

An Internet
Success And Darts
Failure



BY

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Foreword

Whilst this book is loosely about darts and the life of a middle aged darter (myself) who never made the grade as a player, it is also made up of a lot of funny articles that were written by myself when I took over as league Secretary of a village based darts league after the old lady who had run it for many years died. I dragged the league into the 21st century by first of all introducing advertising on the league Fixtures to raise money for the league and then starting a Web-site. The League web-site struggled to gain recognition for a year or two, but started to receive more and more hits as jokes and articles about darts were added. The jokes became ruder and the articles sillier/funnier and the number of hits rose accordingly. Then I got more involved with another local league and set up a web-site for them. This second site rapidly became a hit, far quicker than the first and took up more and more of my attention so that in the end I virtually stopped playing darts and simply went to watch the games and get occasional ideas for topics to write about.



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My Early Years And Darts.



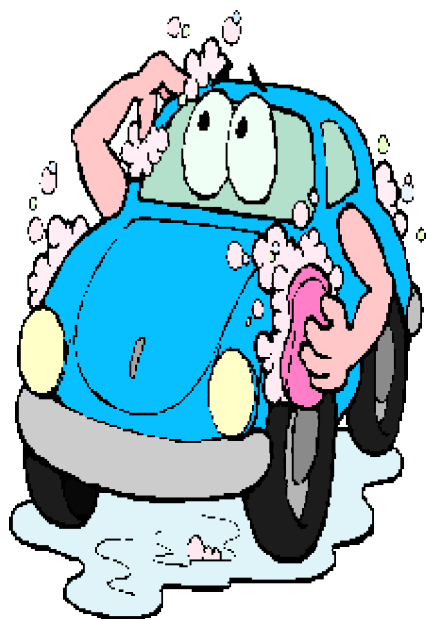
As a young child I was a spoilt little brat with quite wealthy parents but that was not to stop me from becoming a keen darts player and enthusiast later in life. Because of my parents good fortunes not only did our house have a playroom for me, but it also had a grown ups games room with a full size table tennis table and a 6 foot slate bed snooker table. I never really developed any ability at table tennis but snooker seemed to fascinate me. When my eldest brother was home from University we used to play sometimes and as a teenager I often played against friends and family. It was not until I entered the sixth form at school that I got hooked on darts though. Of course there had always been a tatty old dart board hanging up in the games room at home, but at school it was very different with many people to challenge.

The sixth form block was in an annexe several hundred yards from the main school and was in fact in the grounds of a junior school. The building consisted of 3 floors. Art classrooms and offices were on the ground floor and the middle floor was for study with the top floor for relaxation. One of the other boys brought a dart board from home and hung it up. It was only made of paper instead of bristles but it lasted for a while. Long enough to get me hooked on the game. Any free time that I had was spent on the board practising and playing whoever came along. I used to get so engrossed in the games that time flew by and sometimes I would miss lessons, not deliberately you understand, I just forgot the time. Unlike today's teenagers school pupils of my years were less likely to go into pubs regularly when they were under age and I was no exception. However, when my 18th birthday came, while I was

still technically at school, everything changed and I started to regularly go to play darts. One pub in particular was the haunt of my group of friends and it was there that I was persuaded to sign up and play for my first team. This would have been in 1975 and was the start of a long chapter in my life that has always been running in the background independent of a variety of jobs that provided the money for me to play.

This first team I played for was a mixture of several young lads like me, including the captain who was only a couple of years older than me, and several older, more experienced players. The pub we called home was one of the roughest in the area and a regular meeting place for the local motorcycle crowd. There never seemed to be any trouble though and I settled into the routine of going down to the pub at least 4 or 5 nights a week. Some people seem to pick up the skills needed to play darts quicker than others and such was the case with me because I rapidly became a useful member of the team.

My first taste of success came in 1976 when I had the most wins for my team in the season. For this I had the honour to represent my team in an exhibition match against some professionals on presentation night. I played quite well and won my game but unfortunately for me the marker had called the wrong score. After pointing out the error we restarted the game which I then lost on the final double. When the man of the match trophy was awarded I received it for my honesty. The glory was all mine and I liked it.



After the match on a Friday I was in the habit of giving the captain a lift home. One day after a particularly

heavy downpour we were on the way home when I saw a pool of water lying across the road. I said to him " Mind your feet as we go through this puddle as there is a hole in the floor," and he laughed politely. We did not slow down and must have hit the water at about 30 miles per hour. His laughter was cut short and turned into a howl of horror as the water sprayed through the hole. There was so much water on the windscreen I had to stop and wipe the inside before I could see to continue. He was absolutely soaked from head to toe. Fortunately the spray was restricted to his side mostly so I could see the funny side of it but strangely enough he did not laugh.

As the years went by I played for several teams and found myself welcomed by one team in particular in the village where I lived. The captain of the team became a father figure to me and he and his wife possibly saw me as a good prospect for their daughter who was 2 or 3 years younger than me and a bit wild.

For a while we got pushed together and started travelling to darts matches together. At one match she sat on my lap because of a shortage of chairs. She had a very definite effect on me and she became uncomfortable saying "What is this lump in your pocket?" With this she reached into my pocket to find the by now very hard lump.

I whispered "Its me"

She replied "Not over there it isn't" and squeezed hard saying "what is it" With my eyes bulging out I repeated " It is me." Finally she got the message and found a chair to sit on to relieve us both of our embarrassment.

Through playing darts I developed many acquaintances and a few friends and darts nights were often quite eventful as one might imagine with a group of young men gathered together over a few pints of beer.

On another occasion we were getting ready to set off for our match when somebody asked, "Who has got a car?"

Everyone looked at me and said "Alan's got a Mini, can we all get in that?" Admittedly it was the estate version called a Countryman with

the rear opening back doors, but it was still a Mini with only an 850 CC engine and there were 8 of us in the team. We all got in by sitting on top of each other but the car was grossly overloaded and struggled to go up hill. However we made it to the match and home again but the poor little cars engine was never the same again.

On another night whilst playing for the same pub there was a terrible gale blowing. We had been practicing and drinking a few pints when I decided it was time to pay a call to nature. The only way out was through a glass panelled door and I was in a hurry. The door crashed to behind me smashing the glass and sending shards everywhere. As I was the culprit I tried to clear up the mess. Clumsily I cut my fingers quite badly. As the blood dripped over the linoleum floor I fainted collapsing in a heap. It was some minutes before I was over the shock enough to walk without fainting again and with my hand bandaged in a handkerchief we made our way to the match where I played and actually won.

After this I won several pub KO's and another team that I played for had some success in the league. I was still working as a bank clerk at this time and the various landlords and other players who knew me and who banked with my bank would come in and chat about the numerous darts matches that I had played in. The bank manager became very irate on many occasions and would admonish me saying, "It is not the done thing for bank clerks to go drinking down the pub every night playing darts and if I wanted to keep my job I would have to curtail my activities."

However, whilst at the bank I found out that the bank encouraged many inter-branch sporting activities, including darts. So I immediately entered. The local area competitions were played close to the branch where I worked so there was no problem in playing out of hours in an evening. I won the West Midlands and Wales Region without too much difficulty and was told the finals would be held in London at the bank's expense. It meant having the Friday afternoon off and meeting up with

some others in Birmingham and then travelling down on the train. We all then stayed a couple of nights in a hotel that the bank owned and travelled back on the Sunday. The competition was played at the banks sports and social club on the Saturday. Before I went my manager suddenly said " If you are going to have a weekend at the banks expense in London you had better win."

I played well all day until the final match came and then the pressure got to me and I crumbled. My opponent was a county player of some repute, but he admitted that he would have struggled against me, if I had played in the finals the way I had earlier. When I got back to the bank and told my manager that I had come second he seemed to relax his view on my darts nights a little as long as it was not talked about in the bank.

During my time with the bank I was sent on a weeks course in London at the banks expense. In the evenings during my course I would go out to the local pubs in search of a game of darts. On one such night I was offered a second hand set of tungsten darts for £10. This was nearly 30 years ago and tungsten darts were very expensive then so I tried them and decided to buy them. Then I found that I had not got enough money on me so I told him I was off to the nearest bank to get some money.

This was in the early days of cash dispenser cards and mine was a very simple punched card type that would only give me £10 but as this was enough I was happy. On my way back from the bank for some reason I took the penknife that I always carried in my coat out of my pocket and opened the blade. Then I put it back with the blade still open and held it by the handle. When I returned to the pub the man who had offered me the darts came up to me and pulled out a knife. He threatened me with it saying that I should give him all my money. Then he told me to take my hands out of my pocket which I did not thinking and still holding the knife. He took one look at it and backed off saying that he did not want any trouble. Then he sold me the darts and I went on my way none the worse for the unpleasant incident.

The next serious incident happened when I was about 21 or 22. It happened one night after the usual darts match. I left my local pub and went outside to my car. Unbeknown to me two lads had followed me out and they jumped me from behind. One of them hit me hard and I went out like a light falling onto the pavement. They took what little money I had and left me unconscious. My friends found me sometime later and revived me with a brandy.



I started to win more and more trophies as success piled on success and I was quite a popular player. One year I entered the News Of The World competition which was one of the big ones at the time with a car as the first prize. It was held in various stages starting with the first rounds played off in your local pub. This I won and went on to the local town KOs. Again I won and then played at the area finals. This was on a Saturday and when the day came I forgot all about it remembering at the last minute. I rushed to get there on time but was late so I did not get any chance to warm up and relax. Soon after arriving I went up to play and embarrassed, myself as I was that bad. Needless to say I lost but it did not disillusion me and I continued to play as much as possible.

A lot of the bigger pubs and clubs held exhibition matches from time to time and I managed to get my name pushed foreword to play in several of them as the local underdog against the visiting professional. One game I remember was against the superstar of the day who was John Lowe. It was 1001 instead of the usual 301 and this was supposed to separate the men from the boys but I gave him a good run for his money although I did not beat him.

One night a car full of the Wednesday team was on its way to a match when the driver was seen to be having trouble with the gears. One bright spark in the back seat piped up "What's up can't you find the right gear?" At this the irate driver turned in his seat and said "No, here you are you have a go," and then handed him the gear stick which had come out. We all howled with laughter but after a brief struggle it was replaced without accident.

Another memorable game that I played was in a local hotel. This was a doubles game of 1001 and my partner and myself played a couple of Welsh internationals. Every time a score of 100 or more was made and called out over the loudspeaker system the audience would applaud. At one point during the game one of our opponents went up to the oche and scored 140. The audience politely applauded and then my partner took his throw, again scoring 140. The audience clapped a little more enthusiastically and after they had quietened down my other opponent had his throw again scoring 140. This time the applause took longer to die down and while it was still going on I took my throw. When I hit 140 the roof nearly came off and we had to wait several minutes for silence. Nowadays, nearly 30 years later standards have gone up, but then this was exceptional throwing. My partner and myself went on to win that game much to every bodies delight.

On a Wednesday we had one player who had an artificial leg which on one occasion brought us all a little laugh. As usual it was a match night and we were all sitting huddled around the board watching the games when a dart bounced out of the board hitting the afore mentioned player firmly in his artificial leg where it stuck. A gasp went round the room as all the opposition saw it and felt his pain. He did not flinch, well he had not felt anything as it had hit the artificial bit of his shortened leg, and another gasp went up as he pulled it out and returned it to the player who stood there open mouthed.

There were several exhibition matches I played in after this and this was probably when I was at my peak. One other game worth a mention was

in a local pub. Again it was 1001 against someone who was some international competition winner and I won. This time however his exhibition partner played with 6 inch nails performing various trick shots. As arrogant as ever I thought if I can beat your partner I can throw nails as well as you. I armed myself with some sharpened nails and started practicing at home. Within a few weeks I was not only getting them to stick in but was achieving some accuracy with them so I took them down to my local pub and put on my own exhibition.

