

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 26 June 2012



INTRODUCTION

Hi everyone and welcome to this special edition of *DDN*.

It's special in two ways; firstly because most of this issue is focused on the story of the very first Home International played in the UK on 29th July 1973 and secondly because I bring news that *DDN* has now exceeded 500 subscribers. Not bad considering that the subscribe feature has been offline since last October.



DDN's 500th subscriber is Kevin Harris from Lubbock, Texas. Kevin (pictured) is an accountant who has been playing darts for about 15 years. He told me, "I have battled through several bouts of darditis that have hindered my progress to compete at the level I desire." Kevin is currently suffering through his worst bout yet and has not played competitively in almost a year. However, he said, "My absence from competition has not slowed my love for the game, as I continue to closely follow both professional darts and darts here in the US." To mark this milestone I have sent Kevin a signed copy of my book *The Official Bar Guide to Darts* with my compliments. The book does include some advice and guidance relating to darditis which I

hope will help Kevin.

Welcome Kevin and welcome too to Brian L. from Canada and my first subscriber from Brazil, Achilles Ferreira of the Dourados Darts Federation, Mato Grosso do Sul. Achilles tells me that he does not speak English but that *DDN* will be translated for him. The Dourados league was started three years ago with the encouragement of globe-trotting darts entrepreneur Dr. Eddie Norman. (We'll hear more about Eddie later in this special issue.)

FOLLOW UP FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES

(a) Jocky Wilson and Mike Gregory

Thanks again to all those who wrote to me with their memories of either watching and/or playing the late, great Jocky Wilson some of which I published in *DDN* #25. Shortly after I published the May issue, Canadian darts champion Bob Sinnaeve and his wife Judy wrote to me saying, "It is extremely sad about Jocky's passing. We recall the 1986 World

Masters Bob played Jocky in the semi-final (as we remember) and beat him and he was so gracious in that loss. Truly a great darter and friend.

It was also nostalgic to read about Mike [*Gregory*]... Ironically that same time frame of the 1986 Masters where Bob lost to Bob Anderson in the final, he then travelled to Birmingham to play the Butlins and lost in the final to Mike Gregory.

We hope that the dates and times are accurate as time tends to cloud the facts. It was great to hear about two old friends.”

(b) ‘Dr. Darts’ and Belgian TV

In the May *DDN* I reported on a visit to my local pub by a Belgian TV crew where, after the filming an ‘international’ match was played ‘England v Belgium’; one game of 501 which was won by the home side.

Kevin Stammers (a regular contributor to *Darts World* and a member of the Executive Committee of Essex County darts) e-mailed me about Essex vs Belgium darts matches that have been played for over a decade. Here’s Kevin’s story:

On September 7th 2001, the Essex town of Brentwood hosted the first Inter-Continental Challenge Match, the combined Brentwood & Ingatestone Leagues versus the DC Voltreffers from Zelem, near Hasselt, Belgium. This match followed an e-mail from Steven Steenaerts a year earlier to many leagues in and around London, which I was the only person to reply.

Steven’s reason for sending the e-mail was that he and his team-mates wished to improve their darts and thought that playing against us Brit’s was the only way forward. Therefore at the *Oakwood* public house in Brentwood we played this first match, with Brentwood/ Ingatestone winning the match 11-0. The following night at the Bentley Village Club, Brentwood, a second match took place and again victory went to the Brentwood and Ingatestone leagues 8-3. All the players involved got on so well that it was planned for a re-match at the Sporthal in Zelem the following summer and sponsored by both the Brentwood and Ingatestone leagues took two teams over to play and won all four matches.

In 2003, the DC Voltreffers visited Essex with two teams, and this time it was the Ingatestone league alone that took up the challenge with all the matches being held at the Chelmsford Social Club. The result was a 4-0 victory to Ingatestone, but it was noticed that the individual score lines were getting closer.

In Zelem 2004, Ingatestone achieved another 4-0 win. Unfortunately in 2005 the DC Voltreffers were unable to visit the UK but in 2006 Ingatestone travelled to Belgium with three teams and suffered their first defeat as Ingatestone ‘B’ lost out 7-8 to DC Voltreffers ‘B’. However, Ingatestone won the weekend 5-1. In 2007 the Original DC

Voltreffers, who visited in 2001, returned to the Bentley Village Club and subsequently lost out 2-0 to Ingatestone in closely fought matches.

