

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 48 May 2014

MYSTERY SOLVED!

Welcome to Issue #48.

Sincere thanks to everyone who contacted me about the photograph of the mystery darter (pictured below, left) I featured in issue 47. His identity will be revealed later in this issue.



What a busy month it's been for old Dr. Darts! I delayed completing this month's *DDN* as I wanted to report back on my latest involvement with TV; this time being filmed and interviewed for BBC Four on 1st May at Bobby George's house for a documentary. Plus I've been back on local radio. More about all of that later.

A very warm welcome to all those who have subscribed to *DDN* during the past few weeks. I can now boast another two countries to add to the global coverage of *DDN* namely Singapore (Sentosa Island) and Finland, so welcome Mabel and Alex L. and Meike. *DDN* now

reaches 50 countries!

APRIL FOOLISHNESS

In issue 47 (the April issue) I wrote about an alternative dart game of the 1930s called 'Pantathlian' where, like the Pentathlon, players participate in a number of different games, in this particular case five. Although most were fairly straight forward, the fourth game was a little mad. The instructions read as follows:

After removing all breakable objects, the player is blindfolded (or tight "shut-eye" will do). Others then revolve the player three times and leave him facing the dartboard. It is then advisable for everyone else to retreat to a safe distance while the player throws three darts singularly with the right (or left) hand and adds score, if any, to his total.

I then asked the question of you, "Is 'Pantathlian' an April Fool's joke or genuine?"

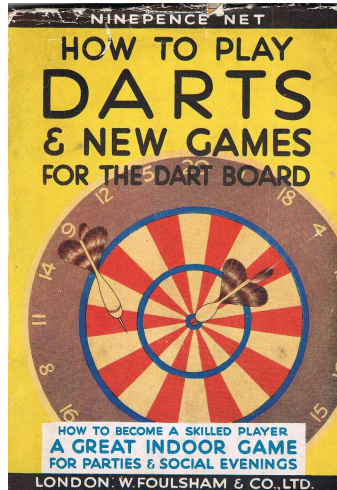
Mick S. wrote, 'The old 1930s pub game must be an April Fool. Surely nobody would play a game like that!' whilst Dave B was a little cautious with his reply when he e-mailed me, 'I have to admit I think I spotted the April Fool trick, although now I am not quite so sure.'

I wonder how many others thought that 'Pantathlian' was my 2014 April Fool joke. In fact for the first time ever *DDN* was clear of all such trickery. 'Pantathlian' was/is



absolutely genuine and I have *DDN* subscriber Bill Bell to thank for writing to me some time ago suggesting that the game might be of interest to you all.

‘Pantathlian’ was the invention of an author named John Young who wrote the book *How to Play Darts & New Games for the Dart Board* (front cover, pictured left)



which was published in London by W. Foulsham & Co., Ltd., in 1938.

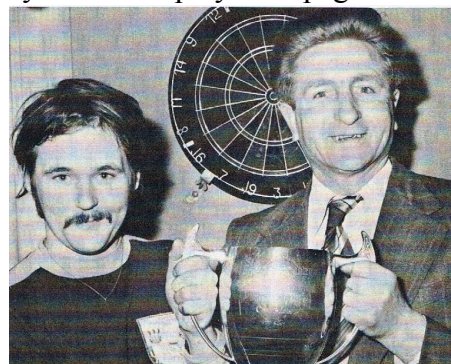
Apart from inventing the most ludicrous format for a darts game *ever*, Young was also the instigator of one of the long-standing myths in darts; that early bristle dartboards were made from *pig bristle*. He wrote of ‘the “Bristle” board, made of compressed pig bristles on end, ... with the grain, as it were, running through the board’ and informed readers that such a board retailed at ‘about 25/-.’ Very expensive for the time when you consider that a wooden (elm or poplar) dartboard cost 7/6d (about 38p in today’s money).

When Young’s book was revised and republished by Foulsham in 1981, presumably to cash in on the increasing popularity of darts at the time, it appeared under the new title *Winning Darts*. The pig bristle myth remained intact and ‘Pantathlian’ was still a recommend game but with the added recommendation that it was ‘not suitable for the home.’

MYSTERY DARTER – SOLVED!

When I featured the image shown on this month’s front page in issue #47 of an unknown darts player holding the *News of the World* trophy and with a wry smile on his face, I asked *DDN* readers if they could help identify him. I didn’t have to wait long.

