

WORLD CUP REPORT

When athletes are interviewed about the prospect of being selected to represent their country in an international event their responses are almost always the same: “It’s a tremendous honour”, “It’s a dream come true”, and “It’s what I’ve worked for all my life...” Each of these responses is an attempt to describe an indescribable feeling. When I put on a Team Alberta shirt for the first time this past summer I was ecstatic – it was a proud moment I had worked for nearly 7 years to achieve. To be a part of a team, representing your province, working collectively towards achieving a mutual goal; it is a very special experience. But for everything its worth, and for how incredibly special it was, it barely even holds a match to the feeling you get playing for Team Canada at the World Cup of Darts.

As many as 104 men represent their province in the National Championships every year, but only 4 men represent Canada once every two years at the World Cup of Darts. When you look at the list of players that have represented Canada at this event it reads like the who’s who of Canadian darts (John Part, Bob Sinnavee and Patricia Farrell to name a few). To have your name on that list, to pull a red and white jersey over your shoulders and step to the line – not as a player but as your county – nothing I have ever experienced can compare to that feeling.

You throw every dart like it means more than anything, not because you want to do well, but because you want your country to do well. Every missed opportunity feels like you’re taking a bullet and every big score or clutch finish feels like a momentous occasion. That’s what World Cup is all about and it was an experience I will never ever forget.

In 2009 Canada sent a team to World Cup that was dedicated and committed to representing our country and showing the strength of Canadian darts. It included:

Diane Gobeil, 5-time Quebec Provincial Champion and 6-time Quebec Mixed Provincial Champion.

Cindy Pardy, 3-time Alberta Champion, 2-time Canadian Open Champion and reigning National and Ranking Champion.

Ken MacNeil, 2-time Alberta Champion, 2007 National Ranking Champion, PDC World Championship Qualifier.

Bernie Miller, 2009 National Championship Finalist and Team Ontario representative.

Jerry Hull, 2-time Canadian Open Champion, 2008 Quebec Provincial Champion.

Clint Clarkson, reigning Canadian National Ranking Champion and Team Alberta representative.

Bill Hatter (Manager), NDFC and Darts Alberta President.

Mary Dezan (Manager), NDFC General Secretary.

Bob Gulliver (Supporter), Newfoundland and Labrador Darts, Provincial Director.

Ann Marie Farmer (Supporter).

Entering the 2009 World Cup we were seen as a “filler team”, a group of players that were in attendance for the “experience” but not a team that would challenge for an event win, let alone an overall medal. But, by the time we walked off the stage at the closing ceremonies we had earned the respect of countries around the world, not just for our performance at the oche, but also for our sportsmanship and the composure with which we handled adversity.

The 2009 World Cup of Darts was hosted in Charlotte, North Carolina at the Blake Hotel. The venue was simply superb and suited an event of this competitive level while still facilitating the camaraderie of the occasion. The front lobby was big, open and had several couches, chairs and even a pool table. On the

right side of the lobby was an indoor poolside bar and outside the pool was surrounded by large lounge tents filled with comfy couches. The practice area was set in a completely separate room from the playing hall but was anything but secondary; it was a beautiful room with 11 immaculate setups. The playing hall itself was unbelievable! It was 4 (maybe even 5 times) the size of the playing area at the World Masters in Bridlington and was designed to allow spectators to watch any match they wanted; sixteen boards lined each side of the hall with a giant stage centered at the front of the room. An additional 5 boards were setup exclusively for the youth events on the wall opposing the stage. It was simply outstanding!

Master of Ceremonies, Richard Ashdown opened the World Cup saying “Wherever you find a dart board you find a friend” and the World Cup is a fantastic dramatization of this point. The true experience of the World Cup starts well before a dart is ever thrown. When I pulled up to the venue the entrance and front lobby was packed with dart players from all over the world chumming and making new friends. Much like the Canadian National Championships, this was the theme throughout the entire week.

The Opening Ceremony was an enchanting occasion, highlighted by the introduction of each country and their team’s historical performance at the World Cup. Players were each introduced by name and marched onto stage under bright lights while cameras flashed like paparazzi bulbs. Players and managers smiled, joked and soaked up every minute of this fantastic moment. In the four times I’ve attended the Canadian National Championships (twice as a player, twice as a spectator) I’ve noticed a competitive undertone from the moment I arrived. At the opening ceremony of the World Cup that undertone simply didn’t exist – it was an evening of celebration not competition.

Men’s Teams

The first event of the World Cup was the Men’s Teams, which is the most prestigious event of the 3-day competition. There is not currently a Ladies’ team event, but it has been voted to include a Ladies Team competition in future World Cups. Our Canadian Team had drawn a very tough section which included, Brazil, Belgium and the Netherlands, who have won the last two overall World Cups.

