

## **DARTERS FROM CANADA AND THE USA PLAY A FULL PART IN HARROWS BARBADOS DARTS FESTIVAL**

The contingent of darts players from Canada and the USA who participated in this year's Harrows Barbados Darts Festival in November really entered into the spirit of the event and performed with great credit both on and off the oche, winning a number of friends as well as claiming some of the prizes!

The number attending from the North American continent would have been even greater but four couples had to cancel at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. However, they have already indicated that they want to make up for it in 2016!

The participants enjoyed a delightful Caribbean cocktail of tournament darts, social darts and the opportunity to enjoy all that Barbados is justifiably famous for – the hospitality of its people, the clear, azure blue ocean, golden beaches, consistently warm climate and some stunning scenic memories.

Now in its 13<sup>th</sup> successful year, The Harrows Barbados Darts Festival has firmly established itself as the premier annual darts event in the Caribbean. The 60 strong party of visitors from the UK, Canada and the USA were joined for the major tournaments over the weekend of November 6 – 7 at the well-appointed and air conditioned Solidarity House by participants from Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, St. Lucia and the Cayman Islands.

However, in the days leading up to the major tournaments there were a number of social darts events that took place at The Sporting Pig – a venue just a short walk from the HQ hotel in St. Lawrence Gap hotel and timed to coincide with their "Happy Hour".

With a good working knowledge of the respective playing abilities of the participants, The Festival Director, Michael Heal, organised the teams in pairs to reflect their combined abilities and on the first night the North American players distinguished themselves.

In the men's pairs it was the team of Roy Baillie from Northern Ireland and Ron Lynk from Canada that prevailed, defeating the team of Eric Paquette from Canada ( celebrating his 36<sup>th</sup> birthday on the island ) and Nick Billington from the U.K in the final. In the ladies section it was Roy's wife Linda and her Canadian partner Judith Zappa who defeated the Anglo/Canadian pairing of Sarah Harper and Linda Pashleigh.

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In Friday's games at The Sporting Pig, the Canadian and American contingent were again well in evidence. This time the Anglo/Canadian team of Shereen Downs and Lori Earnshaw took the honours in the final with the all-Canadian pairing of Shelby Brushett and Linda Pashleigh the runner's up.

The mens competition saw the popular duo of Brit Alan Collins and Steven Repucci from Boston take the honours, defeating the pair of Sheraz Rasool from Trinidad and John Downs from the UK in the final.

Steven and Mary Lou Repucci are a couple who encapsulate the essence of the Festival. Steven will be the first to admit that his enthusiasm for the game is not always matched by his scores on the oche. However, they are regular attendees and Steve sums it up like this:

"As one of the few American dart players to have participated in several "Barbados Dart Festivals" I would like to take the opportunity to entice more American players to make tracks to this Caribbean destination and enjoy all the pleasures and darting excitement this Festival offers for dart players and just plain vacationers. Already looking forward to next year!"

The following Tuesday, after the major tournaments, it is customary for the Bajans to invite the tourists to the rustic A & T Hideaway and they play a "Blind Draw" doubles event and the victors here were Ron Lynk and Bajan Clyde Murrell.

On the final Thursday, at The Sporting Pig, the remaining tourists from the UK, Canada and the USA were joined by the Bajans and the Trinidadians and it was the pairing of Lynda Jones from Wales and John Downs who came out on top. Michael Heal was indebted to Patrick Dunham, Wendy Reader and Shereen Downs for their assistance in the organisation of these social darts events.

The major tournaments at the well appointed and air conditioned Solidarity House were keenly contested and the standard was higher than ever – with a good number of the games in the men's events being completed around the 15 dart mark – a standard that even the top professionals would be happy with!

Yet, here again the players from Canada and America were up for the contest. Terry Bonney from Portland, Oregon, and his partner Simon Thomas from the UK made it through to the quarter finals of the Gatorade Mens Pairs and were only defeated by the eventual winners, the UK team of Alan Collins and Gary Tipping.

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In the Gatorade Ladies Pairs the Canadian team of Judith Zappa and Cathy Matthews made it to the semi-finals and only went out to the eventual winners, the UK pairing of Wendy Reader and Joan Calvert.

Cathy Matthews also made it to the semi-finals of the Harrows Ladies Singles but lost out by 3 – 1 to the winner of the tournament, Barbadian Maureen Shepherd. Cathy was disappointed because she felt she had a chance to pull off a victory but her game fell away in the latter stages of the contest. Cathy's husband Pierre also impressed in all the events but found himself up against some high class opposition.

The Festival generates considerable media attention in Barbados with previews and tournament reports given ample space in both the country's newspapers and CBC TV filming both the mens and ladies finals. An edited highlights version with interviews with the winners was broadcast in their weekly sports slot on the Monday after the tournaments at Solidarity House.

But, as Festival Director, Michael Heal, points out:

"This Festival is not all about Darts! The itinerary is designed to enable darts players and their non-playing partners and friends to thoroughly enjoy a holiday in one of the most sought-after destinations on the planet. As Gary Tipping remarked to me ( before he won any of the tournaments! )  
"Who could not enjoy this?"

"All darts events and excursions are optional but we advise folk to take the opportunity to experience the catamaran cruise where you snorkel over reefs and a wreck and swim with the turtles and go on an Island Safari in Land Rovers to see aspects of Barbados that you are unlikely to see left to your own devices. There are plenty of other attractions too!

Festival Director Michael Heal is already preparing for the 2016 Festival but wants to ensure that it retains the character that has made it so popular – **namely a Darts Festival that caters for all, rather than a darts tournament dominated by the few.** "We have worked hard over these last 14 years to create an environment where all participants feel they have a role to play and enjoy taking part.

"And it is so easy now for participants to get to Barbados from Canada and the USA with regular direct economy flights from the eastern states of both countries. We can also offer accommodation with air conditioned rooms and continental breakfast at our designated hotels at less than \$100 US per night – that's only \$50 per person per night.

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“That we can offer this kind of package for darts festival attendees at such an attractive price is down to the support we get from sponsors such as the Tourism Development Corporation, Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. and commercial sponsors such as RMJ Agencies - the distributors of brands such as Harrows Darts, Gatorade, Appleton Rum and Frito Lay.

Andrew Lewis, CEO of RMJ Agencies, comments:

“We are delighted to be associated with an event of this calibre which not only provides an incentive to darts players in the region to raise their game but, in a wider context, introduces new tourists to Barbados - with the hope that they will continue to return to the island and also spread the good word to their darting circle.

“Participants simply book their own flights to coincide with the dates of the major tournaments at Solidarity House ( Nov 11 – 13 ) to give themselves about 8 – 10 nights in Barbados – longer if possible. They then book the type of room they require at the HQ hotel through Festival Director Michael Heal who has reserved a block of rooms for Darts Festival attendees.

The Barbados Darts Festival is open to darts players, both men and women of all standards, plus their family and friends. However, conditions for entry are that participants must book their hotel accommodation through the Festival Director and pay a registration fee of \$120 US per person for full participation and \$60 US for social participation at least one month prior to the Festival. The 2016 Festival takes place from November 6 – 16. All matters relating to the organisation and participation in the Barbados Darts Festival remain at the discretion of The Festival Director.

The 2016 Festival takes place from November 6 – 16.  
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