

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF DARTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

There is no doubt that darts is now a global sport, even though there may still be one or two nations that have yet to discover the 'arrers.'



This month I am looking at one of the European nations that embraced darts with fervour in the 1990s when a certain 'Barney' took the British Darts Organisation (BDO) Embassy (later Lakeside) World Professional Darts Championship title and set his homeland alight with a flame for our game which has never dimmed.



The story of darts in The Netherlands begins further back than many would imagine. I have found a single report about darts being played in The Netherlands in the 1930s but the game really started to take hold just after the Second World War. With the cessation of hostilities, the allies who had been stationed there, mainly the British, packed up and went home. However, a great number stayed because they loved the country and afterward adopted it for themselves or, perhaps, they had - Dare I say it? – fallen in love and married a Dutch person and made the country their home.

As happened in other countries where ex-pats adopted it their home, the British looked to create their own part of home, so a number of British Legion club were set up. Hundreds of them were established across the world. This then was where the Brits could meet and continue to doing things like they used to do back in their homeland. Things that included meeting, socialising, and playing darts. From that small start, darts gradually became part of Dutch culture, the game tending to be played in those clubs or as a developing part of the café culture.

That was until The House of Darts International decided to visit.

In 1963 the Norman brothers (Eddie and Peter) who owned the House of Darts International set out to promote the sport of darts in The Netherlands. An exploratory trip in March that year showed that "there was not much to be seen in the sport except by a few English workmen posted overseas who loved darts but appeared to have nowhere to play." Surely the English love of darts must have caught on with the Dutch by then. All it needed was the Norman's to find them, encourage their participation and organise them.

In the early sixties, with sponsorship from British Midland Airways and Dan Air, The House of Darts International flew English darts players across to Holland to places including

Utrecht, Naaldwijk, Haarlem, Groningen and Eindhoven. The purpose was to promote the game, play exhibitions to show those interested what could be achieved, to challenge the local talent and arrange tournaments. By 1965 Dutch, and some Belgian, players entered these tournaments and local interest grew.

A tournament called the Anglo-Dutch Classic was founded between representative Dutch and English teams. In addition, a Singles championship was founded in April 1965. The problem was, now the interest had been created, where could players play?

The answer was to expand the existing playing of darts in cafés.

Sponsorship by NODOR, then based in Bedwas, South Wales (about two miles from Caerphilly) consisting of one hundred NODOR 'Bristle' dartboards was, Eddie told me, 'the icing on the cake.' Dan Air flew the boards over to Holland and the boards were then distributed to willing café owners who were keen to encourage the new sport with their regulars and place a board on their walls.

From little acorns the future darts boom in Holland would grow.

The House of Darts International produced their own-brand 'Dutch Range Darts,' named after some of the Dutch cities. This, together with Dutch Darts flights bearing the Dutch flag, quickly caught on.

A prototype darts league between the cafés in Utrecht, sponsored by the House of Darts International, encouraged the continuing growth of darts in Holland.



Help and support from British and Dutch trade associations further helped the expansion. Peter and Eddie Norman (pictured above together at Maastricht in 1972) spent many weekends travelling throughout Holland promoting the sport; organising various tournaments in which Dutch players were becoming more interested and, as a result, more entries were being received for tournaments.



NODOR became increasingly interested in promoting and sponsoring events in The Netherlands. The House of Darts International then decided to concentrate on one main area and so Den Haag (The Hague – the administrative and political centre of the country, the third largest city in Holland and also, some time into the future, the home of Raymond van Barneveld, pictured left (Photo: © Tip Top Pics. Used with permission.)), was targeted as well as both Dutch and Belgian players who were, by now, entering the increasing number of

tournaments. Dan Air sponsored competitions with prizes of trips to England for the winners to English football matches.

The main café where darts featured in Den Haag was the Café de Luifel, at Grote Marktstraat 37, which was run by Willem Koek. Darts began to gain immense popularity there and elsewhere which, naturally, resulted in inter-café matches being played.