The team’s event is by far the most intense event I have ever been a part of. It is similar to the Nodor Cup at the Canadian National Championships, but is best of 17 format where each player plays one leg against each player from the other team (2 legs with throw, two legs against throw). The first team to win nine legs wins the match. If the teams are tied after 16 legs, each team selects one player to play-off in one leg of 501. It’s an extremely tough format as only two matches are played at any one time and you are only given 3 darts to warm up before each leg (remember that – it’ll be important later). Essentially, you need to be ready to play right now, every time! One bad shot, one bounce out, one missed double can cost your team dearly.

Canada came out of the gates hot blasting Brazil for a 9-1 victory. It was a good start for our team and allowed us to shake any early jitters we might have had. I opened the day with a 13 darter and the boys followed with strong legs in suit. Our second match came against a very strong Belgian squad which included World Masters Stage Qualifier Kim Huybrechts. We came out on top again with a 9-3 victory. Our final match came against a very strong Dutch team and it was a great one. Despite falling behind early we rallied to tie the match at 8 games apiece. During the match it looked like everything was going to go the way of the Dutch; Bernie missed 4 darts to take a leg from Willy van de Wiel, and then Frans Harmsen and Joey ten Berge stole legs with 131 and 112 checkouts while Canada was sitting on one dart outs. In a one leg tie-breaker Frans won the bull against Ken and took the match for the Netherlands. Coming out of our group second to the Netherlands put us in a tough position. We were on the same side of the draw as England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and an under rated Finnish team. We drew the Finns in the first round and our team was a bit slow out of the gates but managed to keep it close. This

was the best match I played in the team event winning all four of my legs, including two against the throw allowing us to advance with a 9-6 victory.

While we were playing the Finish club, England and Scotland were embroiled in a classic battle that eventually saw the Scots come out on top. The Scottish Team was obviously very happy with their first round result having drawn what was “on paper” the strongest team in the room. Perhaps when they learned they were playing Canada in the second round they didn’t come in with the same focus.

Bernie Miller found his groove this round and almost in a flash Canada was up by a score of 6-2. You could see the panic on the Scottish side... they didn’t see it coming! After winning two legs and pulling the match to 6-4, a WDF ruling caused a little controversy. Prior to his third match Ken mistakenly threw 3 additional practice darts for 6 in total (remember that rule from earlier). This resulted in a protest, a brief discussion and eventually a referee being called over who determined based on WDF rules that Canada must forfeit the match. MacNeil was furious but walked away calmly and took a little time to cool off. With MacNeil’s leg being forfeited the score was now 6-5. Having been forced to forfeit a leg ignited the Canadian side who took the next 3 legs without hesitation to win the match 9-5.

We were quite upset with being called over 3 extra darts as it’s not a call we ever seen made in Canada. None-the-less, we have to remember that the rules are followed for more stringently in the UK than they are in North America. The decision was appropriate given the circumstance and our team respected it.

In our semi-final match we played a Northern Ireland Team that was hot-on-the-trot and had just come off a 9-1 smashing of the Italian group. It was another great match that was very tight until Jerry Hull broke throw with a 153 checkout to give us the advantage. We eventually landed on a 9-6 victory but not without a little more controversy. After the incident with the Scots, Ken MacNeil stopped taking his warm-up darts and just went straight into his games. The Northern Ireland team took exception to this thinking that he was “playing games”. In reality Ken was simply using the situation to motivate himself and it showed as he went 4-0 in that match.

On the other side of the draw our friends the Dutch were making things very hard on themselves. They narrowly escaped a one leg playoff against Japan with a 9-7 win and then won a one-leg playoff against Australia with a 9-8 victory. In the semi-finals they tidied things up a bit quicker with a 9-6 win over Ireland setting up a rematch in the finals, which would be played 2 days later.

Ladies Doubles

Our girls played their hearts out but didn’t have a great first day in the ladies doubles – they did manage to squeak out of their round robin section on a count-back and good luck but fell 0-4 to a very strong Russian duo in the first round.

Men’s Singles

Day two brought the Men’s Singles at 9:00AM. Kenny drew Irishman, Martin McCloskey who recently qualified for the Lakeside World Championships and has been playing outstanding as of late. This day was no different and our best player from day one was out in the first round. The other three Canadian’s all advanced by scores of 4-1.

Jerry Hull defeated Greg Moss (NZ)

Bernie Miller defeated Luigi Marino (ITA)

Clint Clarkson defeated Harry Brown (BAH)

In the second round another Canadian was felled when Jerry Hull lost to Norwegian Øyvind Aasland by a score of 1-4. Bernie advanced with a 4-2 victory over Japanese player Atsushi Takeuchi, despite

Atsushi's outstanding play early in the match. I also progressed with a 4-1 win over New Zealand's Bernie Smith.