2008 was planned to be the last of these challenge matches, and two teams from Ingatestone league travelled for an extended weekend break to Hasselt, and came away with a 3-1 weekend victory as the DC Voltreffers 'A' won against Ingatestone 'B'. However, in 2011, following many Facebook contacts and e-mails between players and friends, Ingatestone returned to Zelem to play an anniversary weekend match, and although not as well supported by numbers still managed to field two teams against a vastly improved DC Voltreffers 'A' team which ended in an honourable 2-2 draw... with the DC Voltreffers promising to return to Brentwood in 2013. (Photo of Ingatestone v Belgium 2011 © Kevin Stammers)



For Ingatestone Martin Compton, Paul Sedge and I are the only three players that played in the first match and all matches between. As for the DC Voltreffers, Steven Steenaerts, Michel Nolmans and Francis Lemmens were ever-present. The big question is "Was September 4th 2011 in the Sporthal Zelem the last ever match between Ingatestone and the DC Voltreffers or will the matches continue in 2013?" Let's hope the latter."

Many thanks for the report Kevin and please let me know if the match goes ahead next year. Of course I'd love to hear about any other international matches played by local teams from anywhere in the world. Drop me a line via the Contacts page of my website www.patrickchaplin.com with details.

In a future issue I'll be telling you about a Northamptonshire (UK) darts team that played against a USA side using the long-distance telephone!

THE FIRST DARTS HOME INTERNATIONAL

In the early 1960s, darts business man Eddie Norman had a dream.

Involved with darts from his earliest days Eddie returned to UK from abroad in 1962 and, along with his brother Peter, founded *The House of Darts International* which was based

in Bristol. At the same time Eddie founded the Bristol and District Darts League and in 1968 the Bristol Darts Organisation (the original 'BDO') later to be renamed the Bristol and West of England Darts Organisation and then later still the West of England Darts Organisation. The House of Darts International business grew and the company sponsored local leagues and in addition during 1968 Eddie ran the local Super League and the Bristol Monday night darts league.



Eddie (pictured) told me, "At this time the thoughts of the National Inter-City or National County Darts League leading on to International Darts Championships between England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland were always on my mind." Eddie gave himself ten years from 1963 to organise the First Home International Darts Championship or die in the attempt.

In order to pursue his dream Eddie met with the only national darts association extant at that time. He recalled, "Throughout the 1960s I had numerous and very long meetings with Johnny Ross of the National Darts Association of Great Britain (NDAGB) to discuss the possibility of organising a home international through his Association. John was as keen as mustard on the ideas I put to him but it was always the same problem – Finance." Money was the primary sticking point but the idea – the dream – was never shelved and Eddie's resolve never faltered.

Then, as today, Eddie spoke on a voluntary basis at many small business meetings on basically how a small business could succeed against their bigger company counterparts and still be successful in exporting abroad. In mid-1971 at one of these business seminars, something struck a chord as two leading firms who had been represented at this particular meeting as they contacted him. One of these companies was Rothmans International (a cigarette company), the other Berni Inns, a national company based in Bristol, the latter being eventually take over by Watneys who themselves were eventually swallowed up by Grand Metropolitan.

Eddie recalled, "I received a phone call from the marketing director of Berni Inns and the sales director asking me to meet them. I had several meetings with them, and they told me that they were impressed with my seminar speech and my ideas and would I like to work for the firm as the manager of their PR department and overseas development section." Eddie gracefully declined the offer as his own business was growing apace and was successful in its own right. However, ever the shrewd businessman Eddie turned the Berni Inns offer to his own advantage. He said, "I put a plan to Berni Inns. I told them that I would like to organise a Home International Darts Championship in Bristol between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales and then asked if they would sponsor the event. The international would be scheduled to coincide with the celebration in 1973 of the 600th anniversary of Bristol's county status (1373-1973), one of a number of events planned for the overall celebration which was to be called 'Bristol 600'."

The two directors of Berni Inns listened intently to Eddie and asked him to put all his ideas in writing which of course he was pleased to do. Part of Eddie's plan was to ask

Berni Inns to agree a five-year sponsorship deal. This was the chance to turn his dream into a reality. Eddie told me, "A month later I was called to a board meeting of the Berni Inn directors. The result was that they agreed my suggested five-year deal but with a firm proviso that I stayed in charge of the organisation of the event for that term. They also agreed that the inaugural event would be held in Bristol but that the second would be held in London at The Lyceum (which was owned by the group)."

With his dream on the edge of fulfilment Eddie started planning the first home international in earnest in June/July 1972. The event would be in a giant circus-style marquee on Bristol Durdham Downs and would include a revolving stage so that entertainment could be provided between darts matches. Even back in 1973 the hire of the marquees ran into thousands of pounds. Come the tournament, Berni Inns accommodated all the teams in the Hawthorns Hotel owned by the group. The company also paid for the welcome dinner, programmes and drinks for the teams. They covered every aspect of sponsorship.

