

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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POLITICAL CORRECTNESS GONE MAD?

I was fascinated by the attention drawn to our sport recently by the realisation that the walk-on girls would no longer be walking-on at PDC darts tournaments.

There were of course the extreme feminists on one side screaming how demeaning it was for women (not, of course, a view held by the models from Angels Elite who do/did the walking-on). (Image of the walk-on girls (below) © PDC/Lawrence Lustig 2018. Used with permission.)



Then there were those who clearly mourn the passing of what appears up to now to have always been an essential element of the presentation of darts at major PDC events. (Probably more male darts fans than female, I guess.) Then there were those who thought "This is PC gone mad." (No, not this PC. Of course they mean 'Political Correctness'.) Perhaps they have a point.

But wasn't it simply time for a change?

And times do change. Take the composition of PDC audiences. Years ago when the WDC, the World Darts Council as the PDC was back then, held its World Championships at the Circus Tavern, Purfleet, Essex, I would suggest that the ratio of male fans to female fans was, about, 90%/10%. But as the years passed the PDC succeeded in popularising darts beyond anyone's expectations and gradually, very gradually to begin with, the composition of the darts audiences changed.

In my view the PDC, since its inception, has changed the whole culture of darts, turning it into a massive spectator sport (rather like what happened to football in the interwar years) and one that nowadays appeals to and attracts fans regardless of gender and, in many cases, some who are not that interested in darts. The latter comprise those who appreciate a good night out with their mates. It's the company and atmosphere and simply being part of an exciting something that brings them there. It's a social occasion. Look at the audiences now. Watch as the boom of the camera ranges across the auditorium. Look at that ratio. Surely more like 70%/30% nowadays, or certainly heading that way.

I'm not aware that many female darts fans who attend major tournaments have raged against the walk-on girls. What we are seeing here (I think) is simply an agreed policy change, not the PDC acquiescing to the PC brigade. Maybe it's a decision based on recognising the

change in the structure of the audience or maybe the PDC thought that walk-on girls don't really fit in anyone.

Recently, as the debate flared, most commentators and critics of the walk-on girls stated that the PDC was the first darts organisation to introduce them 'in the mid-nineties'. It is true that models Karen Smith and Sue Willets were the first PDC walk-on girls. They appeared at the inaugural World Matchplay at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool in 1994. The girls were all part of the razzmatazz the PDC introduced to give darts the shot in the arm it had needed since it fell into the doldrums in the late 1980s.

However, to be historically accurate, it was the BDO that first used girls to lead contestants to the oche back in 1977. The event was the World Cup; the venue the Wembley Conference Centre. Olly Croft's daughters Elaine and Lesley were among four 'hostesses', dressed in long white dresses and wearing sashes who led the players on to the stage. (See the front page of the December 1977 *Darts World*, right.) The girls were also featured at that year's World Masters. After that the BDO changed tack.



Instead of walk-on girls, a recorded fanfare accompanied the players to the stage and, slightly later, the music was accompanied by a BDO official (The first walk-on man?) carrying the player's appropriate national flag and leading him or her to the oche. This change had apparently nothing to do with political correctness (virtually unheard of four decades ago) but was, according to BDO boss Olly Croft, mainly for 'security reasons.'

But in the interests of equality we must not forget that the PDC *has* used at least one walk-on man at one of its top tournaments. In 2009 Anastasia Dobromyslova qualified for the Ladbrokes.com PDC World Championships at the Alexandra Palace. Clearly it would be wholly inappropriate to have a walk-on girl accompany her to the stage so, for balance, the PDC provided a 'walk-on man'. (Sadly his name seems to have been lost to history.)

So, the walk-on girls at darts tournaments are no more.

This change in policy seems also to have spread to darts companies too; well at least one. For many years the Red Dragon catalogue has featured models on the front cover and inside posing and toying with the company's products. For 2018 the bikinied girl has disappeared to be replaced with three blokes!

Sad day? Let me know what you think. Write to me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

THREE IN A BED...

As a good number of you know, I am and always have been a pub darts player.

