

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 53 October 2014

WORLD MASTERS TIME AGAIN



Can you believe that the WINMAU World Masters is now in its *forty-first year*?



This makes it by far the longest-running major darts tournament in the world and it's happening again this month on the weekend of 10th-12th October at the City Hall, Hull.

WINMAU Sales and Marketing Director, Ian Flack, (pictured left at the 2012 Masters) told me, "Every year the WINMAU World Masters just seems to get better and better! The standard of the youth and women's darts in particular is at an incredible level. This tournament certainly brings out the best from all of the players." Ian also told me that this year the Masters will be broadcast by Eurosport which will take the action to millions of homes with three days of coverage. The production will be provided 24/7.

For more information about this year's WINMAU World Masters go to

http://www.winmau.com/pages/783/World_Masters/

SO WHAT ELSE IS IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE?

When darts commentator Dave Lanning (pictured below right) retired from the PDC commentary box in 2010 he had completed nearly four decades of darts broadcasting and writing. Dave was the man behind the microphone commentating on the 1972 *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship; effectively the TV broadcast that started it all.



I originally interviewed Dave about his life and career in 2011 but, for some unaccountable reason, have only now come around to publishing the piece in this *DDN*. (Image © Lawrence Lustig/PDC. Used with permission.)

Also in this issue, Frank Saunders, 'an exiled Geordie living in Canada,' remembers playing Joe Hitchcock (see #52) and provides an example of Joe taking on a journalist from Scotland's *Sunday Post* back in 1967.

SELLING OUT?

You may recall that, in issue #52, I consulted readers about whether or not I should 'sell out' and begin accepting advertisements in *DDN*. Research is expensive and this

seemed a way of increasing my revenue flow. As a result the legendary 'Anon' has written to me 'using a friend's e-mail to ensure anonymity' as follows:

Dear Doctor Darts,

With reference to your article in the latest DDN re Sponsorship, would it really be considered as "selling-out" if you were to float the idea of a nominal annual subscription?

If DDN was a published monthly magazine/newsletter sitting on a newsagent's shelf with all the other informative sports journals that one can purchase, I would've thought that any loyal fan or interested party would be happy to spend a few shillings to assist in the cost of ongoing research and production.

Don't forget.....information is money!

Well, what do other readers think? Would you pay a minimal subscription to receive or should I begin to seek advertisements? Let me have your views by contacting me at info@patrickchaplin.com.

JOE HITCHCOCK

As a result of receiving issue #52, Ad K., a DDN subscriber from Holland, wrote to thank me for 'another very interesting DDN especially the part about Joe Hitchcock.' Well Ad. Here's some more about the 'Marathon Marvel.'

My thanks to Frank Saunders from Canada for providing me with a newspaper cutting from Scotland's *Sunday Post* dated March 5, 1967 which records journalist the 'Hon Man' (hereafter called 'Hon') playing stooge to Joe Hitchcock at the *Gypsy Queen* pub, Kentish Town, London. The headline read 'Hon Gets The Worst Scare Of His Life' and records in great detail the event that Hon wrote, 'near turned my hair grey.' He was to be the human target for Britain's professional darts champion, 'The Wizard of the Elm Board.'



Describing Joe as 'a jolly, big chap, a young-looking 52,' Hon Man nearly had 'a pink fit' when instead of darts, Joe produced a set of three four-inch nails 'sharpened to a needle point.' Joe then told him, "Now stand against the dartboard with a cigarette in your mouth." Hon wrote, "That was it! If anyone wants to know how William Tell's son felt, I've got first-hand information."

But Hon did not have time to worry. Joe's hand flashed out. There was 'a short, sharp swish' and the cigarette flew out of Hon's mouth. A split second later and the nail 'quivered into the board with a solid thung!' Hon wrote, 'The crowd clapped. I trembled.' But there was more to come...

Joe said, “Now this time face the board with a cigarette in each ear.” Quivering like jelly Hon was told by Joe to relax saying, “Those cigarettes in your ears are flapping like wings!” Hon froze wondering if he was to receive a pair of pierced ears. Then ‘Thunk! Thunk!’ and there was a nail an inch from each of Hon’s ears and four half-cigarettes on the floor.

