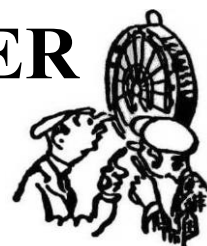


DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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Also February 2017

DARTITIS SPECIAL



Welcome to this special 'Dartitis' edition of *DDN*.

In 2007 the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) included the word 'dartitis' for the first time, defining the condition as 'a state of nervousness which prevents a player from releasing a dart at the right moment when throwing.'

The word had first appeared in *Darts World* magazine in 1981, coined by the then editor Tony Wood to describe a condition whereby a player finds himself or herself unable to release a dart (or darts) properly. The dart is picked up. The dart is brought up to eye level and the aim corrected. The dart is drawn back...and that's where it stays! (In this, dartitis is similar to the 'yips' in golf where the player goes to swing the club but is unable to bring it down to complete the movement.)



Players who have suffered from this condition include England's Mark Walsh, a top PDC player and, famously, the five-time World Professional Darts Champion, Eric Bristow MBE. (Image of Mark Walsh (left) © Tip Top Pics Ltd. Used with permission.)

Although the problem of dartitis has been the subject of much research and discussion on darts forums and in magazines, there appears to be no single solution and thus opinions differ on not only the causes but also the solutions.

For some the solution is to change from a heavy dart to a lighter one or even changing the hand with which you throw a dart. Others are of the view that it is psychological and that the cause is deeply imbedded in the psyche and that professional help is essential.

One serious pub player rid himself of dartitis by seriously examining the potential causes. He eventually changed his throw (he took a deep breath before each throw and expelled the air *with* the throw) and threw his darts slower. He also improved his chances of successfully overcoming the condition by 'leaving any home and work worries outside.'

Although he was never able to revert to his world championship-winning level of play, Eric Bristow eventually cured his dartitis by going back to the style of throw that he had used pre-1983. He also changed his diet, reducing his intake of junk food. I cured my dartitis by ceasing to drink strong lager and reverting to good old English real ale. (Well, it worked for me!)

With such a variety of ‘cures’ for the condition known as ‘dartitis’ it is clear that one must seek the solution that best suits your particular case. However, I suggest that, if you are a sufferer, before you do anything else, read the following advice and guidance provided by Bob Johnson who has spent many years studying the condition and indeed successfully advising and mentoring sufferers.

Some time ago, in response to requests from subscribers, I featured advice and guidance provided by Bob Johnson (pictured right), Chairman of the Larnaca Friendly Darts League in Cyprus, who made a study of dartitis following being himself afflicted with the condition and who made a full recovery. (Image ©2017 Bob Johnson. Used with permission.)



Over the years Bob has answered numerous questions from darters suffering from dartitis and last year Bob sent me an updated version of his document ‘Recovery From and Avoidance of Dartitis’ which had produced during several years of e-mail exchanges with dartitis sufferers and helping many to find a cure.

Recently, just before going into hospital for a serious operation, Bob gave me permission to publish it in *DDN* and to provide his contact details.

RECOVERY FROM AND AVOIDANCE OF DARTITIS

Prelude

It was fifty years ago that I first suffered from dartitis, having played some good local league darts for about four years and it is only in recent years that I asked myself the question, “Why was I so much better when I started at eighteen and for the four years following until dartitis set in?” It took me quite a few years to recover from it and I have played reasonably well since doing so. The answer I came up with is that when I started playing, my throw was natural and uninhibited with the dart flowing freely from my hand to the target. Although I have now recovered from dartitis my throw has changed over the years; becoming slower and more deliberate and the missing ingredient was the freedom of throw that I had when I was eighteen and for the subsequent four years.

What is Dartitis?

Most players including professionals have a stress point, e.g. pace is hot; a crucial high score or out shot is required and on an important throw may hook; pull; sway; lean or tense up, causing them to miss. When composure is required at a time of stress it can be very difficult to retain a free and natural throw. Yet, it is at this time that your throw needs to be as free as possible whilst maintaining composure.

