

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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THE DEBATE CONTINUES



When I opened the debate some time back about who was the first professional darts player I had no idea that several months on I would still be receiving mail on the subject. This month ex-England international Dave Whitcombe pitches in again responding to the 'Global Darts Ambassador's feedback in #69, plus one of my



Australian subscribers, Warren Ackary has a view.

Also in this issue I report on the retirement from darts of the Professional Darts Corporation's Tournament Director, Tommy Cox, pictured left with PDC Chairman Barry Hearn. (Image © 2016 Lawrence

Lustig/PDC. Used with permission.) We also hear from a man who, back in the 1970s, took on and beat the legendary Joe Hitchcock.

Looking back at old issues of *Darts World* magazine, I consider some darting predictions that were made in that magazine in 1974, looking forward to what darts might be like in 1984, and I then ask *you* where you think darts will be in ten years' time.

As always, a warm welcome to all who have joined us since the last *DDN* amongst whom is Ken Auger. Ken told me,

I'm from London, Ontario, Canada. Just moved here in October 2015. The LDMDL (London District Men's Dart League) is one of the oldest and longest running Leagues in North America, founded in 1946 by some returning Canadian soldiers who learned the game while stationed in Britain.

I wonder if anyone is researching the history of darts in Canada.

Plus *DDN* is **70** this month! Where has all the time gone?

THE FIRST FULL-TIME PROFESSIONAL DARTS PLAYER – CONTINUED

I made a small error in #69. I mentioned a 'global darts ambassador' and meant to name him but didn't. Those of you who have been subscribers for some time will probably have known that his name is Dr. Eddie Norman.

Ex-England international Dave Whitcombe has responded to the article, referring to Eddie as 'GDA' and has thus rekindling this fascinating debate. Dave wrote:

In reply to GDA, I too don't want to get into a disagreement with him over who the first darts Professional was, after all he may be correct.

Professional darts has been a grey area for as long as I can remember, and there are many theories as to who is Professional and who isn't. Even the BDO billed the world championship as "Professional" at one time when we clearly knew several players in it who were not.

I offered up Barry Twomlow as a possibility of being the first full time Professional, not as an absolute fact, but which was based on the criteria that everything he did for Unicorn was darts-related for which he received a full-time salary. I too was with Unicorn at one time and travelled with Barry to Europe giving exhibitions, or demonstrations as they call it, playing in tournaments, and teaching relative beginners. Barry was in every sense of the word "Professional", and having done exhibitions myself with Alan Glazier, Alan Evans, Leighton Rees (pictured right), John Lowe, and many others, Barry was in exhibitions himself an equal to everyone. (Image of Leighton Rees courtesy of the PC Darts Archive. Used with permission.)



Another point worth considering is the Inland Revenue who over the years have been scratching their heads when deciding who is and isn't a Professional player. When I played in the Professional Darts Corporation World Championship I was a Manager of a pub and thus employed full time by the Pub Company.

So was I a Professional player, Semi Professional, or an Amateur player because I was a Publican? It really is a minefield of ifs and buts.

But I do fully understand GDA's remarks and appreciate where he is coming from. Without different opinions we would have no discussion, and it's a pleasure to read what people like GDA have to say who has been around since the modern game began.

I don't think we will be able to pinpoint who exactly was the first Professional player as many players have an equal claim.

Joe Hitchcock is probably the key here and if you look at it from the perspective of GDA then if Joe's sole earnings were from Watney, he would have a huge claim as the first Professional player and decades before Evans, Rees, or Glazier. Or do we exclude Joe, because if he was on a full-time wage as Barry Twomlow was, (and I don't know the answer to that) then would he be classed as a Pub Company employee rather than a Professional player?

Lastly, not everyone has the ability to put themselves up to entertain an audience and show their skills time and time again and remain employed to do so. And if a Pub or Club, Beer Company, Brewery, Darts Company, or anyone else pays you to do it on a

regular basis, then you have made the grade and surely classed as a Professional player.

Perhaps others have an opinion on this subject.