Hon was clearly a sucker for punishment as the tricks became progressively harder. Next Hon had to balance a half-crown (a fairly large pre-decimal coin) on the end of his nose with a key-ring on top of that. Joe flicked them off Hon’s nose one after the other and before Hon had time to draw breath Joe told him to stick out his tongue. Joe walked up and placed a shirt button on it. “Tongue-tied?” Hon asked his readers. “I was speechless! Surely even *he* couldn’t knock a shirt button off my tongue with a nail from nine feet.”

Joe missed.

However, Joe told Hon it was only a sighting shot. Hon wrote, “I got into position again. Those few seconds waiting were the worst. Then Whish! Thunk! And, saints be praised, the shirt button was nicked off my tongue as neat as you please. Oh how the audience cheered.”

But the evening was not at an end. Joe had one more trick. He announced that he was going to knock a cigarette out of Hon’s mouth *blindfolded*! The first shot went high. The second was at the right height but still an inch away from the cigarette. The third shot cut the cigarette in half. Hon wrote, “By this time I was soaked in the cold sweat of fear. But it was all over. I could relax.”

Joe’s exhibition was at an end. The following month he would take his skills to Scotland to entertain the crowds and add to the £100,000 he had already earned for charity through the demonstration of his incredible skills.

Frank, 75, ‘an exiled Geordie living in Canada since 1966,’ (pictured) who provided me with this story has his own personal experience of meeting Joe Hitchcock, not as a stooge for Joe’s exhibition shots but in straight competition. Frank told me,



I did play Joe twice myself once with his nails and once with his regular darts back in the late 50s at Westerhope Excelsior Social Club, near Newcastle upon Tyne where he did a show for Watney’s Brewery. The man was phenomenal and such a friendly guy. I was the official scorer that evening. We had a couple of rum & blackcurrant’s together after the show ended. Obviously, he beat me both games, but I did enjoy the show.

Years later Frank also played Eric Bristow ‘about 1988 or 89.’ He said, “Eric was at a large printing machine show at the Toronto International Centre, and playing anyone who wanted to try. (He also beat me.)”

I know how that feels Frank. I've played Eric twice over the years and on both occasions really need not have bothered to turn up!

Sadly I never saw or met Joe Hitchcock as he died in 1982, a few years before I began my in-depth research into the history of the sport of darts. Fortunately, as reported in *DDN #52*, I have met his daughter Joan and gained a tremendous amount of information about Joe from her for which I am most grateful.

DAVE LANNING – IN RETIREMENT

In 2010 Dave Lanning, one of the greatest darts commentators of all time, retired after 38 years in the commentary box. He had considered quitting earlier on a number of occasions but each time he had been persuaded to stay on.

Born on 24th March 1938 in Parkstone, Dorset, Dave is the second child of Ernest and Catherine Lanning. His father was a fitter and turner and with Catherine had also been licensees for a short period after the Second World War.

Dave was educated at Poole Grammar School and when he left school he became a newspaper reporter for the *Bournemouth Echo* subsequently working for, amongst others, the *Daily Sketch*, *Daily Mail*, *TV Times*, *The Sun* and the Mirror Group. In 1965 he joined ITV Sport and during his 27 years with that company he covered sports as diverse as speedway, stock car racing, motorcross, arm wrestling and, of course, darts.

It is often thought by some that Dave's first darts match commentary was in 1973 when he was invited to join Yorkshire Television's *Indoor League* but no; Dave first sat behind a mic commentating on darts in the preceding year. *News of the World* Promotions Executive Ron Bacchus persuaded John Bromley, the then Head of ITV Sport, to give darts air time on its flagship programme *World of Sport*. Dave recognises this as one of the greatest breakthroughs in the history of televised darts.

He told me, "This really started things up." Dave added, "Originally *World of Sport* intended the legendary sports director John Scrimminger to handle the *News of the World* but he was drafted into another OB [*outside broadcast*] so John Bromley called up Peter Jones from Yorkshire Television to replace him." Dave was asked to commentate on the first 'live' networked transmission by ITV Sport of the 1972 *News of the World* Darts Championship which was to be held at the Alexandra Palace, north London.

As a trial run before the main event, Dave attended the Western Region Divisional Finals of the *News of the World* championship which were held at the Civic Hall, Exeter in March 1972. During the tournament Dave spoke his commentary into a tape recorder; the winner of the Divisional Finals being Cornwall's Brian Netherton. Dave told me, "I can't remember the first match we taped. It had to be done *sotto voce* because John Scrimm and I were simply sitting about six rows from the front. Folk looked at us very suspiciously. In those days portable tape recorders were something out of James Bond."