In my opinion, dartitis is the extreme way of showing any stress and occurs when you cannot release your dart due to the fear of missing what you are throwing for and the brain stops the arm from doing the throwing action.

Recovery from Dartitis and exercises

If your dartitis is very bad it may take much time and effort on your part to correct it before you can say you are cured. You should also lower your expectations for a period of time and maybe to go through re-learning the throw you previously had.

To regain your confidence I would suggest you practice only on a board at home at first and not in public until you feel your confidence returning. If no board at home, find a nice quiet pub board and practice for about 15 to 30 minutes. This is about the time it would take to complete playing for most match formats.

If you are a severely affected player and you cannot throw at the board at all.

In my original article I suggested throwing caveman like and this still applies initially. Throw at the board with no target in mind. Forget that the board has doubles, trebles and sections. Cover it over if necessary and just use the entire board as your target. Use the most relaxed and natural throw you feel comfortable with even if it is from side of the head, as if a dagger was being thrown. Throw at the board area and just get used to the freedom of throwing.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Only when you have freed up your throw sufficiently, proceed to the next part.

If you are able to throw at the board with some difficulty at times. Or your arm cramps up as time passes.



Free up your throw as if you were just starting a pre-match warm up session. The idea behind this is to get your brain and arm accustomed to throwing freely and reinforce in your mind that you are able to throw albeit with limited accuracy. Throw without concentrating on any particular area of the board. As you warm up and the arm and shoulder muscles relax you should get more consistent with your three darts and they will group closer together automatically.

The next step is to group your darts on or near any specific area on the board. Try any large whole number first before any double, treble or bull. If dartitis occurs at any time it is best to recompose yourself. Step back if necessary and try again with your relaxed or warm up style. If unsuccessful put your darts to one side and return later. (Eric Bristow, above left, the most famous dartitis sufferer. Image © Tip Top Pics. Used with permission.)

Practice and gain confidence and consistency with private sessions. Always start a session with relaxed throwing and try to remember this action so you are able to recall it quickly because you may need to recover this style of throw should you be playing in practice, friendly or match conditions.

Do not shut yourself off from the odd friendly game. Just remember that you are likely to get a hint of competitiveness only to discover that over-trying can be detrimental and cause you to lock up suddenly. Remember composure in times of stress and don't forget to breathe.

Get your stance right. Take a good look at your target and repeat your natural throw on your 1st 2nd and 3rd darts. The chances are you will succeed in getting what you want. If not you are likely to be very close. Try not to be disappointed should you miss. Even professionals miss sometimes.

Thinking too much and over trying is at the root of the dartitis problem and it does take quite a bit of composure to maintain consistency with a throw. Do not just hammer away at the T20s. Move about the board and use 1, 2 or 3 darts at various targets. Try the occasional round the board on doubles, followed by 25 & bull with the relaxed throw. Then focus on some doubles; i.e. five relaxed doubles, then the sixth dart with focus. Note any different way that your body reacts when in the focus mode. Try to correct any twitches by being more relaxed. Your aim should be to complete all doubles with focus and relaxation without any re-occurrence of the arm locking up.

After some time you should feel confidence return to the point that you can throw your dart in a reasonable manner even when under pressure. You will however have to accept that not every throw is going to be perfect. You will get the occasions where you are on the wire and not in. At least you would have given it your best shot and you will find your consistency will improve over time.

Thinking can be a killer!

A technique I used to rid my dartitis was to walk up to the oche and with no study of the board for the usual moment. As I raised my head to look, my first dart was already in hand and being thrown. This kept the flow going and in fact improved consistency by not thinking too much about it. Give it a try and see how you get on.

Maintaining your throw

For me the biggest single cause for an erratic throw was not throwing freely enough. Over the years I had started to push the dart to the board affecting the wrist movement and release causing a drift to the right or loss of height. This can lead to over trying and more problems.

I now practice freeing up my throw more. Learn to relax more when in a pressure situation; and rely on my natural skill.

