

dartsplanet

DUZZA DOES IT!

Glen Durrant lifts his maiden PDC TV title by winning the 2020 Unibet Premier League after eight months of play. Full Review -

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REVIEW

PDC WORLD GRAND PRIX

Gerwyn Price takes the top prize in Coventry, with the tournament held outside of Ireland for the first time in nearly 20 years. We talk to Dirk van Duijvenbode, who enjoyed a dream week by reaching the final.

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REVIEW

PDC EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Peter Wright secures his fifth title of 2020, with a dominant display in Germany, winning his first European Championship in Oberhausen.

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DAVID EVANS

The Challenge Tour came to an end, and Manchester's David Evans came through the pack to top the Order of Merit and secure a debut at the PDC World Championship. We talk to "Stretch" about his superb 2020.

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PDC WOMEN'S SERIES

We review the ground-breaking PDC Women's Series, where Lisa Ashton and Deta Hedman took the spoils. We chat to Deta, and Corrine Hammond, about their experiences in Barnsley and hopes for the future.

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PREMIER LEAGUE REVIEW

DAZZLING DUZZA WINS UNIBET PREMIER LEAGUE

After over eight months, and with the majority of the league phase played behind closed doors, the curtain finally came down on the 2020 Unibet Premier League, with Glen Durrant crowned the winner of the invitational event inside the Ricoh Arena, Coventry with a tense 11-8 win over the always passionate

Nathan Aspinall.

The man from Middlesbrough secured £250,000 and a place in the Boyle Sports Grand Slam of Darts as a result of his hard work over seventeen match nights, as he backed up his first placed finish in the league phase by taking the coveted pyramid trophy back to the North East.

Durrant had edged Gary Anderson 10-9 in the last four, while Aspinall overcame Peter Wright 10-7 to ensure two debutants would contest the final.

A 14 darter ensured Durrant took the first leg on throw, but Aspinall quickly levelled. With a lot on the line, the two were nervous, and they couldn't be separated at the break, with no breaks of throw in a 5-5 stalemate. A 100 finish kept a flat Aspinall going at 6-6 after 'Duzza' missed two darts at double for a break, but one missed dart at tops from 116 allowed Durrant to clean up 25 to edge ahead again. The break finally came in leg 14, when 'The Asp' missed five darts at double, and in stepped the three time BDO World Champion to move 8-6 up. The enormity of gaining the first break of the match affected Durrant though, but he went two away from the title with a superb 127 checkout after being a distant second in the leg. After a missed dart at the bull, Aspinall grittily took out 96 with his last dart to cling onto his throw, but had to watch Durrant go to the brink of the match with a 72 finish as the

contest got down to the business end. Nathan ensured Durrant would have to serve the match out as he closed to 10-8. An ice cool 180 kicked off the leg for the Teessider, and he saw four match darts go by with Aspinall in the rear view mirror, but it was fifth time lucky for the visibly emotional Durrant, as he nailed double 16 to clinch the title.

"I had a feeling that you can't play that badly twice. The game against Gary will probably go down as one of the worst in the Premier League, but I am feeling magnificent right now" said Durrant to Sky Sports post match.

"This is the one. I always said my first Lakeside win was incredible, but this supersedes everything. Tonight, I feel like the best player in the world, and I maybe never really felt that winning Lakeside etc. Coming over from the BDO, there was a lot of scrutiny on me".

"This is mammoth. It puts me in the Grand Slam and Premier League next year. I've been sat with Damon Heta a lot recently, and tonight, I'm stoked!!

SEMI FINALS

The first semi final saw the table topper Glen Durrant survive match darts, rallying from 9-7 down after being 6-3 up to defeat Gary Anderson 10-9 in a real war of attrition.

A nervy and scrappy opening leg saw Durrant hold in 23 darts, while Anderson levelled in 19 in what was a slow start. Seven missed darts at double were costly for the Scot, as 'Duzza' took a 3-1 lead. A first 180 was timely for Anderson in leg five, but Durrant missed double 18 for a 113 checkout to allow Gary to take out 56 to break straight back. The response was short lived though, when Durrant took out 74 after two more doubles from Anderson to level the match went begging, and extended his lead further before the two time PDC World Champion responded with a 124 checkout to reduce his arrears to 5-3. Both men were struggling, but Anderson kept his hopes alive at the break, with an 84 finish keeping him in touch at 6-4 down. On the resumption, a 120 finish brought 'Ando' within a leg of his opponent, and an 80 checkout gave him parity at 6-6. The pair traded legs before Anderson scored a crucial break of throw for 8-7, and back to back 180's put the Burnham on Sea native on the brink of victory. A magnificent 113 finish under pressure kept Durrant's hopes alive, and a nerveless 64 checkout after watching Anderson miss the bullseye, gave him the throw to advance to the final. A understandably shaky final leg went the way of the man from Middlesbrough, with Anderson missing three darts at double, and Durrant nailing double 10 to squeeze through with an 86.1 average.