OK so a few decades ago I won several inter-club/pub tournaments but I have never believed that my darting prowess was ever good enough to take on anyone outside of my local. I love the social side of darts and, although I have written two books on how to play, and received some excellent reviews, I have never worked hard enough to succeed beyond social darts. In fact I never really wanted to.



But I still play occasionally and, equally occasionally, hit a maximum or two but something I have never done *up until now*, was hit three bullseyes in three darts.

Last month I was practising darts at my home, warming up before wandering to my local pub, the *Carpenters Arms*, for an evening of darts with a couple of good mates. I was throwing at bullseyes. The best I have ever done in many, many decades of practice and pub play is to hit two out of three but on this occasion I actually planted all three darts, dead centre.

I know it's a personal and selfish ego-trip to feature the photographic evidence in this issue of *DDN* but I just had to tell *someone*.

DR. DARTS MENTIONED ON TV BY 'SILVERBACK'

There was I sitting watching an early round of the Lakeside World Championships when darts star Tony 'Silverback' O'Shea, (pictured right) who was in the commentary box at the time, mentioned my book *180! – Fascinating Darts Facts*. (The image shows Tony practising in the player's bar at Lakeside in 2010. © Chippix. Used with permission.)



A viewer had contacted Channel 4 and asked why the outshot, treble 20, single 20, double 20 was called SHANGHAI. Apparently, someone, presumably Tony, had referred to my book for the answer and read it out on air. What a surprise! I nearly spilt my beer! Not stopping there, he mentioned my name and told his colleague in the commentary box that "Patrick Chaplin also has a superb blog" (that is *DDN*). I can't tell you how chuffed I felt.

Thanks Tony.

By the way, *180! – Fascinating Darts Facts* is still available via The History Press via www.thehistorypress.co.uk. £7.99 plus postage and packing. Signed copies can be obtained direct from me with a free set of WINMAU Rhino brand, 'Dr. Darts' flights. Contact me for details at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

Talking of my books...

I recently received an e-mail from Adam R. who wrote:

Hi Patrick. I've recently started playing darts, and got your book Darts, Skills, Tactics, Techniques, for ideas to help me practice. Just wanted to say what a great book it is and that I hope to put it all to good use.

Adam added,

I was quite surprised to find out halfway through the book you play darts at the Carpenters Arms in Maldon... I work as a postie [a postman] in the town!

Darts. Skills. Tactics. Techniques is available from The Crowood Press www.crowood.com.

EX-PAT – LEN HEARD – US DARTS CHAMPION

Last month ex-pat darts player Len Heard celebrated his 76th birthday. Immediately I can hear you saying “Len who?” I’ll let guest contributor Steve Chapman explain.

Leonard Heard (pictured below) was born in Plymouth, Devon here in the UK on January 18, 1942. (Photo: PC/DW Archive. Used with permission.)



A former plumber and apprentice coppersmith in Devonport Dockyard, he played darts for the *Sydenham Arms* (later the *Clipper*) for three years under the tenancy of Jim Luckie and it's fair to say that he did not set the world alight, playing in the Courage PB Darts League. However, he did win the Devon County individual championship in 1970. Len won it again the following year and qualified for the South West regional finals of the *News of the World* tournament before losing in the area final.

of the World tournament before losing in the area final.

Heard emigrated to the USA in 1973, making his home in San Diego, California, where he still lives today, and where he met and married his second wife, Gail, who was born in Massachusetts, but grew up in California. It was through darts that Len and Gail met. Len had a pub at the time and Gail used to play league darts there. They got to know each other and the rest, as they say, is history.

But he did not start playing again in his new homeland straight away.

It was a couple years after his arrival when, after work on a very hot day, that his workmates suggested they go for a beer and the bar, in Coronado, had a dartboard. (Coronado, for the record, is a Californian resort city on a peninsula in San Diego Bay.)

Len was working as a plumber for a large mechanical engineering firm but still managed to rise from relative obscurity to a career high world ranking of No.10 in arguably his best years, 1980 and 1981.