First up was Mike C. who wrote ‘Your unknown player NOTW player on page 10 looks very much like Bryan Smart who was the Lancashire & Cheshire representative in the 1977 finals.’ Mike was good enough to attach a picture of Bryan from the 1997 programme (see right) adding, ‘As you can see he is even wearing the same shirt lol.’ (The other person in the photograph is ex-Liverpool and Everton footballer Dave Hickson presenting Bryan with the divisional winner’s cup.)



Next to contact me was John S. who said, ‘[That] looks like Bryan Smart from Wigan. He never won the *News of the World* but knowing Brian he probably just had a photo [taken] holding the trophy.’

Ex-England international Doug McCarthy from County Durham rang me to say that he thought the player was Bryan Smart. Doug was very happy when I was able to tell him that he had guessed correctly.

The 1977 *News of the World* programme stated that, at that time, Bryan was a 22-year old player from the Manley Hotel, Ince. The notes added that 'Bryan should get all the practice he needs as his father is landlord of the hotel.' Bryan had substantial boots to fill as the previous year's Lancashire and Cheshire divisional champion, the legendary Bill Lennard, had gone on to win the title.

Fortunately my copy of the *News of the World* programme for 1977 includes a list of the results of every match which records that in the first round Bryan beat the Australian champion Hugh Barnsley 2-0. In the next round Bryan came up against Mick Norris the London and Home Counties Divisional Champion. Bryan lost 2-0 to Norris who went on to become the 1977 champion. (This was also the last year that the *News of the World* darts championship would be held at the Alexandra Palace.)

Three-time Embassy World Professional Darts Champion, John Lowe, told me, "The man in the photo is definitely Bryan Smart. I was at the *News of the World* final the year he played. That would appear to be how he managed to have his photograph taken with the winner's trophy." John also recalled being drawn against Bryan in the first round of the 1976 WINMAU World Masters. He told me, "Bryan travelled with a lot of followers from Wigan. I had drawn him first game at 9.30 in the morning. I was ready for a tough match. I had played Bryan twice for money in the past at that stage and won so I knew he was out for revenge.

Our board was called and I made my way there. Bryan did not show and they called his name again and again. In the end they disqualified him. I found out later that he was practising in his room and told one of his mates to call him when his name came out. That never happened and they lost a large amount of money in bets."

John went on to win the World Masters title, beating Wales' Phil Obbard in the final but recently said to me, "I wonder what the outcome would have been if Bryan had showed that first game? I would like to think still the same but you never know. Fate."



Bryan was first selected to play for England in 1977. Doug McCarthy told me that the BDO practice back then was for departing England players to be allowed to keep their England jackets but to return the trousers. Bryan being small and of very slight build was allocated the trousers previously worn by Cyril Hayes, a man once described by Derek Brown (author of *The Guinness Book of Darts*) as the 'ever-cheerful heavyweight from Taunton.' (See image, left. Courtesy of DW/PC Archive. Used with permission.)

Doug told me, "The trousers were about twenty-five sizes too big for Bryan. When he put them on Bryan said in his very strong Lancashire accent, "Do you think they'd mind if I tucked t' shirt in't my trousers?""" Doug was laughing all the time he was telling me this story; the sight still very fresh in his memory.

Doug also said that, at the height of his career in the late 1970s, Bryan appeared on television in the long-running ITV soap opera *Coronation Street*. "You never actually saw him. He threw darts in the *Rovers Return* pub. It was a story about a darts hustler

and of course an actor was seen to throw the darts but it was Bryan's darts that hit the board. I knew it was him because I recognised his darts."

According to John S. from Wigan, Bryan has not thrown a dart for over twenty years but, John informs me, "He is still alive and often sits in the local legion club picking his horses and occasionally plays a game of snooker. We in Wigan have been trying to get him to make a comeback but he is not interested anymore, which is such a shame because Bryan was probably the best darter Wigan ever produced."

'THE ICEMAN' ON TV

At a time when I mention Bryan Smart (or rather his darts) appearing on *Coronation Street* there is news of a much more recent television appearance (or rather of his darts) by Alan Warriner-Little.

Alan, the former World Grand Prix Champion and World Number One, has been signed up for Episode 3, Series 7 of ITV's Sitcom 'Benidorm' to help out with a darts-related aspect of one of the stories.

Alan the Chief Executive Officer of the Professional Dart Player's Association said, "It was an absolute pleasure to be invited to help out with the filming of that episode. I was asked to spend some time over there on set in Benidorm during some filming in April and will also go out sometime in May to finish Episode 3. It features the return of 'The Oracle' (Johnny Vegas) [seen here on set with Alan] in a darts competition with other cast members in the Neptune's Bar." (Image © 2014 Alan Warriner-Little. Used with permission.)



