

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 75

August 2016



DR. DARTS TO WRITE YET ANOTHER BOOK?

That's a point raised later in this issue thanks to an e-mail from 'Ocheplayer' from the USA. But am I up to the challenge? See later...

Thanks to all those who gave me such positive feedback following publication of the 'International' edition (#74) last month. It's always appreciated and confirms to me that I must be doing something right. This month's issue features yet another theory about the derivation of the word 'oche' (which made me smile) and another *News of the World* snippet. Also included is an obituary for one of darts' local heroes.

But first...

FEEDBACK - THE HAMLET 'PIZZA' DARTBOARD

I received some excellent feedback from subscribers following the 'Tobacco Dartboards' article in last month's *DDN*. Long-time subscriber Phil 'The Postman' Wakeman wrote:



Hi Patrick, Really enjoyed the July edition of DDN.....cracking read.

The article about the tobacco dartboards reminded me of playing in the Steve Mallen Memorial Pairs which ran from the early 1990s until 2015. It was a charity memorial knockout tournament organised by Steve's father Mick and played at the Dial pub, Stourbridge and very popular it was too with as many as 120 pairs entering some years. I was lucky enough to win the competition in 1999 along with former Midland Open winner Steve Round. Upon winning the title with Steve, we both received, along with a cash prize, a Hamlet red and cream coloured board.

The 'pizza' board (great description) I was given as part of the winner's prize was donated to the team playing at the Queens Head, Pensnett but proved to be unpopular because of the cream and red colours. It was used in several league matches until players complained the colours were off-putting. The Queens Head is sadly no longer standing like so many of local pubs gone forever, along with their darts teams.

Having been told by another subscriber, Andy Scott, that Hamlet dartboards had been used in the past by Hampshire County Darts Organisation, I wrote to that organisation's General Secretary, Frank Branscombe, for information. Frank wrote back almost immediately saying

Hi Patrick. Trust you are well. You must be psychic!! I have just done a few notes on the Hamlet 'Pizza' Board.

The background of its inception refers back to one afternoon when I received a phone call from Mike Hallett who was then the Promotions Manager of Hamlet Cigars. He was looking for a means of promoting the product in the South of England where it was still being outsold by other brands such as Castella, etc. and he was wondering if a promotion via darts could help.

We met at an hotel in Eastleigh that evening and the concept of Hamlet sponsoring the Hampshire Men's Super League became a reality. We enjoyed several years of mutually beneficial sponsorship and during that time Hamlet provided playing shirts for all Super League Teams, financed costs for events such as the BDO Champions Cup, gave monetary support for the league and produced large quantities of advertising memorabilia, for example, sets of darts, darts flights, darts cases, key rings, playing cards etc., etc.

Hamlet did Sales Promotions in venues giving reduced drinks prices when buying cigars etc. They really did an intensive advertising operation and we were lucky enough to be beneficiaries of its success. During that time they commissioned our then top player and England International Ged Harrop [pictured right] to do a series of Hamlet Challenges in I think some 12 x pubs and clubs in and around the Portsmouth, Gosport, Havant and surrounding area. This was extremely successful and well supported and Ged won every match he played.



(Image of Ged Harrop © Hampshire Darts Organisation. Used with permission.)

Hamlet also sponsored a Mixed Triples event which was a huge success and eventually won by Ged Harrop, Stan Brimecome and Tracey Lennon [It was this event that prompted the Ged Harrop Challenges.]

The access we gave Hamlet into the pubs and clubs, together with special cigar offers they set up, boosted their sales and they eclipsed the other brands very quickly for which Mike and his Management Team were most grateful.

We and the Hamlet promotion team were sad to see the discontinuation of the sponsorship but in the cold hard business world I suppose we had achieved the targets by getting the name out there and the product on the shelves and from then on the quality of the product would determine its future.

It was during this time that the Hamlet Dartboard was conceived and the idea was that it would be played on at Super League Matches and if possible County Matches [which had this been possible would have been beneficial in extra sponsorship of the Hampshire County Teams]. I discussed the concept with Olly (Croft of the BDO) and whilst he saw no problem with us using the board at Hampshire Super League he did not think that the British Inter County Championships were quite ready for it yet!!

[He said it wouldn't work without a red treble 20 – and he was probably right as we would have had no 'lipstick' to aim at!!!] The board was met with mixed opinions by the players and soon became nicknamed, for obvious reasons, the 'Pizza Board' and it never really caught on other than as a novelty.

