

Darts

Record viewing figures for Anderson's win show rapid growth of the sport

SEÁN INGLE

In the aftermath of his sensational victory over Phil Taylor in the PDC World Darts Championship at Alexandra Palace on Sunday, Gary Anderson announced his plans to celebrate by doing some DIY. "I'll be getting some sleep and then I'll get my tool belt on at home," he said, as he sipped from a celebratory cup of coffee.

"There's always something that needs doing around the house."

How darts has changed. While the sport in which this former builder currently plies his trade has never been in ruder health its promoter, Barry Hearn, has also made renovation and redesign a priority.

More than 20 years after the acrimonious split from which the PDC emerged to eclipse its ailing counterpart the BDO, a sell-out crowd of 2,500 attended this year's thrilling final, but Hearn insists that demand for tickets means more than 10 times that number could have been sold. This year's decider also attracted record viewing figures on Sky.

Tokyo tournament
A plan to increase the capacity for next year's finals by moving the tournament to one of Ally Pally's bigger halls has already been mooted, while a new tournament in Tokyo will showcase the sport's finest before a country with a population of more than 127 million potential fans.

Whether or not they are more reserved than their raucous, beer-sodden and imaginatively-attired British and Irish counterparts remains to be seen.

With the dominance of the 16-times world champion Phil Taylor having waned in recent years, the field has never been more open for professional darts players.

The nine major PDC events of the past calendar year produced six different winners, while total prize money for all their tournaments is closing in on almost £10 million. It is a figure Hearn believes he can "smash" sooner rather than later. "Now I am looking at £20 million," he said. "The perception of the game is changing globally. I believe darts is only

just beginning and there is another level to go." Having already revamped snooker and taken it to China, it doesn't take much imagination to figure out which market the PDC chairman sees as a source of potentially huge extra revenue.

£10m

Prize money for PDC events – and Barry Hearn says will 'smash' that figure soon

Despite no shortage of evidence to the contrary, the world of darts is no longer the exclusive domain of the lager-fuelled working-class bunter boy, bellowing at equally

hard-drinking fat men as they did battle for a first prize of around £10,000 in a smoke-filled Lakeside Country Club in the BDO World Championships, the first darts tournament to sear the public consciousness during the 1980s.

World Cup winner

In the wake of Anderson's victory against Taylor, the World Cup winner and Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos was among those to tweet his congratulations to the Scot.

Spectators are not the only people present who are fond of a drink, although competitors are no longer allowed to consume alcohol on stage and must adjourn to the players' lounge to down any liveners they might



Gary Anderson celebrates becoming World Champion

require to keep a steady hand. The impenetrable fog of ciga-

rette smoke that used to envelop the Lakeside stage has now been replaced by dry ice, while glamorous cheerleaders and walk-on girls are among the many bells and whistles Sky Sports have added to the gaiety of an evening at the arrows.

Meanwhile, having joined the Ashes series and Ryder Cup in being given an exclusive Sky Sports channel for the duration of its blue riband event, professional darts is a multimillion pound TV industry that is here to stay.

Its appeal is growing. Germany, Gibraltar, Holland, Austria, Japan and Ireland are among the countries where the PDC will be staging tournaments in 2015. Guardian Service

Cricket

Ireland confirm final 15 for World Cup

EMMET RIORDAN

Cricket Ireland have confirmed that the 15-man squad for next month's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand will be the same selection that have travelled to Dubai for the upcoming tri-series against Scotland and Afghanistan.

The selectors have rubber stamped the squad they named in December, passing on the list to the International Cricket Council a day ahead of the deadline.

The squad features nine players who took part in the 2011 World Cup and five survivors from Ireland's debut in the tournament in 2007, including William Porterfield, who will skipper the side for the second time in a 50-overs World Cup.

The other players to take part in the West Indies are Niall and Kevin O'Brien, John Mooney and Ed Joyce, who played for England eight years ago.

Middlesex batsman Andrew Balbirnie and tall Durham pace bowler Peter Chase both made a late run to make the squad following good showings on both the acclimatisation tour to Australia and New Zealand and the pre-Christmas trip to Dubai.