Indeed they do. One of my Australian subscribers, Warren Ackary, referring to Dave's views in an earlier *DDN* wrote:

I was happy to read the ongoing debate of "What is a professional player?" I have personally believed a professional player is one who earns his/her money from the sport that the person plays. So, yes, Dave Whitcombe is wrong.

However, that is my own opinion as I am sure this [debate] will go one for ages. The last few paragraphs were spot on. Players like Eric, John and Co. all earned from playing tournaments/exhibitions. They relied on that money as they didn't have a permanent income.

Side note to last paragraph: However if a player has a part time job (John Lowe still did some carpentry in the 70/80's while playing darts) then while receiving another income therefore is not classified to be a professional. Another example is if a player who claims to be a professional yet gets, let's say, social service money fortnightly then that person cannot call themselves a "true" professional player.

Sorry for the lengthy reply but that issue has always been in my mind as there are players now even on the BDO/PDC who have a job on the side because they need it as they may not be making enough to go to the next event on the calendar.

TOMMY COX RETIRES

As many of you will know, the conclusion of the William Hill World Darts Championship this year marked the end of an era for the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) with the retirement of Tournament Director Tommy Cox.

I first met Tommy in the early 1990s at the Circus Tavern, Purfleet, Essex, at the then World Darts Council (WDC) (later the PDC) world championship event; a time when the whole idea of anyone else organising darts on a world scale was scorned by all those who were blinkered to the possibilities; some might have said the threat. But we all know what happened.

Tommy was extremely helpful with regard to my research especially in the early days. I was able to reciprocate some years later by providing research regarding 'the split.'

Here's what the PDC website had to say in praise of their retiring Tournament Director:

Tommy has been involved with the PDC since playing a pivotal role in the company's formation in 1993, and has helped to create the world's biggest and best darts championships. Originally a player manager during the 1980s, Cox joined forces with Dick Allix and the late John Markovic to help found the World Darts Council back in 1993, the organisation which later became the PDC.

A member of the PDC Hall of Fame, Cox was inducted in 2010 alongside Allix, while his late brother Eddie worked as a marker and players' marshal at events and son Danny is a member of the PDC's team of event officials.



Tommy's contribution to both the PDC and the sport of darts for three decades is immeasurable," said PDC Chairman Barry Hearn.

He not only stood firm with leading players when the sport split, but worked tirelessly for the success of the WDC and PDC and is held in high regard worldwide for his dedication and contribution.

It is perhaps fitting that the best-ever World Championship was his final event as Tournament Director; an event which was played at a higher standard than ever, featured

some thrilling games, a nine-dart finish and a superb final.

"On behalf of everyone at the PDC, we wish him a happy retirement!"

Tommy Cox said: "It's been a long ride but one that I've hugely enjoyed. I've made a lot of friends along the way and it's been a joy to see the progress darts has made in the last two decades. I look forward to still staying in touch with everyone in the sport."

In the past Tommy managed some of the biggest names in the sport of darts including Phil 'The Power' Taylor, Jocky Wilson, Alan Warriner, Mike Gregory and Jamie Harvey. The image (above) shows (from left to right) Peter Jennings, Marketing Director, Vaux Breweries, Tommy, and Jocky Wilson performing the first round draw for the Samson Darts Classic in either 1993 or 1994; one of the earliest tournaments organised by Tommy at the PDC. (Photo: *Darts World*/PC Archive. Used with permission.)

I wish Tommy Cox a very long and happy retirement.

PDC Media Manager Dave Allen told me recently that Graham Fairhurst has stepped up to be Tournament Director. Dave said, "Graham has worked with the PDC since our formation, as an on-stage marker and one of our tournament officials before becoming ProTour Manager in recent years and now Tournament Director."

BACK IN 1974 – LOOKING FORWARD TO 1984

Those of you who also subscribe to *Darts World* magazine will have noticed that, for the past six months or so, I have been writing a feature each month titled *The Last Word*.

It was never my intention to repeat those pieces in *DDN*. However, *The Last Word* in the February edition was one that I thought I would expand for *DDN* to see if it inspires *you* to put on your thinking cap on and send me *your* predictions for the future of darts.

