

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 54 November 2014

INTRODUCTION

Welcome one and all to *DDN* #54.

This month's issue has a particularly Welsh theme to it as we celebrate Martin Phillips' win in the WINMAU Men's World Masters, plus I look back to Wales' earliest *News of the World* darts champions. Congratulations too, to Anastasia



Dobromyslova's victory in the Ladies Masters final. (Images left and right © 2014 Charis Mutschler. Used with permission.)



I've received some very positive feedback from last month's issue from subscribers. It seems you particularly enjoyed the Dave Lanning article. James S. wrote, 'Really enjoyed the Dave Lanning interview, such a knowledgeable and insightful

commentator and a great foil for Sid Waddell's style, the perfect commentary duo.' I received a phone call from Dave Lanning thanking me for my 'very complementary piece.' We chatted for ages.

The article about Joe Hitchcock prompted responses too. Mick S. e-mailed me to say, 'Great read as always. Great to hear about the late great Joe Hitchcock. Fantastic! Great to hear from other parts of the world too. Thank you for all you do for fans like me.'

THE WINMAU WORLD MASTERS

October began for me darts-wise with a visit to this year's WINMAU World Masters held at City Hall, Hull. You've probably read all about it on the 'net so I will not



include a detailed report here but needless to say my wife Maureen and I had a great time, witnessed some excellent darts and saw - AT LAST! - Wales' cool, calm and collected Martin Phillips winning his first-ever TV major when he became the 41st WINMAU Men's World Master. I have met Martin in the past at the Lakeside World Championships and always believed that he was capable of lifting a premier title.

Russia's Anastasia Dobromyslova won the Women's tournament, something she had been targeting for some years. She has now completed her WINMAU World Masters double, having won the Girls Masters event back in 2001. Praise too, to The Netherlands' Colin Roelofs and Robyn Byrne of the Republic of Ireland (pictured above, left) winners of the Youth Boys and Youth Girls

Masters titles respectively. Colin beat Callen Rydz of England 4-1 (and there were fifteen 100+ scores in only five legs!) and Robyn beat Beau Greaves of England (only 10 years old) 4-0. Robyn is the first youth winner from Ireland (boys or girls).

Over and above the four tournaments for able-bodied darters, the 2014 WINMAU World Masters programme included the inaugural World Disability Darts Association (WDDA) event, the first Masters for disabled darters. Maureen and I witnessed the early rounds and saw some fine dart-throwing from all of the men and women participating.

(Disabled darters are able to play on a par with able-bodied players by utilising special dart frames (the Wildfire 137 and the Solo frames) the brain-children of Russ Strobel, founder of the WDDA.)

The image, right, shows the WDDA team of competitors and helpers at the start of the inaugural WDDA Masters with Russ on the extreme right. (Image © 2014 Chippix. Used with permission.)

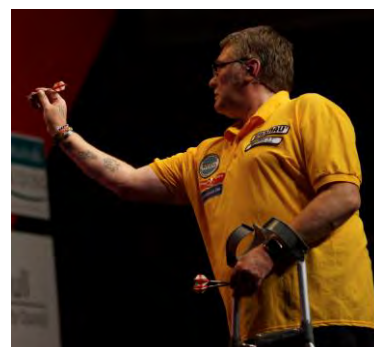


The final, an all-male affair, was fought out on the World Masters stage between Ricky Chilton, from Cornwall and Manchester-based Phil Lees. In the best-of-five-legs match Ricky took an early lead but Phil levelled, the match going all the way to a deciding leg with Ricky eventually taking the match and title on double 16.

Ian Flack, Sales and Marketing Director of the WINMAU Dartboard Co., said, “The highlight of this year’s World Masters was the inaugural World Disability Darts Association event. It was one of the proudest moments of the fifteen years I have been involved in darts to watch a superb game between Phil Lees [*pictured below, right*]



and Ricky Chilton [*below left*]. Ricky was the eventual winner in a final leg decider and became the first-ever WDDA Masters Champion. Our thanks to Russ Strobel of the WDDA and his team for all their help and support for disabled players all over the world.”