The other World Cup newcomers are Tim Murtagh, Craig Young, Stuart Thompson and Donemana off-spinner Andrew McBrine.

In the nets

Although pipped for selection by Chase, Max Sorensen is one of five seam bowlers that have travelled to Dubai where they will work in the nets with the World Cup squad.

Ireland internationals Graeme McCarter and Eddie Richardson, as well as the uncapped duo of Barry McCarthy and Tyrone Kane, have also made the trip.

Ireland coach Phil Simmons has yet to name any replacements for the World Cup, but the intention is to have a number of players based in Australia in the event of injury.

"We've got five extra seamers with the World Cup squad here in Dubai," said Simmons, who arrived with the Irish squad in the emirate on Sunday.

"It's our intention to have some additional players based in Australia to provide cover for the World Cup squad, and we'll finalise those arrangements in the coming weeks."

Ireland play the first of their four ODI matches against Afghanistan on Saturday, before facing Scotland on Monday. Their World Cup campaign begins on February 16th against the West Indies in Nelson, New Zealand.

World Cup squad and fixtures

William Porterfield (Warwickshire, capt), Andrew Balbirnie (Middlesex), Peter Chase (Melbourne), Alex Cusack (Clontarf), George Dockrell (Somerset), Ed Joyce (Sussex), Andrew McBrine (Donemana), John Mooney (North County), Tim Murtagh (Middlesex), Kevin O'Brien (Railway Union), Niall O'Brien (Leicestershire), Paul Stirling (Middlesex), Stuart Thompson (Eglington), Gary Wilson (Surrey), Craig Young (Bready).

World Cup fixtures

Feb 10th v Scotland (warm-up), Sydney
Feb 12th v Bangladesh (warm-up) Sydney
Feb 16th v West Indies, Nelson
Feb 25th v UAE, Brisbane
March 3rd v South Africa, Canberra
March 7th v Zimbabwe, Hobart
March 10th v India, Hamilton
March 15th v Pakistan, Adelaide
March 18th-21st - Quarter-finals
March 24th-26th - Semi-finals
March 29th - Final

Gaelic Games News

Boost for Laois as Quigley returns

Last year's New York captain training with panel ahead of 2015 season

EAMON DONOGHUE

Laois have been buoyed by the return of last year's New York senior football captain Brendan Quigley to their senior panel for the 2015 season.

The Timahoe club man left Ireland in August 2013 in search of work, criticising the hierarchy of the GAA for not doing more to help inter-county players find employment.

Talking about his departure the 2012 All Star nominee said that "there's no point being on a county panel and drawing social welfare".

Last autumn, though, he returned home, began building a house in his local Timahoe



Carlow's Brendan Murphy has returned to the county's football panel

area and, according to club and county officials, stated no intent to return to America.

The 28-year-old was ineligible to represent his club during the remainder of last year's championship having already played in the New York club football championship, instead he could only represent his club's hurlers.

Fully committed

Despite injury ruling him out of Laois' O'Byrne Cup opening defeat to Offaly at the weekend the county board have confirmed that he is currently training with the panel and fully committed for the year ahead.

Meanwhile, Carlow football has also been handed a major boost ahead of the 2015 season as talisman Brendan Murphy has returned to the county's senior panel.

The former Australian Rules footballer with the Sydney Swans club is a member of the defence forces and had opted out of the Carlow panel last

year as he was on a waiting list for a tour of duty in Lebanon and if selected would probably have departed sometime in May.

Yet having not been called up to the tour Murphy decided against returning to the Carlow fold for the championship.

The team fell to heavy defeats against both Meath and Clare in a disappointing campaign which drew manager Anthony Rainbow's tenure to a close.

County title

New manager Turlough O'Brien says that Murphy's "appetite is back now".

The twice selected Irish International Rules player did though return to his club Rathvilly and captained them to the county title from centre half back in October although he's more likely to return to his usual midfield role this year.

"He's probably not a centre back but it gave him the opportunity to develop his game more," explained O'Brien who is being assisted as manager this year by former Galway and Mayo manager John O'Mahony, who is working with the county in an advisory role.