Eddie added, "Another part of the deal was that I had to find someone of prominence to present the medals and trophy to the winners." This was no problem for a man like Eddie. He told me, "Twelve miles from Bristol is Badminton House, home of the Badminton Horse Trials and country seat of the Duke of Beaufort. Who better, I thought, than His Grace the Duke of Beaufort, the Queen's Uncle, to present the prizes." People laughed at the idea and said that the Duke would never agree to it but Eddie took no notice and wrote to the Duke. A week later at *The House of Darts International* Eddie had a call from a Butler at Badminton House. Eddie said, "The butler said that the Duke would like me to call for drinks to discuss my letter and what I wanted him to do. He was very interested in attending the event." The next week Eddie had lunch with the Duke at Badminton House, a three-hour meeting followed by a private tour of the house. The Duke agreed to come and present the prizes, and meet the teams. (Oh ye of little faith!)

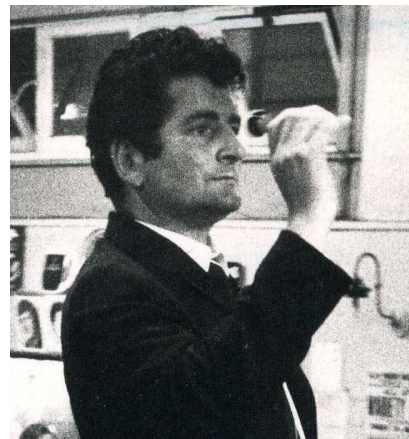


Eddie told me, "The next step was to sort out the teams. I first contacted Ossie Turner, Secretary of the Welsh NDAGB. He jumped at the idea of forming a Welsh International team. I then flew into Dublin to the Kings Inn Bar and its host the great and only Louis Donohue who ran darts throughout the whole of Ireland. He promised to put an Ireland team together. On to Scotland and the wonderful Frank Quinn, President of the Scottish Darts Association (SDA). He promised to have a Scottish team there. Finally I asked Olly Croft if he would be manager of England and select

an England team for the first ever Home International Darts Championship. Olly promised that he would and so the quartet was formed." (Image © DW/PC Archive shows the action on stage)

All Eddie had to do then was to organise the event, to get the show on the road, hoping all the time that things would work out as he had planned. Eddie said, "My brother Peter agreed to work the electric scoreboard - There was no one better than Peter on the scoreboard - and my great friend Jack Price would compere the whole event." Soon everything was in place for the great day – Sunday 29th July 1973. The teams and managers all arrived at the hotel for the pre-match dinner and thankfully the programmes arrived on time. Eddie recalls, "It was a glorious day. The Duke of Beaufort and the Lord Mayor of Bristol arrived in separate Rolls Royces. Berni Inns sent along their three main directors and another special guest was Herta Grisley of NODOR whose company sponsored both the Irish and Welsh team by the provision of team shirts and paying the cost of transport. The 1,000 tickets allocated for the event were completely sold out and organisers had to turn people away on the day.

On the day, all was going well but then... Eddie told me, "We had a revolving stage at the event and the England team was introduced and the national anthem was played. That was fine but then the Scottish team came round on the next turn of the stage, Bill Sheppard (Chairman of The West of England Darts Organisation) was putting the records on and I had the record marked 'Scotland the Brave' but I think it was Tommy O'Regan and Alan Cooper from the England team who switched the records and put in the packet 'By a Babbling Brook' by singer Donald Peers. Bill, who had had a few drinks to steady his nerves never looked at the label and so the poor old Scottish lads stood bewildered as the record was played as they arrived front of stage. The same England guys had also switched the Ireland record and again Bill played the one that had been switched and I think it was the Sinn Fein anthem that was played. The poor old Irish team nearly passed out!" The image (© the DW/PC Archive) shows Tommy O'Regan playing in the NDAGB Men's National Finals in 1972)



There were problems with the national flags too. Eddie said, "The Welsh flag was smaller than the rest. I had purchased the England, Scottish, Welsh and Irish flags but then the Welsh one went missing the day before the tournament. I rang Ossie Turner to ask him if he could get a large Welsh flag and bring it over. "No problem Boyo", he said but when he came over he presented me with the smallest flag I had ever seen. By way of explanation he told me that the Welsh Boys did not want to look too big-headed and he thought the one he had brought over was what the other flags would be like."

Each country's team consisted of seven players and each player played one game of 801 against an opponent from another country, drawn out of the hat beforehand. All games were played from a 7' 6" throw line.

The first winners of the inaugural Home International were England (sponsored by Trulon) and team captain Tommy O'Regan gratefully accepted the trophy from the Duke

of Beaufort. Man-of-the-match was England's Cliff Inglis (pictured below in 1977), receiving a special prize for being the most consistent player. Out of a possible total of 21 points England scored 17, one point for each of the seventeen individual games won. Wales came second with 11 points, Scotland third with eight points and Ireland in fourth and final place with six points.



England played strongly throughout and deserved their victory. England's manager Olly Croft said afterwards, "Today will be the most memorable occasion for the England team and myself on winning the first-ever home international" adding "For me the greatest thing is at last knowing that I made the right choice in picking the best team and the best captain, Tommy O'Regan." Eddie added, "Tommy must have been the only Irishman ever to play for England."