When asked to comment on the event, told me, “Anyone who was at the WINMAU Masters event during the finals weekend in October would now realise a new era of greater inclusion in the sport of darts has well and truly arrived.

WINMAU and the WDDA have had a partnership since the early days of recognition by Darts Australia and then the World Darts Federation (WDF) of a lowered board height for wheelchair players. Being invited to hold our demonstration championship event this year at the Hull City Hall has been the culmination of all we have worked towards. Ian Flack at WINMAU worked tirelessly with the WDDA to ensure the

success of the event. To say it hit its target would be greatly understating its impact. I spoke with people who shed tears over how supportive the whole event was.

Andy 'The Viking' Fordham moved many to tears with his selfless and sincere support of those playing with disability. When thanked by one of our players by e-mail for offering to play our winner on stage, Andy's response was simply "It was my honour to do so." This seems indicative of the whole WINMAU 'darts family' philosophy towards greater inclusion. That WINMAU subsequently offered sponsorship to three of WDDA's top players [*Ricky Chilton, Phil Lees and Rob Franks*] after the event should really be no surprise given their past support. But then again this is a *huge* gesture that will wake-up the darting world by showing anyone living with disability that equality at the highest levels in some things is becoming possible."

Russ added, "The WDDA now has an enthusiastic team of administrators working to stay on top of the wave of interest generated with representation at some of the UK's most prestigious darts events including the Isle of Man in March 2015."

Another exciting development is the WDDA commencing its campaign for darts to gain recognition and inclusion in the Paralympics inclusion. I hope to be able to provide *DDN* readers with more information as the campaign develops.

WALES' FIRST NEWS OF THE WORLD DARTS CHAMPIONS

Shortly before Martin Phillips, captain of Wales, lifted the men's World Masters trophy aloft last month, I was contacted by Simon Hall of Red Dragon Sports, who asked me for information relating to pubs entered players entered the former *News of the World* tournament 'back in the day.' This enquiry started me thinking about Welsh players would had won that tournament. It also reminded me that I had already undertaken some research into Oliver James, the first Welshman to win the coveted *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship post-World War Two.

Actually, back in March this year, I was contacted by Oliver James' great-grandson, Simon James, who had been undertaking his own research into Oliver's darting life. I promised Simon that I would see what I held on file and then publish his great-grandfather's story. It was a timely reminder from Simon James that spookily arrived in my in-box at the same time as I was in correspondence with Simon Hall. However, before looking at Oliver's story, there were some earlier Welsh *News of the World* darts champions who came to light and so deserve a mention.

The *News of the World* darts championship began in the 1927/28 season and was held only in the Metropolitan area of London until 1935/36 when it was expanded to London and the Home Counties. The following year (1936/37) saw the setting up of a Wales division of the competition. In that first season D. Cornacia (representing the *Ivy Bush Hotel*, Portardawe, Neath) beat T. A. Jones (playing out of the *Llanerch Hotel*, Llandrindod Wells) 2-0 in the final.

In the next season (1937-38) the Welsh divisional champion was Gwyn Jones. He represented the Unemployed Club, Penygraig, Rhondda and beat Jack Corvett

(playing out of the *Ferry Boat Inn*, Briton Ferry) by two games to nil. In the last *News of the World* tournament before the competition was suspended on the outbreak of war, the Welsh champion for the 1938/39 season was Charlie Parker of the *Castle Inn*, Pontywaun, Newport, who beat Horace Trickett (representing the *Old Express Hotel*, Merthyr) by yet another margin of 2-0.

