



3-18



The afternoon of Sunday 29th May saw Guernsey take on a UKDA Select side in an online challenge match, with the Guernsey contingent all based at the West Legion. It was sure to be a good test for the Green Army, with their opponents all having had many years' experience playing in similar matches within the old BDO County system.

The match would definitely give Guernsey an insight of things should they decide to enter the UKDA National League in future years, although were they to compete in that competition matches would take place over a full weekend rather than on one day as was the case here, with six Ladies B and twelve Men's B matches taking place on the Saturday, and the equivalent number of Ladies and Men's A matches on the Sunday.

All matches were played over the standard UKDA NL distances. The Men played over the best of seven legs, with the Ladies the best of five.

The results were as follows: (UKDA Players NL Teams in brackets)

Match 1: Tracy Ingrouille (12.32) 3-0 Lisa Dunford [Kent] (11.91)

Both players took their time leaving the starting blocks in the opening leg, which didn't help either to establish an early rhythm. Dunford was first to have darts at the outer segments, but it was Ingrouille who broke throw with a smart 76 finish. The second leg was far better, Ingrouille cracked in a superb 171 to set up darts at the double. Dunford had three at double ten, but couldn't take them, before Ingrouille stepped in to double her lead. Leg three saw the most consistent scoring of the match. Ingrouille had a couple of missed opportunities to close it out before finding the outer ring for her second break of the contest and thus getting the first point on the scoreboard for the Green Army.

Match 2: Adie Exall (23.04) 1-4 Ben Hazel [Bedfordshire] (24.51)

The first Men's game of the day was always going to be a tough ask for Exall. Hazel is a quality operator, and proved it before the pandemic, defeating Gary Robson en route before eventually losing in the Second Round of the 2020 BDO World Championship. Exall wasn't short of confidence either, going into the contest as the reigning Herm Classic title holder. Despite throwing second in the opener, Exall soon found his range on the big trebles, two tons on the bounce kept him in contention before he broke throw to take the lead. Hazel then returned the favour to level things up, before holding in the third to get his nose in front. There was little to choose between them in legs four and five, but Hazel showed his class to take both with some clinical finishing. A 72 gave him a crucial break before he wrapped things up with a 68 takeout.

Match 3: Kevin Brouard (21.25) 1-4 Johnny Stefano (23.74)

Brouard was paired against the Chairman of the UKDA, who spent the previous decade as Chairman and Men's Team Manager for London (and who also brought your correspondent into the London set-up as a Match referee). The first two legs of the match both went against the head. It was Brouard who drew first blood, and Stefano then squared it up in leg two. From that point on the scoring was nip and tuck, but Brouard could do little about the inspired finishing from his opponent. Stefano rattled off three on the trot, taking out 116 and 58 before ending the contest with a 90 in leg five.

Match 4: Lee Smith (22.38) 2-4 Colin Savage [N Ireland] (22.75)

Next up was another of the UKDA bigwigs, with Smith taking on the UKDA's CEO. It initially looked like this was going to only go the minimum trip. A fine 78 checkout for a break in leg two was bookended by two holds of throw to give the Irishman a commanding three nil lead. Smith then decided to join the party, taking leg four in 16 darts before cracking home a great 84 under pressure in the next to get within one. The sixth leg was there for the taking, but Savage took out 72 with Smith poised on double top to claim the spoils.

Match 5: Debbie Hamon (12.98) 2-3 Emma Martin [Kent] (15.29)

The first two legs saw steady, if unspectacular play. But at the business end of each it was Hamon who was the more assured, breaking the Martin throw in the first before holding to take control of the game at two-nil. The Kent thrower then took the third without being pushed. Leg four proved to be pivotal. Hamon started well with first use of the oche and put herself in pole position to close out the contest. However, she couldn't quite nail the clinching out shot and Martin stepped in to send the contest all the way. Now it was Martin with the all-important throw, and she managed to keep in front throughout to claim the point without allowing Hamon a shot at double in a match that could have easily gone the other way.

Match 6: Caroline La Touche (12.11) 0-3 Rebecca Garrett [Kent] (12.63)

The opening leg was probably the best of the match. Both ladies picked up the scoring as the leg wore on but Garrett made full use of having throw to take it. Leg two was a more drawn-out affair, after a bright start the big trebles became harder to locate and eventually the Kent lady found the finish to go one away. The quality picked up in the next, but the tension increased as each player strived to find the outer segment. Both players had numerous chances to take the leg, but neither could take advantage, try as they might. Garrett finally claimed the win in a nervy contest by virtue of being marginally better on the doubles when it counted.