The third round proved to be very entertaining. I drew against Russian representative Andrey Ratnikov who had knocked out Scottish Captain Mike Vietch in a very impressive first round match. Bernie matched up against a very talented Swede, Daniel Larsson. Our matches were very different in content but had the same end result. I got on top of my Russian opponent quickly and never gave him a chance to breathe which resulted in a 4-0 triumph. Bernie on the other hand thought it would be fun to give his challenger a 3-0 lead before coming back to win 4 straight and cap off a dramatic come from behind win. For the first time in many years Canada had two representatives in the top 16 and we were nearing some pretty heavy points to help our team towards an overall medal. Bernie and I both came out of the gates fast; broke our opponents throw and shot to a 3-1 lead in our respective matches. Unfortunately, we each failed to finish our opponents off and went on to 3-4 losses. Making this scenario a tad bit harder to swallow was that we finished the event tied with England at 55 points for second in the overall standings. This put us in a great position to win an overall medal with only one event remaining and knowing that we had the Men's Team Final still to play. However, there were only 4 teams that could realistically derail our bid for an overall medal: Australia, Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland. Bernie and I let a Welshmen and Aussie steal wins from us and my next match would have been against an Irishmen.

Men's Pairs

Each of our Men's Pairs teams was a great mix of intensity and calm which we felt would serve us well on this day. Both teams advanced out of the first round with solid performances. In the second round, however, Bernie and I ran into a Swedish team of Daniel Larsson (Yep! That's the same guy Bernie came back from a 0-3 deficit against.) and Magnus Caris. The two played simply outstanding against us and we weren't able to match their brilliant play and failed to win a single leg. Ken and Jerry rolled forward with their second 4-0 victory over a team from the Barbados setting up a match with a talented pairing from Norway. Despite battling hard, the Norwegian's were simply finding the mark a bit more than our boys and they slipped away with by a 4-2 margin. Having two teams catch fire against our pairs definitely hurt our overall standings. Making matters significantly worse were the end results of the Men's Pairs. Pairs from Northern Ireland and Australia had made their way to the finals meaning we had to win our Teams Final match against the Netherlands to win an overall medal.

Ladies Singles

Cindy and Diane had a bit of bad luck in the Ladies Singles drawing some of the world's top players in the early rounds. Cindy lost 0-4 to Japan's Mayumi Ouchi. Diane fared only slightly better picking up a first round win over Spain's Loli Cascales before falling to Welsh player Julie Gore. Julie went on to make the Ladies Singles final.

The Finals

Each of the finals had drama and excitement and were extremely entertaining. In the Youth Girls Final, Finland's Aliisa Koskivirta came back from a 0-3 deficit and broke England's Zoe Jones throw in the final leg to win by a score of 6-5. The boy's had a remarkable final worthy of stage play at any level. After losing the first leg, Finland's Tuomos Tikka threw a 12 darter with a 170 finish! Remember this is the youth event!!! Tuomos eventually lost to Welshman Jamie Lewis by a score of 6-4. Having players in each of the youth finals didn't hurt Finland any though as they went on to win the youth mixed event and the overall youth World Cup.

Sweden and England squared off in the Ladies Pairs final which saw England take the title and the overall Ladies World Cup. The match was close early tied at 2 legs apiece but missed doubles by the Swedish team allowed England to run away with a decisive victory.

In the Ladies Singles it was Julie Gore up against the host countries top lady, Stacey Bromberg. Stacey had ruffled a few feathers earlier in the day when she asked to have the events order changed so that she could leave early to attend a wedding. Her request was of course denied – but that didn't stop her from playing brilliantly on stage and taking home the Ladies World Cup Singles title by a score of 7-3. The Men's Doubles final was another great match and featured ample drama. The Northern Ireland team stepped out to a 4-2 lead in the best-of-eleven bout only to see the Australian's take advantage of missed doubles and rattle off 4 legs in a row to take the title. This victory guaranteed Canada would finish no lower than 4th in the overall standings.

The Men's Singles was a brilliant display of darting talent. Netherlands Joey ten Berge squared off against World #1 Tony O'Shea in a clash between World Cup contending teams. Joey an excitable 23-year-old Dutch phenomena would have his hands full with the veteran superstar. Tony got the early edge breaking Joey's throw in the second leg with a 141 finish that put him up by a score of 2-0. Joey quickly broke back however with a 12 darter on the strength of a 121 finish and then took the next leg with his throw to tie the match at 2's. Tony regained his lead in the 5th leg only to have Joey tie up the match again in the 6th with a 120 out shot. It seemed as though the match would go back and forth right till the end. In 3 prior major finals appearances, Tony O'Shea had a total of zero wins and after the 6th leg it seemed as though he became possessed with the will to win no matter what. Tony absolutely lit up and took the next 4 legs for a 7-3 triumph! He finished the match with a 107.1 three dart average (way to go Tony!).