By 1967, so many bars and cafés began to take an interest in darts, that the first official league table was drawn up and organised by The House of Darts International and sponsored by Dan Air and NODOR. Another excellent sign was that Dutch companies began to show interest and began to sponsor players and tournaments. Eddie Norman told me:

“At this time, Willem Koek had only one darts team at the Luifel (called in the league, not surprisingly ‘The Luifel’) but after the great interest growing with darts in Holland, more and more people wanted to play the sport, including ladies, so many that more teams had to be formed at the Luifel, so ‘Luifel 1,’ ‘Luifel 2,’ ‘Luifel 3,’ and ‘Luifel Ladies’ were formed and the café was packed nightly with people who wanted to play darts. This was happening in many cafés and bars all over Den Haag.”

(The undated photo, right, shows an English darts player named Lester ‘Les’ Millard, winning one of the Café De Luifel tournaments. (Image © The House of Darts International. Used with permission.))

Eddie Norman took the same format to many other Dutch cities “where the same phenomenon happened.”

Eddie told me,



“The sport had taken off in Holland. This was the beginning and it was on a crescendo. Everyone wanted a game of darts; businessmen or rail workers. More and more bars and cafés from all across Holland wanted to join leagues, which led to inter-city teams playing each other with fierce competition.”

Soon after the Dutch Inter-City Darts Championship was established; and the winners invited to England. As expected, after seeing the growth of the sport in Holland, other British darts companies began to take an interest and move in. Eddie said:

“As 1970 approached, the next obvious step at that time was the need to register the leagues with the Dutch authorities in order to take part in and organise officially recognised competitions and international matches.”

Leaving Dutch darts in good hands, The House of Darts International exited Holland. Eddie and Peter had achieved their aim and now it was someone else’s job to take the sport forward in The Netherlands. Of course, The House of Darts International would continue to supply darts products to the Dutch and, of course, much of Europe.

In a future issue of *Darts History*, I will look at those Dutch players who appeared on the scene during the late 1970s/early 1980s: those who first represented their country at the World Masters and the Embassy (later the Lakeside) World Professional Darts Championship and then examine the emergence of 'The Man,' a man called Barney.

UNICORN WORLD DARTS CHAMPIONSHIP 1975

Earlier this year, Michael M. wrote to me as follows:

Hi Patrick.

I have a set of 1975 World Quarter Finalist darts passed down to me by my very dear old friend Dennis Nutt.



I am looking for assistance in acknowledging their historical significance and, if possible, obtaining an estimated value for them. They are solid silver. I think they might be of great interest among the darting world.

Dennis lived several doors away from my dad and I down the same road in Byfleet, Surrey. We used to regularly have a drink and sometimes play cards at the Byfleet Comrades Club. In the 1970s Dennis was playing London County team darts with his pals Tony Brown and Jack North**. When Dennis linked up with Ken Brown*** in 1975, I was only 24 years old.*

In the same year, Dennis brought along to the Comrades Club a certain Mr Eric Bristow a relative stranger at the time. What a dart player. No one could touch him on our local dart board.

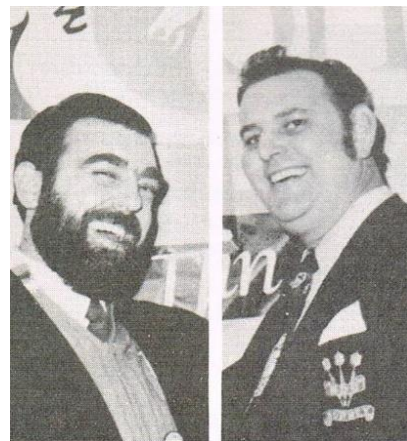
It wasn't too long before Eric started dating Linda, who was the daughter of Dennis. So, we

saw quite a bit of Eric back in the day. Sadly, Linda and Eric split up as Eric rapidly moved up the darting ladder to greatness.

Dennis certainly knew and played with the best a great testimony to him.'

As a result of Michael's enquiry, I first checked on the actual event in which the silver darts were awarded.

It was the Unicorn World Darts Championship 1975 which was held at the Thames Suite of the West Centre Hotel, Little Road, Fulham, London, SW6 over the Easter weekend Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th March that year. A 'Welcome Dinner' was held on



Friday 28th March, attended by competitors, sponsors, stockists, officials, and their personal guests. During that dinner, the draw was made for the order of Saturday's play. This pre-event was 'By Invitation Only.'

