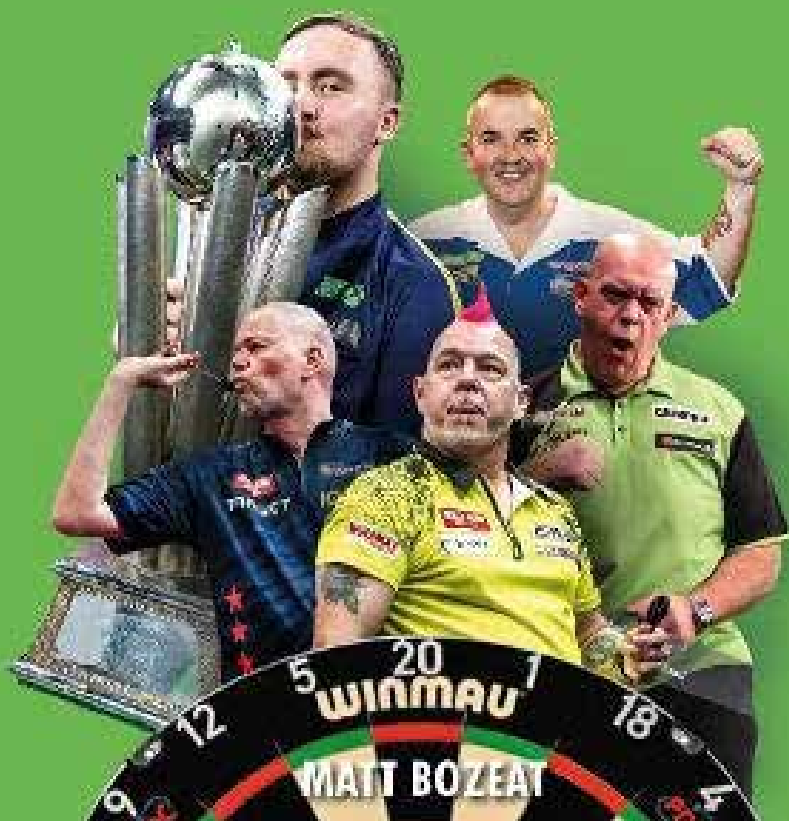




DARTS

Miscellany

*Darts Trivia,
History, Facts & Stats*



DARTS *Miscellany*

MATT BOZEAT



THE CRAFTY COCKNEY

IN FEBRUARY, 1980, Eric Bristow played Bobby George in a darts match that was a turning point in the sport's history.

"Me and Eric changed the game, didn't we?" said George.

"He was the nasty one and I was the good looking one!

"Women would be flicking through the channels and say: 'Oh, he's good looking, I will watch him' or 'He's horrible, I'm going to watch this to see him lose.'

"I was in good shape in those days and I thought things needed livening up. I wore glittery shirts, carried candles and got the crowd involved.

"I remember asking a cameraman: 'Can I put some music on when I come out?' He asked his boss, he said: 'Yes' and that's where that started. Without things like that, we wouldn't have the game we have today.

"I knew that darts was a show and we had to entertain. It took a lot of bottle to go up there wearing those shirts, but I wanted people to remember me.

"We put on a show. We threw our arms in the air after we hit doubles and got the crowds chanting our names."

For six sets, Bristow and George matched each other double for double.

The crucial first break of throw went Bristow's way in the seventh set – and it left him on the brink of the World Championship.

Bristow had a dart at double top for the title – and missed.

The pressure shifted to George. One dart from defeat moments earlier, he found himself 18 points away from sending the match into a ninth-set decider.

He dragged his first dart into nine and took aim at single one to leave double eight.

He blew it.

“You spend all those hours trying to hit 20, not the one, and the one time you need to hit the one, you hit the 20,” sighed George more than four decades on.

Bristow mopped up for the first of his five BDO world titles and remained close to George until his death in April, 2018, aged 60.

Bristow suffered a fatal heart attack before a Premier League night in Liverpool.

George was with Bristow just minutes before he collapsed and said: “I tried to save him. Eric used to drink 17 pints of Guinness every day, then have a curry. He would do that all the time. Guinness, curry and betting shops were his life. I used to tell him: ‘You can’t live like this,’ but Eric always said: ‘Nobody is pushing me around in a wheelchair, Bob Bo.’ The thing with Eric was, he was never ill. I used to think: ‘He’s going to be ill,’ but he never was. He never even had a cold – and then one day he was gone.”