Basically, I had been reading through some very early issues of *Darts World* and, in the February 1974 issue, came across an article by Robin Young titled '1984' in which he looked forward ten years to that year in which writer George Orwell back in the 1940s had predicted the age of 'Big Brother.' (No. Not the reality TV show!)

Young interviewed a number of prominent men from within the darts industry asking them how different they thought the sport would be a decade on from 1974. Their responses make fascinating reading.

Roger Messer of Kwiz Darts felt that 'in the future the most popular darts will be made of brass and have feather flights,' adding 'If there is any significant change it will be in the organisation of the game. Darts could well be an Olympic sport. It will become more international and probably develop professional status.' Wise words (well apart from the bit about brass darts being the future), Roger predicting changes in the organisation (which was two decades hence) and the rise of the professional darts player. Like many at the time Roger Messer thought darts ought to be an Olympic sport but all opportunities were lost in 2012. (Kwiz darts advertisement, right, as appeared in the March 1973 issue of *Darts Word*, courtesy of the PC/*Darts World* archive. Used with permission.)



Darts manufacturer E. W. Tunnicliffe of Bloxwich, Staffordshire predicted that

Darts will obviously become even more popular, but it would want a wild imagination to design a futuristic dart that would be in any way an improvement on the traditional. Even the latest innovation in the game, tungsten darts, haven't exactly revolutionised the manufacture of darts. There will be no major changes in design of flights either. People use plastic flights but that is because, as a result of the 'darts explosion' in America, there is a shortage of feathers.

So, no revolutionary darts and no tungsten revolution...

Dartboard manufacturer, Theodore Traish foresaw 'big companies putting scientists to work on designing a dartboard made of wood, but treated with a chemical that will mean it never needs soaking and will never split.' At that time there was not much room for the bristle dartboard but soon after Young's article was published. Dutch elm disease savaged supply and within a few years, in the main, the bristle dartboard became the board of choice. Traish also predicted that darts 'could well become an

Olympic sport by 1984' adding sagely 'More and more people will be putting money into the sport as time progresses,' obviously anticipating the rush of sponsors to come.

Back in 1974 a spokesman for NODOR did not envisage any drastic change in darts' design and believed that 'the main development will be in the use of electronic scoreboards', with no drastic change in the design of darts but believed that we would be 'playing on more boards made of man-made fibres.' (The NODOR advertisement (below) is as featured in *Darts World* March 1973. © NODOR International. Used with permission.)

Olly Croft, Secretary of the newly emergent governing body of the sport the British Darts Organisation (BDO) stated



Before, darts was mainly for participants, but now it's becoming more of a spectator sport it can only go from strength to strength. By 1984 there is undoubtedly going to be a lot more leisure time – and what better way to spend it than playing darts?

But he warned

We have made tremendous progress over the last two years, but, as with football, there must come a saturation point. What we have to do is find our level and maintain it – and who knows what that level will be?

As history has shown darts exploded upon the TV sports scene in the UK a couple of years after Robin Young's article was published, potential sponsors queuing at Olly Croft's door for a piece of the darts action. However, sadly, by 1984, the popularity of darts on TV in the UK was beginning to wane, Olly's predicted 'saturation point' had already been reached and the 'boom' appeared to be over. This plus dissatisfaction and dissension in the ranks of professional players would lead to 'the split' in the late 1980s/early 1990s and the eventual rise of the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC).

It was the PDC that eventually breathed new life into the sport of darts making it more of a spectator sport as envisaged back in 1974 by Olly Croft and going 'from strength to strength'; seemingly unstoppable. The British Darts Organisation (BDO) is now seen by many as a spent force, unable to compete with the PDC at any level.

Is that then the future of darts? Total eventual control by the PDC? Do *you* have a view? Also what further developments in darts technology do *you* envisage over the next ten years? Where will darts be by 2026? I look forward to receiving your views at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

I PLAYED AND BEAT JOE HITCHCOCK

Darts fan Alan Stonelake visited my website www.patrickchaplin.com and, having read an article about the legendary Joe Hitchcock, wrote:

I played Joe Hitchcock back in the seventies, at the Bonar Law Club, New Tredegar, South Wales. Joe was giving an exhibition there. His nail throwing was brilliant. He then took on players over three legs using darts. I did not get picked to play him but my buddy did, so I asked my friend if he would let me play instead of him and he said yes. I was the only one to beat Joe two out of three and I had a nine darter in the second leg! Well that's my claim to fame. I was very sorry to hear Joe had passed away. What a great man!