There are still some shirts in existence as Hamlet really did make and supply hundreds...and not only to darts players. Hamlet continued to have them made for a while and some found themselves in different parts of the country. I had several in my garden shed until they went mouldy and were discarded!

They do invoke many happy memories of a great association and working partnership we had with Mike Hallett and Hamlet Cigars.

LOCAL HEROES - STEVE LOWE

Whilst writing to me about the Hamlet dartboard, Phil Wakeman, who is based in Kingswinford in the west Midlands, added

I know that space is at a premium in your editions, but I wondered if you could mention the untimely passing of a local darts stalwart, Steve Lowe, who succumbed to cancer at the age of only 59 after a brave battle against the condition.

DDN does not only pay tribute to the 'names' in the game who pass away. It is also here to recognise the achievements of 'local heroes'. So I am pleased to be able to publish this tribute to Steve Lowe based on information given to me by Phil.

Steve Lowe was born on 21st March 1957 in Amblecote, Stourbridge and captained the very successful *Cottage* pub team (also known as 'Livies') of the late 90's through to 2003. The pub was based in Mill Street, Brierley Hill. (The *Cottage* is sadly no longer a pub and is in the process of being changed into flats.) The team played in the Quarry Bank League and the locally renowned Lye Tuesday League which, Phil tells me, had a reputation of being one of the toughest leagues to win in the Black Country area at the time (1999-2005).

The photograph, right, taken at the Lye Tuesday League presentation evening in 2001, shows (back row, left to right) Billy Ball, Mark Jones, Andy Mears, Jeff Batham and (front row, left to right) John Wills, Paul Hill, Steve Lowe (Captain), Phil Wakeman and Mark Rollason.



Phil told me that the trophies pictured are only *half* of those the team won that year; the others were on a separate table out of shot. The tremendous success of the team was due in no small part to what Phil described as having 'a canny and astute captain such as Steve.'

Steve died on 1st July this year at the age of only 59. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him, especially those involved with local darts. Sincere condolences are sent to his wife Lynn and daughter Cherise.

NEWS OF THE WORLD SNIPPET

Although he never won a major *News of the World* title, the name Jim Pike (pictured below) is synonymous with that famous competition. His name lives on whilst many of his era have faded from memory. (Image courtesy of PC Archive. Used with permission.)

In my research I had never expected to find any articles attributed to Pike, only reports of his achievements. However, I have discovered a piece (cunningly titled 'Darts') written by him in *The Sports Book* compiled and edited by James Rivers and published in London by MacDonald & Co. Ltd., in 1946. Here is a small section of what Jim Pike, still regarded by many darts fans as one of the, if not *the*, greatest darts players ever, had to say seventy years ago:



The astonishing rise of the game from the tap rooms of public houses to its present popularity is something worth recording; culminating in the annual tournaments promoted by the News of the World – which are shortly to be resuscitated. The last tournament, held at the Royal Agricultural Hall, London, in May 1939, drew an audience of nearly 17,000 people.

The reader may well enquire how a crowd of that size could intelligently follow the play's progress. A huge electronic board was fixed high overhead and every shot made was instantly recorded in lights as the arrows entered the board used for the tournament. This ingenious contrivance has since been used on other big occasions. It is a matter of interest that the News of the World has given additional encouragement to the game by issuing gratuitously the rules governing Darts, rules which have been adopted as official by almost every league and club in Britain.

Additionally, every scorer of a maximum (180 with three darts) receives a certificate and the holder thereof automatically becomes a member of the Treble 20 Guild.

I will have more on the Treble 20 Guild in a future issue of *DDN*.

ALLAN PLANT

As many of you will recall, the July issue of *DDN* paid tribute to former Welsh international and Gwent county darts ace Allan Plant. Just after *DDN* #74 was published, Vince Bluck, the Managing Director of NODOR International, wrote to say:

Thanks so much for including the obituary of Allan. As well as a great ambassador for Welsh darts, he was just a great guy and a great friend for 35 years.

Allan was also, I believe, the only British international player to play darts both left-handed and right-handed for his country. A natural left-hander he threw right-handed on one occasion when his left hand was injured!

DARTS LINGO

I know it's a bit of an old chestnut (something that keeps being raised time and time again) but I never cease to wonder how people continue to come up with 'new' theories about the derivation of the word 'oche'. Here's the latest which I received from Julian H.

