

dartsplanet



REVIEW

PRICE IS RIGHT IN SALZBURG

Gerwyn Price has a hot streak in September, as he clinches the World Series of Darts Finals to add to his two Autumn Series titles.

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Devon Petersen wins a maiden PDC ranking title in some style, winning the second Euro Tour event in Hildesheim, Germany.

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'The Bronzed Adonis' talks exclusively to Andrew Sinclair about his career longevity, and his famous 1996 Embassy World Championship triumph.

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We catch up with the Aussie ace, who talks about his recent success in the Autumn Series, as well as his plans to become a PDC mainstay.

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We get the latest on the County Darts revolution from UKDA Chairman, Colin Savage, who outlines the organisation's plans for the future.

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The Development Tour comes to a close in Barnsley, with Tour Cards and World Championships awarded, and the finalists of the 2020 World Youth Championships identified.

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LATEST NEWS

RAYMOND VAN BARNEVELD SET FOR SHOCK RETURN TO PROFESSIONAL SCENE



Photo Credit: PDC

Five-time world champion Raymond Van Barneveld will make a shock return to the professional scene next year as he attempts to reclaim his PDC tour card at Qualifying School.

Van Barneveld, who relinquished his tour card following an early World Championship departure in December, will participate in January's Q School for the first time in the hope of making a full-time professional return.

The Dutchman's last televised appearance came at Alexandra Palace, with American Darin Young stunning the doyen of Dutch darts in a sizeable opening round upset.

Beforehand, Van Barneveld endured a deeply disappointing farewell season, failing to qualify for both the World Matchplay and the World Grand Prix as well as suffering elimination from the Premier League.

November's Players Championship Finals saw him reach his last televised quarter-final, in which he saw off Nathan Aspinall, Glen Durrant and Joe Cullen.

The 53-year-old will be setting his sights on the sport's biggest stages once again as he heads to the gruelling, intense Q School after receiving a lucrative sponsorship deal from former manager Ben de Kok.

"It's very simple. I miss it. I miss it terribly," Van Barneveld explained to RTL News. "I think the decision [to retire] was the right one, but I have now had a lot of time to think about it. Then I realised I miss it terribly.

"I now have a unique opportunity to realise my dream and to work in a team. I think that is the solution for me. Because I haven't been myself for the past two or three years, you don't always make the right decisions.

"Your head is haunted and you're a nightmare for everyone, but that's different now. I'm looking forward to it. I signed for three years, so we have the chance to at least get a tour card for three years. If I want to get my tour card, I will have to do my best."

Hundreds of professional hopefuls head to the respective Q Schools annually in order to compete in an arduous four days of competitive action.

Three-time BDO world champion Glen Durrant is the most esteemed name to attempt the four-day spectacle in recent years, winning through by the skin of his teeth in Wigan.

Van Barneveld will presumably enter the doors of European Q School, usually held at Halle 39 in Hildesheim, come early January as he brings his retirement to a halt.

WORDS: BEN HUDD

WARD TO STEP DOWN FROM PDC TOUR AT THE END OF THE SEASON

Promising youngster Harry Ward will hand over his professional tour card at the culmination of the season, just over a year after securing his maiden ranking title in fairytale fashion.

Ward, a 23-year-old bricklayer from Swadlincote, claimed his debut tour card in January of last year and has since progressed into the world's top 64.

The Derbyshire darter defeated the likes of Jose de Sousa, world number four Michael Smith and former UK Open champion Nathan Aspinall, before beating Max Hopp in the final to win Players Championship 16 last May.

Four months beforehand, Ward won through Qualifying School in Wigan alongside his management stablemate Jamie Hughes, recording a remarkable 103 average in


 A portrait of Damon Heta, a professional darts player, wearing glasses and a dark shirt. Behind him is a red dartboard with a 'unicorn' logo and a PDC logo. The background is dark and slightly out of focus.

MAN ON FIRE

DAMON HETA INTERVIEW | WORDS: PAUL MASON

Darts in Australia and New Zealand has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years, and one player in particular that has come out of the pack to score impressive success is Perth's Damon Heta.