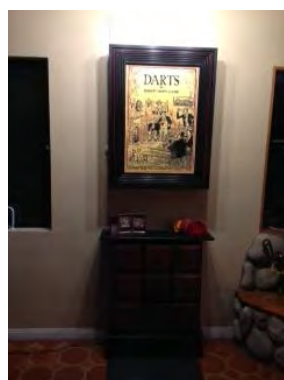
Thanks Alan. If any reader has any memories of playing the likes of Joe Hitchcock (pictured above, right) and Jim Pike way back then, I would love to hear from you, (whether you beat them or not). (Joe Hitchcock caricature courtesy of PC Archive.)

PICTURE THIS...

Back in January I received an e-mail from Robert Ventner who lives in San Diego, California. Robert wrote:

David King with Dart501.com suggested I contact you about source for vintage dart tournament posters or images of the posters. I want to use the poster as the door for my dartboard case. Thanks for your help with my project.

I was unable to help as regards a poster so sent Robert the front page of a 1980s programme of an MFI darts event and a scan of the front page of the book *Darts* by Rupert Croft-Cooke (1936) the first book ever to be written entirely about the game. Robert's reply was almost immediate. He said,



Patrick, The 1936 darts book cover is perfect. Thanks so much. I think this will make a fantastic front for my dartboard cabinet.

And so it has. (See photo left. © Robert Ventner.) As always I was very happy to help. My thanks too, to my good friend David King for putting Robert in touch with me.

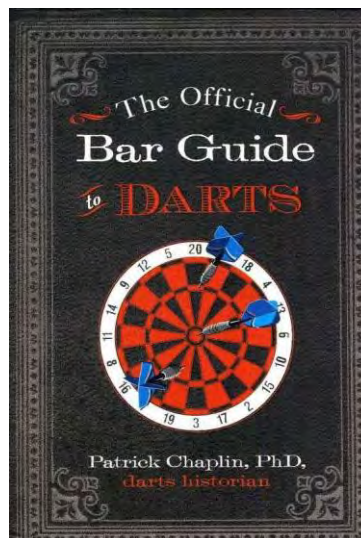
Interestingly Robert told me that there is somewhat of a resurgence of steel-tip darts in southern California which has to be good news. Robert told me "My wife and I started playing darts back in the late 70's and took a forty year break and have been playing now for a couple of years."

AND FINALLY...

THE OFFICIAL BAR GUIDE TO DARTS – SPECIAL OFFER

All around us late winter sales are on and early spring sales are popping up all over the place so why shouldn't I join in?

Back in 2010 my book *The Official Bar Guide to Darts* was published in New York by the Puzzle Wright Press (an imprint of Sterling Publishing Co. Inc.). It received some great reviews and sold in good numbers. Over 180 pages, the book offers tips and advice to all level of darts players, both steel-tip and soft-tip, and also includes chapters on the history of the sport in both the UK and the USA and biographies of some of the legends of darts.



The reason I am telling you all this is that I have found a small box of books here at home and, according to my wife Maureen, we need the space. So in this issue of *DDN* I am offering copies of *The Official Bar Guide* (usual price £7.99) at the reduced cost of only **£3.50 each** (excluding postage and packing). I will, of course, sign each book and dedicate it to whomsoever you wish.

In the UK the total price including postage and packing is **£5.50** (first class post), for Europe **£7.50** and for overseas, including the USA, the total price is **£9.00** (sterling). (Tracking will cost extra if required.)

Each copy purchased will include a *free* set of my **DR. DARTS** 'Rhino' flights manufactured by my sponsor WINMAU. If you are interested, please contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com for further details. **This offer is valid only until 31st March 2016.** Due to limited availability orders will be dealt with on a first come, first served basis.

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