January 1, 1976, saw the birth of the American Darts Organization (ADO) which began with 30 clubs and a membership of 7,500 players. Today the ADO boasts a membership of around 250 clubs, representing more than 50,000 members. It was also in 1976 that Heard won the Far West Shoot Out in Laguna Beach, in his adopted sunshine state of California and the same year, with fellow Californian Ross Hamilton, won the Santa Monica doubles title.

In 1977 Len claimed the St Patrick Day singles title, a \$30,000 plus tournament organised each spring by the Greater San Diego Darting Association and followed it up the following year when beating English International Tony Brown in the final of the Santa Monica Open. He was runner-up in the 1979 North American Open, losing to Eric Bristow, the last year that the competition was held on board the Queen Mary.

In the World Cup of that year, Heard was a valued member of the four-man USA team which also consisted of Conrad Daniels, Nicky Virachkul and Jerry Umberger. The quartet won the most singles points, 49, against England's 24, but below par performances in the pairs and fours meant that they had to settle for second spot behind winners England whose team consisted of John Lowe, Eric Bristow, Tony Brown and Bill Lennard.

Following his success in the World Cup, Heard won a sponsorship deal with Accudart and the "Lenny Heard Signature Dart" was created for general sale. They came in two weights of 20 and 23 grams.

Heard went one better than his runner-up the previous year when he won the 1980 North American Open defeating Canadian Fred Boyce who hailed from British Columbia. That tournament was held for the first time in Las Vegas at the Sahara Hotel. Over 1700 players competed from 35 states and 12 countries; all the action taking place on no fewer than 85 playing boards.

Len's success in the North American Open, arguably his finest achievement, brought him invitations into the World Professional Championships, the Guinness Golden Darts and the Nations Cup.

On the international scene, the United States never seemed to achieve their potential but there was little doubt that in 1979 and 1980, their stock had risen.

In the Nations Cup of 1980, Heard, partnered with Conrad Daniels and Nicky Virachkul, was part of the three-man USA team who made it through to the final, and the trio gave a very good account of themselves only losing 5-3 to the English trio of John Lowe, Eric Bristow and Tony Brown, who had also claimed the title the previous year.

Heard represented the USA in the 1980 Embassy World Professional Championships at Jollees, Stoke, under the auspices of the British Darts Organisation (BDO) but lost 2-0 to England International Dave Whitcombe.

He represented his adopted country again in the 1981 BDO World Darts Championship, where he lost in the first round 2-0 to fellow American Jerry Umberger.

Heard qualified for the World Masters in 1980, contested at the Wembley Conference Centre and reached the last 32. The event was won by John Lowe when he defeated Scotsman Rab Smith in the final.

He was also the American representative in the World Masters of 1982 at the Rainbow Suite, London, but was ousted by Jocky Wilson who went on to make the final, where he was beaten by Dave Whitcombe.

The WDF Asia-Pacific Cup is a competition held every two years and in 1986, Len was a member of the USA team that emerged as overall champions when the competition was held in Auckland, New Zealand. His team mates were Tony Payne, Kathy Hopkins and Kathy Karpowich. (The image, right, shows the front cover of the November/December 1986 *Bull's Eye News* (Vol. VI, Issue VI) featuring Len and within celebrating America's victory in the Pacific Cup.) |



Heard picked up valuable points when winning through to the final of the men's singles, only to be defeated by Paul Lim, who was then representing his native Singapore before competing for the USA in 1988, after he settled in San Bernadino, California. The team title came down to the ladies' singles final between Karpowich and Rani Gill.

If the Canadian had won it, the title would have gone to Canada, but the 24-year-old American won the best of seven leg final 4-2 and the USA were crowned as team champions.

Heard represented the USA in the 1990 *News of the World* finals, one of 20 players taking part in what was to become the penultimate time that the world-famous tournament was competed for.

There were seven players from England and one each from Wales, Finland, Belgium, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Italy, Holland, Russia, Canada and the USA.

Held at the London Arena, on Sunday June 3, most of the overseas competitors were of an unknown quantity for the London audience but it was soon clear that they were not to be dismissed lightly.

Len Heard was given a bye in round one, before going on to defeat Knud Nilsen, the Norwegian representative in round two, aided by a maximum score. In the best of three legs of 501 tie, Heard came from a leg down to level in 15 darts before clinching the winning leg with an outshot of 107.