Creator and writer Derren Litten wanted the darts scenes to look authentic and decided to ask 'The Iceman' to come on board. However, you will need an eagle eye to see Alan but you will probably recognise the arm, hand and throw. Alan told me, "It was an exciting yet anxious time being invited to help out with the show. All the cast made me feel very welcome. I wanted to do a good job and have some fun which is how it worked out. I can't wait to see the final screening. It is a very funny episode and Johnny was awesome. I'm so glad to have been part of it, even if it is only my arm, hand and throw."

The new series of *Benidorm* will be screened by ITV in the UK in early 2015.

MORE TV FOR 'DR. DARTS'

Earlier this year I was contacted by a researcher from television's BBC Four asking if I would be prepared to be interviewed for a new programme in the BBC's series *Timeshift*. The company was looking to feature the pre-1970 history of darts, then moving on to modern times. I was very pleased to accept and arrangements were

made for me to be filmed and interviewed at George Hall, the home of darts legend Bobby George, deep in the Essex countryside on 1st May.

Come the day, I arrived at George Hall exactly at 10 a.m. where I was greeted by his wife Marie and taken into the room that features Bobby's bar, his dartboard and snooker table; the room bedecked with darts memorabilia from his illustrious career where the TV folk were setting up. There I was introduced to Matt, the Director, Adam the cameraman and Manu, the soundman.



I was very pleased to learn that much of the information to be used for the pre-modern era darts history was to be sourced from the book of my PhD, *Darts in England 1900-39: A social history*, which was originally published in hardback by Manchester University Press in 2009. This was also the book upon which most of the questions to me were based.

Surprisingly the recording lasted over three hours during which time I was asked numerous questions and responded to the best of my ability whilst not being allowed to move from a seated position. Matt, the Director, seemed very pleased and, having had a bite to eat afterwards, I departed at about 2.30 p.m.

As I left Bobby made a comment about how long it had taken. He was up next. When I contacted Marie the following day she told me that the TV crew didn't leave George Hall until 8 p.m. and were returning that morning! They were unable to complete the filming on 1st May due to the fact that one of the crew was very ill and had to go to hospital. Thankfully everything they need from Bobby and me is now 'in the can.'

I will, of course, let you all know when the programme is to be transmitted.

(As no photographs were taken at the recording on 1st May I've included here an image of Bobby and a couple of young fans at a book launch in Colchester back in 2011. (Image ©2011 Chippix. Used with permission.))

BOBBY – VALUE FOR MONEY

DDN subscriber Steve Metalman, who often provides feedback to various issues of the *Newsletter*, has written telling me how Bobby George went down a storm at a sell-out exhibition night at the *Miners Arms*, Brymbo, Wrexham, on 29th March.

Steve told me, "Bobby was a real trooper, only three weeks after his hip operation, and, although he was noticeably in pain, he still managed to hit a few 140s and a 180, so he's still got it," adding, "He made time for everyone there."

This was Darts Night 10 in a series of exhibitions being held at the *Miners Arms*. Steve said, "Ian Walker (aka 'Troubleagain') my darts captain, organises these events in our humble little pub in a small village in North Wales which fortunately has a large function room. So far we can boast having Terry Jenkins, Peter Manley, Dennis

Priestley, Andy Hamilton, James Wade, Wayne Mardle, Adrian Lewis, Dave Chisnal and now Bobby George in our company.”

Steve added, “The main thing about Bobby was his stories. He sat down and told us about Jocky Wilson, Eric Bristow and the *News of the World*. Those were the darts I watched on TV as a lad. Unfortunately for others, it’s history.”

When my name was mentioned, Steve said that Bobby replied, “Did Patrick tell you I taught him everything he knows about darts?” adding, “He’s good at what he does, but he’s a boring ****.” (Thanks Bobby. Always the charmer!)

Steve told me, “Bobby stayed for ages afterwards, chatting, when he was supposed to have left. I had a huge respect for him before but it’s even bigger now, considering what he went through for us. He could have easily cancelled, but he didn’t. Awesome bloke.”



On a personal level Steve said, “It was a privilege to meet him in person. He was very warm and funny. It’s only when you meet these folk up close that you can appreciate first hand why they are where they are. Every one of the players who have come to entertain us have been great with the crowd.”