It was the birthday of one of the lads I knew and he was a little intoxicated to say the least. If he had not been I doubt whether he would have been persuaded to stand sideways in front of the dartboard with a stick of chalk in his mouth. I knocked the chalk out of his mouth and coins from his fingers. Then I played a few regular games of 301 with the nails. Every body watching was impressed including the captain but when he got closer to the board he saw the damage the thick rough points were doing to it and he banned me from playing with them on the board again.



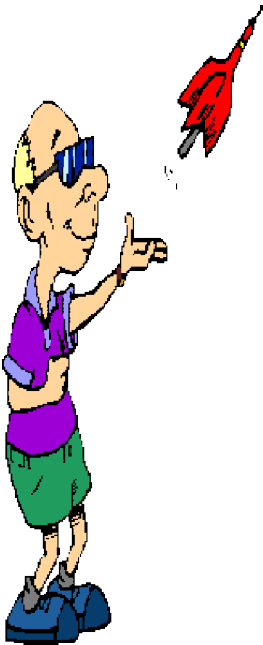
I have this one friend who particularly likes a drink. When told by the doctor that the drink limit was 11 pints he said " Oh, I rarely drink that much in a night." To which the doctor replied "I mean 11 pints a week." At a match in a local town one night, myself, my friend, his wife and another

couple were sitting together at a table when a young girl doing a drinks promotion for the brewery came round and gave everyone a free pint. As my friend was the only one who liked this beer he felt obliged to drink all 5 pints for us before continuing with his favourite brew. This was the only night I have ever seen him merry.

When I was about 26 I had a nervous breakdown and started to take medication. The standard of my game rapidly became worse and it was many years before I started to have any better games. About this time I had one memorable game though for a new team.

It was a friendly but quite serious and as a new player the captain wanted to see what I could do. The side was not drawn but picked so he put me against a county player. It was just one of those nights when my darts went. It was 501 and I started with 180 followed by 140. Then I hit 100+ and finished with the next 3 darts leaving my opponent well behind. One of the opposition was heard to say to a friend "Where the hell did you get him from? To which my friend replied "I knew him when he was good!"

When playing any of the many practice games make sure that you have enough lives chalked up for a good game. Two of my friends suggested that we play 3 handed cricket in the pub one night. One friend was an average sort of pub player and the other to put it politely was not so good. He did not want the game to last too long so he only chalked up 6 wickets each. We started and I went for a score first getting a respectable 245.



Then the not so bad player went, getting all out for a miserly 47. My other friend chuckled confidently and we started the next round. We bowled for the wickets before he could score and took 4 wickets with our first 6 darts between us. Then he went up and had 3 darts failing to score. I went up and the first dart hit the bull taking his remaining 2 wickets. He was out for a duck with one go at the board. After this he said " This is a silly game " and put his darts away.

Spot lights have to be fixed somewhere close to the board to be effective and on a low ceiling

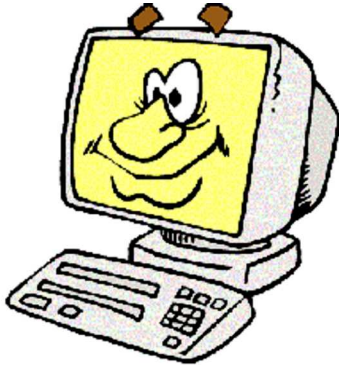
sometimes become an unintentional target for the darts. I remember playing one night on such an oche and again I was the culprit with my lobbing lazy style of throw. During the match I succeeded in breaking 3 light bulbs with my darts.

The captain pleaded with me to be careful and not to break any more because they had no more bulbs and the match would have to be abandoned. One of the most unusual incidents that we occurred was when a match was nearly rained off when playing inside in the middle of a 6 week drought. The pub was an old fashioned place which was basically a farm house that had been partially converted. The toilet block was across a farmyard with no lights and sheep were free to roam around inside as well as out. There were only two pumps in the bar, one for mild and one for bitter. Everything else came out of a bottle if they had it. Having said all this you got a good welcome and the landlady was the salt of the earth.

The darts lay was in a room which had a flat roof and unknown to anybody an old cistern had been pouring water through its overflow onto the said roof for some time. The roof was old and in some disrepair and leaked a little. The water built up in the plaster of the ceiling until it could hold no more and just as one of our players took his place on the oche the ceiling gave way cascading about 20 gallons of water down in front of him. Fortunately he did not get wet, only his feet, but we had to wait for the water to stop and be mopped up before the game could continue.

Other things that can go wrong at pubs where darts are involved can be quite costly. I know of one pub which had just been refurbished with new fixtures and fittings including carpets throughout. The darts team tried to drill holes through the carpet to fix a raised oche and the thread caught round the drill and pulled, running for yards before they could do anything about it. It ruined a large piece of carpet and they were not popular.

Setting Up A League Web-site.



Years went by with me just taking the role of pub team player, but I never gained the skill and ability that might have taken me further in the world of darts. Then there was a bit of a falling out with the Landlady of the pub where I played darts. It was suggested that the team should move to another pub a little further away that seemed happy to have us. So we did. However the captain of my team was not

keen on the new pub and was going to emigrate to Spain anyway, so a new Captain was required. Nobody was very keen to take on the role, so somewhat reluctantly I was volunteered. The new venue for the team was a few miles away, but as a non-drinker I usually drove to the matches and my route to the pub would take me past 3 of the teams houses, so it was easy for me to pick them up en-route each week. With 4 players (including myself) in the car each week it did not take much effort to get the team motivated to turn up each week. I settled into my new role and although the team did not have outstanding success it flourished. With my new responsibilities as Captain came a little more recognition in the league with other Captains and players. I attended seasonal meetings and established myself as a veteran player. A few years passed by and the old Lady that had run the league for many years started to ask me to help out with the league a little. Firstly I was requested to take on some of the deliveries of letters to pubs and Captains. Then out of the blue the old Lady asked me if I knew anyone that could help with getting the fixtures typed up each season. I had just bought an old second hand word processor so I said that I could do them. Two or three seasons later the old Lady went into hospital for a serious operation. The league carried on under its own momentum until

the worst happened and she died. One of the Lady Captains jumped into the breach and took over, but without being rude she had not got the experience to run the league. The first problem she had was not knowing how to do the draw for the knockouts and the league fixtures. Someone suggested to her that she contact me which she did and I offered my assistance. A full season went by and a league meeting was called. By this time I was not too happy with the fact that I was doing a lot of the work in running the league and not getting any recognition, so when at the meeting one of the captains suggested I take over as League Secretary I agreed. Thinking back on events now it seems that the old Lady that had run the league had intended me to take over when she stopped running it because of all the coaching and background information on the League that she had given me whilst I had been helping her.

Often when a new person is appointed to take charge of something they try to stamp their new authority on the proceedings and I was no exception. Unfortunately I had little experience of handling problems, people and the art of diplomacy. It was a steep learning curve for a year or two until I started to learn to take things a little more gently and the League started to settle down. The league started to flourish again in terms of numbers of teams and we got back to 3 divisions of Mens teams and eventually 2 Divisions of Ladies.

New ideas started to get implemented and one bright idea that a committee member came up with was sponsorship. After some discussion it was decided to sell advertising space on the League fixtures for local businesses. By now I had a computer and had completed a number of free training courses arranged by the government for the unemployed. With me new technical abilities I sold advertising space and designed a number of adverts that I printed on the sides of the league fixtures. It did not raise vast sums of money and involved a lot of work, but was a very useful fundraiser for the league. This continued for a couple of years, but became too much of a struggle for me to obtain the advertising so it was abandoned.

The next major innovation was the creation of a web-site for the league. My computer courses had covered every aspect of computing that I could learn about. The internet was really taking off by now and I was keen to join the revolution. The League was unsure of any possible benefits but I went ahead anyway.

One of my occupations was running an aquatic department on a garden centre and as part of a self promotional exercise I had been writing short articles on fish keeping for the local free newspaper. With my growing writing skills and the new web-site I found an outlet for a combination of my talents by writing and publishing items that I thought might be of interest to the members of the darts league. One of my first articles was the following:-

Moving With The Times



For more years than I care to remember Doris Steventen ran the Weston And Trent Valley Darts League almost single handed but towards the sad end of her life her failing health meant that the league suffered a little. When I took over my lack of diplomacy upset several teams and furthered the decline of the league. Several teams dropped out within a short interval but now the dark days seem to be behind us as we are starting to attract new teams. I am starting to use more tact when dealing with problems. Also we are becoming more up to date with the way the league is run.

At a committee meeting shortly before the summer league of 2002 started one of the committee members suggested that we seek sponsorship for the league. We discussed it

briefly and by the time the league started we had a number of firms interested in placing small adverts on our fixtures that were circulated around the teams. The fees gained from these adverts over the past seasons have raised many hundreds of pounds for the league and eased our financial situation to such an extent that this Autumn we are presenting every pub in the league with a free dart board courtesy of the league.

As you are reading this article on the Internet you are aware that we have now launched our own Web Site. It will contain much of the information that is regularly dispatched to the team captains such as fixtures and league tables, for any one to download, but it is my intention to place short articles of interest about things going on in the league as well. If it can be arranged I am also going to E-mail the results on a weekly basis to the Newsletter, so, hopefully they will start printing them again as they used to.

P.S.

As some of you will be aware I have been rather pleased with myself just lately for launching the website and I have been a bit like a kid with a new toy telling every body about it. The other week when I delivered the fixtures I was taken aback by some of the Landlords comments which I probably deserved.

Upon entering the Green Man and proudly showing the Landlord the address for the web-site he said "Does that mean you want us to E-Mail the results in to you now?" I politely said no and left. A little later I entered the Crown and announced that I had got the fixtures to which the Landlady said "Oh, I have already got mine off the Internet this morning." I thought are the Landlords trying to wind me up or something, but the rest of the evenings deliveries were uneventful.

The website was disorganised at first but gradually grew and developed as more information was loaded on to it. Sometimes I spotted items in the news papers that seemed worthy of mention to the darters and the following piece is one such;-

Ladies Team Win £1 Million

A Ladies team from a social club in Newcastle Under Lyme in The Potteries have recently been celebrating a big win. The win was not on the dartboard, although it did pay its part, but on the lottery. The team of 'Lucky 13' Ladies won approximately £85,000 each which totalled £1 Million altogether. They have entered the lottery for a number of years but only won a few small prizes of £10 before their one big win came.



The winning numbers were selected, by, each player throwing one dart at the board in turn. The team comprised of ladies of all ages, indeed the captain was 84 years old. They celebrated by drinking champagne and playing on their new dartboard which had been autographed by The Potteries own superstar player, Eric Bristow.

Other articles were specifically about the league and of little interest to non league players that might chance upon the web-site. The following is an early example;-

A Great Start

At the time of writing this my team, the Greyhound, has got off to a record start of winning the first three games of the season, but the first game against the Bankhouse B was the most memorable. It is no exaggeration to say that there were some stupendous shots from players on both teams. Clay for the Bankhouse had a break of 160 that will surely win him £5 and with Howard in the doubles was on for a 15 darter until they messed up the finish. (The least darts in the doubles is of course a new prize introduced this season.)

Other players also did well with Nutting hitting a score of 137 and

someone, I forget who, having a shot at a 160 finish. I must also add that I got a 127 finish on the bull that has unfortunately been beaten since by Hampson of the Bankhouse A with a 148 finish. Other teams also seem to have got off to a good start with a 180 being hit in the first match by Tomkinson of the Bonnie Gem mens and a 9 darter from Hamner of the Rising Sun. The Ladies have also had their moments it seems with some respectable starts and finishes (Hickman of the Greyhound 118 start). The best of which was by Godbold of the Prince Of Wales with a 146 start last week. Lets hope the league continues with more great games and scores.