EVANS STRETCHING FOR PDC STARDOM AFTER WINNING TOUR CARD



Photo Credit: Chris Sargeant, Tip Top Pics

For David Evans, a fair few years of sharpening his skills on the PDC Challenge Tour, coupled with strong showings on the BDO Tour, have finally paid off for the man from Manchester, as he finally gained a well earned two year PDC Tour Card, as well as a place in the 2021 PDC William Hill World Championship, by finishing top of the pile in the 2020 Challenge Tour Order of Merit.

It capped a year that has been full of hard work for "Stretch" despite all of the restrictions in playing due to the folding of the BDO, and the COVID-19 hit PDC Tour. Rather than wait for opportunities to come his way, he went and grabbed valuable practice against the elite, as part of the Modus Live League, and this paid off coming into the final Challenge Tour events in Barnsley. Evans was understandably proud of his achievements.

"It means the world to me to win a 2 year Tour Card, it's something that I've wanted since I started playing on the PDC Tour, and to be able to play against the top players for the next two years and hopefully further is amazing" said Evans.

"The experience I gained comes with playing many games against top players during lockdown in the Modus Icons of Darts Live league. Because when you are playing the likes of van Barneveld, Phil Taylor, Martin Adams and Paul Nicholson etc, who have that vast experience, then it did me the world of good to be able to compose myself and play to my ability".

"The large schedule of online play has had a massive

impact on where I am now because it gave me the confidence and experience to know that I can win challenge tour and tournaments. While I was on lockdown, I just practiced more because I was playing the online league and that was the best practice I could have. I was keeping active and fresh ready for when the PDC said that the Challenge Tour was to return".

The 30 year old swiftly rocketed up the Challenge Tour Order of Merit on the resumption of the series, as Evans clinched two titles on the weekend from a possible six, to ensure he ended top of the table, clinching his Tour Card and a maiden appearance at Alexandra Palace in December. It will be a surreal experience, with there likely to be little or no fans in attendance, but he is still excited by the prospect of getting a crack at the Sid Waddell Trophy.

"I am really excited to be able to play in the PDC World Championships, it's an honour to be walking out onto the Ally Pally stage. But also, to be part of a great line up for it, it's going to be an amazing experience. If there is to be no crowd at the World Championships, then that will be a shame because the atmosphere at the Ally Pally is always great, but with the current situation, it is better to be safe than sorry".

"It has been absolutely crazy since the Challenge Tour ended, I've not stopped, but it's the lifestyle that I wanted to be able to travel around the world playing the game that I love, it's a dream come true for me. My life has changed slightly, but that's only with knowing that I'll be getting to play against the best in the world. My life will obviously change going forward because of playing on the Pro Tour, but apart from that, I won't change as a person. I'll still be there for my friends and family always".

The good form for Evans carried on to the following week after his whirlwind weekend in Barnsley, as he made his PDC EuroTour debut at the European Darts Grand Prix in Sindelfingen, Germany, averaging over 100 in a 6-3 first round win over Kai Gotthardt, before giving a spirited display in bowing out by the same scoreline to Mensur Suljovic.

"I really enjoyed playing on the Euro Tour for the first time, and it was a very good experience that I can learn to get used to. The first game was a great game against a very good opponent in Kai Goddhardt. His 180 scoring was awesome but unfortunately his doubles let him down a bit which gave me the opportunity to take it. Averaging over 100 is always nice, but it's not about averages, it's about winning and that is the main thing.

"Mensur, as the world knows, is a very good player, and would not be in the top 16 in the world if he wasn't. I felt I held my own against him and proved to myself that

DON'T SLAM THE DOORS

MARK AIREY LOOKS INTO THE HISTORY OF THE GRAND SLAM, AND WHY IT'S A TOURNAMENT THAT DESERVES TO KEEP ITS STATUS, AND TO CONTINUE TO GROW THE GAME AWAY FROM THE PDC.



Photo Credit: Lawrence Lustig, PDC

With the demise of the BDO, does the Grand Slam of Darts now lack an identity? We drill down into one of the most unique TV tournaments around to find out.

When the Grand Slam of Darts arrives on our screen in mid-November, it always feels like we are right into the heart of "darts season" – the period between October and January when the TV tournaments come thick and fast, leading up to the two World Championships in the Christmas and New Year period. But the fact that we will be building up to crown just the one world champion this year reminds us that the darting landscape is looking a bit different this time around and permanently going forward too, which has big ramifications for the future of the Slam.

When the PDC announced the birth of this new and exciting tournament in early 2007, ears were instantly pricked at the prospect of both PDC and BDO players duking it out at a time of real conflict between the two rival organisations. This wasn't, however, the first tournament to offer this rare luxury to fans of the game. The Tomlin order decision of the late 1990's opened the door for BDO players to participate in PDC tournaments (that were not the World Championship) for a few years and the World Matchplay and World Grand Prix enjoyed this unique format briefly, before the door was firmly closed a few years later as the sparring between the powers that be continued unabated behind the scenes.