The trial was a success and Dave's darts commentating career proper had begun.

I asked Dave to tell me more about his impressions of that 1972 *News of the World* championship. He told me,

When they opened the doors to the Main Hall about noon, the noise of 12,000 running feet was like approaching thunder, a stampede from an old John Wayne movie. Some fans were humping firkins of their local brew under each arm.

The continual noise and energy of the crowd stayed constant at one jot short of total hysteria. Fortunately, the soundmen were able to fade up the voiceback level so that I could hear the director and my own level above the local effects.

The climax of the occasion was when [Alan] Evans beat the reigning champ Dennis Filkins in the semis and bounced around the stage in jubilation. In honesty, Evans provided the charisma on the occasion. It was something of an anti-climax when he was beaten [in the final] by the less emotional technique of [Brian] Netherton.

After the event, the arena was literally ankle deep in rubbish and running with a mixture of water (the toilets had overflowed through pressure of use) and beer slops. We actually took off our shoes and socks and rolled up our trousers to wade through to the reception area.

We went back to LWT [London Weekend Television] for their end of transmission thrash and everyone was turning back somersaults with delight about the effect of the TX. Even the security staff waylaid us to talk about the occasion.



Having Peter Jones as Director was fortuitous for both Dave and for the future development of darts as a television spectacle. Dave told me, “Peter was so taken with the fervour and potential of televised darts that he returned to Leeds and persuaded YTV [Yorkshire Television] to produce their own show. They called up Sid Waddell, then a producer on their regional news programme ‘Calendar,’ to organise *The Indoor League*.

Dave met Sid for the first time in 1972 when Dave was engaged for the original darts and table skittles commentary. When asked what his endearing memories were of *The Indoor League* (which ran for six series and 72 programmes between 1973 and 1977). Dave replied, “Every one of the six series was an outrageous blast of fun and spectacular characters. There’s a well-known adage about living through the wild Sixties that if you could remember anything about it then you never really lived in it. It’s the same with *The Indoor League*. It was wild.” (The photo above left shows Dave presenting prizes to Jean Smith and Peggy Donovan, winners of the NDAGB Women’s Pairs tournament in 1976. Image courtesy PC/DW Archive. Used with permission.)

Asked about his finest moments in darts commentating Dave replied without hesitation, “John Lowe’s first televised nine-darter in 1984, Phil Taylor’s incredible 132 in the World Matchplay in Blackpool in 2009 and describing the scorching 120-

degree sundown at the Las Vegas Desert Classic in 2008 as a ‘chip-pan sunset.’ Add to that other highlights including being the one to commentate on Phil Taylor’s first nine-darter on Sky Sports in 2002, the first two nine-dart finishes in one match (Taylor v James Wade) in the Premier League final at Wembley in 2010 and (with Sid Waddell) commentating the first time darts was transmitted in 3-D at the World Matchplay that same year.

In January 1994 Norman Giller of the *Sunday Express* reported that SKY Sports had ‘outpointed’ the BBC with their wall-to-wall coverage of the ‘breakaway’ world darts tournament. Giller wrote, ‘It was like welcoming back an old friend to hear a nicely restrained Dave Lanning at the Sky microphone.’ He then added, ‘I nicknamed him Lip-along Lanning in his galloping days with ITV. Now he’s more Lope-along and easier on the ear.’

During his life in darts Dave has travelled the world and covered darts in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Kuwait, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa, Hawaii, the USA, and on a desert island in the Bahamas. Thus you have a clear idea of the measure of this man and his dedication to the sport. No surprise then that Dave was inducted into the Professional Darts Corporation’s Hall of Fame in 2008 in recognition of his lifetime contribution to darts. (The image, below right, shows Dave in the commentary box, with Sid Waddell and Stephen Fry at the Premier League Play Offs in 2010. Image © Lawrence Lustig/PDC. Used with permission.)

In Dave’s view is the PDC good for darts?

“Without a doubt,” he replied without hesitation, “They’ve created a completely new image.” And the split? “That was desperately sad,” said Dave, “The end of dinosaurs and the introduction of twenty-first century show ponies.”