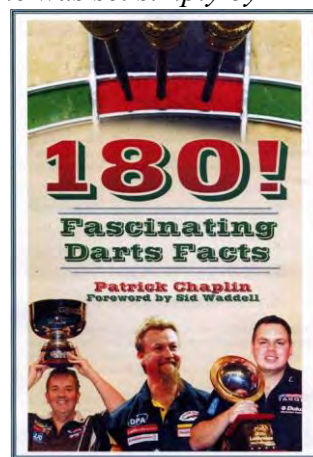
Patrick, regarding the origin of the name oche in darts - my Google search also presented multiple images of geese. It seems oche is Italian for 'geese' or 'goose.' Is it possible that there was a connection through Italian or one of the European languages and the common sporting idea of a duck or goose (egg) meaning 'no score' for a foul such as a throw in darts with one's foot over the foul(fowl) line?

My knowledge of darts history is about nil so do forgive me if this idea seems completely silly for some well-known reason.

Making no comment, I will try *once again* to lay all 'oche theories' to rest, except the following which appears on page 121 of my book *180! – Fascinating Darts Facts*:

The word 'hockey' was first used in darts in the 1920s and was borrowed from the pub game of 'Aunt Sally' where the throw-line was called 'the hockey'. Where exactly the word 'hockey' came from before that is subject to conjecture but the most plausible and slightly disgusting theory is that it derived from the old Northern English word 'hocken' (meaning 'to spit'). Presumably the line was set simply by someone standing at a set position (in the case of darts, with his back to the wall on which the dartboard hung) and spitting a distance which was then marked out in chalk. So, the word 'hockey' was used in the earliest darts rules from the 1920s onwards and was ever thus until the 1970s until it was suddenly replaced by 'oche'.

The word 'oche' is an Old French word, the verb being 'oschier' or 'ocher', meaning to notch or to nick and was introduced into the language and rules of darts in the mid-1970s by Olly Croft of the British Darts Organisation (BDO). 'Hockey' was then consigned to history.



I have checked my archive for any reference to 'goose' or 'geese' in darts language but have failed, thus far.

PLEASE NOTE: Signed copies of my book *180! – Fascinating Darts Facts* are available direct from me. Please e-mail me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com for

details of cost and postage and packing. I will ship worldwide for anyone outside of the UK paying via PayPal.

ANOTHER BOOK?

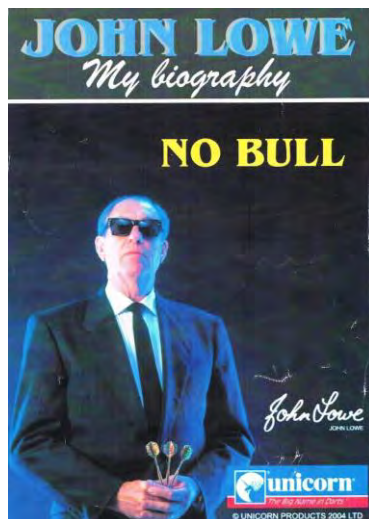
‘Ocheplayer’ has written to me from the USA with an idea for what might become my ninth – Yes, my *ninth* - book on darts. He writes:

Pat. I had an idea, and thought of you... Has anyone ever written an in depth book about the great split in darts between the British Darts Organisation (BDO) and the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC)?

I'm sure it would be fascinating to get all the details of the build-up, the players' personal views and sacrifice, the court battles etc. all in one book! And you being the great author and dart historian that you are, I thought you could do a great job on such a book!! Maybe one already exists that I'm unaware of??

Just my random idea for the day!! I know it's a subject I would like to get more in depth info on. Not a huge topic of interest over here unfortunately! Thanks for your time!

As far as I am aware no one has written a book entirely devoted to 'the split' although the late and sorely missed Sid Waddell discusses it in some depth in his book *Bellies and Bullseyes – The Outrageous True Story of Darts* (London: Ebury Press, 2007), while three-times World Darts Champion, England's John Lowe, was the first professional darts player to write about it in his autobiography (which I co-authored) *Old Stoneface – The Autobiography of Britain's Greatest Darts Player* (London: John Blake, 2005). In his book John described 'the split', and particularly the period 1992-1997, as the 'Five Year War.'