Men's Team Final

And there we were – the final event of the World Cup. The underdogs, Canada, versus the reigning World Cup Champions, Netherlands. It had all the makings of a classic. If the Netherlands won they would take their third consecutive World Cup title. If Canada won, they would oust the champs and allow England to take their first World Cup title since 2003. It would be Canada's first event win in 16 years and they would finish second overall, tying Canada's best ever result from 20 years earlier when Bob Sinnaeve, Rick Bisaro, Tony Holyoak and Albert Anstey took the teams title as well. Canada was ready – we came down to the practice area early – we were focused and practicing very well. The Dutch team arrived much later but you could tell from their demeanor that they knew what this match meant.

The teams were called to the stage and the first match was set to start, Bernie Miller was playing Joey ten Berge. The two took their practice darts, but were then asked to leave the stage. The organizers had noticed an error in the draw and the players were asked to wait while it was corrected. This might be where it all went wrong for Canada – we exited the stage and sat to wait for the match to start. The Netherlands squad on the other hand went directly to the practice boards and continued to keep warm. When the match did finally start we came out slow and it hurt us dearly.

Bernie started the first leg against the throw and opened with a 140 but followed with a 30. Joey finished up the leg in 18 darts to give the Netherlands a 1-0 lead. They extended that lead when I missed one dart at 34 to tie the match against Willy van de Wiel and then built a 3-0 lead when Frans Harmsen defeated Jerry Hull. Ken MacNeil who had played brilliantly throughout the team event did so again and gave us life when he crafted an 18 darter against Daniel Brouwer. The momentum didn't

carry however as Willy took the stage and rattled in an 11 darter (140-140-180-41) against Bernie to restore the 3 leg lead. The slaughter continued as Joey and Daniel collected legs against Jerry and me creating a 6-1 deficit. Once again, it was MacNeil that sparked life in the Canadian's putting together another 18 darter to bring the score to 6-2. But, much like the first time – the Netherlands responded in kind – this time it was Daniel tossing a 14 darter followed by a 19 darter by Joey. The Netherlands was 1 leg short of the title.

Canadian's aren't known for giving in easily and this day was no exception. Ken took his third consecutive win with another 18 darter, despite Willy missing three match darts. Frans also missed 3 darts to take the match in the next leg and Bernie pulled off another win for Canada. The rotation had Ken take the board again this time against Joey. It was a clash between the two top players in the final and Joey had the throw. Ken demonstrated dominance more time as he broke Joey's throw with a 17 dart leg and pulled the count to 8-5. Canada had won three legs in a row and we held throw in two of the next three legs. Ken's miraculous performance had given us life and suddenly we could see the possibility of bringing the match to a deciding leg... but it was Willy playing the darts of his life that brought our hopes crashing down when he thundered in a 15 darter bringing the Dutch fans out of their seats and leaving the Canadians (and the Brits for that matter) dejected.

It was such a hard way to lose – to be so close and finish so far. We had gone from 2 points out of first after one event; tied for second after two events and then sitting fourth after three events. After all is said and done I'm sure everyone of us is proud of what we accomplished – the first Canadian's to medal since 1993 and the first team to finish in the top 4 since 1989. The accomplishment is something to be happy with – but – it also served as a reminder of how good our players truly are and how much we could accomplish on the international stage. World be ready – Canada's back!

Class Acts

I could not complete this blog without giving tremendous respect to the English team for the way they conducted themselves throughout the week. In the Men's Singles round of 16 Joey ten Berge defeated Martin Adams who had held a 3-1 advantage. When Joey hit the winning shot he shouted and leaped in the air and celebrated boisterously. Adams responded with a laugh and congratulations to the young Dutchmen. No doubt he didn't want to lose that match – but Adam's respected the fact that it was the biggest win of Joey's young career.

In the Men's Pairs it was Tony O'Shea and Darryl Fitton who showed their class when they were upset in the biggest of possible upsets by a team from the Bahamas, Harry Brown and Anderson Lewis. Harry and Anderson had taken a 3-0 lead only to see the Brits strike back with 3 unanswered legs. Then after having 4 darts to win the match the Englishmen were sent packing by the boys from the Bahamas. The room erupted as fans, teammates and spectators cheered wildly. Harry gave a little dance of celebration no doubt it was the most momentous occasion of their darting life! The Brits, ever gentlemen, didn't toss their darts, scowl or complain – then kindly shook hands and then turned around to sign autographs. Classy demonstrations by some of the World's best players.

Thanks to Clint Clarkson for compiling this report of the 2009 World Cup of Darts from Charlotte North Carolina. September 23rd – 25th 2009.