And the BDO?



“They were once such rip-roaring trailblazers but missed the boat big time. They allowed the PDC and Sky to set the pace and lift standards to stratospheric new levels...” Dave paused briefly then added, “...and they haven’t peaked yet. As I have said on commentary in the past, thanks to the PDC darts has gone from spit-and-sawdust to champagne and stardust.”

Now to the \$64,000 question...

Why did Dave retire from darts commentating?

He told me, “After 38 years, I felt that I’d had a pretty good run. It was becoming clear that my style of commentary did not fit entirely with the way the Sky producers wished to project the sport.” In the past Dave had twice indicated that he thought he should ‘retire gracefully’ but had been gently dissuaded from doing so by Sid Waddell and Sky Executive Producer Rory Hopkins. Dave told me that, in the end, “I

was determined to go out still on top and with as much dignity as possible. There's nothing more pathetic than hanging on to imagined past glories."

Looking back over nearly four decades of involvement with the sport of darts who does Dave most admire?

He said, "It's a long list. Lowey, Eric Bristow, Sid [*Waddell*], John [*Gwynne*] and all the Sky commentating teams, Barry Hearn, Dave Clark, Dave Allen, John McDonald, Barney, Tommy Cox, Dick Allix, Phil Taylor of course, Dennis Priestley and Marcus Robertson." In addition, Dave had special praise for Dennis 'The Heat' Ovens. He told me, "Over thirty years, in every tournament, Dennis always sought me out to enquire of my well-being and insist that I should never retire!"

But that time came in 2010 and Dave now lives in retirement in Poole, Dorset with Leona his wife of over fifty years. So how does he spend his time nowadays? Does he, just for instance, play darts? Dave confided, "To be honest I haven't played darts for over forty years. I won more league games than I lost when playing for the *Bournemouth Echo* but I abandoned playing when starting my commentary career after the legendary sports anchor-man Eamonn Andrews advised, "If you are going to pretend to be an expert, don't ever play and show the world you're phoney."

So no darts...

Dave added, "I continue to play a great deal of golf. I also enjoy walking on the local beaches, trying to grow orchids and bougainvilleas, spectating at cricket matches, writing a bit and, of course, watching my grandchildren blossom beautifully." Despite having lived in the London area for more than thirty-five years Dave told me, "By amazing and unintended synchronicity I again live within a mile of my actual birthplace."

But what of the future of the sport of darts?

Dave said, "Stick like glue to Sky. Try to find genuine championship-challenging contenders from the USA, the Far East and South Africa and make Barry Hearn Minister of Sport."

Extremely happy in retirement with, I am sure, many more similar years ahead I asked Dave how he would like to be remembered. He replied modestly, "Just as a good solid pro," adding, "I hope darts folk don't forget me."

I doubt that very much. Dave has left an indelible mark on the sport, something that darts folk are unlikely to forget. In some small way I hope that this article is contributing to the permanent record of the life and work of Dave Lanning.

JEAN SMITH

As I was drafting this issue of *DDN* and mentioning Jean Smith in the Dave Lanning article (above), I received, purely by coincidence, an e-mail from subscriber and good friend Mat C. who brought my attention to an obituary that appeared in the *Western Daily Press* dated 10th September.

The obituary was in respect of Denis Arthur Smith, Jean's husband, who had recently died at the age of 88. Whilst I have little information about Jean, the obituary mentions that Denis married Jean in 1957 and that he taught her to play darts. Jean then 'went on to become a UK champion with Denis acting as her manager.'



In *The Guinness Book of Darts* (1981), Derek Brown stated that Jean (b. 19th April 1929) 'is a bespectacled housewife from Bristol who was the best woman player about 1970.' Derek added, 'She wore a red beret and stormed through her opponents like a paratrooper.'

In 1975 Sid Waddell wrote that Jean (pictured left) was 'probably the best woman darts player in the world' at that time. Describing Jean as 'a lumberjack who has been darting for seventeen years' Sid informed readers of his book *The Indoor League* (co-authored by John Meade) (London: Pan Books, 1975)) that Jean, who had appeared on that famous Yorkshire TV series, played three times a week for *The Foresters* pub in Bristol and that Jean's ambition was to 'represent England in the Olympic Games in 1976.' Sadly that was one ambition Jean (or any other darts player for that matter) would never achieve.