As for the future Steve told me, “We are trying to talk Ian into Darts Night 11 once he’s got over this one!” Steve also asked me to give a special mention to Julian, the landlord of the *Miners Arms*. Steve said, “He’s always been supportive of the Miners Arms darts teams and is an avid darts fan and has made us a true darting pub.”

AND WHILE WE’RE TALKING ABOUT MEDIA...

I was very pleased to be invited by Sarah Banham to appear on the community radio station Saint FM – 94.7 FM. Sarah is a published author and features local and national writers on her radio show ‘Writer’s Block’ which is broadcast every Tuesday evening.



We spoke about my dart books and my previous life as the editor of *The Journal* magazine, a free community magazine that I worked for in the late 1980s/early 1990s, plus we chatted about creative writing in general, both of us giving tips to those listening about how to start off on the frustrating but rewarding road to authorship. You may be surprised to learn that my latest book has *nothing* whatsoever to do with darts.

Sarah was a most congenial, patient and generous host, making me feel at home in the studio right from the start. Thanks Sarah and good luck with your latest book *I’ve got*

a pen and I'm not afraid to use it in which she passes on her top tips on creative writing. (Image © 2014 Sarah Banham. Used with permission.)

VIETNAMESE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS – FOLLOW UP

DDN subscriber Dr. Eddie N. (pictured below right) seems to have been very pleased with my article about the Vietnamese National Darts Championship which I published in the April issue, based on information received from Lee Dutton over there in Ho Chi Minh City.

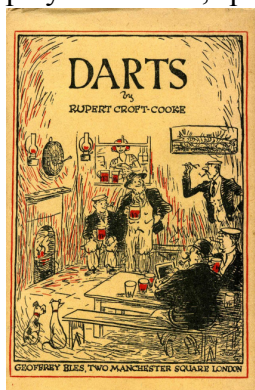


Eddie wrote: ‘Your Vietnamese report was superb. I have been over there several times and seen the darts and your article described it as it is. The article was superb.’

Thanks Eddie.

Eddie is exceedingly well travelled and has seen and promoted darts in more places in the world than anyone else I know and so he is clearly the person best placed to comment on the global development of the sport and, indeed, anything I might write about darts across the globe.

He told me, ‘I have said darts is played everywhere around the world and, in the main, no one playing the game is interested in the PDC, WDF or BDO. They just want to play local darts, spend time at the local, play league darts, a few competitions and [then go] back to work and family.’



That comment struck a chord with me so I raced to one of my bookshelves to check out what Rupert Croft-Cooke (author of *Darts* (1936). (Cover pictured left)) said about the organisation and the imposition of darts of rules and regulations on the general pub player back in the late 1930s. There it was on page 86. Croft-Cooke wrote, ‘I am as glad as anybody that the game is free from officialdom and dogma, and firmly believe in the happy-go-lucky system by which the rules of the [public] house are followed.’

It was still like that when I first played darts in the pub in the late 1960s. Has that relaxed approach to darts disappeared? Clearly not overseas.

(Image of Dr. Eddie ©2011 Moppix International. Used with permission.)

TIME TO CHANGE THE RULES?

Rudy van den E. from Holland e-mailed me a while back and after having told me how darts in his country has ‘only just been ‘resuscitated’ courtesy of Michael van Gerwen’ Rudy turned his attention to his ‘bewilderment’ or ‘long-term frustration about the seven ‘bogey’ outshot numbers; those impossible to finish in three darts, namely, in descending order, 169, 168, 166, 165, 163, 162 and 159.

About darts, a sport he loves, Rudy wrote, ‘Darts, both playing wise and mathematically, seems such a perfect game, but in fact is not [*it being*] rather a tad incomplete due to the impossibility to finish a darts leg when a player is left on either one of the seven bogey numbers.

The same could, of course, be said about higher numbers than 170, were it not that there has to be drawn a line somewhere and the fact that the aforementioned seven numbers are all less than the highest outshot (170).’

As far as I am aware this issue has never been raised with me before and I do not recall entering into any debate on internet darts forums about it either. Rudy is keen to raise the matter and thus shared it with me (and as I now do with you my readers) to see what I/we think about his possible suggested way forward.

Rudy wants those bogey numbers to become ‘finishable numbers.’ By this Rudy means that if a player is unfortunate enough to leave himself or herself any of those seven numbers, that player should be allowed to finish on the next higher ‘finishable’ number, thus, 160 for 159, 164 for 162 and 163, 167 for 165 and 166 and 170 for 168 and 169. Rudy told me, ‘I once figured an option could perhaps also be to allow players on a bogey number to finish on a treble (so e.g. 159 and 162 to finish on treble 12).’ However, Rudy soon realised that that does not work on all bogey numbers, Rudy adding, ‘For example, 163 never leaves a third treble.’