Amongst the 'Messages' and 'Acknowledgements,' Stanley and Michael Lowy of the Unicorn Group of Companies welcomed everyone and stated that they were '*proud to present this first ever World Darts Championship.*'

I had never thought of it before but was this genuinely the *first ever* world championship? As a pairs world tournament perhaps but the first *World Masters Individual Darts Championship* had taken place the previous year, at the same venue, on 31st August, sponsored by Phonogram Ltd. Can anyone think of an earlier *World* tournament (and I don't mean the *News of the World*).

Welcome messages were also published from Ken Baker, the General Manager of the NODOR Company Limited, Olly Croft, Honorary General Secretary of the British Darts Organisation (BDO) and Norman Byram, Chairman of the BDO.

Ken and Dennis had qualified for the championship finals by winning the Southern Region of the U.K. tournament. The programme introduced them as:

'Ken Brown, 37. Surrey Darts Organiser from Carshalton. Great Britain International Player and Surrey Individual Champion 1974.'

Dennis Nutt, 44. Engineering Manager from Byfleet, Secretary of Surrey Darts Organisation. London and Home Counties Individual Champion and keen swimmer.'

The programme confirmed that all losing Quarterfinalists were awarded: 'Konica Deluxe 8 x 30 binoculars: coated lenses for brilliant viewing, centre focus, ideal for holidays, race meetings, and all sports activities. Complete with carrying case.'

That was Dennis's prize for reaching the quarter final, not the silver darts. However, as can be seen, left, Dennis and Ken also received a set of hallmarked sterling silver UNICORN darts, with a small engraved plaque for reaching the quarters. Indeed, the programme confirmed that: 'All competitors in the World Finals also receive an inscribed set of hallmarked sterling silver UNICORN darts.'



As regards the value of the silver darts, I told Michael that I have a policy of never providing estimates of what darts items might make on line or in any auction as, especially nowadays, with the 'Littler effect' on darts memorability, it is an impossible science.

*Information about England International, Tony Brown, can be found either in #151 October 2022 or on my website on this link <https://patrickchaplin.com/2022/10/02/tony-brown-1945-2022-a-tribute/>

**Jack North was a name that I had to look up. I knew it at the back of my poor old brain but needed Derek Brown and his *The Guinness Book of Darts* (Revised edition, 1982) to refresh my memory:

North, Jack (b 24 Dec 1949) is a joiner from Burnley whose career has been a mixture of success and periods when he has disappeared from the national scene. Won the NDA [*the NDAGB*] men's individual in 1975, came third in the World Masters that year, then won the British Open in 1976. Feels he might have got more recognition for these performances and, indeed, was dropped by Lancashire at the time of his Open win. [*I wonder why that was. Does any reader know?*] Won the Sunday People-Strongbow triples in 1979.

*** England's International, Ken Brown, played for the Great Britain side against the United States in 1974. Ken played for Surrey County and his record playing for England was impressive: five wins out of six.

IN PRAISE OF *DARTS HISTORY*

I am always pleased to receive feedback about any article featured in *Darts History* but it was clear from feedback about the early days of darts in Germany (Issues 186, 187 and 188) that there was more to come. Thus, I am very happy to publish the 'multiple feedback' received via James King (and his colleague Bob) of the Europe Ex-pats Darts Federation. On receiving each issue of *Darts History*, James forwards it to all Federation members.

What follows are just some of the comments received by James and, where appropriate, my responses:

'Darts History brings the sport alive. Loved the German article. Dr. Darts must be a great darts player. Love his writing. - Peter, Rome Darts.'

[Dr. Darts said: "Peter. I love darts. You can tell that. But I'm only a run-of-the mill pub player and I've always been happy with that."]

'James, Thanks for Darts History. Great article on Darts in Germany. Will there be article of 'Early Days of Darts in Belgium'? - Francois, Madrid.'

[Dr. Darts said "Francois. There will be an article on the early history of darts in Belgium as soon as I can find the notes I collected some years ago!"]