(It is a little-known fact that John's book *Old Stoneface* originally had the working title *No Bull*. (See image (right). © John Lowe 2005. Used with permission.)

Subsequently other professional darts players have referred to 'the split' in their auto/biographies including Bobby George (*Bobby Dazzler – My Story* (London: Orion Publishing, 2006)) and Eric Bristow (*The Crafty Cockney – The Autobiography* (London: Century, 2008)). Many of you would perhaps expect me to mention Phil Taylor's book *The Power – My Autobiography* (London: CollinsWillow, 2003). The issue of 'the split' is covered in Chapter 11, 'An End to Strife' but as Sid Waddell ghosted the book, it reflected more or less exactly what Sid was to write four years later in his *Bellies and Bullseyes*.

Although these autobiographies presented readers with each players (and Sid's) personal views of the situation, all bar one (Bobby George) were World Darts Council

(WDC) (then later PDC) players and thus were seeing the situation from a PDC standpoint.

It is worth noting that a few years ago I suggested to Olly Croft (one of the founders of the British Darts Organisation (BDO)) that he write his own life story. This would naturally include his part in the creation of the BDO and his years in charge and would include his personal view of 'the split' also seen from the BDO perspective.



I met with Olly a couple of years ago, interviewed him, drafted the first chapter and prepared a synopsis. I sent the latter to numerous publishers many of whom enjoyed the synopsis but all of whom turned the project down as no interest ("Too niche"). (The photograph, above right, shows Olly and me at a BDO youth darts tournament at Braintree, Essex, in 2010. Photo ©2010 Moppix. Used with permission.)

I suggested to Olly that, for an appropriate fee, I would work with him to produce his life story (working title, 'The Godfather of Darts') and that, upon completion, Olly could self-publish at his own expense. I saw Olly's book as an opportunity not only to enable darts fans to learn more about his life in darts but also, in this present context, to gain a more balanced view of 'the split'. For whatever reason Olly turned my proposal down and the project was shelved, seemingly forever.

An opportunity lost in my view.

Generally books about darts don't sell in vast numbers. It's a tough market and the majority of darts fans prefer to play and/or watch it on TV rather than read about the sport. If publishers did not want to publish Olly's story then what chance a book solely dedicated to 'the split'? None I guess.

Thus, as I informed 'Ocheplayer', it will *not* become my ninth darts book. Sorry. However, it might well make an interesting subject for a PhD dissertation.

WINMAU SPONSORS FIRST EVER RANKING TOURNAMENT IN MONGOLIA

WINMAU, the world's leading darts brand, has announced a three year exclusive sponsorship agreement to support the Mongolian Classic Darts Federation (MCDF), which includes the first ever World Darts Federation (WDF) ranking event in Mongolia.

Scheduled to take place in the country's capital city, Ulaanbaatar from August 5-7 2016, the tournament will be billed as The Mongolian Open in Association with

Winmau and is expected to see more than 200 players compete in the Men's and Women's Singles, Youth, Doubles and Team events.

Binderiya Batbileg, President of the Mongolian Classic Darts Federation, said

We have only just joined the World Darts Federation and we are excited to have the support of such a well-respected company as WINMAU. We are sure that the Mongolian Open will grow into a major tournament in the WDF calendar and with WINMAU's help and considerable marketing support, the future looks very bright for Mongolian darts.

WINMAU will help promote the event by lending its brand to a range of promotional activities, including websites, social media, TV, banners and promotional brochures. Ian Flack, WINMAU's Sales and Marketing Director, said



We're delighted to be able to support the MCDF and their inaugural WDF ranking event," says. "We're celebrating our 70th anniversary this year, and assisting the sport in developing darts markets is a very proud part of our philosophy. The Mongolian Classic Darts Federation is one of the newest members of the WDF and, with their proactive vision, I have no doubt that we will start to see Mongolian players starring on the world stage in the near future.

It is great to hear that a company such as WINMAU is becoming involved with the MCDF and I am certain that the popularity of darts in Mongolia will expand immensely as a result of that association.

In DDN #51 (August 2014) I featured darts in that country. In that article I quoted the then President of MCDF who had told *The Guardian* in October 2013, "Of course our dream is to play against English people and beat them. Our dream is to become world champions." With the help of WINMAU I am sure that the dart players of Mongolia are taking a major step towards the Lakeside oche.

NEXT ISSUE... Sooner than you think.

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