The crowd at Liverpool’s Echo Arena chanted Bristow’s name throughout the night and players wiped away tears on the most emotional of nights.

During his playing pomp, Bristow wasn’t the most popular of characters with fans or his peers – and when he played the likes of Jocky Wilson and John Lowe, millions tuned in to watch hoping he would lose.

That was acknowledged ahead of the 1985 World Championship final against Lowe, the last match ever played at Jollees Cabaret Club in Stoke before the building was pulled down.

Tony Gubba told BBC viewers that Lowe’s support would be “swelled by those who want to see Bristow lose”.

That match was one of Bristow’s finest moments.

The John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg of the drinking classes, Bristow and John Lowe were the perfect mismatch.

Bristow was every Northerner’s idea of a flash Cockney and for Southerners, Lowe was unblinking, unsmiling proof that it’s grim up North.

Bristow and Lowe had first met after Lowe won the World Masters in 1976.

Lowe remembers “a tall guy wearing dark glasses” shaking his hand and congratulating him.

“You don’t know me, do you?” he asked.

Lowe said he didn’t and the stranger replied: “Well, you soon will. Eric Bristow’s the name.”

Bristow always backed himself, ever since his father George first took him to the pub to play the locals for money.

“When a 15-year-old tells a 35-year-old in front of everyone in the pub he’s no bloody good, he plays you for money,” said Bristow. “I didn’t worry who I wound up.”

Duels between Bristow and Lowe were unmissable and in that 1985 final, as he usually did, Bristow came out on top.

The pivotal leg was the deciding leg of the sixth set. Lowe needed a break for 3-3 – and Bristow shut him out by starting with seven perfect darts.

From 4-2 up, he pulled away.

“Happy new year,” chirped Bristow as he held aloft the trophy.

Bristow knew how to get under the skin of his opponents.

Paul Wade, once considered a shoo-in to follow Bristow as the king of darts before he broke his arm, spent a lot of time with ‘The Crafty Cockney’ during his pomp.

“Wherever Eric went, all the big tournaments, I was there,” said Wade.

“I was there backstage with him, carrying his bags. All the players had holdalls with bottles of vodka, or whatever, in them and I would carry Eric’s.

“I’ve played everything with him, from space invaders to snooker and tennis, and he was good at everything.

“He was a good snooker player, but then he spent a lot of time in pubs.”

Mostly, he played darts and according to Wade, Bristow won matches before a dart was even thrown.

"I saw him beat players before they even got on stage. He would rip them to bits," said Wade. "I remember a World Masters final against Alan Hogg that was over before it began. Eric was on his back in the practice room. He was telling him: 'Why have you bothered turning up? You won't take a leg off me.' Eric's banter broke him.

"Another time, I was sitting there with Eric and Bobby George. Bobby was known as one of the worst counters on the circuit and Eric kept nudging me and saying: 'Ask Bobby how to take out 138? I bet he doesn't know.'

"I asked Bobby and he said: 'When you're as good as he is, you can talk to me, but until then, shut up.'

"I went to see Eric at an exhibition in Sleaford once. Lincolnshire were the top County team at the time – and Eric beat all their top players.

"He wanted to take us for something to eat afterwards and we walked into a Chinese restaurant. The owner came running out from the back saying: 'We're closed, we're closed ... Oh, Eric Bristow, sit wherever you like.'"

In the days of three and four television channels, Bristow was as famous as any British sportsman, up there with Olympic runner Sebastian Coe and heavyweight boxer Frank Bruno, and was happy to take a swipe at his countrymen when they didn't live up to the nation's lofty expectations.

"Other British sportsmen can learn from me," he said after winning the World Championship in 1986. "I don't want to put on a jolly good show. I want to stuff the other guy."

Without Bristow, darts may not be the sport it is today.

"I was born at the right time," he admitted. "I was a freak, the only young player when darts took off in the 1970s. My dad bought me a dartboard for my 11th birthday and I became intrigued by the game.

“I thrashed all my mates, but I didn’t realise how good I was until my dad took me down the local pub in Stoke Newington one Sunday when I was 14. I stayed on all afternoon and went home with pockets full of change. At that age, you either take to something or you don’t, don’t you?”

The BDO put him No 1 in their world rankings on January 1, 1980 and he stayed there until 1987, when Bob Anderson replaced him.

Bristow would later be Anderson’s best man at his wedding.