Heta has long been a serial winner on the DPA circuit, and he backed up his ever growing reputation last August with a ground breaking win in the Brisbane Darts Masters as part of the World Series of Darts to announce himself to the wider world of the sport. As a non PDC Tour Card holder, Heta defeated James Wade, Gary Anderson and his compatriot, Simon Whitlock, before a magical 8-7 success against Rob Cross scooped the title and the £20,000 first prize. The week before the event came another significant win for Heta, as he beat the likes of Jim Williams and Scott Mitchell on the way to winning the inaugural DFA Australian Open. This gave 'The Heat' a much needed confidence boost to take to Brisbane. For Heta, this was the perfect reward for taking up the sport more seriously from 2018, with darts in the blood.

"Both of my parents played darts when I was younger, and we had a dart board set up at home" said Heta.

"They needed me to fill in one night for their local dart league when I was around 15. I use to play winter darts and then put my darts down for the remaining six months. I played locally, and I have also represented my state and Australia, and I qualified for a few of the World Series, however, I didn't take darts seriously until 2018, as prior to this I was happy with working and setting my life up".

"I was confident going into Brisbane as I had won the Australian Open the weekend before beating Jim Williams in the Semis and Scott Mitchell in the final and I had a really good year on the DPA circuit".

"I just took each game as it came and knew that I was

playing well and I had what it took to win".

The win over Cross meant that Heta became the first non Tour Card holder to win a World Series event, and only the second non Tour Card holder to win a PDC televised title after Scott Waites 2010 Grand Slam triumph. He appeared in two more World Series events, as well as the World Series Finals, but the balance between working, playing and travelling led to no further success. He did appear at Alexandra Palace as a DPA representative, and impressed in defeating Jose de Sousa 3-0 in the first round, before losing to Glen Durrant by the same scoreline in the last 64.

The clamour for Heta to give Q School a go in January 2020 was great though on the back of his stellar 2019, and he was encouraged to try his hand at the full PDC Tour by many, including Gary Anderson. A consistent display in Wigan over four days saw him finish fourth on the Order of Merit, which was more than enough to gain a coveted two year Tour Card.

"I made the decision in August 2018 after playing in the World Series that I wanted to come to England and give Q School a go. I committed to the DPA circuit for the full 12 months and worked to save as much money as we could to set ourselves up for when we came over".

"I came over to England in November to set myself up before playing in the World Championships and going to Q-School. I brought a car, rented a flat etc".

"It was tough with working and playing darts. I am a roofer by trade so I would work 12-hour days Monday to Thursday, fly to the east coast Friday morning (Perth to the east coast is around a 5 hour flight) I would then usually have to drive a few hours to the venue which would usually only leave me an 1-2 hours before I had to play. I would play the one tournament on the Friday and then two more on the Saturday which, if I was in the final, I would be playing from 9am to often midnight, and then

FROM HONG KONG TO LIVERPOOL

HOW ASIAN TRAILBLAZER KAI FAN LEUNG HAS RELOCATED ACROSS THE WORLD IN ORDER TO PURSUE HIS DARTING DREAM

Once a passionate long-distance runner, Kai Fan Leung's original outlook on darts was a disparaging one. "I was quite reluctant to play darts in the beginning," Leung said. "I thought it was a stupid and boring game as I preferred more outdoor sports."

One of the Asian number one's earliest darting memories involves a soft darts final between Stephen Bunting and Royden Lam - two players who would subsequently prove crucial figures in his journey to the professional echelons.

"Royden introduced me to Q School. He opened my eyes to the professional elites in the darts world," an appreciative Leung said. Bunting has likewise provided much support towards him. "We now fly out to tournaments together," he added. "He's a wonderful person, very helpful and always cheers me up."

Despite now earning a living from the more renowned form of the sport, Hong Kong's Leung began his career playing soft-tip darts, similar to the majority of Asian players who have emerged onto the scene. In Hong Kong, most people start playing darts as soft-tip players because in bars, they only

have soft-tip machines to generate revenue as people would put coins in to play darts," Leung explained.

"After I started to play well in the soft-tip leagues, I was encouraged by some team members to play steel leagues too. I then started to enjoy playing and practising both soft-tip and steel-tip darts. Even though people always say the board is bigger, playing soft-tip games also trains you well to handle under pressure situations and access yourself to minimise errors".

"It's another mentality and form of training too - which helped my

steel-tip darts a bit. Of course, there's still a lot to learn in steel darts, the rhythm, the calculation too."

At the back end of 2015, Leung would shelve his stockbroker position of employment in order to pursue his darting dream. His audacious decision would arrive roughly a year prior to his first taste of professional darts.

"I thought 2017 was a brand new experience which I never had - which also shaped how I am today now," the Hongkonger added after appearing on television multiple times throughout the season.