Adding More Interest To The Web-site

The web-site became listed on some of the major search engines and players were looking at it more and more as became evident by some of the overheard conversations in the pubs. So, I widened the scope of things placed on the site to include a few poems about drinking, pub life and of course darts. One of the Lady players wrote the following which appeared on my web-site.

The Darts Match

A Poem By **Pat Taylor (Great Haywood Club)**

Every Wednesday I go with the ðladsö to play darts
We play, we win, we lose, we laugh, then everyone departs
They aim for the bull but the dart goes wild
A cry goes up ðYou fatherless childö
ðGood arrers,ö ðUnluckyö are heard from the crowd
and ðMiss it you tow ragö (but never out loud)
One hundred and eighties go into the book
They start on the doubles, itø now time to cook
Hot dogs and chips come out on a tray
Some pubs treat us to a brilliant array
When weøve all filled our faces (and pockets as well)
Itø time for the handshakes, then race back like hell.

Gradually my sense of humour started to surface on the site which resulted in the rather un-politically correct description of Lady players in the following article;-

A New Ambassador For Darts

For many years the sport of darts has been trying to change its image from a game played by beer bellied fat old men to that of a modern competitive sport. Phil Taylor and a few other players have done a lot to promote the new image of the game but not as much as Trina Gulliver. For the last 5 years she has been voted BDO Sports Personality and this



year she was given the title of Midlands Sports Personality of the year after competing with many other famous Midlanders from more glamorous sports.

At 34 she looks more like a model with her long blond hair and looks nothing like the familiar image of a female dart player who is a squat shaven headed, tattooed lesbian with a ring through her nose. Trina has been a professional darts player for the last 4 years and believe it or not before that she was a trained carpenter and joiner. She was born in Warwickshire and has remained a Midlander all her life. Although married she has no children as yet.

Trina Gulliver has been playing darts for over 20 years as she first became interested in the game when she was 14. Since turning professional she has won just about every competition going including the British Open, British Matchplay, Embassy Gold Cup and Winmau World Masters. Ranked at No 1 she is undoubtedly one of the best ambassadors the sport of darts has had for a long time. Hopefully she will remain at the top to promote the game and encourage more young ladies to join in for a long time to come.

Immediately after the offending article went live on the net one of the lady players sent me the following poem which in fairness to myself I did not hesitate in publishing on the darts site on the net.

A Poetic Reply.

By Pat Taylor Of Great Haywood Club.

I have just read on the Internet your views on Lady players,
I think you should apologize or at least start and say your prayers,
We're not all squat, shorn headed, tattooed or gay,
As you should know if you've watched us play,
We could say that all male players are beer bellied sexist pigs,
But we are far too Lady like to make sarcastic digs,
I know we're not all divas, just like your precious Trina,
We're not as talented perhaps, but believe me we're much meaner.
I'm also a toxopholist. I don't know if you know,
I belong to Stafford Archers and pull a mean compound bow,
When my carbon fibre arrows go flying though the air,
They can hit a moving target-so **ALAN HARTLEY-BEWARE!!!!**



As time went by I started to see the opportunities for articles on all sorts of different aspects of darts. One or two were even written that contained a little bit of advice to younger players about some of the pitfalls of inexperience on the dart board. The names have been

removed from the following article but otherwise it remains as it was written.

A Word Of Warning!!!

This little piece should perhaps be in the section on anecdotes, but, I will include it here anyway as a word of warning to new and in-experienced players.

A few weeks ago when I was playing in the Rugeley Monday League my team had some good games, one player in particular was ----- . It was best of 3 games each and in his first game he hit a 180. Very good we all thought and then in his second game he had 180 left. He hit the first 2 treble twenties and then threw for another 20 to leave tops. He hit another treble busting his score on 180.

A couple of weeks later on a Wednesday one of my players had 181 left after breaking with 120. His first 2 darts hit treble 20 leaving him 61 and I could see him going for another. Fortunately I stopped him and he went for treble 19 leaving himself double two. But I could see that he would have bust the 181 if I had not said anything.

Last week at the Amasal I had 131 left and I hit the 60, then 17 and went for an 18 to leave the double. Like a fool I hit the treble 18 scoring exactly 131 and busting it. The next throw I hit a 20 and treble 17 leaving 60 and yes you've guessed it I went for a 20. Fortunately the dart hit the flight of the one already in the board and bounced harmlessly into the big 20 leaving tops, but for one dreadful moment, I could see it going into the treble to bust it again.

When I was younger an older player once told me "Never throw a dart where you can bust the score."

It was good advice then and still is 25 years later. Perhaps we all ought to stop and think a little while playing, especially when we have hit a big score.

New players to the league and new teams were hard to come by as the trend away from traditional pub activities continued to develop with many closing and others turning into restaurants. I reflected on these

changes and the difficulty in keeping life in the league in the following article;-

The Need For Fresh Blood.



When I first joined a darts team in the early seventies nearly every pub had a darts team whether it was in a town or a country village. Nowadays the village pubs are changing into restaurants and the town pubs are putting in large screen TVs for Sky Sports such as football.

Consequently a lot of leagues seem to be struggling to recruit new teams. Indeed some leagues have lost so many teams that they have completely folded altogether.

We have lost many teams over the years from pubs such as the Gayton Hotel and the Wheatsheaf which have closed. In more recent times teams such as the Albion, the Prince Of Wales (Stafford), St Leonards

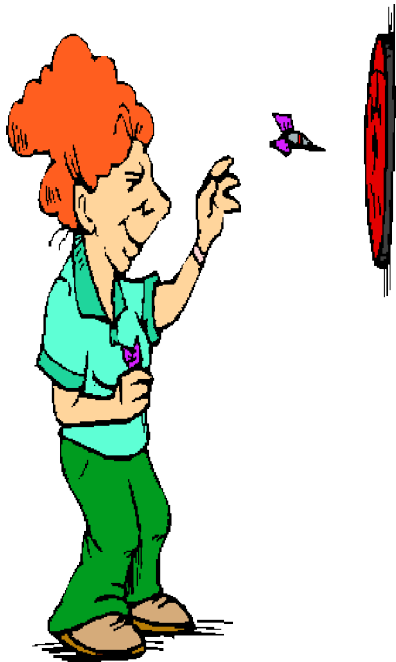
Club (Back In Now), the Woolpack (Back in now) and the Plough have left the league. Others like the Bird In Hand, the Roebuck and the Balmoral left the league long ago back in the mists of time. Disputes with the league have caused teams such as the Farmers Arms and the Chetwynd Arms to leave and the new management personnel of certain pubs has lead to a change in attitude to darts teams making them not so welcome such as has happened in the Hollybush, the Seven Stars, the Dog and Doublet, the Green Man at Hixon (back in now, almost!) and the Greyhound at Burston.

To combat this problem, every season I go out a couple of times following up comments made about interest in our league expressed by

other pubs and sometimes just cold calling on pubs in our area telling them about our league.

Another problem facing darts teams is the average age of the players in their teams. When I first joined the league if you saw a 50 years old player he was considered an old man but now it is the norm. My team at the Greyhound in Colton has an average age of over 55 and at 46 I am currently the youngest member. This is not particularly uncommon although I know that one or two younger teams are now starting to join the league.

Many people have commented on this saying that there don't seem to be many young players coming on. Perhaps darts has lost its image with the game often being thought of as an old mans game and also not very sexy for the young studs with the players having the familiar beer belly, although of course darts are "Phallic Symbols." Perhaps this is what attracts the ladies because the ladies league seems to be going from strength to strength with a slow acquisition of new teams every year. Also the ladies seem to be getting their daughters to join them, so, for them at least it is not all doom and gloom. Perhaps we should be taking a leaf out of their book and encourage more of the young lads in our families to join our teams.



The Introduction Of A Jokes Page.

In order to increase the appeal of the web-site I introduced a jokes page that rapidly grew and gained a faithful following who were forever looking to see if new jokes had been added each week. Some of the jokes were rather rude to say the least and it was a while before I appreciated that, although you would not expect children to look at a darts web-site, as it is essentially an adults game as it is played in pubs, the internet is accessible to all. An overheard conversation resulted in my splitting the jokes pages between clean and rude jokes. I then went further and placed a warning on the link for the rude jokes in bold red text saying that the jokes were very rude, not for under 18s and might cause offence. Furthermore, just to be safe I contacted the local police and their unofficial advice was not to put anything on the site that that was in any way racist or sexist. They added that although they were not too bothered about how rude the jokes were, if they or I myself received complaints, the offending jokes would have to be removed immediately. Along with the mixed bag of pub type jokes that I posted on the net was a page intended to be devoted to darts jokes. After many weeks I only managed to gather together a few darting jokes, so I added an extract from the book on darts that I had written to pad out the page. The few jokes I found are printed here:-

A research program has just been completed into the contents of a pint of beer and it has been discovered that all beer contains female hormones. This of course explains why after 10 pints of beer you talk a load of nonsense and can't throw a dart straight!

I was at a darts match the other week when one of the older players suddenly developed cramp in his leg and started going Ooh Agh Ooh. He tried rubbing it but he could not get down to do it properly so the pretty barmaid took pity on him and came out from behind the bar and started to rub his leg and massage it. Within a few seconds both teams

started limping and going Ooh Agh Ooh all round the bar. Who says darts players aren't sharp!

I know a young lad who plays darts and is not very good. Of course he is at a disadvantage to every body else because while most people throw from 7 feet 9 1/4 inches he throws from about 10 feet. He doesn't want to but he has size 15 feet! Give him a red nose and he would pass for a clown. Still I suppose he saves money on winter holidays as he would not need to hire skis.

A man goes into a strange pub and starts chatting to some of the local darts players, then they ask him if he wants a game. He says "I have never played a game of darts before but I will give it a go if you tell me what to do."

After playing for about an hour he has not lost a single game and has hit some fantastic shots. One of the players says to him "I thought you had never played before?"

The man replies "No I haven't, but there are a lot of flies in my flat and I have got some old darts which I throw at them and pin them to the wall."

"No wonder you are so good then if you can do that. But doesn't it make a mess on the wall?"

"Not really" replies the man "Because I only pin them by their back legs."

There were a few other jokes, but they are reproduced in other parts of this book as part of an article so I have not included them here as well.

Gradually the pieces that I was writing for the site drifted away from the game of darts and focussed more on humorous incidents that occurred whilst out for the evening and were only loosely connected with the game.

A Sign Of The Times

A funny thing happened to me a few weeks ago.

As some of you will know I sell a few darts flights, shafts and bits and pieces that I buy from Tommy's Darts, from the back of my car. The profit from these sales is not much but it goes towards the team funds. I have quite a good selection of bits and people in the different teams are starting to ask me for things when I go to my different matches. One night a little while ago, I was standing at the back of my car with three fellow players around the open boot showing them the cards of flights etc, when a man walked up to the car with his coat huddled up round his shoulders and face. As he approached he asked "How much are you selling them for?"

One of my friends replied "50 pence a packet."

"That's cheap" he said "What are they, E's?"

"No" my friend replied "Dart flights" and then we all burst out laughing. He was not amused but went away without any trouble anyway.



My Own Soapbox.

Not only did I see the web-site as a place to provide the fixtures and so on for the league, along with jokes and funny articles to entertain the players, but I also started to add articles that expressed my opinions about subjects that were under discussion in the league. In other words to some extent it became a political platform to influence a greater number of players than would normally attend league meetings. This is quite apparent in the following;-

Trophies Versus Money.



When first starting your darts career it is nice to receive a few trophies to show to your friends and family but very quickly, if you have any skill, you will accumulate dozens of useless bits of plastic. Some will be made of wood and some may have a marble plinth but they will still have no real value. Silver cups and shields are nice to win but are only awarded for the bigger competitions or else they have to be returned every year for the next presentation.

