

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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SPECIAL EDITION

BRISTOW'S DEATH SHOCKS THE DARTS WORLD



The announcement that Eric 'The Crafty Cockney' Bristow had died suddenly on Thursday 5th April came as shock to all those who ever knew him, loved him, hated him, played against him or watched him play. In view of Eric's contribution to the sport of darts I have decided to dedicate this entire issue to his memory. Eric's life story is well-documented, so I will be concentrating on the impact his death has had on the world of darts and people involved in it.

The man was a legend and I *never* use that word lightly.

For a few days after his death, the national newspapers here in the UK featured varying quality of obituaries and related stories; headlines ranging from 'Legend of darts Eric Bristow is dead at 60', 'Darts mourns Eric Bristow' and 'Simply the Tops', to the more direct message, 'Eric R.I.P.'

News of Eric's death reached across the pond. Eric was clearly a significant name in major parts of the USA. Journalist Rich Sandomir of the *New York Times* contacted me for some information and he wrote an obituary on the crafty one which appeared on 8th April. Rick's article can be found at www.nytimes.com.

Howie Reed, famous, and some might say infamous, in darts circles for many years posted an eloquent obituary on the *Dartoid's World* website. He began by writing

The skies that glowed so brightly over the Golden Age of Darts lost one of its' brightest lights on Thursday. Eric "The Crafty Cockney" Bristow succumbed to a massive heart attack, extinguishing a star that soared over the darting world as he led a galaxy soon to become extinct. From the 1970s until the early 1990s this galaxy dominated the landscape of the sisal universe.

For the full obituary go to <http://www.dartoidsworld.com/latest%20column/>.

I contacted a number of players who were part the Bristow era. Bob Anderson and his wife Sally wrote

Patrick, sad times indeed. You will know that Eric was our best man 14 years ago. We both shed tears at the news of his passing. In the early years we certainly didn't see eye to eye but he was an inspiration to myself and thousands more. We became much closer in latter years and we will miss him so much. The world of darts is a poorer place without Eric. RIP Eric. With heavy heart. Bob and Sally Anderson.



(Image of Bob courtesy DW/PC archive. Used with permission.)

Three time world darts champion John Lowe told me



Patrick. Still cannot believe what's happened. Eric Bristow, my rival, my partner, my friend. Eric was 17 when we first met. He marked on for my final of the World Masters. For the next 43 years we shared the oche worldwide. Our rivalry grew into a friendship and we holidayed in Tenerife for the last 13 years.

Eric Bristow is a Legend within the Sport. His titles speak for themselves. He was replaced on the oche. In life that can never happen. R.I.P. Eric my Friend.

Bobby and Marie George wrote

What a tragedy! Still can't believe it! "There's only one Eric Bristow!" He will never be forgotten! RIP Big E

(Images of John Lowe and Bobby George © Tip Top Pics. Used with permission.)



Twice Embassy World finalist Dave Whitcombe was stunned by the news writing

I was so sorry to hear of Eric's passing. What can I say? He was by far the best player of my generation.

Keith Deller, who we all know beat Eric in that historic 1983 Embassy World Championship final securing the title with a 137 outshot, said on stage at the Echo Arena, Liverpool on that fateful night



Awful evening here in Liverpool. Was with Eric earlier and he was in great spirits. A massive character. There are tears for a legend backstage here tonight. I'm devastated. Me and Eric were together all the time. What he's done for the game, tonight, if it wasn't for Eric, no-one would be here tonight.

(Image of Keith © Tip Top Pics. Used with permission.)

Tommy Cox, former Tournament Director for the Professional Darts Corporation told me that during the formative years of what was then the World Darts Council (WDC) when both internal and external pressures were being applied to make the former BDO players' lives as uncomfortable as possible

...it was Eric Bristow who held the...players together and that with Eric's determination they held firm and so did Sky Sports. Dick Allix and I may have been the front men but without Eric's determination and influence, darts would probably still have been struggling to establish itself today.



The photo (above, right) shows Dick Allix and Tommy Cox at the 1993 Embassy World Championships. In this rare image Tommy is shown wearing the WDC badge effectively baiting the BDO. (Image: DW/PC Archive. Used with permission.)