Having since left the army Murphy is also now studying in and playing with Carlow IT which means he will remain unavailable for the county team during the O'Byrne Cup campaign.

There's been no such return-to-the-fold for Seanie Johnston in Cavan though, as three years after his controversial transfer to Kildare it's been confirmed that manager Terry Hyland has again opted not to include him in the county's current pre-season panel.

After some good club performances in winning the county championship with Cavan Gaels the Cavan manager had left the door open to a return, although such has not materialised and it now seems unlikely any return of sorts is on the cards this year.

O'Byrne Cup



Ryan sees light at end of winter tunnel as Kildare injury worries ease

Pre-season training rules means team has had less practice than others

Ryan eager to use tournament as platform to build for tough Division Two campaign

DARAGH Ó CONCHÚIR

As Wexford manager when the GAA introduced the winter training ban in 2010, Jason Ryan was one of the initiative's loudest critics.

The rules regarding the commencement of pre-season training were amended subsequently to a staggered system based on how teams fared in the championship.

Ryan is now in his second season as Kildare manager. Though Kildare's summer aspirations ended in round four of the qualifiers, their December 8th resumption date for collective training means they have less work done than the other teams in their Bord na Móna O'Byrne Cup group - Louth, Carlow and Sigerson Cup fan-

cies UCD.

However, it proved no issue as the hosts trounced Louth by 12 points in Newbridge on Sunday, and with two more home games - in Athy against Carlow Wednesday night and back at St Conleth's Park against UCD on Sunday - Ryan is glad of the opportunity to see his players in some sort of competitive action.

Kildare have won the pre-season competition 11 times and are three clear of Meath in the roll of honour, having won three out of the last four renewals.

Ready to roll

And Ryan is more than happy to go as far as he can again this year in a bid to be ready for a challenging Division Two Alli-

anz League campaign, which begins with the visit to Down in Newbridge on February 1st.

"You don't know what you're against at this stage of the year," says the Waterford native. "A number of the teams we're going to be playing, they've had more time on the pitch in preparation for the games. Collectively, we weren't able to go on the pitch until after December 8th, so we're a little bit off."

"We've a big enough squad to be able to change an awful lot of the players for Wednesday night, and after that we'll be able to assess where we stand

“There's guys who haven't been able to play for a number of years. They're back

for the UCD game next weekend.

"Players like playing, not necessarily training, and they'll be delighted that there's games coming thick and fast at this stage of the year. Our aim is to

be in a position to be playing the following week in the semi-final.

"We want competitive games in January, which is the best possible preparation we can have for Down and Meath, the first two National League games."

Pushing Tomás

Throughout Sunday's game, Ryan could be heard encouraging supreme ball-winner Tomás O'Connor to take on his direct marker more often than he is accustomed to.

The Clane full-forward showed the potential with a brilliant solo goal, closely followed by a rare kicked point from play.

That pleased management, as did scoring 1-16 and not offering up any goalscoring chances. But it was the easing of a dire injury situation that has the Kildare supreme feeling optimistic.

"To see Fionn Dowling, who has had a real misfortunate number of years with injuries, finishing the game and looking dangerous every time he got on the ball - he made some out-

Kildare manager Jason Ryan: 'A number of the teams we're going to be playing have had more time on the pitch in preparation for the games.'

PHOTOGRAPH: ©INPHO/JAMES CROMBIE

standing runs. Eamonn Callaghan... I think it's the first time he has played in January in three or four years.

"The same with Hugh Lynch starting a game in January. Hugh's been plagued with injuries for a number of years, so it's terrific having those guys."

Peter Kelly has been "really excited over the last few weeks. All his injuries are behind him. Ciarán Fitzpatrick missed all the National League last year with injury as well. So there's guys who haven't been able to play for a number of years and missed huge chunks of preparation, training and pre-season. They're back now and able to do it."

"And thankfully, Cathal McNally, Keith Cribbin, Paul Cribbin, Alan Smith and Fergal Conway aren't a million miles away either from being back in action."

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