More and more pub leagues are realising that players are getting disenchanted with these plastic prizes and some are starting to award prize money instead. The amounts are usually small and will only buy you a few free drinks although some leagues are now playing for higher stakes. To do this though team fees have to be considerably more. Prize money in town KOs is usually a little higher, may be a couple of hundred pounds, but the really big money is only to be had in national

competitions. Even then the prizes are not of the same order as for snooker, tennis or golf. For some reason the game of darts does not have the same kudos as these sports.

PS The Weston League used to give trophies, but a couple of years ago a league vote was taken to award small monetary prizes instead.

However, recently one or two teams have approached me with the idea of going back to trophies and I would like to hear your comments. If many more people say that this is what they want we will have another vote which may reverse our policy in the future.

Several more articles followed in a similar vein and then I started to return to things on a lighter note. I had always been able to laugh at myself and managed to tackle a delicate subject that a newspaper had highlighted from an event that had occurred in another league.

Trouble With Gay Darts Team



The committee and myself as league secretary have had some problems to sort out over the last 5 years that I have been running the league, but, fortunately nothing like the problem that occurred with two teams in a mixed league in Brighton. The host team the Stag, were an all gay team and the visitors, the Bevendean Hotel gave them more than a little friendly banter on one match in particular. You can imagine the comments such as, don't bend down to pick up your darts in here and don't shake hands with

them because you don't know what you will catch. Other comments were reported in the Daily Mail Newspaper which featured quite a write up on the problems.

The Stag team reported the incident to the league who in this politically correct society of ours took exception and banned the 6 players from the

Bevendean team for life and even suspended the Hotel from entering another team for 3 years. As one member of the offending team said much worse happens all the time in pubs with beer glasses being thrown and fights occurring but nothing usually happens to them.

I am just glad we don't have any all gay teams in this league because I don't think I would have made such an example of a team making homophobic remarks.

I know in men's darts at least there is often a lot of bantering between the teams and you take it as part of the evening. I know that after a particularly bad throw on more than one occasion my manhood has been called into question with such remarks as "You big fairy can't you do any better than that?" but then again when it's your own side responsible I suppose it is a little difficult to get them banned!

Don't get me wrong I do believe we should be more tolerant of minority groups but I do think they should temper their complaints with common sense. I don't have any objections to gays playing in our league but I do think that they should expect to get jibes made against them as does everyone else.

All sorts of things began to attract my attention and the pieces that I wrote became sillier and sillier.

Aren't Our Policemen Wonderful?

Last Wednesday I went to darts as usual and going home I turned into my road slowly as it is only a short road. This was very fortunate for me because if I had been going any faster I would have run into the police car that was parked halfway down it with no lights on. Bearing in mind that it was half past ten, quite dark and there are no street lamps in my road, I was lucky to spot the car in time. Imagine the conversation if I had run into it.

"And where have you been at this time of night sir?"

"I've been down the pub all evening playing darts officer."

"Have you been drinking sir?"

"No officer, only diet coke, I am virtually tea total."

"Would you mind taking a breath test sir?"

"Certainly officer. You can have a urine sample as well if you want. In fact if you don't take the piss I will for parking like that!"

The web-site was provided free of charge by my internet provider, so due to the budget constraints of the league I took advantage of the service even though it had severe limitations. I had built the web-site in Microsoft Front Page which is really meant for the amateur, but is very comprehensive in the functions that it offers. However, my web host did not enable many of the more advanced functions to be used. One such function was a hit counter. This would reveal just how many people were looking at the site. I eventually managed to find an internet service that enabled me to place a hit counter on the site by adding a small piece of code that simply re-directed the surfer to another web-site where the hit was registered and back again in the blink of an eye. I am sure the service did not come without a price and that was in the form of advertising. A Cookie was placed on the surfers computer so that the hit counter provider could use it for advertising. Also the surfer could click on a link to view more detailed site statistics where they were bombarded with advertising. This all paid for the "Free" service. The system seemed to work without any complaints and I was staggered by the number of hits the darts site received in the first year of the counter being installed. From May 2005 to May 2006 the counter recorded over 3,000 hits. That may not sound many compared to other sites that make the news, but this was just for a local darts league. I was pleased with the count and after registering the site with an international listing for darts web-sites the hits were put into perspective. The listing was world wide and any site remotely connected with darts could register whether it was an out and out commercial one selling darts paraphernalia, the site of a professional player or just another league site. In its first few months of operation the league site was always in the top 100 listing which was not difficult given the number of sites registered, but the numbers grew easily passing the 1,000 mark and my little league site stayed firmly up there with the best of them in the top 100. Not only were other league sites much lower in the rankings, but many big

commercial sites were struggling to get above us. People other than league players were obviously looking at my site and coming back time after time. Such was the attention that the site was getting I started to get E-mails from various businesses asking me to place an advertising link to their site on mine. In other words businesses thought that my site had a big enough audience to bring them trade. Unfortunately the internet seems to thrive on mutual promotion and without fail all of these businesses wanted a link in exchange for them putting a link on their site for mine. I had started to think of the darts site as a possible fund raiser for the league, but this mutual advertising virtually scuppered that idea. One of the companies seeking promotion was the production company behind an attempt to remake the very popular darts TV Programme called "Bullseye." As a consequence I wrote the following article;-

Bullseye Special 22/10/05



Last night saw a Bullseye Special run by comedy presenters Ant & Dec on Midlands ITV at 8pm. The first few minutes of the show featured clips from old shows from the 14 years that it ran. Soap stars Vernon Kay and William Roache were the contestants playing for charity and a viewers prize. The programme kept to the old format with the first round played on a

special board with different question categories worth different points depending which part of the segment the dart player hit with his dart. Andy Forham was Vernons dart partner and he showed his style by hitting two bullseyes worth a bonus 200 points each. Old time superstar Eric Bristow was Roaches partner and he did not do so well missing one category altogether. Bill Roache did not help by not being able to answer the questions and the pair slipped behind. In the next round where the player has to score as much as they can with three darts

Bristow and Roache fared somewhat better albeit by default as Vernon failed to answer a couple of questions.

The next round was the Bronze Bully where a visiting darts player has to score 301 or more with 9 darts. The show had none other than darts number one player of all time Phil Taylor. It just goes to show how hard it is to make the score with 9 darts under pressure because although Phil is the greatest player to have ever lived he came nowhere near Bristow's record 380 and did not even get close to 301.

Vernon and Andy went through to the prize board where Andy immediately hit the bullseye holiday prize. He also hit 5 other prizes but Vernon failed to gain a single prize. The pair decided to stay with the prizes they had won for a viewer and let Bill and Eric throw for the star prize. This final round is played on a normal match board and the aim is to score 101 or more with 6 darts. It sounds easy enough but in reality a lot of people used to fail the challenge on the show. Bill went up first and hit the magnificent score of 27 making it harder for Eric. There was a time when Eric would not have had a problem with this but he is very definitely a spent force now and all he could manage was a miserly 52 making a total of 79. They failed to win the popular star prize of a speedboat that the show had on so many times.

It was hoped that if the Bullseye special had a big enough audience the show might be brought back as a normal weekly offering but it is still to be seen whether this will happen.

Even when tackling a serious subject I started to inject a little humour where possible. The next article is a good example that was written following complaints about the new raised oche at the venue I favoured for finals night and many of the knock outs.

[Great Haywood Clubs Raised Oche.](#)

Raised ocheø for dart throws are not very common in pub leagues but are seen more at higher levels of darts. One or two pubs in our league employ them but when the dart board was moved at the end of last season in the Club a raised oche was the outcome. Usually the oche consists of a wooden bar fastened down at the required distance but in

the Club it went a lot further. The whole area between the throwers feet and the facing wall with the board on is raised about 6 inches. Actually the board and floor area round it is on a stage whereas the thrower stands with their toes against the edge of the stage where the oche is. With the marker standing high on the stage and towering over the board it creates the optical illusion that the board is low but when you actually come to eye up the board it is spot on and extremely well lit. It is, as has been said, a good home throw.



When the board was first moved to its current position we heard all sorts of jokes such as;-

- 1) "Let's see you step over the line now!"
- 2) "All the short arses will be able to get their darts out of the twenties now!"
- 3) "You would pay good money at a gym to get exercise like that! (Stepping up to retrieve the darts.)"
- 4) "Who said playing darts did not involve any exercise!"

The step up proved too much for one elderly lady player at a recent match and her darts had to be retrieved for her by a runner!

Having said all these things the throw is in an excellent place to be seen by the whole room whereas the previous position was in the way

of people moving about the room. The board is probably the best lit in the league with an uninterrupted throw. Most throws in the league have some problems with them which is why we play home and away, but the only problem with the Club's is an optical illusion and after all said and done it is only a pub league. What we must also remember is that the club provide the room free of charge to the league and if we went elsewhere we would have to pay. The clubs bar prices are the cheapest in the area, there is ample parking, the room is amply big enough to accommodate all our functions except presentation night and the venue is centrally located to the league. Personally I am very grateful to the Club for the use of their premises and I think that if we are all honest

with ourselves there are no alternatives that come anywhere near close to the facilities it offers.

Some pieces were still a little dry in their flavour, but by now I was beginning to realise that the web-site had all sorts of people looking at it. Some were merely curious to see what other leagues were up to, others looking for something light and entertaining to while away a few bored minutes while surfing and yet others were serious darters who avidly explored and digested anything to do with the subject.

Electronic Scoreboards

Electronic Scoreboards have been around for a number of years now and more pubs seem to be installing them. Admittedly they have some benefits but they are not all good. Perhaps the main reason for their proliferation is that there is no chalk dust produced which must be a problem for the pub cleaners to continually remove.

The scoreboards usually carry a notice saying that they are league approved but the truth is that not all leagues do permit their use. Indeed it is only a couple of years ago that the Weston & Trent Valley Darts League removed a rule forbidding their use. The rule stated that "Scoring must be carried out by the subtraction method using chalk and a board to record the score." This was quietly dropped as more pubs insisted on not using chalk.

There are a number of different types of scoreboards available that record the score differently. The first one pictured only shows the last score for each player which makes it difficult to check previous scores. The scores can be revealed from the memory but few people know how to do this. Also it makes it difficult to count the number of darts used as there is a prize for this in our league. The second scoreboard pictured from another club is far better as it shows the last 5 scores made on each side.

Another benefit with electronic scoreboards is that they are easier and quicker for most people to record the scores made, than using chalk and

working out the score remaining by hand. However this laziness is encouraging young players who can't count properly, which is all very well, but it can be very off putting to a player when looking for a finish if they have to stop and ask the marker what is left. I know of one young player who plays county darts and is very good but could be a lot better if he learned to count.



A Second Web-site

Gradually I was becoming more involved in the administration side of another local league based in Rugeley. At the end of 2005 I offered to set up a web-site for this league, again free of charge using another free site provided by my ISP. There were limitations as to what I could do with the free sites but the constraints seemed far more generous than other so called "free web-sites" that had many strings attached to them. Most such sites included enforced advertising of one sort or another and very limited usage especially in terms of file types that could be loaded on to the site. Admittedly my ISP did not permit Front Page File Extensions (except on their business sites) but every other file type that I tried seemed to work from Excel to Word Documents, from PDF files to WAV and MP3, from all types of picture files to Windows Movie files. The sites were not supposed to be used for out and out commercial purposes and a very high limit was imposed on downloads from the sites, but unless people were downloading dozens of audio or video files every day it is unlikely that the limits would ever be reached. I certainly encountered no problems in the 5 years that I ran the darts sites. The ISP did have a help line but I found that e-mail questions got the most helpful answers and any problems I encountered were invariably due to my own lack of knowledge and never through a fault in the system. I never encountered any down time and the system/connections with my ISP only ever seemed to slow when the USA came on line, but there again that might have been imagination. I only have praise for Tiscali for the service they provided me and still use them to this day, although like most people I am now on Broadband.