Dr. Eddie Norman recently recalled, "Believe it or not, Jean Smith was registered blind, could not see a yard in front of her [yet] still played darts. [She] was Gloucestershire Singles Champion seven times and played for the NDAGB [*National Darts Association of Great Britain*] Great Britain team versus the USA."

(Image above courtesy of the PC/DW Archive. Used with permission. Original copyright holder unknown.) (Special thanks to Mat C.)

FROM RUSSIA WITH SISAL

Back in December 2011 (*DDN* #21) I welcomed to *DDN* Aleksey from Russia who had become one of my latest international subscribers.

At the time Aleksey told me that he was only just learning to play darts but was enjoying it. He had purchased a NODOR Supermatch dartboard and a set of 21 gram NODOR tungstens and had already scored three maximum 180s. To help Aleksey I sent him a copy of my book *The Official Bar Guide to Darts* for which he was most grateful. At the end of August this year I received an e-mail from Aleksey in which he wrote:



Dear Patrick!

I hope you remember me...In November of 2011 you presented me [with] your book 'The Official Bar Guide to Darts.' And you even wrote about me a small article...

Last week I spent few days in Abkhazia. Abkhazia is a little country which borders with Russia on south. I was in place which is called Pitzunda.

There I saw an Agave cactus the leaves of which are used for making sisal fibers from which dartboards are made. I have photographed me with it. [see above] I still play darts and have an interest in it. And of course, every month I read your interesting magazine DDN. Thank you for your great work.

It's always good to hear from subscribers about any and all darts-related matters. Thanks for making contact again Aleksey.

BIRTHDAY BOY

As you may remember, it was my birthday in July. (Yes. *Another* one.)



It never ceases to amaze me how, year after year, my friends and family seek out darts-related cards for me. Most simply feature a dartboard and darts, perhaps in a traditional pub scene, with the legend 'Happy Birthday.' However, I just *had* to bring the one shown here to your attention.

I know it's an old joke but this is the first time I have seen it transferred to a birthday card and utilising an old darts photo. Brilliant!

This particular card is part of the 'Game On' series produced by the company whose website is www.quittinghollywood.com. (My thanks to my sister-in-law Margaret for seeking out this gem of a darts card.)

DR. DARTS – MORE MEDIA ATTENTION

Since the last *DDN* I have been quoted in the *Sunday Times* (discussing the change in culture of darts) (see below, right) and been interviewed by BBC Radio Cambridge (about the same subject, plus a little darts history). I've also gained some column inches in the local press (*Essex Chronicle* and the free journal *Maldon Life*) and a local website about my election to the Chairmanship of the Pub History Society.



Still no news about the transmission date for the darts-related *Timeshift* programme that I have been involved with for BBC Four but I understand that it will be 'soon.' I will, of course, let you all know. However, another TV interview is being recorded, this time at my home, this month for RTL television in the Netherlands. I will be answering a number of questions on camera about the history of the sport of darts and illustrating my responses by using items from my collection of darts memorabilia.

THE QUADRO 240 DARTBOARD

In issue #50 I recorded the history of the Quadro 240 dartboard. Yes, that one which included a quadruple ring which scored *four times* the value of the segment. The dartboard was manufactured by Harrows Darts Technology from 1992 until 2000. In response to that article Robert Pringle, Sales and Marketing Director of Harrows Darts, told me that it was “a fair summing up of our Quadro adventure,” adding “To be honest I had forgotten we ran the TV event for four years. As you said, it completely messed up the pros brains!” Indeed, many professional players were bamboozled by the addition ring. Robert said, “I remember presenting a cheque for £500 to ‘Big Cliff’ Lazarenko for the highest checkout utilising at least one quad. I think it was 210, Cliff hitting 80, 80, Bull!”

Robert also sent me the link below saying “Quadro mania! Watch this Patrick and be amazed!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQv7U4eoBXU>

I guarantee you *will* be amazed.

AND FINALLY...

I’m grateful to Jon from Kent who, after receiving the 50th edition of *DDN*, sent me an e-mail congratulating me on reaching that milestone. More importantly for me, Jon also wrote, ‘I hope there are more to come. Your enthusiasm for darts is infectious and inspiring.’

Thanks Jon. It’s always pleasing to receive such positive feedback.

‘Til next time...

Patrick

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