Match 7: Neil Hutchinson (19.45) 1-4 Micky Reed [Leicestershire] (22.82)

The first three legs all went with the throw, with neither player really letting their opponent in with a chance when leading off the leg. Reed knocked home a good 81 to edge ahead in the third. Good scoring took Hutchinson to the brink of squaring the tie with three to play, but Reed nipped in to pinch the fourth to go one away. Needing a break to prolong the argument, Hutchinson produced his most consistent bout of scoring in the match, but Reed then crucially hit two tons to bag first crack at the double, at which he duly obliged at the first time of asking to seal the deal.

Match 8: Michael Ogier (19.12) 3-4 Cole Davey [Clwyd] (21.27)

Talented youth player Davey was embroiled in a real nip and tuck battle before finally edging across the winning line. The advantage of going first was never more evident than in this contest, with the only break of throw coming in the decider. The match started off at a steady pace in the first two legs, and continued in the same vein throughout which merely added to the intrigue. Ogier was always able to keep the pressure on as he held throw each time, nudging ahead in the scoring department and offering few chances, forcing Davey to do likewise in order to keep the match going. Ogier had the darts in the last leg, but a loose start allowed Davey to get on the front foot, and he closed the contest out in relative ease without allowing Ogier darts at the double.

Match 9: Alex Rosamond (21.46) 3-4 Lewis Venes [Black Country] (21.40)

The next match saw another nail biter with the result in doubt right up to the very last. It didn't seem that way to begin with, as Rosamond shot out of the starting traps like a Greyhound Derby winner on the back of some powerful scoring. Six scores of a ton or more enabled him to take the opening two legs in just 37 darts. Venes then halved the deficit, and the leg that followed proved to be critical in the final outcome. Rosamond looked a good thing to go two clear once again, before both players had an attack of the heebie-jeebies in trying to find the outer ring. Chances came and went for both, before Venes eventually snared the shot to level it up with Rosamond wondering how he missed 18 darts at double. He was still cursing his luck with a poor visit to start leg five, but quickly dusted himself down to hit three straight scores of a ton or more. Unfortunately for him Venes decided to do likewise and took the lead for the first time in the match. The penultimate leg was won at a canter by the Guernsey man to set up a winner takes all finale. He started well, but a mid-leg scoring burst by Venes regained the initiative which gave him time to set up and close out a good match which neither really deserved to lose.

Match 10: Mark Fletcher (25.22) 4-1 Jamie Green [Wirral] (23.46)

Fletcher got off to a fine start, taking the opener in brisk fashion before breaking Green's throw to gain an early two nil lead. Green then returned the compliment, knocking off 75 to immediately break back. That turned out to be a mere consolation for the son of Robbie "Kong" Green, as Fletcher's superior scoring in leg four broke the Scouser once again and restored the two leg cushion. He then began the fifth with two tons either side of a 140 and from there it was just a question of when and not if as he claimed Guernsey's second point of the day in relative ease.

Match 11: Paul Poullain (22.37) 0-4 Matt Doe [Essex] (24.44)

Doe is an experienced campaigner, particularly in BDDA and WDDA events and this came to the fore in a match that only went the minimum trip. The opening stanza actually saw Poullain off to the better start, but Doe quickly found his scoring boots as the leg wore on and took it against the head. Tons were traded to begin the next, but a brilliant 177 from the Essex man set up the double 18 at which he only needed one dart to pin in order to double the advantage.

Poullain picked up his scoring in leg three, but couldn't quite get ahead and was broken once more to be left on the brink of defeat. That came in the next, as again Doe again managed to keep himself far enough in front to be able to hit the clinching double.

Match 12: Jo Ellis (16.61) 0-3 Helen Ward [Kent] (21.17)

Ellis had the misfortune to come up against an opponent who was on top form. Ward got off to a flier, hitting three score of a ton or more in the first leg, but Ellis battled well to stay in contact before the leg was concluded on throw. The second leg wasn't as close, with the Kent thrower breaking to go one away. Leg three was similar to the opener. Ellis started the leg in fine form, but Ward took control midway through and then closed the match out. Although on first glance it may seem to have been a fairly straightforward win, Ellis can take real heart from the fact that she gave as good as she got against an opponent who on this showing wouldn't have lost many "A" games in the upper echelons of the UKDA ranks and possibly have claimed the "Lady of the Match" award to boot.