Anyway back to the story. The Rugeley darts League Web-site got off to a flying start as I had a lot more experience of how things could be done, but basically the site was a copy of the old Weston Darts League web-site that had by now been running for about 3 and a half years. Jokes, poems and news articles went on the site immediately as did of

course all matters relating to the league including fixtures, rules, results, venue addresses, blank result sheets, etc. A hit counter was added almost straight away and the hits climbed almost from day one. It was a while before Google listed the site but the address was typed at the bottom of the fixtures so that some people could find it. Since then I have found how to get a free listing from Google in about 2 weeks from registering the site with them. The new site had jokes added to it regularly, but at first there were only a limited number of articles I could come up with. The following is one of the first and was received with much appreciation.

An Unfortunate Decision

On Monday the 21st November I was very late getting to the match at the Castle. The first game was over and Adam had started throwing up on the oche for the second game. John, his opponent, had also started throwing up but he was in the toilets! Our captain Charlie asked if he could substitute me for John under the circumstances and while they were about it could they change Neil for Ian as well because no one new that Neil was in the pub at the time of the draw. I must point out that Neil had been in the pub for hours before the match as he had been doing some jobs for Graham but at the time of the draw no one knew where he was. The Castle captain agreed and the match continued. Unfortunately for the Castle Neil won his game against Norman and surprisingly I won my game against Adam. We also won our doubles game which we played together. This meant that we won the match. If neither of us had played it could well have been a different result and one or two of the castle players were not best pleased. I spoke to Graham afterwards and he said that if the draw has been made and the players names have been written down they should not be changed. However, if both captains agree to a change under special circumstances then that is up to them and nothing should be said afterwards. Normally it would not have changed the result so much, but, as I say it was unfortunate for the castle. It does serve as a warning though to other teams.

Although this first piece was a report on a match it had a little dart humour and also had a moral in its tale and consequently in other words it had everything in it. Certain items of general darting news still found a place as a short report on the site such as the next piece about Bristow.

[Another Win For Bristow 24/11/05](#)

Faded darts superstar Eric Bristow, who was once the best darts player in the world and who is still a popular darting personality, had another victory today, but, this time in court. In April of this year his wife, Jane had made an allegation against him saying that he had punched her in the face at their family home in Leek. Later she had tried to withdraw the allegation but the Department of Public Prosecutions had decided to proceed with the case against Bristow anyway. The case was not proved and Bristow was released with no blot on his record. Outside the court afterwards a relieved Bristow commented that his wife had got a new man and she just wanted a divorce. He added that he would now give her that.

The Rugeley Darts League, or at least the Secretary Graham, had strong connections from the past with legendary darts Superstar Phil Taylor. As a result of that I often saw fit to write short articles on Phil who was always news worthy and at the time always seemed to be making headlines.

[Phil Taylor's Dart Hand](#)

We all know that some famous actresses and models have insured their legs against injury and one or two famous musicians have been known to insure their hands as well, but never has a darts player insured his hand. Earlier this week Phil Taylor announced that he had insured his dart hand for the princely sum of £1 Million. While it is true that he is arguably the greatest darts player that has ever lived it still seems a lot of money. Phil obviously believes that he is going to win an awful lot

more prize money in the years to come simply to pay the exorbitant costs of insurance. It would seem that he has no intention of retiring just yet even though he has said that with all the new up and coming players it is getting harder to win all the time.

I was still running the Weston web-site and really getting into the swing of adding more and more humour to otherwise serious comments on important points that occurred at matches.

Dangerous Darts.



When darts are thrown they don't always stay in the board. Occasionally a dart will fall out and sometimes they hit a wire and bounce out flying from the board at unpredictable angles. Often the marker, who is nearest the board, can be seen to "Duck and dive" to avoid stray darts. That reminds me of a joke elsewhere in this site:-
A young man plays a game of darts who has never played before. His first dart hits the double 20. He throws another and hits double 20 again, but the third dart bounces out and hits a nun who is watching the game. The dart hits her smack between the eyes

and kills her stone dead. The marker calls out "One dead nun and eighty."

It was because of this perceived danger to bystanders that some years ago there was a move, albeit short lived, to get darts banned from all public places in England. Fortunately the movement never received any backing and sank without trace.

If a dart bounces out of the board when going nearest to bull for start it is usual to throw the dart again, but during the actual game that is not

the case. A lot of people jokingly say that if a dart bounces out and goes behind the oche you can have it again. However it is not expected.

Some people try to catch a dart that bounces and it is often said that if they had caught it (Not easy) they could have it again.

Darts also go astray for other reasons. A lot of players have difficulty at some time in their careers of letting go of their darts properly. The timing of the dart leaving their grasp is wrong and the dart often flies at strange angles instead of following a smooth trajectory. Also the darts fail to reach the target accurately and often miss the board altogether hitting the wall or surround. This condition has become so well recognised that it has been given the name "Dart-itus". The condition first gained recognition when the famous Eric Bristow went through a very bad patch in his professional career and for a year or two he constantly failed to maintain a decent standard of play. The only way to recover from this condition is to play through it with constant practice if you are able to bear the embarrassment of appearing like a rank amateur.

If a player drops a dart, which often happens, it is normal practice for them to simply pick it up and throw it, but occasionally a dart is thrown and for some other reason does not even reach the board.

In fact I remember one local pub which had a low ceiling and darts were making holes in the ceiling because it was hit that much. The landlord fixed some tiles on the ceiling which prevented the darts from sticking in and usually they just fell to the floor. Some of the players could cope with this if they were the type that threw their darts very hard but if they were like me and lobbed their darts, the darts followed a curved flight path and invariably hit the ceiling.

I always used to throw for double 20 to start then and on one occasion I remember throwing my first dart which hit the ceiling tiles, bounced off and landed in the board in the bull which gave me a very acceptable bull start as the game was any double start. The landlord still remembers it to this day but thankfully the board has been moved to another room now. Projecting beams over the lay can cause the same hazard. In a local league we use to have another pub with a beam above the throwers head, a couple of foot in front of him. I have seen a player throw all 3

darts only to see them stuck in a neat row in the beam with none of them even reaching the board.

As I have stated if a dart is dropped at the players feet they may have it again but if it has been thrown they don't. (Not usually.) Last week in my match I went to throw a dart and it never crossed the line, but somehow went several feet behind me and to the left just missing a spectator who thought he was safe way back there! When I picked it up and threw it properly, it went into the Treble Twenty, so I could not complain but my opponent did not look happy! Was I right to have thrown the dart because it could not have just been dropped to have traveled that far, but on the other hand you could hardly have said that it had been thrown at the board either. We lost the match so I did not feel too guilty about winning my game but if the match had been decided by my game I think the opposition would have had reason to complain.

Even a report on a serious occasion such as presentation night came in for added humour as the following extract shows.

Presentation Night



----- A raffle was held that helped in part to fund the evenings festivities that included a bar and free buffet for all. Altogether the raffle raised £91 and the many prizes for the raffle comprised of bottles of various tipples, several T shirts and a number of boxes of sweets/chocolates that were very kindly donated by a number of landlords and teams. Some of the more expensive prizes included a presentation pack bottle of whiskey donated by Graham form the Castle, a gallon of beer from the Woolpack and a

very large toiletries and perfume pack for the ladies. There were many smaller prizes of all sorts, (I counted 28) and the committee are very grateful to everybody who contributed.

We also had a disco provided by the same gentleman that ran it last year at the Rangers Club but being St. Josephs Club I advised him not to play some of the records that he played last year!

Less people than we normally expect turned up and consequently a lot of the buffet was left, but I think those that went enjoyed themselves. St Leonards lads certainly entered the spirit of the evening and I mean spirit (and beer and wine.) Although attendance was down most teams were represented and few prizes went unclaimed. A small amount of prize money was not claimed and as the league had previously agreed this will be donated to the Air Ambulance. -----

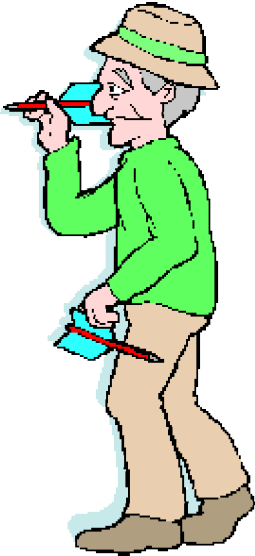


Televised Darts.

With two web-sites to write for I looked further afield for inspiration and found a little from the Bullseye television series that had returned to our screens on Skye.

A Manly Bullseye.

Another new series of Bullseye had quite a memorable show on Monday 11th September featuring Dave Spikey who is making a name for himself as Jim Bowen's replacement. Tony Green, who has been a



feature of darts on TV for many years is still on the show as checker. This particular night had 3 pairs of competitors as usual, one couple were from Torquay near Melbourne Australia. They were both young and although they came from Australia one of their pastimes was snowboarding and another darts. Helen, the young lady said, she loves her darts and "Came on the program to show that darts is not just for fat old men." As you can imagine this went down well with the audience. At end of the category board round all 3 pairs had £160 and that was, I think, the first time that all the competitors had tied at that stage in the history of the program. The next round produced a winner in Kevin & Ross who won the £Pounds for points round with £260.

Next came Bronze Bully with superdarter Peter "One Dart" Manley trying to score 301 with 9 darts for charity. His first dart found a good home in treble 20 and he scored 100. With his next throw another treble fell out but he finished after 9 darts on a respectable score of 202.

Dave Spikey asked Peter where the nickname had come from and Peter said that in 1995 after winning 15 straight legs in a televised tournament Tony Green named had him "One Dart" and it had stuck. Recently

though Peter has adopted a new nickname along with an improved image and has made a performance comeback. Dave Spikey commented on the fact that Peter's good lady is quite a good player of some repute. Peter said that she is but it's very difficult for her because obviously she has the ironing and cooking to do. A comment worthy of any male dart player.

In Bully's Prize board round Kevin & Ross only won a dartboard but gambled their £260 cash and prize dart board for the star prize. Not many manage the 101 but this pair did and scored 118 with one dart left. They did not win the famous speed boat or car but instead won a Home Gym System. Going back to the earlier comments made by Helen about darts being played by fat old men I wonder if this was the best of choices for a star prize.

In the Summer of 2006 I resigned from the role as Secretary for the Weston league and concentrated on the Rugeley league in which I had taken more interest on being badgered into becoming joint Secretary. With renewed fervour I started watching darts on TV more. This resulted in several articles on various players and events in early 2007.

[Surprise Victory For Stompé \(06/01/07\)](#)

Jelle Klaasen has only been playing darts for 5 years, but after his surprise 7-5 victory over fellow countryman Raymond van Barneveld last year at Lakeside Country Club in the World Darts Championship, the 21 year old youngster was defending his title against Co Stompé in the first round this year.

Stompé, another Dutchman, had not won a match at the championships for the last 5 years and so was not favoured to win against the competitions youngest ever champion, but his years of match experience showed against Klaasen who could only achieve an average of around 90, far less than Stompé's 97 despite hitting several 180s. I don't think Stompé hit any 180s at all but he did score 170 twice and also 174. The first set was hard fought with the score-line 3-2 to Stompé, but then Klaasen seemed to lose his way and was the far more erratic player. On one leg he had 76 to finish. After hitting the 20 he

actually missed the big 16 altogether allowing Stompé to take the leg. It was poor shots like this that meant Stompé did not drop a leg in the second and third sets to take the match 3-0.

Bobby George pointed out in his summary of the game that Klaasen had problems with his sponsor and manager at the start of this year and these problems had prevented him from getting much competition practice. Two other Dutchmen went out on the first day as Robbe and Van der Voot were both beaten, but others remained in the competition and they will be well supported by the large Dutch contingent in the crowd who seem to be taking over the competition. This is probably due in no small part to the continuing success of Raymond Barneveld who beat Phil Taylor to take another world title crown in a surprise result only the other week.