'James and Bob. Thanks for forwarding Darts History. Great read as always from the Doctor; so interesting and I learn more about darts than ever from the Doctor. Loved the German Darts write up. More on early darts in [other] countries? Yes please Dr. Darts.' - Albert and Gwen, Albania.

'James. Great Read, Great Writer. Congrats to Eddie Norman and thanks to the English Doctor for the History of Darts in Germany' - Roberta, Lisbon.

'Bob and James. Thanks for sharing [the] April Darts History. Saw Eddie Norman in Nice, a great lecture on darts. Amazing article on Darts in Germany.' Barbara- Deauville, France.

'Bob and James... Ex-pats darts. Great read Darts History. What a great writer. Wonderful article on Darts History in Germany and it says a follow up [about] Darts in The Netherlands - Can't wait. Best.' - Andy - Croatia

'Jimmy and Bob. Lovely article on Eddie Norman and Darts in Germany. Loved the whole of April Magazine. Eddie Norman 65 years in darts – amazing.' - The Dartman - Estonia

'Thanks, James, for sharing April Darts History. Loved the whole mag. Darts in Germany was brilliant. Please ask Doctor D. to pass on congrats to Eddie Norman. More Darts Medicine from the doctor next month please.' - 170 Darts, Montenegro.

HENRY VII, ANNE BOLEYN AND DARTS

In June I was approached by Charlotte Peak, Assistant Producer from Lion TV based here in the UK. Charlotte wrote:

'Dear Patrick,

I am an assistant producer working on the Channel 5 series 'Inside the Tower of London'. I am looking into the possibility of doing a short history piece on darts as part of the programme and I came across your published PHD paper, Darts in England, 1900-39: A Social History. I would love to be able to read it in order to inform my research because, as you are no doubt aware, there is a lot of conjecture and misrepresentation on the subject!'

Working on documentaries relating to the Tower of London, naturally involves the life of King Henry VIII. Thus, I was able to provide Charlotte with everything that I discovered about in the 1980s when I examined darts as a hunting or missive weapon in early history and the existing myth that King Henry VIII not only played darts but also received a set from Anne Boleyn as a birthday/New Year present in 1532. For Charlotte I provided information not only about that present and the history of 'darts.'

My discoveries about King Henry and Anne Boleyn that follow were included in my book *Darts in England 1900-39: A social history*, in Chapter 2; the section titled 'Darts as a hunting or missive weapon.'

I wrote:

'A weapon known as a 'dart' or 'darte' existed in the sixteenth century and references to King Henry VIII playing darts have led to misinterpretation and the assumption that the pub game was thriving in the Tudor period. In his 1973 autobiography, dart player Tom Barrett [1973] wrote 'Darts – or dartes as it was



known in the days when Anne Boleyn gave a set to her beloved King Henry VIII – is one of our oldest and most popular sports.

Although Derek Brown [1981] referred to Anne Boleyn presenting Henry VIII with ‘darts worked in the Biscayan fashion, richly ornamented’ at the annual exchange of New Year gifts in 1532, Brown argued that these were ‘doubtless hunting weapons, presumably used by the Basques,’ adding that ‘Henry did not play darts’ in the sense of the modern game.

Clarification was sought from the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv in Vienna. The Austrian State Archives holds a document dated 4th January 1532, written by the Austrian Emperor’s Ambassador, Ernest Chapuys which verifies the presentation of Anne’s gift to the King and his to her. It reads:

de laquelle il a accepte certains dards fais a la Biscayne, richement accoustrez. Et, pour recompence, il luy a donne une chamber tapissee...

from her, he received special darts, richly ornamented in Biscayan fashion. And he in return, presented her with a room hung with tapestries...

Alison Weir, writing about the King’s penchant for wild boar hunting, refers to the New Year’s gift and states that the ‘dards’ were ‘probably hunting spears.’

Next month I will continue the Henry VIII theme by featuring darts on the *Mary Rose*!

RAB SMITH - CORRECTION

Due to a typing error on my part, I gave the wrong date for the passing of the Scottish darts star Rab Smith. He died on 16th not 17th May. My apologies.

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