The *News of the World* was restored in 1947 as the 'Darts Championship of England and Wales' and so was beginning to take a first, somewhat hesitant, step towards being a 'national' competition. (However, Scotland and Northern Ireland were not to join the tournament until the 1970s.) The first Wales Division winner post-World War Two was William 'Bill' Preece (pictured below, left). He progressed to the Grand



Finals held at the Empire Pool, Wembley, on Wednesday 9th June 1948 to match his darting skills with the other seven divisional champions, all of whom came from England.

Bill Preece played out of the *Alma Inn*, Blaenarvon and became the Monmouthshire Area Champion before winning the divisional championship of Wales. A 36-year-old worker in the Big Pit at Blaenarvon, Bill had started playing darts about ten years earlier. He had reached Wembley at his first attempt. A darts player with a preference for the bottom half of the dartboard, the programme notes for that Grand Final informed the reader that Bill's favourite treble 'is treble 19, but if he gets it he usually goes for the treble 20 and then comes down again to the treble 17 with his third dart' adding '[He] has often hit all these to give him a score of 168 (57, 60, 51).' With these credentials the contingent of Welsh fans were, according to the programme, confident 'he'll take the cup home with him.' Unfortunately that was not to be, the glory going to the Lancashire and Cheshire divisional champions, Harry Leadbetter (representing the Windle Labour Club, St. Helens), who beat the North of England divisional champion, Tommy Small (playing out of the South Durham Steel and Iron Social Club, West Hartlepool) 2-1 in the final.

Thus it was that, although Wales continued to send top class divisional champions to London for the *News of the World* Grand Finals every year it was not until the 1954 final that a Welsh darter won that prestigious tournament. His name was Oliver James (pictured right).

During his research into his great-grandfather's achievements, Simon James found a report in an unnamed Welsh newspaper written by journalist Barry Walsh in the early 1960s; an article titled 'Oliver James – Darts Champion Supreme.' Walsh's opening gambit read:

Pandemonium broke out in Earls Court, London, on an evening in 1954, when 6,000 wildly excited darts enthusiasts, - many of whom travelled up from the Dulais Valley - saw a 52-years-old Seven Sisters grandfather, Oliver James, beat the cream players of the country to become the first Welshman to win the much coveted "News Of The World" individual darts championship of England and Wales. A



magnificent record coupled with another, for Oliver still holds the record of being the oldest ever player to win the national title...

Oliver, by then 61-years old, was interviewed because of the fact that 'Wales's only British darts champion' had been made an honorary member of the team he had played for in recent years – the "Coalites" of the *Half Way Inn*, Onllwyn. In a letter notifying him of this honour, team captain and secretary Ray Venn wrote, 'We will always admire and cherish the name of Oliver James.'

Oliver James was born in the town of Pembroke on 1st March 1902, son of the town crier. At the age of 15, Oliver went out into the wide world but soon settled at Nantymoel in the Ogmore Valley where he became a collier and eventually moved to Seven Sisters. As a youngster he took an interest in indoor sports and gained success as an exponent of table tennis, billiards and table quoits. In spite of his useful ability at these games, Oliver treated them 'merely as a pastimes.'

He was introduced to darts in 1937 and played for 'Hoopers Shop' in the Dulais Valley Shoppers League, the original darts league in the valley. League Officials applied to the local Welfare association asking them to present a shield for individual competition in the league and this was agreed. Oliver subsequently won that trophy three times and earned success with the "Hoopers shop" team of Martyn's Avenue, Seven Sisters, which included such local stars as Stan Jones ('The Milk') and Syd Williams ('The Ostler'). Despite these successes the league eventually disbanded.

During his interview with Barry Walsh, Oliver James told him, "Darts was growing far more popular by now and was being introduced into public houses [*rather than just clubs*]." With his other team disbanded, Oliver joined the team at the Ex-Servicemen's Club, at Dyffryn Cellwen, Onllwyn, competing in the Club Institute Union (CIU) League. Oliver said, "It was the best team and league I have ever played in." It was while playing for the club that he won his *News of the World* title.