Exploring New Avenues.

New ways of doing things with computers always fascinated me and when I came across a Movie Maker Program by Microsoft I had to have a play with it. I gathered together all the cartoon darts player pictures that I had found and looked for more on clip art discs. Needless to say there were plenty of pictures of drinkers of one sort or another, but not darters, so I decided to edit the pictures of the drinkers by cutting away their glasses of beer or even cups of tea, etc and then pasting in a picture of a dart. I am no artist but removing the glass often meant removing the fingers on the cartoon so I had to paint the fingers back in. This was great fun and occupied me for several hours as I found out how to carry out the various tasks to complete the cartoons. Even then I wanted a few more cartoons of lady players so I looked at cartoon pictures on the clip art discs generally and found some of ladies holding all sorts of items including one memorable picture of an elderly figure looking disgusted holding a bra. These pictures were all doctored and gave me quite a selection of figures. Next I strung them together on a story board in the movie maker prog, added a few more pictures and old black and white silent movie type comments and a sound track. Then I had to save the file in a condensed form because the video was some 6 minutes or so in length. An ordinary DVD type file would have been many megabytes, too long to download with Dial Up and also taken up far too much space on the web-site. After condensing, the quality was reduced dramatically, but so was the file size coming down to about 4 meg, which was less than an MP3 track of the same playing length. This Mpeg file was a great success with no one complaining about the quality, so I also loaded onto the site an old Power Point cartoon file that I doctored and constructed a GIF animation that combined with other elements made for 3 very entertaining downloads.

The Rugeley Web-site became a success as far as gaining the attention of the darting world far more quickly than the old Weston site and soon I was getting E-mails for links and adverts. One such request came from a holiday firm in an attempt to get me to promote a darting holiday/competition hosted by darts legend John Lowe. The advert was duly placed on the site and I decided to write a general piece on John Lowe as well, especially when I discovered that he had a new book out.

[John Lowe \(Old Stoneface or Gentleman John\)](#)

John Lowe was born in the village of New Tupton, near Chesterfield, on July the 21st 1945. He is married to a lady called Karen and has two children from a previous marriage, a boy and a girl who are both now grown up. He calls himself a family man even though his darts takes him all over the country and sometimes even the world, resulting in many overnight stays away from home. "I have been to Russia five times and actually stepped inside The Kremlin when the Cold War was on!" One of the real gentlemen of British sport, Lowe has won just about everything there is to win. He is celebrating an incredible 30 years as a Darts professional and has also just passed another notable milestone ó his 60th birthday.

Unlike a good number a professional darters who began their careers in the 1970s, John, is still competing at the top level, still playing against ó and often beating ó the very best. He has appeared in world championship finals every year since 1978. He is still the only man to win the World Championship in three different decades. His partnership with Unicorn has spanned an amazing 33 years and is almost certainly the longest running sponsorship deal in any sport, anywhere in the world. It is only three years ago that Lowe came close to beating Team Unicorn favourite Phil Taylor in the semi-finals of the World Matchplay at Blackpool.

John promotes darts the world over as part of Team Unicorn and as part of his activities he is hosting a darts festival in Barbados later in the year.

The year before last (2005), John Lowe and Eric Bristow were given the honour of being the first two stars to be named in the PDC Darts Hall of Fame.

In 1984 he set a new milestone in darts when he was playing on television in the MFI World Matchplay Championship. During the competition he hit a 9 dart 501 game which was the first in such a recorded televised competition. His scores for that game were 180, 180 and 141 (Treble 17, Treble 18 and Double 18.) He pocketed a cool £102,000 for that one game. Nowadays, that would equate to a staggering £350,000.

Since then John Lowe has won most of the major titles around the country with a tally of several hundred competitions including The World Masters, The World Matchplay and The World Championship. He has played for and indeed has Captained England many times in his career. As an added string to his bow he wrote a column in the Daily Star for many years.

Last October, there was another milestone for the great man, with the publication of his autobiography, "Old Stoneface ó The Autobiography of John Lowe." The book is being billed as explosive and revealing. "It took a year to write and a week for the libel lawyers to proof read," Lowe revealed. Although in the pipeline for a long time, it was not until the summer of 2004 that John was able to schedule the time to write this, his fourth book. John says, "The first two books were basically how to play and consisted of passing on my skills and knowledge to my readers. The third book "The John Lowe Story ó Inside Pro Darts with the World Champion" was my first stab at an autobiography and took my story up to 1987."

John's autobiography "Old Stoneface ó The Autobiography of Britain's Greatest Darts Player" will be published by John Blake in October and copies signed by John will be available shortly via his web site,

I did meet John Lowe many years ago when I was in my early twenties at Lea Hall club. It was an exhibition match and I managed to get my

name pushed forward to play against him. The game was 1001 instead of the usual 301 and this was supposed to separate the men from the boys. Coming down I matched him score for score but when we got to about 200 I got nervous and threw some crap letting him win. After the game he said to me that if I learnt to lose and did not get so worked up about it I might make a decent darts player one day. Since then I have had a lot of experience (Of losing!) but I still can't play.



More Success And Added Inspiration.

The January of 2007 was just about 12 months after starting the Rugeley web-site and saw the hit counter go sailing past the 2,000 mark. The Weston site had taken much longer to reach anything like this figure so I was delighted. This success spurred me on to write more articles and several followed very quickly. Often I would feel the spirit move in me and I would be inspired to write a couple of pieces a week.

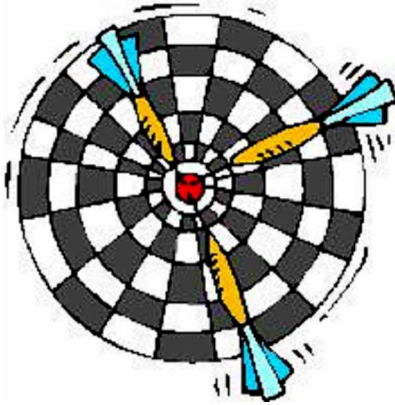
A Load Of Bull

On the 4th night of the televised Holsten Premier League Darts Raymond Van Barneveld scored a magnificent 170 finish which won him £1,000 for just those 3 darts. Our very own Will Hall has also managed a 170 check out in the past and I also believe he had a 170 start some time ago. I did not see Will's start, but some years ago whilst playing in the local Weston Darts League I saw Chris Seaward, who was playing at the Greyhound in Colton, start on 170. This was the one and only time I have actually seen it done in 30 years of playing darts. A 170 start is of course the highest possible when you start with a double. One point worth thinking about is that you have to leave 170 in a game before you actually get a shot at it and that is not going to happen all that often. If you start on a bull, you can, if you are so inclined, have a shot at the 170 start every game that you play, so in theory you should see a lot more 170 starts than finishes, but in practice not many people try a Bull start. In my opinion if you do it is showing either over confidence in your abilities, a touch of arrogance or is even a little insulting to your opponent in suggesting that you think you have time to



mess about because they are not very good players. Having said that I did once start a match on the bull, but it was not intended.

Many years ago I played a match in a pub that had a low ceiling. Some players can cope with this if they are the type that throws their darts very hard but if they are like me and lob their darts, the darts follow a curved flight path and invariably hit the ceiling. In fact I remember in this particular pub it was such a problem that the darts were making holes in the ceiling as it was hit that much. So the landlord fixed some



tiles on the ceiling to prevent the darts from sticking in. I always used to throw for double 20 to start then and on one occasion I remember throwing my first dart which hit the ceiling tiles, bounced off and landed in the board in the bull which gave me a very acceptable start as the game was any double start. The landlord still remembers it to this day but thankfully the board has been moved to another room now.

My mental alertness seemed to be improving around this time and my memory started to recall events from my darting past that, put together, made, hopefully, interesting, light hearted pieces for the darting community to read.

Some Salubrious Darts Venues

Darts has always been classed as a working mans sport, so with Rugeley being an old mining town the game has always had a good following here. However being a working town some of the pubs are not as õp marketõ as they might be, nor are some of their customers. After playing darts for 30 years I must say I canõ remember ever being involved in any trouble, but some months ago, we, as a team, walked into one town centre pub for a match when football was being shown on the big screen with the volume up high. Some players like a bit of quiet whilst playing

so one of my mates, who is over 6 feet tall walked up to the bar and asked if someone would turn the volume down on the football. A man standing at the bar turned to him and said, "Pick a window." My friend was puzzled and asked why. The reply came back, "Cause that's the one you're going through if you touch that volume control." Needless to say the football stayed on.

Normally when 7 or 8 men go into a pub together the local jobs stay clear of them, but I did hear of trouble at one match many years ago when a pool table went through the window and chairs were flying all over the place. I must point out that the fight that happened was between the players of the home team arguing amongst themselves and did not involve the visiting team at all who walked out somewhat gob smacked to seek safety.

A few weeks ago we went to another pub that my mate and his wife had not seen before. We drove into the car park and got out of his car to go into the pub. It was winter so it was dark but there was a bright moon. "Ooh, look," his wife said, "that looks ever so pretty with the moonlight sparkling on the surface of the car park. They must have special tarmac down to make it fancy."

No," I said, "that's all the broken glass from bottles, glasses and car windows. I told you it was a bit rough here."

As I have already stated, Rugeley is a working town and so are some of the ladies that frequent the pubs. We walked into another pub one night with lots of people watching the home team practicing and I heard someone sarcastically say, "Look the darts professionals have come to show us how to play."

I quickly retorted, "We aren't Pro's but I think a lot of the woman watching are," and then immediately looked for somewhere to hide! Having said all this if you watch your mouth and stay together as a team on arriving and leaving the pubs you will probably not come to much harm and may even enjoy the nights match!

All sorts of darts related things caught my attention during this period of writing fever. Phil Taylor, who always seemed to be in the news caught some of the flack as can be seen in this piece.

Healthy Darts



Now some people call me a fat bōstrd and at 16 ½ stone you might well agree. Indeed my body mass index is 29 which is considered very unhealthy medically, however Phil The Power Taylors BMI was 38 a few weeks ago, so how would he be described! He might not be any heavier than me, but I am just over 6 foot and he is, well, quite a bit less. Phil blamed his lack of fitness and stamina at the start of the year for losing in the World Championship competition which has a gruelling 3 hour final, so 6 weeks ago he commenced a get fit campaign and has made remarkable progress by losing a stone in weight already. I won't say that his improving stamina level is going to enable him to make a comeback, because he

never went away. His losing the title was just a momentary blip in his incredible career as I am sure Barneveld will find when he plays him shortly.

Myself, I have always followed my doctors advice regarding my health and fitness. Mind you I do have a doctor that sometimes gives unexpected advice. I am approaching 50 and have the usual health concerns that a man my age might have and I won't tell you what he told me to do in bed at night, (which would also build up my muscles in my right arm and help me to throw darts.) His predecessor also gave some good advice. On one visit he instructed me to do 3 things;-

- 1) No strenuous exercise. Do not do anything that brings me out in a sweat.
- 2) Eat 4 square meals a day. Not just sandwiches. Then he spoilt it with the third,
- 3) No alcohol.

As Meatloaf said two out of three ain't bad.

Perhaps I should point out that the doctors who gave me this sound advice are in fact Psychiatrists and we all know what they say about them!

The abstinence from beer means that at darts matches I nearly always drink diet Coke/diet Pepsi and when people comment on this I say that if I have that it means I can have more sandwiches after the match without getting too fat!

Richardson in the World BDO competition also got a mention through his somewhat bizarre and unfortunate accident before his big game.

Unexpected Dangers

Many sports have obvious dangers inherent in the sport such as motor racing, but some sports can have risks that are totally unexpected. A case in point springs to mind and happened some years ago to a darting friend of mine. This friend had gone fishing with a mate and had volunteered to carry most of the tackle including rods, fishing box, etc down to the bank. I say down to the bank because a steep slope had to be negotiated to reach the waters edge. Unfortunately the ground was a little soft and muddy causing him to lose his footing. He slipped and tried to hold onto everything resulting in a bad fall which broke his leg. Now when you go fishing you don't think about the possibility of breaking your leg, but there you have it he wasn't prepared for the unexpected.