"Royden would go to Q School in the January so I had the chance to go with him and play a bit at Q School, watching Royden come from behind to win his board final against Jose de Sousa, and managing to qualify for the UK Open in Minehead".

"I then represented Hong Kong in the World Cup of Darts, before winning the North East Asian Qualifier in Taiwan, and stepped onto the Ally Pally stage in December. It seems that all the good things and experiences happened three years ago, experiences I thought were unreachable before they actually happened".

"It was a brilliant PDC experience I had which was a lot of learning the foundations, observing and trying to understand what the players requirements or routines were - which led me over to where I am now."

His debut season on the professional scene would reach its climax with Leung making his Alexandra Palace debut. Asian darts legend Paul Lim, aged 63 at the time, stood in his way.

"I still recall the day when Paul won the East Asian Qualifier in Thailand," Leung revealed, "I was representing Hong Kong at the WDF World Cup in Japan.

"Me and my team manager were watching his live-stream. After he won, we were talking and he told me to win the North Asian spot. I was so happy to eventually qualify as well. Paul basically resides in Hong Kong now and has lived there for seven or eight years. He enlightened a lot of young and new players, especially me as well".

"We were planning to practise a bit with each other before the World Championship, until we found out the draw then we didn't actually practise together. It could be a good thing or a bad thing to play someone you know on the big stage, in the end it was a massive experience for me to play at Ally Pally. Later on that night, Paul won against Mark Webster with everyone chanting and shouting his name. It was massive.

"Since then, I think I played a lot and learned a lot from Paul as he represented Hong Kong now and again so we



Photo Credit: Kai Fan Leung



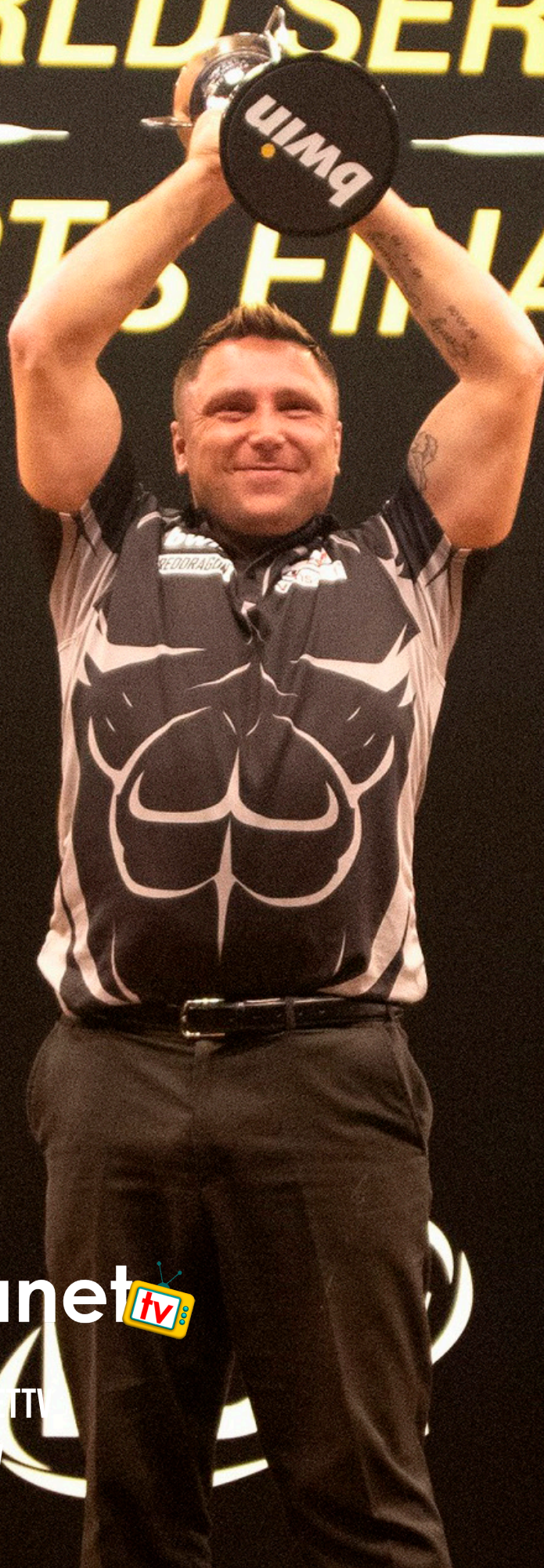
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