Bristow once said boxing legend Muhammad Ali was “the only bloke I ever looked up to” and they both had the charisma and ability to draw in an audience beyond their sport’s hardcore following.

Patrick Chaplin – known as Dr Darts – wrote: “Darts by its very nature is a repetitive sport and in those early days of the new era of darts, it needed some players that would hold the fans’ attention. Bristow was such a player.”

Peter Arnold wrote that Bristow was “one of the quickest calculators in the game, never at a loss as to his next shot, and he loves to produce the flamboyant unexpected checkout on a large number.”

Bristow also hated losing.

He had told Keith Deller after losing the 1983 final in a huge upset: “Enjoy it. You’ll only have it for a year.”

Bristow had it for the next three.

He dropped only one set when winning the 1984 championship, dodged a match dart in the first round to lift the trophy again 12 months later and his put-downs were as sharp as his darts at the 1986 World Championship, the first to be played at the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green.

He said after beating Welshman Alan Evans and Malcolm Davies: “Now the fun starts. We get rid of the rubbish in the first two rounds.”

Peter Locke became the third Welshman to exit at Bristow’s hands in the quarter-finals and the winner quipped: “It’s a pity Alan and

Malcolm didn't wait – then the Welsh lads could have all gone home in the same car.”

Alan Glazier – the left-handed ‘Ton Machine’ – pushed Bristow 5-3 in the semi-finals before a more one-sided final.

Bristow had won 10 of his 11 previous matches against Dave Whitcombe, including a 7-1 thumping in the 1984 World Championship final.

Bristow hammered Whitcombe 6-0 and his fifth World Championship in total would prove to be his last. “If you had told me then I wouldn't win another world title I'd have laughed at you,” he said years later.

There were signs of the darditis that would cut short his career at the following year's World Championship. Though he struggled to release his darts, Bristow was still good enough to reach the final, losing to Lowe.

Knowing his days at the top were coming to an end, Bristow set out to find his successor and one day, Phil Taylor walked into ‘The Crafty Cockney’ pub that he owned in Stoke-on-Trent.

Bristow's sponsorship enabled Taylor to throw darts full-time – and helped turn him into a 16-time world champion.

Bristow's advice included: “Bash them when they play well and it hurts them. Next time they play you, they think their best game isn't going to be good enough.”

He said: “We like winning, that's what I drilled into him [Taylor]. Nobody remembers the runner-up.”

The torch was passed from master to pupil after the 1990 World Championship when Taylor thumped Bristow 6-1.

By then, Bristow was well in decline, but from nowhere, he rediscovered something like his best form for the 1997 PDC World Championship.

He reached the semi-finals – where he met Taylor.

The crowd at the Circus Tavern willed Bristow on to turn back the clock and he took Taylor to a deciding ninth set before losing.

“You’ve heard of Custer’s last stand? That was Bristow’s last stand,” he said later.

That proved to be Bristow’s last match at the World Championship.

He entered the qualifiers in 2009 and was brutally honest about his opposition. He said: “There’s only Phil and Barney [Ray van Barneveld] out there really. There’s nobody else for me to worry about.

“The rest of them will fold if you get a lead against them and they won’t want to play me.”

Bristow didn’t qualify.

In his absence, Taylor won a 14th World Championship at Alexandra Palace.

In the final, he walloped Barneveld 7-1 – despite a 101.50 average from the Dutchman.

Taylor always accepted he owed Bristow so much, but their relationship was up and down.

During one PDC World Championship, Bristow accused Taylor of being unable to count.

But that was Bristow, who, incidentally, was regarded as one of the game’s best counters. He was the same with reporters and promoters. When you interviewed Bristow or booked him for an exhibition, you simply didn’t know what you were going to get. He could be utterly charming – or downright rude. Bristow, you sensed, liked to keep you guessing.

He was popular on the exhibition circuit until the end and though the dartsitis that cut short his career at the highest level had long since forced him to reinvent his throw, Bristow could still play.

His favourite trick was dropping to his knees and hitting his doubles.

Double 16, as anyone who grew up in the 1980s would know, was always his favourite.

Bristow’s death severed another link to darts’ golden age.

We grew up with Sid Waddell, Jim Bowen, Dave Lanning, Jocky Wilson – and Bristow.

They are all gone now.

Bristow regarded himself as “the first nutter of darts” – and his former manager put it another way.