A fixed pattern of afternoon shifts working down the mine, meant that Oliver was unable to enter even the preliminary rounds of the *News of the World* until 1952. Then his first attempt at the *News of the World* title in the 1952/53 season ended abruptly when he was beaten in one of the preliminary rounds by Len Heath, a teammate at the

Ex-Servicemen's Club. However, Oliver did not then have to wait long for success.



At the start of the 1953/54 season, armed with his 'bombers', heavy-weighted brass darts he had always used (darts he had specially filed down for better grip) he won through the *News of the World* preliminary rounds. From there Oliver travelled to Cardiff where he won the Wales divisional title, being presented with a magnificent trophy by former international and

Captain of the Glamorgan County Cricket Club, Wilfred Wooller. (See image, left. Oliver James is on the right.)

The news that Oliver had made it through to the *News of the World* finals at the Empress Hall, Earl's Court, London, spread like wildfire throughout the Dulais Valley and his supporters set about organising their trek to the capital.

Barry Walsh's report revealed that, as it was holiday time, an unassuming Oliver, 'in his usual cool and calculative manner,' decided to make his visit to London serve a dual purpose. On his way to the finals he travelled to Gillingham, Kent to visit his son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren, for a brief holiday before the big day.

While Oliver was relaxing with his family, panic stricken organisers visited Oliver's home to find it empty. Frantic telegrams and telephone calls (no mobile phones in those days) were made to try and track him down and at the last moment they discovered where he was. Oliver told Barry Walsh, "A report appeared in a paper that I was missing, but I got to London in plenty of time."

According to Walsh's report, Oliver's nerves were unshaken by the crowded Earl's Court, and the '6,000-plus baying fans.' But he was confident from the outset. Walsh reported that Oliver's band of Dulais Valley supporters, 'in a state of nail-biting tension, watched in silence as he took on Peter Aldridge, the London and Home Counties champion, in the quarter final. On his first visit to the board he notched up a good ton and finally defeated Aldridge by two legs to one.'

In the semi-finals, Oliver came up against Alec Adamson, the North of England champion. Unperturbed and with frequent tons and 140's, the Welsh champion strode through to the finals by two straight legs. Afterwards, Oliver learned that in the final he would be meeting the Eastern Counties champion Johnny Bell, representing the *Sun Inn*, Waltham Abbey, Essex, a man regarded as the 'dark horse' of the grand finals.

'Dark horse' or not, Oliver remained calm and unruffled and threw consistently well, comfortably winning the first leg against Bell. However, the second leg was a different story. Johnny Bell bolted in front, striking four consecutive tons but, again, Oliver remained unruffled and battled on. Oliver told Barry Walsh, "The Eastern champion left himself on double 18 while I wanted 224. But Bell had cracked, he had shot his bolt."

Within another three darts, after Bell had 'wire trouble,' his darts hugging the wire of double 18, Oliver, scoring 99, reduced his remaining score to 125. Johnny Bell's next three darts again struck outside his required double. With tension running high, Oliver strode up to the oche, pinned his first dart in the treble 20 (60), embedded his second in the outer bull (25) and narrowly missed the match-winning double top. Sensing that his time was *now* Bell pinned the first two darts of his next throw close to the wire and then hit a single 18 with the third.

By now the tension by was unbearable. Oliver told Walsh that you could have heard a pin-drop in the Empress Hall. But Oliver, quietly confident, moved up to the hockey (as it was spelt in those days) and, with his first darts, hit the winning double top. Immediately there was pandemonium throughout the Hall as a delighted Oliver, his cool temperament discarded, jumped on his opponent's back!

Oliver James was presented with the magnificent silver cup by the famous air ace Douglas Bader (see image, below, right) who was, at the time, Air Correspondent to the *News of the World*. After witnessing the final Bader was quoted as saying, "I have never been to a darts competition before but at times I was simply trembling with excitement." Afterwards Oliver James was chaired from the vast arena by his jubilant band of supporters.