Match 13: Yvonne Le Gallic (16.24) 0-3 Kirsty Gibbs [Buckinghamshire] (19.78)

The UKDA ladies were certainly at the peak of their form. Le Gallic was quickly off and running in the scoring stakes, and was well in contention in the opener. Gibbs matched the early Le Gallic 140, and a couple of good scores halfway through the leg gained her a slight advantage which yielded the opening leg. The second was a more straightforward for Ward but Le Gallic shrugged off a slow start and finished strongly which augered well for leg three. The first two visits saw Le Gallic carry on from the previous leg but then she began to find that the big trebles were harder to come by as Ward carried on as before for the eventual three-nil win, although she would be the first to admit that she was certainly pushed all the way.

Match 14: Simon De La Mare (15.85) 0-4 Steven Stanbridge [Nottinghamshire] (24.14)

Sunday is normally the Day of Rest, and De La Mare's set of arrows seemed to be acting in accordance with that as he was swept aside in straight legs. Both players struggled to find their range in the opener. Stanbridge was first to hit a ton plus and another in his next visit set up the leg winning double. De La Mare put up a bit more of a fight in the next, but was a mere spectator as Stanbridge only needed 4 darts from 191 to break throw and double the advantage. From that point on it was pretty much one way traffic as Stanbridge's much heavier scoring meant that he took legs three and four to complete the whitewash without allowing De La Mare any darts at the double at any juncture in the match.

Match 15: Callum Ferbrache (22.77) 4-0 Scott Artiss [Kent] (22.37)

Ferbrache bagged another point for the Green Army in a game that perhaps was far closer than the scoreline would imply, but which was ultimately determined by superior finishing from the Guernsey arrowsmith. We didn't have to wait long to start seeing the big scores, as both Ferbrache and Artiss went straight to work on the big trebles. Artiss would have fancied his chances of an opening leg break whilst sat on forty, but Ferbrache was having none of it and cracked home a smart 72 for the early lead. The second leg was fairly even, but when Artiss missed darts at the double Ferbrache stepped in to go halfway to the win. The Kent man got off to a quick start in the third, but missed darts at the out shot which proved costly in his attempt to immediately break back as Ferbrache recovered from a slow beginning to record two tons before pinning the double. He then stole the darts from Artiss in the fourth, eventually taking out 58 for an 18 darter to complete a shirt ripping win in straight legs.

Match 16: Tracy De La Haye (15.19) 0-3 Natalie Davey [Clwyd] (19.52)

De La Haye battled well, particularly in the first two legs against another of the UKDA ladies who was firing on all cylinders. Davey didn't take very long to start hitting the lipstick, with two scores of a ton plus in her first three visits to the oche. De La Haye took a little bit longer, but was starting to score more consistently when Davey checked out for the opener on throw. The second leg could easily have gone to De La Haye, and probably would have done, had her opponent not registered a mid-leg 139 which nudged her in front before closing out the leg. Unfortunately the good play of the first two legs couldn't quite be sustained by De La Haye in the third, and she wasn't able to get a blow in as Davey claimed the match winning double.

Match 17 Ken Waters (19.98) 3-4 Andrew Culling [Hertfordshire] (20.39)

This game was a local derby of sorts, as it pitched together Hertfordshire and UKDA Elite referee Culling and Waters, who previously played for Herts in the old BDO county system. The first leg was pretty much how the game went as a whole, with very little to choose between the combatants. Culling held the first on throw, and Waters did likewise to square the contest. Leg three really should have gone to Guernsey's Team Manager, but some uncharacteristic errant darts at the conclusion of it saw Culling pinch a leg which he ought not to have claimed on his own throw. Waters shrugged off the disappointment to restore parity, and then took the lead for the first time with his best leg of the match when breaking in the fifth. Culling needed the immediate break to stay in the contest, and smacked in the first

180 of the day's play to begin the penultimate leg. But that wasn't enough, as Waters came back with high scores of his own to create the opportunity to finish things off. The chance came and went, and so it all boiled down to a one leg shootout. Culling started well and Waters never got going at any point, which led to a more comfortable final leg which wasn't really in keeping with what had gone before as Culling bagged the win.

Match 18 Megan Billien (15.23) 1-3 Jane Robson [Cheshire] (20.00)

This was always going to be a tough ask for Billien, as her opponent will be plying her trade next season in the Premiership, UKDA's top tier. The opening leg went to the Cheshire lady without much duress as Billien was feeling her way into the contest. Leg two was a different affair, Billien showing what she is capable of after a poor opening nine darts. The scoring improved markedly and Robson was made to pay for missing nine darts at double when Billien promptly banged home a superb 80 finish to bring the match all square. The third leg was also a tight affair, but Robson's slightly better scoring enabled her first crack at the outer ring, which she needed to take in the knowledge that Billien was ready to capitalise on any missed darts. Leg four saw Robson show why she will be a tough nut to crack next season with a great leg of darts, as only 17 were required to secure the win.