Playing darts has the obvious dangers of flying darts bouncing out of the board, but most people would not think about taking a bandage in case they sliced open their fingers, but as I said strange accidents do happen. I wrote about the following incident on another web-site and it has been included here as another warning to the unwary.

When I was at darts the other week Young Lizzie asked me if I had got any new shafts with me. I had, so I fetched them out of the car and she selected a couple of sets of metal shafts. Lizzie had trouble getting them in her darts and got one cross-threaded. I offered to put them in for her and said out loud, "Lizzie, you can't screw straight. You have put my shaft in all crooked." Everybody laughed.

I cut my fingers on the chewed up metal thread as I removed it and then said, "Look I have cut my fingers getting my shaft out." Again everybody laughed at me. Then I handed the darts back to her and she tried to insert the flights.

"Alan, I can't get these flights in your shaft, it's too tight." This time they laughed at Lizzie and then somebody said, "Push the point of another dart down his shaft." Painful. Eventually the flights were pushed into place and we started the match with me dripping blood, from my gashed fingers, I hasten to add.

Perhaps the most unfortunate darts player that I have heard about recently is Davy Richardson who on his sixth attempt to qualify for the recent B.D.O. World Championship Darts Competition, made the grade and reached the first televised rounds. Unfortunately for him shortly before the match night he was taking his trousers off in his bedroom and he lost his balance which resulted in him falling heavily on the corner of his bed and cracking two ribs. It was the first time he had qualified in the preliminaries so he did not want to miss his chance to compete. After a visit to the doctors he decided to play even though he was in agony. Not surprisingly he did not get very far because of his pain but he won a few games and at least he can say he got there which is more than the vast majority of darts players will ever do. However, if he had been more careful taking off his trousers, who knows he might have won the darts competition.

Let these recollections serve as a warning to all who get careless before competing at any sport whatever they might be doing.



Robbie Green was also unfortunate enough to come under the spotlight.

Drug Testing For Darters.

Just before the last couple of games at the end of the 2006 summer season for the Weston & Trent Valley darts league, the highest finish was only 124

for the men's league which had been hit in an excellent 9 dart game. Then one weekend I got an E-mail from Wayne of the Talbot, who was obviously very pleased with himself for hitting an 8 dart game with a 125 finish. He said that the drug test results were in and he had passed with the result sheet duly signed and witnessed by the opposition.

The next week my partner left me 130 in our doubles game. He had had 230 to go for and hit two 20's before hitting a treble. Foolishly I commented to my opponent, I am glad Taylor (No relation to the great man) got the 60 with his last dart and did not leave me the 170 because I did not fancy that. Believe it or not I hit treble 20, treble 10 and followed it with tops. Once or twice I have had high finishes before, but I commented at the time 'I know Wayne will want to look at the match sheet for confirmation and demand to see the drug test results.'

We often joke about having drugs tests in darts when people play well and in the past it always seemed ridiculous to even think about it with the amount of alcohol consumed during the average match, but drug testing has just been implemented this year and has already resulted in the banning of one player, Robbie Green who was banned after becoming the first darts player to fail a drugs test.

Robbie 'Kongö' Green, who comes from the Wirral, gave a sample for testing in June at the UK Open in Bolton where he reached the quarter-finals which resulted in him testing positive for marijuana. Robbie was only the eighth player to be tested by anti-doping agency UK Sport. The 32-year-old was suspended by the Darts Regulation Authority and banned for 8 weeks.

If drug testing has been considered necessary to control the sport of darts, then perhaps it is a sign that darts is starting to be taken more seriously by the sporting world and is at last taking its rightful place as a serious sport and not just pub entertainment. A few years ago there was talk of darts being included as an Olympic event. Who knows, maybe it was not such a fanciful idea after all!

The great Phil Taylor never seemed to be out of the news in my TV region.

Darts No Longer A Cinderella Sport.

The BBC Midlands Sports Awards were made on Sunday night the 3rd of December 2006 where the 'Potteries darts legend,' Phil Taylor won the BBC Midlands' Sports Personality of the Year and Sportsman of the Year awards. The 'Personality of the year award,' was voted for, by the public and Taylor had the people behind him, partly due no doubt to the sterling efforts of his wheelchair bound mother, who at one point actually brought a football match to a halt! The 13-time World Champion from Stoke-on-Trent won the top award ahead of Warwickshire cricketer Ian Bell, who is playing in the Ashes for England.

Darts is no longer a Cinderella sport and I am sure Phil would agree that he is no fairytale Princess, although Trina Gulliver who was a previous Midlands Sports Personality Winner 3 years ago, might have been described as such.

Darts passed through lean times for a number of years towards the end of the last century, but it is now shaking off its rough drinking mans

image with alcohol banned on stage in most competitions and the sport is gaining more sustained recognition with more television coverage and better prize money. Of course it still does not yet compare with golf, tennis or snooker but things are definitely improving in leaps and bounds. Phil seems to win most of the big prize money, but there is more money now than ever before out there up for grabs as can be seen from the fact that Phil has made more money out



of darts than anybody in the history of the sport by becoming the first darts millionaire. He is a brilliant darts player and undoubtedly deserves his rich rewards, because he does much to promote the game, even if he sometimes winds up other players with his confidence in his ability to win everything, which he usually does!

Although by now my connections with the Weston league were tenuous I had not deleted the Web-site altogether. The new web-site set up by the new Secretary and his son did not impress me, so very occasionally I put an article onto my old one.

The Stranger Side Of Darts

This morning I decided to get my hair cut and was telling the barber about the darts match last night when Pauline won the match for us and he immediately thought it must be a mixed league. I explained that there are quite a few ladies playing for mens teams to make the numbers up to keep the teams going, but it is really a mens league and there is a separate ladies league which the men are not allowed to play in. He started making comments that the ladies want equality in all things and also special treatment for them. To misquote George Orwell and Animal farm "Everybody is equal, but some are more equal than others."



After putting the world to rights I recalled an incident that I was told about at a pub in Stone on a ladies match night. On any darts match night the teams understandably expect to have the dartboard to themselves all night for practice, both, before and after the match. One night the ladies were playing after the match and a man walked in asking for a game. The ladies captain said it was ladies night, but he could play if he put on a skirt and high heeled shoes. They had a

giggle and the man disappeared out to his van in the car park. When he came back a few minutes later he was wearing a skirt and high heeled shoes. The ladies jaws dropped, but they let him play a few games before he went home. Later the ladies captain pointed out that the skirt and shoes might have been left in the van by a girlfriend, but it seemed unlikely that both her skirt and shoes would fit him, so what was he doing with ladies clothing that fitted him ready to wear in his van?

Perhaps I was writing too much about Phil Taylor, but as he is fairly local to the league and the greatest darts player ever to have lived, when news items about him caught my eye, I usually wrote something.

[The Future For Phil The Power Taylor](#)

Phil is about to take on all comers in defence of the World Championship title that he first won in 1990 some 16 years ago when he lived in a terraced house in the potteries. His devastating record of wins since then has given him the undisputed crown of being the best darts player that has ever lived and along with that honour he has had rich financial rewards. Now he says that he wants to earn a few more bob to make sure that his grandchildren are all right. The future of two of his 4 children should be a little more secure as well because he has recently opened a darts memorabilia and trophy shop in Stoke on the corner of Milton Road and Hanley Road.

Phil has not said that he is thinking about retirement yet, but he admits he is getting a little older and as he approaches 50 he may start to take it a little easier and do some of the things that he has been putting off for a long time. He said a holiday would be nice because he has not had one for 15 or twenty years. Other things such as simply sitting back and watching TV are also high on his agenda. One pastime that he has shown an interest is horse racing as he has been seen at the Uttoxeter Race Course in the past. While there some time ago, a ðBar Steward,ö (Careful how you say that, although some that know barman concerned say that the mispronunciation might be more correct,) who is from a local club I play darts for, reported back that he had a very pleasant chat in a bar at the course, with the great man. The Bar Steward said Phil

was really quite down to earth for such an important person. Personally I have seen Phil a couple of times at darts events where he came across as being a great character and I hope he stays with the sport for many years to come as has the less successful but also very important darts personality of John Lowe.

One of the more serious pieces that I wrote, about this time, involved my getting on my hobby horse and preaching about the standard of the game.

Better Darts

While in the club the other night we started talking about the standard of darts these days and had a few games at the same time. In one knock about game I broke with 120, scored 131 which left the bull after 6 darts, missed it and had a lucky dart into the 18 then had a miss at 32 and got it with my next dart, my 9th dart. Not bad for a rank amateur who has never even played in the Super League never mind County. In another leg a few minutes later I had a magnificent 141 finish. Treble 20, treble 17 and double 15. I very rarely do this sort of thing in a match, but it has been known. I think the standard of darts is going up and these sort of shots are happening more and more often in our leagues than they used to years ago. It used to be really something for someone to hit a 9 dart 301 but these days if a player hits one at the start of the season they are lucky if it gets mentioned in dispatches for more than a couple of weeks as it soon gets beaten by less darts. Fletch did a 7 darter a few weeks ago in the Rugeley League and the other year Jimmy from the Castle got a 7 darter in the Weston league. High starts and finishes used to be worth a mention but 160 starts are almost common place now and at the moment we have two 164 finishes in our league.

The standard is rising through all levels of the game as can be seen from the televised Premier League Darts. During week 4 several players averaged over 100 in their matches although top players averages are usually in the 80s or 90s which are still a lot higher than they used to be.

In the olden days when I first started playing I am sure the averages were more like 70s and 80s in the big competitions. The brilliant Phil Taylor nearly always averages over 100 which is absolutely awesome compared to that. Even the local super league players these days hope to average into the 70s and occasionally 80s or even 90s for odd matches. So, although older player will always say how good things were when they were young, I think the overall standard of darts is steadily climbing in the same way standards seem to be rising in all other sports.

More Silliness.

My elder brother has started having holidays with a difference and exploring all sorts of different parts of the world. After one such holiday in South America comments were made about my poor darts during a match. The following piece is almost a verbatim report although most people reading it will think I used a lot of poetic licence in writing it.

A Different Type Of Darts.



At the match the other night I did not have a bad singles game but my doubles was atrocious with the only decent score towards the end of my leg when I was looking to leave a nice double for my partner. The õgood scoreö only came about because I hit a treble (not even the number I wanted) when I wanted a single thus leaving 17 in a mess for my partner. Needless to say after many misses later we lost our game and ended up one leg adrift in the final score-line for the match. If my partner and myself had won our leg the score would have tipped in our

favour. So I declared, õI am retiring from darts. Iõl give up and go somewhere else.ö

õTry Timbuctoo,ö someone helpfully suggested.

õSouth America is nice,ö someone else added. (Not that my team wants to get rid of me you understand.)

“Funny you should say that,” I commented. “My brother has just spent a month in Ecuador and he loved it there saying it was great there with the Rain Forest and the head hunters etc.”

One bright spark piped up, “We know they play darts there, but they use real darts, blow pipes and all.”

Someone else said, “It would be a bit of a bugger if you stuck your dart in your finger when you were sharpening it though.” (The head-hunters use poison tipped darts.)

“They would play different rules out there with the team with the last man alive winning the match.” (Another head-hunter reference.)

One last bright comment was, “You would have to be careful what the meat was in the sandwiches after the match though.” (Head-hunter/cannibals joke again)

After a little consideration perhaps I’ll just try another team in the next village next season, a bit further from home. Maybe they won’t know how bad I am.

The mood to write was upon me again and another silly piece followed a conversation in my local club one darts night. Incidentally the young lady concerned saw it afterwards and said she was most impressed.