PDC Chairman, Barry Hearn (pictured below with Eric and John Lowe at their inauguration into the PDC Hall of Fame (Image ©PDC)) put into words what the majority of players and fans thought of the crafty one. He told BBC Sport



It's just unbelievable. He was working as normal in hospitality, started feeling ill and collapsed and died. Our thoughts go out to his family because this has come as a massive shock to the whole sport of darts.

...The word legend is overused but it's an understatement for Eric Bristow. We often talk about the absence of characters in sport but Eric Bristow was a character with a capital 'c'. He was

very much a man of the people. He understood what crowds wanted to see – he was controversial, he was a maverick, he spoke his mind and upset a few people from time to time but the man in the street warmed to him because he was very much one of theirs.

He had time for people, he knew how to entertain, he developed his own style, his own persona and he transcended the sport for 10-15 years and to this day people still remember The Crafty Cockney in his pomp.

He is probably one of the reasons why darts is where it is today – it hasn't lost that touch with the ordinary man, because it is made up of ordinary men with extraordinary ability, and Bristow was the ringleader from the beginning. His name is synonymous with darts.

Eric Bristow and Phil Taylor are the two legendary names from that era that took the sport out of the pubs and on to the global stage.

It has come out the ordinary working man's game and Eric Bristow epitomised where the game came from but had the star quality to take it to the next level. For that, every player playing today should be grateful, because he blazed a trail.

Indeed the 'players playing today' lined up to pay credit to The Crafty Cockney. 'Mighty' Michael van Gerwen said "He's a legend in what he did. Look at what he did for darts" whilst five-times World Champion Raymond van Barneveld told reporters

I am lost for words and really devastated. He was darts. He meant so much to me, I cannot believe it.

Australia's Simon Whitlock said

Shocked and saddened to hear the news about a true legend of the sport I love. RIP Eric Bristow. Thanks for everything you did for darts.

Robert Pringle, Sales and Marketing Director of Harrows, who sponsored Eric for many years told me

There have been some great things said about Eric.....the sport owes him a debt of gratitude, for sure. We posted this news feed link on our site

<http://www.harrowsdarts.com/articles/129>.



When we signed Eric on July 7th 1985 Dick Allix arranged for the signing to be conducted live on TV AM. This picture was taken at their studios in Camden Town. The person on the right is your correspondent!

We were all a lot younger then Robert!

(Image © Harrows. Used with permission.)

I also contacted the global darts ambassador (and former co-owner of the House of Darts)

Dr. Eddie Norman (pictured below) for his memories of Eric. Eddie wrote

I first met Eric at the Crafty Cockney pub in Santa Monica, California in 1976.

Bob Martel the smiling California business man friend of Tom Fleetwood (founder of the North America Darts Organisation) had sponsored several West of England darts players including Leighton Rees, Kim Brown, Alan Evans and Cyril Hayes all of whom I managed for the trip to The North American Open. In exchange the players would take part in an exhibition at the Crafty Cockney against the 'Pride of California.'

All the players were given Crafty Cockney shirts to wear with the famous policeman on representing the UK and other souvenirs of the fabulous pub (now a car park).



Eric was at the pub, and later played, and I certainly saw his talent; a talent I was to witness and be overawed by many times in my darts journey around the world. Eric was also given a Crafty Cockney shirt, which was to see him make it famous for the next 42 years.

When Eric played his first county game for London versus The West of England in Bristol before a 2,000 partisan crowd I offered to mark the match. Afterwards he said to me, that he was so nervous he was physically sick with nerves before the match.

At the United Services Club, in Ynysbwl, home of Leighton Rees, Eric was playing an exhibition match I had arranged against Alan Evans ('Pride of the Valleys') which as always was a great needle match between the two and, as always, every Welshman shouting for Alan. However, that did not put Eric off one iota. He just played the crowd who at the end cheered him loudly.

Afterwards Eric gave a great speech and said "I will win the World Masters which Eddie here had founded (and Alan had won only once), five times" which he duly did with his last win in 1984.