Bristow, reckoned Dick Allix, was “an arrogant, irresponsible genius”.

THE SHOWMEN

NOT EVERY darts player spends as much time in front of the mirror as Jocky Wilson.

For Bobby George, image was everything and understated a dirty word.

He wore sequinned shirts and capes, carried a candelabra and when he finally got to the oche, pulled his darts across a handsome face tanned by hours working on building sites and a few more spent under a sun bed.

“Perhaps I am more about glitter and gold than winning darts matches,” he wrote in his autobiography *Bobby Dazzler*.

Bobby always glittered and was involved in some golden moments – including a comeback that is surely the best ever seen in darts.

Six years after his previous appearance at the BDO World Championships and with darts’ bitter break-up well underway, George, beaten by Eric Bristow in the final in 1980, was tempted out of retirement to enter the qualifiers for the BDO World Championship in 1993.

He got through them to book a return to the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green and said before his first-round match against No 7 seed Keith Sullivan that he feared he would embarrass himself. George was so desperate to avoid attention and possible embarrassment that he wore a sparkling gold shirt for the occasion!

All the support was with Bobby and after he won 3-1, he told the watching millions: “Elvis ain’t dead after all!”

Incredibly, he went on to reach the semi-finals before losing to John Lowe and his run to the last four meant George would be heading back to Frimley Green for the 1994 World Championship.

Wins over Russell Stewart and Phillips again took him through to a quarter-final against Kevin Kenny. After Bobby nailed double four to lead 2-0 in sets, he jumped in the air to celebrate and in his own words, “I come down wrong.”

Kenny heard a click and asked: “Has your back gone?”

Bobby was in excruciating pain, yet somehow held it together and won the match 4-2. But his World Championship appeared to be over. "You can't play darts," the doctor told him. "You shouldn't even be able to walk. You've broken your back."

Bobby was a showman, though (it says so at the start of this chapter, remember) and as he knew, the show must go on. So he got a corset made – "I couldn't get one with sequins," he chuckled – that meant his semi-final against Magnus Caris from Sweden could go ahead.

There was some unfinished business between them.

George's defeat against Caris in the 1988 qualifiers sent him into semi-retirement.

George won the opening two sets, but at 4-2 down it looked all over for him. "The Swede is really boiling," reckoned commentator Tony Green after he took the sixth set and after two legs of the seventh, Caris was on the brink of the final.

He took aim at 141 and after treble 20 and treble 15 flew in, George admitted: "I thought, 'I'm going home.'" Caris missed the double 18 for the match, though, and never recovered.

George took the set to a deciding leg and nailed double 16 with his last dart to complete a 41 finish with Caris waiting on 32 for the match.

