darts. Life*.

Listed at **\$1,906.99!** [*That's £1,409 in sterling*]

Now, I've always believed in the power of positive thinking, but this felt like a bit of a stretch. I mean, I like the book. My mother liked the book. A handful of readers have even admitted, under pressure, that they liked the book.

But nineteen hundred and almost seven dollars?

At that price, the book should read itself to you... in a British accent... while pouring you a pint! Maybe it comes with a set of solid gold Phil Taylor darts and a John Lowe-autographed barstool from a smoky pub in Chesterfield.

I clicked on it again, just to be sure it wasn't a typo. Maybe \$19.06? Even \$190.69 I could sort of wrap my head around if the seller had recently inhaled something festive. Nope. \$1,906.99. Five stars too. One review. Which, if I'm being honest, I'm pretty sure I wrote.

Now, I'm not saying don't buy it. In fact, I strongly encourage it. This may be the greatest investment opportunity since someone first looked at a dartboard and thought, "You know what this needs? Wires."

Imagine the resale value. Today, \$1,906.99. Tomorrow? Who knows. We could be talking about retirement planning. A modest villa somewhere. Let's be clear - if this is the going rate, I have several copies in a box somewhere that I am now viewing in an entirely different light. Not as books, mind you, but as a diversified portfolio.

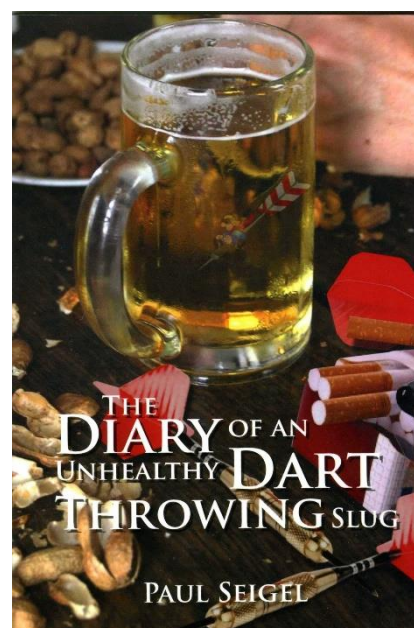
Of course, there is the small matter that nobody has purchased the one listed. But that's a technicality. A mere detail. The market is the market, and right now the market is saying, loudly and with a straight face, that my book is a luxury item.

So, if you've ever thought about picking up a copy, now might be the time. Get in on the ground floor. Before the price goes up. Or - and this is just a hunch - down to something that resembles reality. All it takes is one person. One collector. One individual who says, "You know what I need? A Dartoid paperback at the price of a slightly used jet ski." And boom. History.

So, here's my advice: if you've ever thought about picking up a copy, now is the time. Not later. Not when cooler heads prevail and this thing settles back into the realm of earthly pricing. Now. Get it while it's HOT!

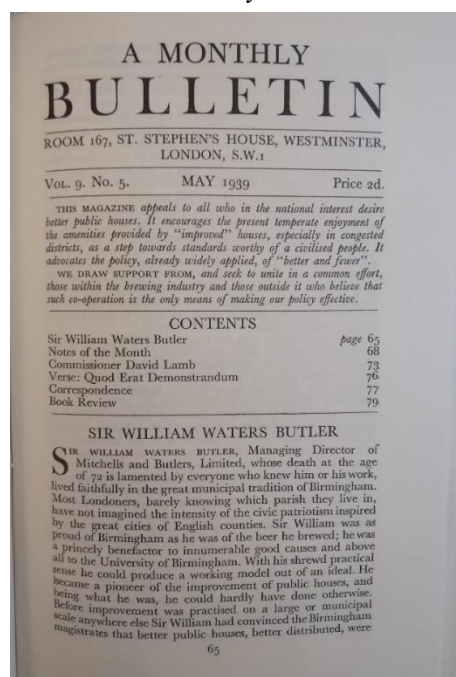
Stay thirsty, my friends"

I have been unable to discover what that book sold for in the end but know that other books by Paul (including *The Diary of an Unhealthy Dart Throwing Slug* (pictured right) are on ebay in the UK for up to £30. A bargain I reckon!



THE TEMPERATE DART

I am indebted to Bob (North Wales), who, having recently come in possession of a number of issues of *A Monthly Bulletin* which was published between 1931 and 1972 who has sent me a number of copies of darts-related articles for my archive, and to share with you. The following, titled 'The Temperate Dart' appeared in the issue dated May 1939:



The Glasgow magistrates' ban of the playing of darts in the public houses of the city has roused a chorus of hostility in the Press and a question in Parliament by Mr. Alan Herbert, who was assured by the Home Secretary. "Reactionary" is a politest adjective. The newspapers' support of public house amenities as part of the new sobriety is full of significance, at a time too when the Press is particularly sensitive to public opinion.

What is even more interesting to the student of licensing is the universal invocation of the Report of the Royal Commission of Licensing. The Commission, of course, bracketed innocent games and amusements with public house improvement. It is not long since the temperance

party was claiming the Licensing Report as its own, though the United Kingdom Alliance must be given the credit of at once spotting the deadly blow which the report dealt to the

policy of beastliness, the keeping down of the pub without which old-fashioned temperance teaching perishes.

As to playing of darts, asks the Press: how can you play properly (as we all do nowadays) with an unsteady hand?

In fact, the official reason given for the banning of darts on licensed premises in Glasgow was that it was ‘a game for young men and not for old men,’ and the then senior magistrate, Baillie T. A. Kerr, declared that he ‘saw in the application [*to allow darts being played in Glasgow pubs*] an attempt to bring young people back to the public-house.’

Of *A Monthly Bulletin*, a source that I wasn’t able to identify or utilise during the period I undertook research for my PhD, Bob told me that the publication started out in 1931, published by the Fellowship of Freedom and Reform then, from 1943, as by the National Publicity Agency right up until 1972 when the publication seems to have ceased.

Bob wrote:

‘The address seems to be roughly the same area up to right at the end - St Stephen's House, Westminster from '31 to '39, then room 167 there until 1948 when it's 4, Dean's Yard, Westminster, SW1 until '69 then 19 Brisset St EC1 for the last 3 issues. It did change over the years and became more 'pubs' towards the end. Obviously, lots of little articles that are more in your pub history line and one or two of the more interesting ones I'll forward once I get round to them, ok?’

OK indeed Bob.

NEXT MONTH:

At last! The history of early darts in The Netherlands begins.

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