Into the mid noughties and the organisers of the Dutch broadcasted International Darts League and World Darts Trophy, originally tournaments for BDO players only, reacted to Barney's switch to the PDC in 2006 by opening the field to a mix of players from both sides of the divide. This decision was marred in controversy and resulted in several court cases between organisers, organisations and players, who were all fighting for their share of the proverbial pie. But for the neutral, these competitions gave a fresh feeling of unification at a turbulent time politically.

Along came Uncle Barry and not long after setting up the new and exciting Grand Slam, he soon announced that 2007 would be the last year that his PDC flock would be permitted to enter the IDL and WDT (or indeed any other non-PDC TV tournaments), another controversial decision that resulted in trips back to court for all involved. The long story short spelled the end of the two Dutch tournaments and the Grand Slam was left to run with the baton of Cross code darts for a long time to come.

It was a real shame from a supporter's perspective that politics denied more opportunities to see all the best players together in one place, but it did make the Slam even more exciting and unpredictable as a result. The anticipation amongst supporters has always felt a notch above any other competition (bar the Worlds) for this tournament for one reason and one reason only and that is without doubt the opportunity to see match ups that are simply impossible in any other competition on our screens, any other time of year. The addition of female participants along the way also offered something new and original to an ever improving recipe cooking away in the melting pot. The organisers provided the ingredients, the players served up the dishes and the bickering rival fans added some spice.

And the Slam did not fail to deliver over the years either in terms of shocks, surprises, drama and incidents as the group stage format, with its best of 9 quick fire round robin tussles, proving a winning formula. The second tournament in 2008 was given a brilliant warm up on the eve of the event with a Pro-Celebrity challenge as Steve Backley and James Wade defeated Phil Taylor and Neil Ruddock in a highly entertaining mini-tournament. It is hard to understand why this experiment was discontinued after only one year as

CAN "DIAMOND" FINALLY SHINE BRIGHT IN THE MAJORS?

Darts is a strange sport: one man (on his day) can look nigh on unbeatable in one setting, but in another setting, he consistently flatters to deceive. If Ian White is to truly reach his potential in the PDC he must start to perform to his level at major events on a consistent basis. If he does not, the World number 12 may look back at his career with regret.

In Players Championship events this year Ian White has netted an impressive £36,000 and lies 6th in the overall Players Championship Order of Merit. White has been regarded as "The World's best floor player" in the past, and his averages back that up. On the other hand, rather disappointingly, White has only picked up £25,000 in major TV events this year (excluding the 19/20 World Championships) despite TV events being worth much more overall than floor tournaments. White has also exited the PDC World Darts Championship at the first round stage twice in the last two years, and with a high amount of TV money weighted towards the World Championships he must find a way to progress in this event if he has aspirations of being a full-time resident of the world's top 8. In that respect, it is impressive that 'Diamond' still finds himself within the world's top 16 as the Order of Merit is heavily weighted towards major ranking TV events, especially major events such as the World Championship and The Matchplay. White needs to find a way to improve on the big stage if he is to reach his full potential. I am now going to take a closer look at White's averages in floor events compared to TV majors.

In order to have as fair an analysis as possible I have taken Ian White's 23 TV games (excluding the double start World Grand Prix) from 2019-2020 and his 66 matches in Players Championship events in 2020. Over his 23 TV appearances "Diamond" had a very respectable overall average of 96.37. Whilst this is fairly good, White must up his average to at least three figures to go deep in TV majors on a consistent basis. White has suffered quite a few defeats by slender margins over the last 18 months, and upping his average to around the 100 mark on a regular basis will give him the opportunity to reverse these close defeats and turn them into victories. Comparatively, White's floor average of 98.54 shows that he is more comfortable when playing on the floor. Staggeringly, the Stoke-On-Trent man has managed to average over the ton mark 26/66 on the Player's Champi-

onship series this year. That is a phenomenal achievement. Some may say that a difference of just above 2 points is negligible, but I disagree. Top players are always looking for that extra 1% to elevate their game to the next level, and the obvious improvement that can be made is to add to his lower overall TV average on a regular basis. If White can match or eclipse his overall Players Championship average of 98.54, he will be a legitimate threat at major events, and will have every chance of breaking into the world's top 8 in the near future.

Having had numerous opportunities to attend ProTour events behind closed doors, there is a certain aura and inevitability about White's work in the floor events. He constantly puts in big scores and takes out big outshots, and he's not a player you want to draw when you arrive in Barnsley or Wigan (other ProTour venues are available!).

I believe that Ian White is a massive danger to the rest of the field in any TV event he enters, but if he is to be remembered as a great player, he must start to produce under the pressure of a TV audience. Without this improvement, White will only be remembered for his ProTour exploits. As a man of his talents, he deserves to be remembered for far more. White definitely has the ability to win a major event, and by improving his average to around the 100 mark he will have every chance of doing this. Personally, I think White can break his major duck in the next 12-18 months by "winning" vital phases of play during games. If he can take the play away from his opponent, he has every chance of at least reaching a major final.

WORDS: RYAN NASSAU

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