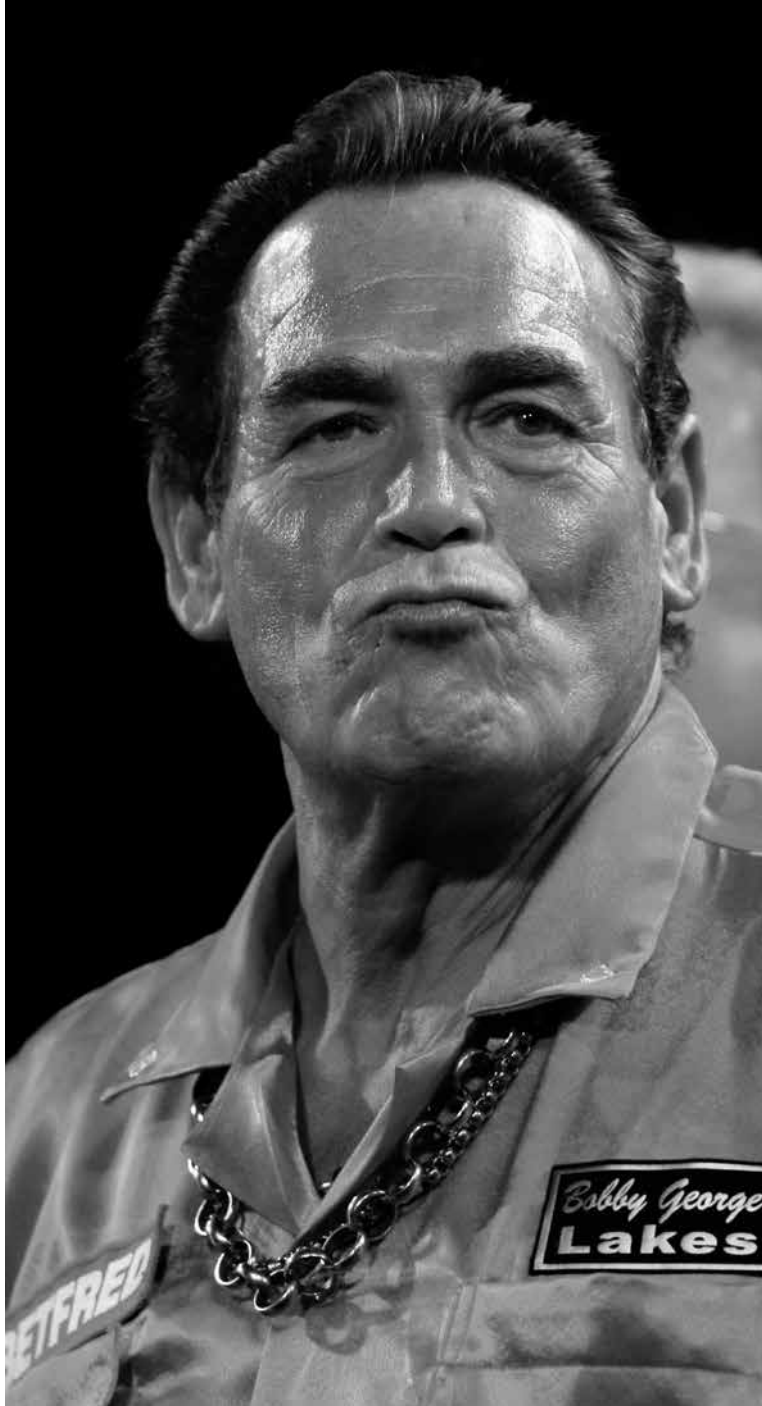
That got it back to 4-3 and talking away to himself in between darts while the crowd screamed and gasped, Bobby romped through the eighth set without dropping a leg to level the match at 4-4 and force a decider.

The momentum was with George and three legs later – and nine legs after Caris missed that dart at double 18 to win the match – it was all over and Bobby was through to his second World Championship final.

There he met John Part and how much his back trouble had to do with it is a moot point, but George simply couldn't hit his doubles.

Well, he hit five of them, but another 44 landed wide of their target and Part whitewashed him to become the first overseas winner of the BDO World Championship.

THAT WAS CLOSE: BOBBY GEORGE JUST MISSES OUT



The extent of George's back injury was revealed a few weeks later when he underwent major surgery and had eight titanium screws inserted into the base of his spine.

In 1999, Bobby got a job as a pundit during BBC television's coverage of the BDO World Championships and ever since has dispensed his wit and wisdom in a gravelly East End accent, leaving his audience occasionally bemused and always entertained.

"Painter didn't play well early on," he said once. "He was up and down like a paint brush."

On the subject of whether darts is a sport, Bobby offered: "Is ballroom dancing a sport? It's recognised as a sport, but I don't see any balls there."

George was all about glitter and gold, while Rod Harrington was the dashing dandy of darts. Known as 'The Prince of Style', he wore a waistcoat, a tie and a snarl and chucked and chewed his way to the top of the world rankings with both the BDO and PDC.

Not bad for someone who only took up darts when he was 30 years old.

Good enough at football to be on Southend United's books – there was also an offer from Queens Park Rangers that was turned down because his mum wanted him to stay living at home – Rod went on to be a roofer after a clash of personalities led to him leaving Southend.

The job he got fixing the roof of the sports and social club in Boreham changed his life.

Rod and wife Dawn ended up running the club and as well as putting on functions, they set up a darts team that Rod joined. "I hadn't picked up a set of darts for years," he remembered.

Harrington was good, but not as good as Kevin Painter according to a friend of 'The Artist' who walked into the sports and social club one night. Harrington felt the glove smack him around the chops and piped up: "Tell him to come here next month and I will play him for £500."

The following month, Painter turned up and a couple of hours later, left with £500 less in his wallet. "We became great mates after that," remembers Rod. "We practised together and made it fun."

More success followed for Harrington in between roofing work – including a job fixing the roof of Paul Durrant from Durro Darts. Durrant was flicking through the sports pages of the *News of the World* newspaper and came across a familiar name. "Is that you?" he asked Harrington after reading of his success at the John Bull Masters.