A Bad Chat Up Line.

A rather attractive young lady has started work as a barmaid at the local club where I play darts twice a week and when I went into the club the other night there was only one person in the club besides myself and the new barmaid, so I had a little chat to her while she was getting my diet coke. She asked if there was a match in the club to which I replied there wasn’t because we were playing away. “That’s good,” she said “because I don’t like it too smokey and when it’s busy and there’s a lot of darters smoking in the club it makes my eyes water.”

“You won’t have to put up with that much longer,” I said pointing to the notice about the forthcoming smoking ban in all public places in July.

“I know, I’ll have to give up,” she said

“Most people find that sucking boiled sweets helps when they give up

smoking,ö I said and added öBut that won't do much for your figure.ö
öI'll have to find something else to do with my mouth,ö she said.

At this point I could have said something really very rude, but didn't



and settled for something only a little rude. öMost ladies don't usually have any trouble exercising their jaw muscles,ö I said and gave a little grin. öThat reminds me of something I heard recently,ö I said. öYou know that the Japanese are very good at making cameras and improving the technical capabilities of them. Well, one firm has just made a camera with a super fast shutter speed. The shutter speed is so fast that the camera can even take a picture of a woman with her mouth shut.ö

öGo and play darts,ö she said in no uncertain terms.

Perhaps I should have used a different approach and a better chat up line because she was very pretty. Never mind I still had a game of darts to look forwards to and as always that was the reason I had gone out.

Another very silly article followed a match where I was more interested in chatting to one of the players, that had been round the league as long as I had, than in watching the match.

Wildlife And Darts.

Everybody is always on about the environment, nature and looking after the wildlife around the country, so I thought it was about time to do a darts article that involved some of the animals seen in England.

Playing in different leagues as I do I often travel to all sorts of venues for matches and one such recent game was played at a club with its own gate-keeper security. As the club has many acres of grounds round it, it's a haven for all sorts of wildlife including ever resourceful foxes which have realised that if they approach the guards at the gate they will

get fed with titbits from the guards lunchboxes. The club itself is built on the banks of a large lake.

We played our match in the clubhouse particularly early in the evening because it was a re-arranged game that could only be played on that night before a second match later on in the evening. It was quite warm so the doors were open and some of the players were strolling round the grassy area by the lake watching the ducks and geese on the water. Many years ago the geese were causing a nuisance with their vast numbers. Everywhere was covered in the rather large droppings that the hundreds of birds produced. In fact the geese, were such a nuisance to the golfers on the private course in the grounds, that, the golfers used to go round the nests and smash the eggs in an attempt to reduce their numbers.

While watching the few birds that remained the other night I recalled an evening some years ago on another visit to the club for a game of darts with some friends. It was the first time one of the group had been to this club and he had a reputation for shooting and eating the local wildlife. As I have said there were hundreds of geese present then. My friend asked if they would miss one of the geese because he fancied one for Christmas. He was told they were a pest and to help himself. He did and grabbed one that ventured too near looking for handouts. He wrung its neck, or so he thought and put it in the boot of the car. The ladies in the party were not told of his actions, but they found out on the way home. As they were driving along there was a sudden banging noise and a commotion started in the boot that was followed by honking and an assortment of other noises all from within the car. The ladies panicked and were not reassured when they were told that there was a live goose in the boot! Geese have a rather flexible neck and my friend had tried to wring its neck but had only stunned it and not actually killed it! Needless to say it did end up on the dinner table.

Anyway, back to our recent match the other night. As I said some of the players were staring out to the lake speculating on the fish stocks in it. The lake obviously had quite a stock because we could see a large fountain of the sort that are used to aerate waters that contain fish. One of the players informed us that they were all öttdlersö in the lake as it

had just been stocked with young trout. "There are no old trout in there," he said.

My quick reply, which was, "There are plenty of old trout in the club tonight," did not go down too well with the spectators.

After we had won our match, with an unexpected struggle, as they were second from bottom and we were second from top in the league, we all piled into the cars and headed back out of the grounds. On the way out rabbits were running everywhere across the private roads. One of the ladies exclaimed, "Be careful, watch out, make sure you don't hit one of the little bunnies."

Back came the inevitable reply, "Don't worry there's no chance of him hitting a rabbit, he's hit nothing all night!"

A couple of the most recent articles written are of a more serious nature and less frivolous, but hopefully the darters in the league still found them entertaining enough to read.

Disco Darts



Most players like to have a bit of "Order" during their games with cheering and shouting frowned upon while the players are actually throwing. It is customary to ask for the juke box to be turned down when the match is about to start and to enable the music to continue in the rest of the pub some pubs have installed on off switches on the

speakers so that those nearest to the players can be turned off leaving the others on.

Some pubs are more like discos with loudspeaker that are often turned up to deafening levels and I remember in one pub that I played in some years ago there were numerous loud speakers dotted round the place with one being right over the Oche. In this pub however there were no switches installed, but when I looked at the offending speaker more closely I saw that the wires were only held in with a little spring clip.

My mates were all complaining about the awful racket being played, so I pointed out that a wire could easily be removed without any difficulty. With a bit of arm twisting I deftly reached up and unclipped one of the wires. Peace, or at least it was a lot quieter where we were playing with the other speakers being much further away in other parts of the bar. Then a couple of young tearaways that had obviously been listening to the music suddenly realised the sound had gone off near to them. After a little grunting and head scratching the brighter one went up to the bar and asked for the music to be turned back on as he had filled up the jukebox with money.

The barmaid fiddled about with the controls for the music system behind the bar and told him that she could not get it to work. He protested, but she was adamant that nothing could be done until the landlord could get someone out to fix it next Monday at the earliest. A couple of my friends and myself were doing our best to stifle our laughter because obviously no one had seen me disconnect the speaker.

Eventually the tearaways decided to move to a different part of the bar where the music was still playing. This was an added bonus for us! After the match was over I quietly reconnected the speaker and we left the pub. Nothing was said by the youths, who were in again the next week, about the sound mysteriously going on and off!

Players have been known to get so upset about the offending noise in some pubs that speakers have had darts put through the cones, but this is not to be recommended as the damage will have to be paid for.

These days it is not just jukeboxes that cause a lot of noise. Mobile phones are a more recently introduced distraction for players with their noisy and incessant ringing. In fact one local Ladies League has got so fed up with the problem that they have introduced a £5 fine for any player whose phone goes off during a game! That encourages players to turn off their phones during a match.

A local team that I have just rejoined has a large television mounted on brackets on the wall at the side of the Oche. If you are standing on the Oche no one can see the screen because your face is inches in front of it. Fortunately it is usually turned off when matches are taking place and on the rare occasions when it is on, because of football, the sound is turned off.

At the moment there seems to be attempt to revive the national interest in darts as played in pubs as more and more Landlords are re-installing dart boards. Perhaps it is partly because so many places do meals now that they are realising that they need other attractions to get regulars back in the pubs. What some Landlords need to understand is that for the players to really enjoy the matches the pub needs the right atmosphere and playing in a disco is not conducive to good darts.

[A Good Home Throw](#)

There is one throw in a local town that is very unusual and definitely what you would call a "Good home throw." The wall facing the Oche is not square on to it. To overcome this the dartboard has been mounted on a frame that projects outwards from the wall at an angle. In other words the board is square on to the thrower, but if your eyes wander backwards and forwards to the wall behind it you definitely start to get a queasy feeling!

One of my friends told me about another Oche that is almost legendary in the Midlands. He was on his travels some years ago when he walked into a pub for a lunchtime drink and as usual looked round for the dartboard. When he asked the Landlord where the board was, he was shown a dartboard on a distant wall that was mounted about 3 feet off the floor. My friend asked if they had a lot of children in the pub that played darts. The Landlord said no and that the board was regularly used for men's matches in the local league. Then my friend was shown where the Oche was. The Landlord walked towards the cellar and halfway down the cellar steps was the exact throwing distance!

One local pub has moved the Oche now, but it used to be in a very awkward place. The ceiling over the Oche was very low as it sometimes is in the older village pubs, but that was not the problem in itself. In the ceiling a couple of feet in front of the Oche and going from side to side above the player was a wooden beam. On more than one occasion I have seen a player throw all three darts and not get one in the board. All 3 have been stuck in a neat row in the wooden beam above the Oche! The throw is alright for people under 5 feet 6 inches but if you are 6 feet as I am it can be difficult. Needless to say I rarely go for tops on that board. Having said that playing for the team based in that pub is a player who must be about 6 feet 3 and he plays very well on the board!

Other pubs have cigarette machines or bandits halfway down the lay and in some the darts lay runs down the length of the bar so play stops when someone wants a drink. In a lot of pubs people have to cross the lay to get out to the loos and you can't always persuade them to wait till after the players have thrown if they are in a hurry!

These little hazards are all part of pub darts and are of course the reason why we play home and away so that "Good home throws" are not really an advantage to anyone.



An Internet Success

The two Hit Counters on the Rugeley Darts League Web-site worked independently. The first counter was provided by BraveNet and was very detailed in the statistics that it kept on a linked site providing a breakdown of the type of visitor as to whether they were unique, repeat, etc. It also gave details to the user as to how the site was found ie; search engine details, direct hit, etc. Further details on the browser type used by the visitor were given and the counter displayed historical trends in the records of visitors to the site as daily, 7 day, etc.

The second counter was actually more of a link to another site on which the count was displayed. One difference with this site was that the counter was very simple keeping only numbers for unique and repeat hits, but the main difference was that this counter was displayed on a page/site in order of daily hits along with many other counters from other darts sites. The counters were displayed for all to see in descending order with a small banner advert and link to the site corresponding with each counter. The site was called the Top 100 Darts Sites in the World, however there were far in excess of 100 sites registered within a year or so of the sites inauguration. If you hovered over any link on the site and looked at the bottom of your screen for the link address you could see the site registration number. When I last looked sites were making it into the top 100 that had registration numbers over 1800. From memory the Weston site was 104 and the Rugeley 108 so I believe the numbers were genuine.

All the time I ran the Weston Darts League web-site it was in the top 100, but I must admit the registration numbers were lower then. The Rugeley League was also in the top 100 from its inception and is still today, hovering between, anything from 3 or 4 very early in the morning before America awakes, to somewhere in the 60s, 70s or 80s on most

days. I have not seen the listing when Rugeley Darts has not been listed in the top 100. Bearing in mind that nearly all the sites making the top 100 every day are commercial of one sort or another, whether they are selling something, or they are featuring a professional player, I consider the Rugeley Darts League site to be very successful in attracting a lot of attention. The main aim of the site was to entertain and inform which I think the numbers on the hit counters would suggest it does. My main regret is that a way could not be found to coax money out of the link advertisers to raise funds for the league. At one of the Weston League meetings one of the committee suggested making a separate web-page available to the pubs in the league featuring any special attractions in the pub such as a music night, Thai Restaurant or caravan accommodation. If the page was set up correctly it would get an independent listing on the search engines even though it would still be a part of the darts web-site. Also of course it would not have an easily remembered address. I explored this idea a little with the site I set up for my books by making a simple page for one of the retailers free of charge. The lady concerned seemed pleased with it, but it did not seem to be very practical. A similar idea was tried with the Rugeley site by making a separate page of small adverts and making a timed URL link with the league tables page. Consequently anyone looking at the league tables (who was likely to be local) would have a page of adverts appear on their screen every 30 seconds and no program designed to remove pop ups could do anything about it. One such small advert for a taxi firm had success because although they were based in Rugeley they had a call from over 100 miles away to take a darts team to their local pub in Preston or wherever it was!

Both the Rugeley and Weston darts league web-sites have been a resounding success in my opinion and although the Weston has now been closed, as I am not running the league any more, I am delighted with the way the sites grew and developed, hopefully providing a little entertainment as well as serving a useful purpose for the league. I still lose at darts though!