After winning the national crown, Oliver's feat was recognised locally when he was presented with a silver lighter by the Neath Sports Club panel, a gold watch by the Ex-Servicemen's Club and a silver cup by Councillor Lal Evans, who at the time was president of the club and was among Oliver's supporters at Earl's Court.

After his triumph, although he never again made it to the *News of the World* finals, Oliver went on to earn more trophies at a local level and in 1961, with the 'Coalites,' (the Welsh county and area champions) made it as far as the finals of *The People* Lord Lonsdale Darts Team National Championship in London. However, the team failed to win that trophy.

In his report in the early 1960s, Barry Walsh stated that, 'Oliver still enjoys playing the game. His three sons also play... Mrs James, who has little interest in the game, remarked humorously, "I suppose I have been a darts widow."'

Oliver James died following a heart attack on 10th August 1971.

(My thanks to Oliver's great-grandson Simon for providing much of the information and some of the images included in this article.)

'DR DARTS' – MEDIA UPDATE

Even though I began my research into the history and development of the sport of darts way back in the 1980s, never before have I received so much media attention in just one month. I've been increasingly busy with approaches from the media, local, national and international.



Whilst attending the WINMAU World Masters finals at Hull I met up with Charis Mutschler of globaldarts.de who interviewed me for a couple of hours for her website. I have been in touch with Charis via e-mail for a good number of years but we had never met. It was great to meet face-to-face at last. It was also good to speak to John Gwynne, someone

I hadn't seen for a number of years but had often exchanged e-mails with about darts matters. John was commentating on the World Masters for Eurosport and it was very

pleasing to see him back behind the ‘mic.’ (The image shows Charis and I with John Gwynne. Image © 2014 Moppix International. Used with permission.)

On 14th and 15th October I was visited by a production crew from Holland’s national TV channel RTL7. A few weeks before the team arrived at my house, I had received an approach from RTL7 asking if I would answer a number of questions about the history of the sport of darts in front of camera. RTL7 will be covering the Professional Darts Corporation’s World Darts Championships in December and early January for Dutch darts fans. Of course, I readily agreed to be interviewed.



(And, of course, there is a large number of *DDN* subscribers in the Netherlands.) My answers to their questions will be featured in a number of ‘Ask Dr. Darts’-type segments during RTL7’s daily coverage of the tournament.

I was interviewed by Holland’s ‘Mastercaller,’ darts writer and broadcaster Jacques Nieuwlaat. and answered over 25 questions including one about the history of darts in Holland! The producer, Dennis Wieringa, was also very interested in my collection of darts memorabilia so seized the opportunity to take photographs of darts, dartboards, medals, etc. to further illustrate the interview.

(The image above shows me with the Dutch TV crew: Left to right: Jacques Nieuwlaat (interviewer), yours truly, Fjodor De Lange (cameraman) and Dennis Wieringa (producer). Photo: © 2014 Moppix International. Used with permission.)

Local press published articles about the visit on line and in newspapers. In addition I was interviewed by Steve Young of the local community radio station Saint FM. Steve and I know each other well and so the interview went very smoothly. We discussed the Dutch visit plus non-darts matters such as the Pub History Society (of which I am Chairman) and the local history book titled *Langford: An Obscure Essex Village Transformed* which my co-author, Irene Allen, and I published last June.

Towards the end of October I received an e-mail from Danielle Rossingh, a Sports Writer from the *Bloomberg News* in London. She told me, ‘I came across your name while doing some research on a story I am writing about Phil Taylor and the resurgence of darts. I talked to Phil last week for his new book, and I am putting together a story this week. Would you perhaps have time for an interview? I want to ask you where you would place Phil in darts history, and also find out a bit more about how and why darts has changed audiences over the years and is now becoming a very popular outing for bankers in the City of London even.’