In 1989 I met Eric at Buckingham Palace in London when we both received MBE's in the New Year's Honours from The Queen. It was amazing to see the press coverage that Eric received after the ceremony. Other recipients, nothing at all to do with darts, all seemed to know who Eric was.

Eric came over and told me he fulfilled his promise of winning five World Masters when he told us he would and thanked me for founding the World Masters and that winning the World Masters gave many players a living in darts.

I saw Eric many times over the years, and followed his career, He often asked if I fancied a drink and was amazed when he learned I was teetotal and used to joke he had put in a Diet Coke at the bar for me and to "Be careful what's in it."

Eric, like a few of his early rivals in darts, did a wonderful job in promoting the sport of darts. It is such a shame that he passed away so early at just 60 years of age. He had so much to offer the sport of darts.

He will be sadly missed but I will remember him for being the great darts player and showman that he was; a great man with a great personality and a great heart who was a great pleasure to know and just loved his darts.

But you didn't have to be a famous name to appreciate and mourn the Crafty Cockney. Darts fan Martin Lawrence told me

Eric Bristow was one of the tremendous characters in the world of darts and he will be sorely missed. Not only that, but Eric put something into the game by recognising, backing and sponsoring the potential of 16 time world champion Phil Taylor. Without Eric's input, Taylor might not have quite made it to the heady heights that he achieved.

Well done Eric for thinking of others.

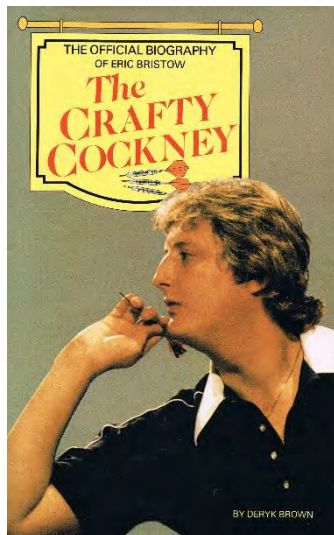
Tony Smith, a former General Manager of the Gatwick Manor Hotel, e-mailed me

Just read the sad news about Eric Bristow and thought I would post something when I found info on your site [www.patrickchaplin.com] about Don Coutts and the Sussex Open Darts.

In the 1970's when in my late 20's I was General Manager at Gatwick Manor in Crawley and was very involved in the setting up and execution of the very first Sussex Open Darts Competition. I presented the first prize to Eric, I believe it was his very first Professional Trophy? There might be a photo somewhere in the Sussex Darts archive.

So sad he has passed away so young.

I checked various sources and found that Eric did mention briefly 'One tournament I played in was at Gatwick' in his autobiography (2008, page 41) but did not put a date on it. Much



more informative was Deryk Brown's 1985 biography of Eric, *The Crafty Cockney – The Official Biography of Eric Bristow*. Brown revealed on page 54 that Eric did play in that Sussex Open in the Shipley Barn at the Gatwick Manor Hotel on Sunday 23rd May 1975. According to Brown, Eric received a cheque for £100 and the Berni Inns rose bowl. Other players included Tom Barrett and Tony Brown. The runner-up was Lew Walker, a bus driver from Gravesend. Bristow beat him 2-1.

Whilst there is no mention in either biography or the autobiography of it being Eric's first professional win, in an earlier book, *The Guinness Book of Darts* (1981), Deryk Brown states categorically that Eric 'Won his first tournament in 1975 when he took the Sussex Open.'

Close friends contacted me about Eric's sudden death, one even asking "Are you OK?"

Alan G., a former work colleague and friend of many years, e-mailed me

Sorry to hear about Eric Bristow today. I actually met him many years ago at a Sergeant's Mess function in Berlin. He did some exhibition matches against the soldier star dart players. Not only did he beat them all, but he totally destroyed many of them, including my

best mate at the time, Don. Don was a star player. He was very high up in the Garrison league. He played Eric. Eric played Don with Don's darts, left handed, kneeling on the oche, and beat him. Don very nearly cried. But it was all in fun. Eric was a great bloke, with a never-ending sense of humour, and tales from the world of darts that kept us up into the small hours. Bobby George featured in loads of them, and this is me remembering that evening from 26 years ago! RIP Eric Bristow.