Whilst I find Rudy’s idea plausible and quite interesting, I cannot ever foresee a time when such a rule would be introduced. In my view it would reduce the level of skill involved and the excitement of a game. How often have we seen top professional players cringe when they suddenly realise that their last dart has left them one of the bogey numbers thus handing the advantage to their opponent by effectively giving him or her six darts in which to turn the game around and potentially win the match.

What do *DDN* readers think?

Rudy has also been pondering on another issue; how to deal in a different way with the (what seems to Rudy) the growing number of bounce outs. Rudy wrote, ‘Would it [*not*] be fairer to treat the deflected dart as they do in electronic darts?’

Check the following quote from the NDA [*in the USA*]:

In electronic darts, the dartboard score is always accepted, even if a dart which clearly hits a scoring area does not register on the machine. The only exception to this is the Last Dart-Winning Dart rule. This rule states that a player who throws a winning dart wins the match even if the machine fails to register or marks an erroneous score. The word of any officiating referee is final should a dispute arise.’



Oh dear. I’m sorry Rudy but, as a non-soft-tip player and a staunch darts traditionalist I could never support scoring the bounce outs. Even if I did, how would you

determine what segment each bounce out had actually hit? Without TV coverage playback to examine players and officials could be arguing for hours and never come to a decision.

Anyway, the solution to bounce outs in normal dart play is simple. Make sure you are playing on a WINMAU BLADE 4 dartboard! (BLADE 4 image above © WINMAU Dartboard Co. Ltd. Used with permission.)

THE HEIGHT OF A DARTBOARD

Geoff C. e-mailed me during February via my website www.patrickchaplin.com. He wrote, 'Patrick, I was wondering if you could tell me the history of why a dartboard height is set at 5' 8" from the floor to the bullseye. Couldn't find the answer on Google so thought you'd be the man to know.'

Better than Google eh? Well, on this question only I guess. I replied to Geoff as follows:

The first official rules of darts prepared by the newly-formed National Darts Association (NDA) were published in the Morning Advertiser (the official newspaper of the licensed trade) in January 1926. Rule 3 stated:

That the board be 5 ft 8 in. high from the floor to the centre, and the throw 9 ft in a plumb line from the centre of the board.



These rules were first used formally in relation to the Licensees' Charity Cup (Individual competition) and were adopted the following year for the News of the World tournament (from 1927) which the NDA organised on behalf of that newspaper.

Although the NDA never stated why the bullseye was 5 ft 8 in. from the floor to the centre of the bull, it is generally accepted that it was

equivalent to the average height of a man in the mid-1920s.

If the 1920s team shown here were allied to the NDA they would have thrown from nine feet. I wonder how many of our top darters today could play at that distance...

Don't forget many other darts facts that you will not find via Google *can* be found in my book *180! - Fascinating Darts Facts*. I am currently offering signed copies of my book on e Bay at a surprisingly low starting price.

(Image of the *Regent Tavern* darts team of Bow, east London 1925, is reproduced by permission of Scottish & Newcastle plc.)

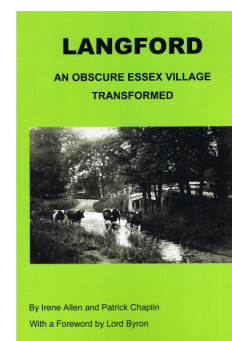
AND FINALLY...

THERE WAS ANOTHER REASON...

Yes, there was another reason for this *DDN* being late this month which had nothing whatsoever to do with darts.

For the past few years I have been collaborating with my friend Irene Allen writing a local history book about the village we were both brought up in, Langford, Essex here in the UK.

I started researching Langford in 1971 just for something to do. I accumulated loads of files of material which a few years later were carefully filed away in the loft. In 2007 Irene wanted to write a history of the village church of St. Giles' and asked to see my archive. This led to a series of conversations which culminated with us agreeing to write a book about the *whole* village. The result? A 500-page tome titled *Langford: An Obscure Essex Village Transformed* about a tiny village of never any more than 230 souls. The book has a Foreword written by the current Lord Byron.



Now that the book has been printed, Irene, my wife Maureen and I are now spending a lot of time planning the launch which is due to take place next month.

So that's it for this time...

I hope you have enjoyed issue #48. As always, any feedback is welcomed.

Best wishes,

Patrick

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