Check that your stance is balanced and that no unwanted body, arm, hand or finger movements have crept in unnoticed. Bad habits with your throwing will lead to problems after a time and cause a loss of confidence. Possibly even dartitis!

Use free practice time to hone your skills and maintain or improve your consistency and composure under relaxed conditions. You are not afforded this luxury when playing a match with someone else as it is pressure from the first throw.

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Thanks Bob. In fact, if you wish to discuss your dartitis-related problems with Bob or seek more detailed individual advice and guidance he would be happy to hear from you. Bob's contact e-mail address is robertjohns@cytanet.com.cy.

CORRECTION – BDDA EVENTS

I have received confirmation from Sarah Smale of the BDDA that, of the events listed in DDN #82, the one scheduled for July at the K2 in Crawley, has been cancelled.

Sarah confirmed, “Unfortunately yes. [*This event has been*] removed from the BDO calendar a week ago and organisers have confirmed [it] will not be going ahead. We hope to replace it with another event.”

RELIANCE DARTS

Absolutely *ages* ago, Adrian McCauley e-mailed me from New Zealand to tell me:

My dad found a wooden dart set when clearing out my great uncle's garage, but can't find any information on it. It is a square board made of a soft cork-like material, wooden darts with steel (rusted) tips and plain cardboard flights. It is in a plain square box with a red face and the words 'The Reliance (Regd.) Dart Set'. Can you help us shed any light on this mystery? Thank you for your time.



As many months had passed since I received Adrian's enquiry, I, somewhat hesitantly, contacted Adrian, apologised for the long delay in replying, and asking if his query was still 'live.' After all he may well have decided to sell the set having received no word from me.

Adrian was very pleased to hear from me (at last) and sent photographs of the darts and dartboard to me. In the interim Adrian's dad had suffered a major stroke but miraculously he has regained full mobility and, although he is completely blind in one eye, he has started going back to his local darts club which is great news. As we all know, darts is a great social game and requires skills of balance and hand/eye coordination which must be of benefit to Adrian's dad's gradual recovery.

To me the set, with its diamond-shaped board, looks like a child's game probably dating from the 1940s or 1950s. No worries back then about children playing with little pointy metal objects! Unlike me, the whole thing looks in excellent condition for its age.

I told Adrian that I hoped that someone out there amongst my thousands of subscribers might know something about this particular company and he replied, “Dad and I are really excited that the hunt for information is on again.”

If you can help with any information please contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

NEWS OF THE WORLD SNIPPET

No *DDN* can be complete without a *NoW* snippet...

For the twenty-fifth post-war *News of the World* Grand Finals held at the Alexandra Palace on 29th April 1972, 12,000 spectators turned up by train, coach, bus and underground train to watch Brian Netherton take the title for Cornwall for the first time, hitting 72 in three darts, 5, single 17 and bullseye.

While the Grand Final was being played the spectators, true to the tavern origins of darts, drank 800 half-gallon cans of bitter, 15,600 cans of light ale and 3,600 cans of brown ale, sometimes buying a dozen cans at a time 'in order not to risk missing any of the play.'
(Source: Tom Barrett, *Darts* (London: Pan Books, 1973))

AND FINALLY...

Back in the late summer of last year, I received an enquiry from an ex-pat and serious darts collector living in Texas. He wrote:

Patrick, I can't find anyone to tell me when Unicorn stopped production of the original 1937 Silver Comets. I know they've brought them back as of 2012, I think, and I have a set...and they are outstanding...so I just wondered when they went out of production. Might you know?

Fortunately Stanley Lowy, MBE of Unicorn Products was able to help. Stanley told me:

"I cannot give an exact answer. We certainly offered the original model from 1937 until at least 1954. In 1956 Silver Comet was still offered but the flight fitted is not the original. Thereafter the name Silver Comet was applied from time to time to sets of darts which were distinct different designs from the original. So the answer to your correspondent is "at least to 1954."

(Apologies to the original enquirer whose e-mail address I have mislaid!)

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