Danielle told me that she doesn't normally cover darts so she was pleased that I was able to provide her with a lot of background information about our sport. The interview lasted over an hour and I hope to be able to provide you with a link to Danielle’s article in the December *DDN*. (I will also be reviewing Phil Taylor’s new book *Staying Power – A Year in My Life* in that issue.)

Talking of links, when I asked the BBC Four producer of *Timeshift*, Matt Thomas, when the programme on darts will be broadcast, he told me once again that it was 'imminent.' But although a date is still not available Matt was good enough to provide me with a link to some tester footage:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0287mq6>

Please note that this link also includes exclusive footage of Patrick Dee, 'The Curator of Darts,' who has been previously featured in *DDN*, showing just a fragment of the memorabilia that he owns.

BACK IN ISSUE #50...

I hope readers will remember back in July when the 50th issue of *DDN* was celebrated. I was able to offer up for grabs four prizes, a set of top-of-the-range Zagato 90% tungsten darts (generously donated by the WINMAU Dartboard Co.), signed copies of two of my books, a 'mystery darts-related prize' and a darts t-shirt made to your own personal design donated by Paul Booth.



The winner of the t-shirt was James H. (nicknamed 'Hazza'). When originally notified of his win he replied, 'Wow! Thanks ever so much. Can't wait for this!' In September James contacted me again to say that the shirt had been delivered. He told me, "I had a few delays caused by me faffing with the design...but once it was all sorted I got the shirt [pictured] in two days and I'm well happy." James added, "Cheers for running the comp and to Boothy for putting the prize up."

Thanks indeed to Paul Booth for donating the prize and to James for coming up with such a splendid design. For more details about how you can purchase darts shirts made to your own, specific design visit www.dartsshirts.co.uk.

My thanks again to everyone who donated prizes for the 50th issue and to the many *DDN* readers who entered those celebratory competitions back in the summer.

HISTORICAL SNIPPETS

My thanks to *DDN* subscriber Ray A. for sending me two fascinating snippets from the 1930s extracted from issues of *The Pennant*, the house magazine of the now long extinct Benskin's Brewery of Watford, Hertfordshire.

The first comes from the April 1932 issue and shows a photograph of an elm wood dartboard with nine darts in the bullseye. According to the magazine this image is 'an eloquent testimony to the skill of Mr. P. Uff, the Captain of the *Old Plough &*



Harrow, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The unlikely-named Mr. Uff is credited with 'throwing nine darts into the bull of a standard dartboard in under twelve minutes, without touching any dart after it had pitched.'

Unbelievable?

Ray certainly has his suspicions writing 'the nine darts in the bull idea looks very odd.' I think he has every right to be suspicious.

And 'Mr. P. Uff'? Should the surname be pronounced 'Off'? Was this a wind-up? The magazine editor asked readers to 'produce evidence of an achievement to equal this.' Not surprisingly perhaps, no one appears to have come forward.

Ray's second snippet, again relating to Aylesbury, is drawn from *The Pennant* issued dated October 1937 in which the editor offers 'heartiest congratulations' to Mrs. Abrahams, daughter-in-law of the 'genial' landlord of *The Star*, 'on her recent success in the darts arena.'



Mrs. Abrahams (pictured left) 'achieved a most praiseworthy win' in an open ladies darts competition, played for a challenge cup presented by the Odeon Theatre 'in connection with the Royal Bucks Hospital' for which there had been 130 entries. According to *The Pennant* this was 'the first year in which a ladies competition had taken place' but I assume this means the first year a ladies darts competition had been run in Aylesbury or by Benskin's brewery because, as evidenced in my research for my book *Darts in England*

1900-39 – A social history, darts tournaments for ladies had been popular since the early years of the 1930s.

My thanks again to Ray for sending me the cuttings. It is unlikely that I would have ever discovered these two stories no matter how long and how deep I delved. If any other readers discover snippets like these please scan them and send them to me, with the date of the cutting, to info@patrickchaplin.com and I'll add them to my archive.

AND TALKING OF THE LADIES...