Scotland's Bob McCord told *Darts World* "The trouble was that [we] all suffered a bit from nerves and the English and Welsh have been through all this sort of thing before. None of them batted an eyelid." Welsh team captain Leighton Rees said, "The best team won. It was a close thing and all the lads played well...there was so little in it...next year it could be anybodies day." Even though Ireland came last Joe Regan, a member of the Irish team said, "I was going to retire this year, but after this I've decided not to. It's brought my interest back."

After the event Eddie received more than one hundred letters thanking him for a great day including ones from the Lord Mayor of Bristol and the Duke of Beaufort. Eddie told reporters that Berni Inns were 'over the moon' with the event and promised bigger and better things at the 1974 event in London. *Darts World* pronounced the tournament as 'an outstanding success' and confidently predicted that the Home Internationals would become 'a major event on the darts calendar.' A spokesman for Berni Inns enthused. "There is no reason why the British Home International Darts Championship should not become a permanent fixture."

But then came the hammer-blow for Eddie...

Eddie recalled, "But then I was informed by the newly-formed British Darts Organisation (BDO) that the event was now too big and too important for an individual like me to run and that it should be taken over by them." And there was more. Eddie added, "Worse still, Ossie Turner was not asked to select the Welsh team for the 1974 event as there was now a Welsh Darts Organisation who were affiliated to the BDO and they were asked to select a team. Ossie Turner was very upset and rightly so. He had helped me from the beginning of my dream and was now on the outside looking in."

The second Home International held in 1974 at The Lyceum was also a success. £5,000 was given to Children's Charities by Berni Inns for the excellent work and publicity they had received from Eddie's work at the inaugural event the previous year. TV personality Michael Parkinson accepted the cheque on stage on behalf of the charity. However, two weeks after the event Eddie received a call from Berni Inns directors asking him to meet

them for lunch. Eddie told me, “They reminded me that the company had agreed that they would only sponsor the event for five years *if I was running and organising the event*. As I was now on the outside and the event was being organised by the BDO in London and not by me in Bristol, they said they were unhappy to work with anyone else and were left with no other choice but to withdraw their future sponsorship and involvement in the event. This they did and dropped their sponsorship, although they continued to sponsor darts in Bristol at a local level.”

Thus Eddie’s dream from the early 1960s of organising the first-ever full home international had been realised in 1973. However, fate (or rather the BDO) had decreed that thereafter it was out of his hands. Eddie accepted the position and moved on.

In January 2011 I asked Eddie to encapsulate his feelings today about a now famous tournament that began with his dream - *his* vision – that still runs to this day. He told me, “Looking back in 2011 on that great day in July 1973 when the very first Home Internationals were played in a circus marquee in blistering heat on Durdham Down in Bristol, it makes me smile thirty-eight years later when I see how proud players are to wear their national team shirt as they represent their countries.

Many probably do not have an inkling as they put on their international shirts today of how great it was all those years ago to see the greatest players ever like Tommy O’Regan, Willie Etherington, Roger Smith, Alan Cooper and all the rest of those immortal players smile and stand proudly as they represented their countries in the first-ever Home International Darts Championship.

They do say the first is always the best and so I believe it was as those great players of the 1970s played in that very first home international and for the team managers, all the hard-working officials and sponsors and His Grace, the Duke of Beaufort who all made it a day to remember; a day that has gone down in darts history. And remember this was *before* the days of the British Darts Organisation.

Today, as I reflect on that great event, I think the international players of today, men and women, have a great deal to thank everyone of those who took part in July 1973 for what they are taking part in today as they represent their nations of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland.”

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(With special thanks to Dr. Eddie Norman)

AND FINALLY...

CAN YOU HELP WITH *NEWS OF THE WORLD* PROGRAMMES?

Jim Risbridger of Chingford, East London has asked for *DDN* readers’ help in completing his collection of *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship final programme.

I've tried all the potential sources I know but haven't been able to help but I'm hoping readers can.

Jim is looking for programmes for 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989. So if you can assist please contact Jim at pegasus1999@hotmail.co.uk with details.

(The image shows the crowd at the 1948 *News of the World* finals held at the Empire Pool, Wembley)



COMING UP IN ISSUE 27

Items planned for inclusion in *DDN* #27 include:

- The Unimeeses Darts team from Seattle and their unusual mascot
- 'Dr. Darts' at The Gallery, Farringdon – The English Heritage Interview
- My review of one of the most curious darts books I've ever seen (held over from this issue due to lack of space)
- The *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship – The double-in, double out format
- *180! Fascinating Darts Facts* - Update, publication date and price

That's it for Issue 26 my friends. See you again in July.

Best wishes,

Patrick

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