Harrington confirmed it was and suitably impressed, Durrant became a sponsor. Rod repaid him by winning the Cockney Classic and the BDO World Masters in 1991 with a win over Phil Taylor in the final.

He was ranked No 1 by the BDO when he decided to make the switch to the rival WDC. On his arrival for his first event, Master of Ceremonies Phil Jones took a look at Harrington and dubbed him 'Prince of Style'.

"I had never worn jeans before in my life," remembered Rod. "They made me feel scruffy. I've always tried to look smart. I thought looking the part would help me get work that other darts players wouldn't get."

Harrington saved his best performances for the World Matchplay in Blackpool and in 1998, came up with a checkout that nestles just below Keith Deller's 138 in the 1983 World Championship final in most lists of best-ever darts finishes.

It turned the final against 'Rocket' Ronnie Baxter his way.

At the time, Ronnie was also playing with on the BDO circuit – he would be throwing his darts in their World Championship a few months later – and such was the feeling following the sport's split, Harrington and the other WDC 'rebels' were rooting against 'Rocket' Ronnie. Until that is, Baxter came up against Taylor in the quarter-finals and then Harrington switched his allegiance. "I fancied playing Ronnie rather than Phil," admitted Harrington and he got his wish in the final.

The final was the best of 37 legs and Baxter was just 40 points away from an 18-14 lead when Harrington targeted a 125 checkout.

His first dart landed in treble 15 and left 80. Ever the showman, Harrington stuck his next dart in one corner of double top and his last dart in the other. The match was effectively his. Harrington won the next four legs and with it, the match and the title.

The following year, he was at it again. Harrington got through to the final to face Peter Manley and again, it was a breathtaking battle of skill, will and nerve. As he had done 12 months earlier, Harrington proved to have just that bit more than his opponent and with the final heading for a tie-break, Harrington took out 136 to win the match 19-17.

Among Harrington's other contributions to darts was the exclusion zone on stage. There was needle before he squared up to Keith Deller in the first round of the PDC World Championship in December, 2001. As Harrington remembers it, Deller had talcum powder on his hands before the game and slapped a mitt on Harrington's shoulder in a good luck gesture that left an imprint on Rod's shirt.

Harrington was fuming and refused to start the match until he had been given a wet cloth to clean his shirt. Rod would have his revenge. "The first time I trod on his heel was an accident," he said as he explained that he had caught Deller dawdling. "The next three times I did it, it wasn't an accident.

"I remember looking round to see if anybody had noticed. I thought I might get away with it."

He didn't. The officials noticed and introduced an exclusion zone that players were banned from entering while their opponent was throwing.

By then, Harrington's form had dipped following operations on both knees after suffering a ruptured thigh muscle during a charity football match.

He remembered: "After the operation, I would practise for three hours and not walk for two days."

That was obviously a hammer blow and another followed in 2003 when a change to the way ranking points were dished out meant

'The Prince of Style' missed out on qualifying for the World Matchplay in Blackpool.

Harrington, it's fair to say, was not happy.

After getting legal advice, he headed to see new PDC chairman Barry Hearn and admitted: "I was in the mood to hit him." Rod made his intentions clear and Hearn laughed: "It would be like a couple of grannies hitting each other" and then added: "You can't throw darts any more anyway."

That didn't improve Harrington's mood much, but then came the offer to become a director of the PDC with the promise that as the organisation grew, so would his role. That cooled Harrington down. He accepted the job offer and also gives out advice to players in private and in public in his role as summariser for Sky Sports.

"I always try to do the right thing for the players," said Rod. "I say things to upset them if I think it will motivate them."

Always well turned out for his television work, Harrington could still direct you to the nearest tailors, Bobby George is surely on good terms with every jeweller in Essex and Steve Beaton is the man to ask about hair-care products in the Midlands.

Beaton is the housewives' choice. Always suntanned, his walk-on music is The Bee Gees' 'Staying Alive', he has a hairdon't straight out of a 1980s porn flick and tufts of curly chest hair peep over the top of the several buttons that are intentionally left undone on his brightly coloured shirt.

His nicknames reflect his look. 'Magnum PI' is in reference to his likeness to pin-up actor Tom Selleck and then there is 'The Adonis from Leamington Spa'. These are good nicknames to have. Beaton's throwing style is also easy on the eye and it took him all the way to the BDO World Championship in 1996.