Back in issue #49 (June 2014) I reported that the Ladies Darts Organisation (LDO) had been formally recognised by the British Darts Organisation (BDO). That was a giant step forward for the LDO, the committee then looking to gain recognition from the World Darts Federation (WDF).

I met Julie Lambie, CEO of the LDO, at the World Masters last month and she informed me that she had just issued a press release which featured some important news. It read:

'I am very pleased to announce, that as of today, October 11th 2014, the Ladies Darts Organisation has now been officially recognised by the World Darts Federation.'

We would like to personally thank all of the officials who unanimously passed our request to the WDF.

This is truly amazing news, and this now means that we can work alongside other countries and continue to promote the sport for the Ladies and organise more events for them. This is another big achievement that the LDO has succeeded in through the work and dedication of our own committee. We are very proud to say that we now are officially recognised by both the British Darts Organisation and the World Darts Federation. WHAT AN ACHIEVEMENT!'

What an achievement indeed. Julie went on to thank all members of the LDO, supporters, sponsors, and friends and family for believing in the LDO. I wish Julie and the LDO every success in the future.

It was great to meet Julie and her partner Gordon. Julie later wrote to me saying, "It was lovely to meet you too. And what a lovely gentleman you are." (Pause to blush.)

Julie has promised to keep me up to date with what happens next...

FROM MY LOFT...

My thanks to Mat C. who contacted me recently to say, "Patrick, I've just been clearing out my loft, and I thought you might be amused by something I found up there. I won this in a *Darts World* competition, circa 1980! Very useful it was, too, although I don't remember ever having darts quite that big..."

The item (pictured below, right) is a *Darts World* men's sports holdall which was introduced, as Mat suggested, in 1980. Advertised in the magazine in the May 1980 issue as a men's 'Sports holdall suitable for weekends' and measuring fourteen inches by ten inches, the product was available in blue and red and cost a mere £4.85. Also available was a Ladies Sports handbag' which measured twelve inches by eight inches, and came in either beige or tan colour. This was priced at £4.30. Both products bore the distinctive *Darts World* logo.



Those were the days when you could buy or win *Darts World* branded products. I have a *Darts World* autograph book somewhere...with no autographs in it.

All this made me think about starting a regular 'From my loft...' feature in *DDN* and what darts-related items *you* may have in *your* loft. Why not take a look next time you are up there and tell me what you find? Of course, the idea won't work without your input so please send details and a photo or two to me at info@patrickchaplin.com.

BLIND DARTERS MAKE THE HEADLINES

Here in the UK towards the end of October, over and above the BDO and PDC tournaments going on, the big darts news was a group of *blind* darts players who had formed themselves into a team in order to take part in a charity ‘fast darts’ competition.



Calling themselves ‘The Optimists,’ the team is based at *The Dolphin Inn*, Grampound, Cornwall and comprises Richard Pryor (68), Rachael Beresford (39), Carol Pirret (53), and Sharon Waters (46). Richard Pryor organises a support

group for the blind and visually impaired from the pub and when asked by the landlord if he wanted to enter a team, Richard jumped at the chance. The ‘fast darts’ match involves teams scoring as many points as they can in 90 minutes. At the time of writing, fourteen sighted teams had also entered the competition.

Richard told the *Daily Mail*, “Just because you can’t see, it doesn’t mean it’s the end of the world. I have been blind for nearly 40 years and I have a superb time.” As for the forthcoming match Richard warned, “People might want to stand back a bit. I don’t think we get any points for hitting spectators!”

This team of blind players use a length of string one end of which is pinned to the bullseye, the other held in the player’s non-throwing hand, as a guide. This is exactly the method used by the St. Dunstan’s War-Blinded charity after WW2 to encourage blind ex-servicemen and women to enjoy the game. The final illustration here shows an advert from 1945 for the St. Dunstan’s Dart Box. Note the DORWIN darts and the ‘string guide’ technique.



‘Til next time... *Patrick*

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