Match 19 Lee Savident (18.74) 2-4 Dave Vanderson [Northamptonshire] (20.14)

As was the case with many of the matches that preceded it, this was a contest with very little to separate the combatants. Having first use of the oche seemed to be more of a disadvantage though, as only one leg was won on throw in the six played. It was the Guernsey man who drew first blood, with both players spurning chances to take the early lead before Savident found the double and the break of throw. The second was an easier passage for the man from Northants and he drew level. The third also went against the head, as Savident regained the initiative and the darts before concluding it with a great 76 takeout. Vanderson then produced the best leg of the match, taking the fourth for yet another break to effectively make it a best of three. The only hold of throw came in the next, but even then it could easily have gone to Savident but missing six darts from double top down proved his undoing and Vanderson shakily held on to the arrows. The sixth reverted to type, with Savident not taking a chance to set up a grandstand finish and Vanderson hitting double ten for a hard fought win.

Match 20 Adam Gontier (23.31) 1-4 Paul Marsh [Essex] (24.22)

When I saw the draw, this game was one that I was going to watch closely. Gontier has performed well on the local league scene in the last few months, and he was going up against a player in Marsh who has spent many years in the top flight as part of a powerful Essex Men's "A" team and who is fast approaching 100 appearances at County / National League level. Marsh took the opening two legs, but any hopes he had of making it three on the bounce were soon dashed. Gontier led off with a fine 137, and although his next few visits couldn't match that, he kept the advantage before ramming it home in no uncertain terms with a magnificent 114 checkout to halve the deficit. It looked like Gontier was all set to square the match, as he sustained the fine scoring to set up the break opportunity. Three missed darts came and went, before Marsh called upon his experience when most needed and took out 60 in two to leave himself on the brink of victory. The fifth saw another break, and Gontier could easily have kept the contest going to the sixth and beyond but again Marsh dug deep to eventually grind out the point.

Match 21 Phil Dodd (23.83) 3-4 Carl Wilson [Kent] (28.66)

After a hugely enjoyable day of darts, it was almost fitting that arguably the best match of the day was the one which concluded the action. With the worst legs of the match only requiring 21 darts in order to win it, it showed how well each played and were able to keep producing quality darts for the duration. It was Dodd who was first off the mark, only needing one dart at double 16 to go ahead on throw. Wilson then showed what he is capable of, with an equally brisk hold of his own to square it up. Both players were really producing the good when they were leading off a leg, and Dodd regained the lead in the third, taking out the leg with his opponent sitting on tops and waiting to pounce. Wilson upped the ante still further. The second maximum of the day came in leg four, with just 16 darts used to make the score two apiece. Dodd showed real mettle in the fifth. After seeing Wilson fire in a 174, he immediately answered back with a 140 of his own. Wilson had a chance to get the break but it went begging and Dodd showed no mercy at his next visit to go one up with two to play. Wilson then ended the contest on a high with a superb two legs. On throw in the penultimate leg, he hit a leg better than any which preceded it in all 20 previous matches, ending a superb 14 darter with a 56 to fittingly set up a seventh leg in a match which deserved to go the distance. On throw in the last, Dodd gave it everything and more but even that wasn't enough to stop the Wilson juggernaut as he ended a superb match in style with a 16 dart finale.

So the day ended with the UKDA Select coming out on top by a score of 18 to 3. It may have seemed like a big win, but in fact Guernsey could very easily have had more points in their win column with a little bit of good fortune. Five games

went the full distance and were all won by UKDA. Two or three of those could (and should) easily have gone the other way and that would have given a more accurate reflection of the match as a whole. But it should not be forgotten that they came up against a team who have much more experience of playing games of this format and intensity at a higher level – and who would play at least nine matches a year in similar vein compared to Guernsey who generally only have one match of this nature, the Inter-Insular. Certainly I believe that the players Guernsey faced were as a unit much stronger than any side they would face in UKDA National League Two, and on this showing both the Men and Ladies showed that they would be more than capable of holding their own at that level and continue to improve with each subsequent match. The Ladies in particular should be pleased with their individual displays and none of them lost anything in defeat. The reaction on social media after the game proved that Guernsey more than earned the respect of their opponents both on and off the oche and in my opinion would definitely be warmly welcomed into the UKDA darting family.