Like Harrington, Beaton pulled off flashy finishes when he needed them.

The previous two years, he had gone into the BDO World Championship as the No 1 seed and lost in the first round. To relieve the pressure, he spent two weeks on a beach in Tenerife

before heading to Frimley Green in January, 1996 – and it all ended in tears again. This time they were tears of joy, though.

After beating Co Stompe (3-0), John Part (3-0) and Martin Adams (4-1), Beaton dumped out Andy Fordham in the semi-finals with the help of a spectacular checkout of 115 on bullseye, 15, bullseye. Beaton wrapped up victory with a 104 finish that sent him through to the final and a match against defending champion Richie Burnett.

The Welshman was unbeaten in the tournament having won the title the previous year at the first attempt and soon realised he was going to face a battle to hang on to his prize. They swapped 180s in the opening leg and Beaton went on to win it against the throw in 12 darts before firing in finishes of 124, 118 and 115 on the way to opening up a 3-1 lead.

Burnett battled back and the boxing fan punched the air after grabbing the opening leg of the seventh set to lead the match for the first time.

He couldn't keep it up. The next nine legs all went to Beaton – he slotted in doubles and as the pressure built, Burnett started to miss singles – and the World Championship was won.

Beaton wiped away tears of joy, and so did wife Nanette.

Even though he reached the semi-finals the following year – losing out to Marshall James – Beaton reckons the night he conquered the world was the night his problems started.

“All I had ever wanted to do was win the World Championship,” he said. “I had watched it on television for years when I was a kid and winning that title was the only goal I ever set myself. It's hard to find new goals when you have achieved all you ever wanted to achieve.”

Not only did his form suffer, so did his health.

As the world champion, a pin-up and a likeable character, Beaton was in demand on the exhibition circuit and that meant many nights were spent in pubs and clubs puffing away on cigarettes. “I was getting through 50 a day,” confessed Beaton – until his doctor

gave him an ultimatum. He had to give up smoking – before it was too late.

So he gave up.

Although Beaton has never quite reproduced the form that took him to the World Championship and has lopped off his famous mullet, he hasn't been hair today, gone tomorrow. He has remained a consistent performer on the PDC circuit despite suffering with back injuries caused by working as a driving instructor and hitting a golf ball too hard.

TOP 10 – BEST PLAYERS

Rating the greats

1. **PHIL TAYLOR** – Look at the records section at the back of this book if you need to know why ‘The Power’ is at the top. He won an astonishing 16 world titles between 1990 and 2013 and according to television commentator Dave Lanning, he “mastered” darts, and you can’t do much more than that.
2. **ERIC BRISTOW** – By the time he was 14 years old, Bristow was good enough to beat the locals at the Arundel Arms in Stoke Newington and he went on to win five world titles, appear in five more finals and be awarded an MBE. During that ceremony, Bristow corrected himself for a breach of protocol by saying to the Queen: “Sorry darling.” Also groomed the one player above him in this list. The sport’s most recognisable character, along with Taylor.
3. **MICHAEL VAN GERWEN** – At his peak, MVG was possibly the most watchable sportsman in the world. He was so fast and just about unbeatable. World champion in 2014, 2017 and 2019 when the standard was sky high, he averaged an astonishing 123.40 against Michael Smith in the 2016 Premier League in Aberdeen.
4. **RAY VAN BARNEVELD** – Winner of five world titles and responsible for darts being huge in Holland. Made the switch from the BDO to the PDC and in 2007, he stunned ‘The Power’ in one of the greatest world finals of them all. ‘Barney’ has “the smoothest, most natural throw” in the sport according to Sky Sports’ expert and former world No 1 Rod Harrington.
5. **GARY ANDERSON** – Was 24 when he threw his first darts in a pub. “I just picked up a set of darts. My first three throws were 140, 140 and 180 and I thought: ‘This is easy.’” Anderson was crowned 2015 world champion after a titanic final against Phil Taylor and 12 months later he went in the record books alongside Eric Bristow, Ray van Barneveld and Adrian Lewis as players who successfully defended their first world title.