Steve, a local handyman and friend I've known since my days of playing darts for the *White Horse*, Mundon about three miles from where I live, having heard about Eric's death, brought along a couple of programmes from the 1980s to show me, both of which, of course, featured Eric and other famous names on the cover. Steve told me that when he and his friends went to watch a major darts event in Basildon, Essex "*Eric was sitting nearby. I turned to him and he said, "Come to see me beat this lot have you?" And he did.*"

Typical Eric.

It is clear to me that the whole nation and beyond was mourning Eric's passing.

I was privileged to meet Eric on a number of occasions. He appeared as a 'surprise' guest when I appeared on the TV programme *Collector's Lot*, a UK series where people brought in their collections and discussed them with host Sue Cook. Naturally I was there to show items from my collection of darts memorabilia. At one point Sue asked me "Who is your favourite darts player?" and I answered, "Eric Bristow" and there he was; appearing from behind the curtain backdrop!

I actually played Eric on stage at a sports show at the Brentwood Centre in the 1980s. I was there with my wife Maureen. We had a darts stall, charting the history of the sport and selling darts-related books and ephemera. MC Freddie Williams came over to our stall and said "Patrick. Here's your chance to take on The Crafty Cockney. He's taking on all-comers at 501." I initially hesitated but – Hey! – who would miss an opportunity to play the greatest darts player of all time? I won the bull-up (I think Eric let me) and that was that really. I was thumped; still way back in the 200s when Eric hit game-shot.

In 2005 John Lowe invited Maureen and me to his 60th birthday celebrations in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. What a weekend that was! On the Friday we attended an exhibition match John v Eric and then on the Saturday, at the same venue, the party was held. Numerous darts stars attended including Keith Deller, Cliff Lazarenko, Alan Glazier and Eric. The photo here shows me with the great man enjoying the evening and 'Big Cliff' in the background celebrating something.



The last time I actually spoke to Eric was at the launch of *The Legends of Darts* league at Old Trafford, the home of Manchester United football team some years ago. All those memories will stay with me forever. I just feel privileged to have known The Crafty Cockney, if only fleetingly.

What Eric Bristow did for darts cannot be underestimated. Odd acts of foolishness and misbehaviour by the five-time World Champion over a period of four decades cannot be overlooked but have no place here. Here we're talking only of the positives.

Eric was always going to be a star of the emergent of the 'new era' of darts in the mid-to-late 1970s. He probably told people he'd be famous and beat everyone and become world champion even before the Embassy World Championships began in 1978. However, he had to wait until 1980 to win his first individual world title but by then he had made his name and effectively secured the future of darts, especially on TV, for years to come. As I told the *New York Times*, darts by its very nature is a repetitive sport and in those early days of the new era of darts, it needed some players that would hold the fans attention. Bristow was such a player.

He inspired the 'rebels' during the late 1980s/early 1990s to go with the establishment of the World Darts Council (WDC) (later the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) to help preserve and promote the careers of many professional darts players by encouragement and strength of will. We all know what happened next. Darts today would be nowhere without the influence, energy, passion and persistence of Eric Bristow.



Even though he may not have imagined it at the time, The Crafty Cockney actually gave the sport of darts his natural successor – one Phil (originally 'The Crafty Potter' in deference to Eric but later of course 'The Power') Taylor. That worked out quite well didn't it!

And so today the sport is bereft of the life of Eric Bristow, a legendary darts player taken from us without warning but who leaves such a legacy. I leave the last words to the great man himself. On the final page of *The Crafty Cockney – Eric Bristow – The Autobiography* (London: Century, 2008) he wrote

The game has changed so much since I started out...and pretty soon friends I made as a professional player will start disappearing. I'm still here, and that just doesn't make sense. The way I've lived my life I should've been gone long ago...

Goodbye Eric.

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For obvious reasons the promised article 'International Darts and the Pit' has been held over to the June issue.