Now into the quarter-finals, Heard met Steve Hudson, the Yorkshire divisional champion but went down 2-0. Hudson went on to make the final where he eventually lost to Swindon's Paul Cook.

The popular tournament was suspended after the 1990 final but resurrected for the last time in 1997 when it was won by Phil Taylor.

The most noteworthy annual darts event organised by the Sacramento Valley Darts Association is the Camellia Classic, which draws top players from throughout the western United States with a guaranteed total prize fund of \$20,000. Heard had the distinction of winning this Classic on January 1st, 1991 and this was the last year that he travelled far and wide, playing in tournaments. However, he continued with league darts, then in 1999, played in the San Diego Open in his home town of Powey, and clinched the title when defeating John Cramer in the final.

In an interview that Heard gave in 1989, on how he first became involved with the sport of darts he said,

“Back in my early 20s, I got my tail kicked every day, and every game you played over there cost you a beer, a pint. For the first six months, it cost me a fortune to play. In England, there's a pub on every corner. There's nothing else to do, especially when it's raining, which is all the time. Everything revolves around darts there.”

Now retired, the former President of the North American Professional Darts Players Association likes to get in some serious fishing once or twice a year and travels to Mexico for the privilege. His golf had to stop after major surgery on his shoulder and sadly he now suffers with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) which prevents Len from most forms of exercise.

From the comfort of his armchair, Len still likes to follow English football through the Premier League and also watches Spain's La Liga.

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DARTS SLANG

Staying with the USA, Gary McRobert writes:

I found your article on dart slang and the responses uplifting!

Since I have gotten back into darts for fun I try to keep the game entertaining for some of the younger players and use what little I know from my father and I playing back in the 60's. I find the younger players pick it up quite quickly and have fun with it.

Of course 'Bed and Breakfast might be a bit different these days @ 80 pounds but it would be great to get a book that would explain and list as many of the terms for reference, like a chronology to keep some of the old traditions alive or for the insatiably curious. Also I find that some of the dart players seem to use the slang as a sort of club code and it gets quite funny at times.

I was very pleased, of course, that Gary found my article and feedback 'uplifting'. I replied

In fact Bobby George and I co-authored a book in 2011 titled SCORING FOR SHOW, DOUBLES FOR DOUGH - BOBBY GEORGE'S DARTS LINGO, published by Apex

Publishing of Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, England which explains all the darts definitions we could think of. Sadly, the book is now out of print and I don't have any spare copies but you may be able to find it on eBay or through Abebooks (the second-hand bookshop website).

Having books published locally does pose problems with publicity and promotion. I did try to interest a global publisher in taking on the book once the local publisher agreed to release the book back to Bobby and me but it seems that 'a long list is featured on Wikipedia'. Ah, yes. That's the so-called 'people's encyclopedia that says of the *News of the World* tournament:

Before the tournament was established, darts competitions were held in various forms around England...After World War I...pub breweries began arranging darts leagues...were organised which began to sow the seeds for the establishment of a national darts competition. [No.] The tournament was noted for using an 8 ft oche [It was nine feet.] rather than the regulation 7 ft 9 ¼ inches. [That 'regulation' distance wasn't introduced until 1977.]

One of these competitions was held in Hythe Street, Dartford, Kent in 1927. [No it wasn't.] The competition was sponsored by a local Brewery, C.N Kidd & Sons Ltd. [The News of the World tournament was restricted to the Metropolitan Area of London and did not extend into Kent and was never sponsored by a brewery during the interwar years.]

The tournament was first organised in the 1927/28 season thanks to the help of the staff on the News of the World newspaper and other volunteers, who helped set up the competition. [No. The News of the World tournament was organised by the National Darts Association with the newspaper providing a 'Challenge Cup and Other Prizes' and much needed publicity.]

William Jewiss won the 1927 darts challenge cup sponsored by News of the World [No he didn't. The first final was held in London in 1928 and was won by Sammy Stone of the South West Ham Club. He beat B. Haigh of the Victoria Inn, Kensington] and C. N. Kidd & Sons brewery in Dartford.

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