GET IN THERE ... MORE FOR PHIL 'THE POWER' TAYLOR TO CELEBRATE



6. LUKE LITTLER – The teenager who got the whole world talking about darts. ‘The Nuke’ came from nowhere to reach the 2024 World Championship final aged only 16 years, 347 days. He did it his way as well, taking out unconventional finishes. Littler proved it wasn’t a fluke by winning just about everything in the next 12 months and then lifting the 2025 World Championship.
7. PETER WRIGHT – “He dresses like a clown,” said Wayne Mardle, “but he throws darts like a genius sometimes.” Inspired by his favourite American wrestlers and with the help of wife Joanne, a hairdresser, Wright was one of the most colourful throwers and he really could throw. Wright won the World Championship in 2020 and 2022.
8. JOHN LOWE – Three world titles in three different decades – and no blinking. The legacy of ‘Old Stoneface’. All sports need rivalries and Lowe v Bristow was one of the best.
9. JOCKY WILSON – Never read a book about how to play darts, never had to. Eric Bristow remembered: “You would stand behind him and think: ‘How did that go in?’” Two world titles seven years apart, an appearance on *Top of the Pops*, a darts legend.
10. JOHN PART – Secured his place in the history books – and this book – by becoming the first overseas winner of a version of the World Championship when he whitewashed Bobby George in the 1994 BDO final. Ended Taylor’s eight-year unbeaten run in the PDC World Championship by winning the 2003 final and five years later, secured his third world title and became the first winner of the PDC event at Alexandra Palace.

DELLER IS THE FELLA

Everyone zoomed in on the bullseye.

The television cameras, the crowd ... everyone, in fact, apart from Eric Bristow.

He was looking elsewhere.

Bristow didn't get it wrong many times in his career, but he got it wrong when he gambled that Keith Deller would not take out the 138 he needed to win the 1983 BDO World Darts Championship final.

More of that later ...

So, who was this Keith Deller?

Ask anyone outside the sport's hardcore followers at the start of those championships and it's likely the response would have been a blank expression. Players around his home town, Ipswich, knew all about him, though, and so did everyone who entered the Hastings Open, Texas Open, Cleveland, Ohio Open and Suffolk Open in 1981 because he won the lot.

At the age of 12, Deller, who had shown promise as a piano player, started playing darts in the family kitchen under the watchful eye of his darts-loving parents Pam and Derek and when he was 17 years old, he was throwing his arrows at Alexandra Palace in the divisional final of the News of the World competition.

Deller went out in the first round and blamed his early exit on nerves. To qualify was an achievement, though, and leading women's player Linda Batten recognised that. She arranged a free trip to America for Deller – he came back with winnings of \$6,000 – and they would have five-hour practice sessions together that ended with a match to decide who cooked supper!

Keith qualified for the 1983 World Championship by winning the Los Angeles Singles – and unlike most of his rivals – and definitely Jocky Wilson – Deller didn't drink much. As he would later explain: "It's not about drink. It's about bottle."

Bristow had more bottle than most. There was also John Lowe, Wilson, Leighton Rees, but the man to beat in the world of thud, sweat and beers was Bristow.

Bristow threw his darts with the arrogance of someone who expected them to find their target – and for around a decade, they usually did.

He went into the 1983 World Championship as the red-hot favourite having twice lifted the trophy in the competition's five-year history, while at the same time polarising the darts public with his colourful 'Crafty Cockney' persona. At times, Bristow, with his sloping shoulders and a cigarette permanently dangling from his lips, looked as though he couldn't really be bothered with all this being the best darts player in the world nonsense.

In his pomp, Bristow said he tucked into "a couple of bowls of confidence for breakfast every morning" and he revelled in his role as the sport's anti-hero. He walked on stage at an exhibition in his pomp and said: "If you all hate Bristow clap your hands."

He turned up at Jollees Cabaret Club in Stoke-on-Trent in January, 1983 expecting to get his hands on darts' biggest prize again, while Deller must have been just glad to be there having qualified for the first time. Not that Keith was short of confidence after a successful couple of years. "You get used to being a winner," he would say later. "That's the important thing."

Deller won his first-round match 2-1 against Nicky Virachkul from America and then put out Les Capewell 3-1 to set up a quarter-final against world No 3 Lowe that went all the way to a seventh and deciding set that Deller won. Surely his run would be ended by Wilson, the defending champion and ranked the second-best flinger of darts on the planet? Again, Deller came through with an astonishing 5-3 victory that took him into the final to face Bristow.

Bristow had not had things all his own way in the early rounds of the championships – being taken to a deciding set by Peter Masson, then Dave Lee and Dave Whitcombe before finding an extra gear to batter Tony Brown 5-1 in the last four and set up a clash of personalities.