

MADHOUSE

THE MISSED TARGET

GEMMA HAYTER ON WHY THE PDC MUST INVEST MORE INTO WOMEN'S DARTS

EXCLUSIVE:
TOM SYKES & GEMMA HAYTER

FEATURES:
PDC TOUR CARDS, BLADE X DARTBOARD REVIEW & THE WOMEN'S GAME

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MODUS TO MAINSTAGE

EXCLUSIVE: TOM SYKES

In a sport built on camaraderie and bravado, one man approaches the game a little differently. Tom Sykes, a 33-year-old from Castleford, is known for his calmness at the oche, resilience under pressure and a toughness that makes him hard to beat.

Unlike the overnight sensations of the modern darts era, such as Luke Littler, Tom Sykes' rise has been built on persistence and grit. His journey has been shaped not by instant headlines, but by years of hard graft across the PDC's secondary tours, where every performance has contributed to his steady development.

Capable of producing ton-plus averages and regularly pushing into the latter stages of Challenge and Development Tour events, the 33-year-old has methodically worked his way through the ranks.

This upward progression ultimately paid off when, earlier this month, Sykes secured a two-year PDC Tour Card at Qualifying School. On Day Three, he won six consecutive matches, culminating in a 6-4 victory over Stephen Burton to earn his place on the professional circuit for the 2026-2027 season.

Despite the achievement, Sykes is keeping his feet firmly on the ground.

"My goal is to just retain it,"

he said. "I'm trying to get a bit of TV exposure as well."

He has already tasted the big stage, featuring at the UK Open, where he reached the third round with wins over Owen Roelofs and Thibault Tricole before exiting against William O'Connor. Reflecting on the experience, Sykes remained positive.

"It was a good experience playing on the big stage," he said.

Nicknamed the 'Castleford Tiger', Sykes has quietly built momentum through the Modus Super Series, winning four titles since April 2024. The competition, which has attracted over 33 million views since launching in 2022, has provided a vital platform for players like Sykes.

"It's a good field," he added. "Playing top players all the time is always good."

The 33-year-old has played at every level within the pyramid of darts, including featuring in the Amateur Darts Circuit (ADC) events, where he has thrived. Sykes is ranked at the UK's number three and is

the number one player in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. His running average is just shy of 90 and he believes it has helped shape him as a player.

"I've been playing it for a couple years now," he added. "It's just it's one of them things, it's a good pathway for players."

With his Tour Card set and 34 Players Championship events awaiting him in 2026, Sykes could go one step further and qualify for more major events throughout the year.

2026 could be the year the Castleford Tiger turns momentum into a breakthrough.

By Jacob Bailey

Credit: Chris Sargeant/MODUS



MVG RULES NIGHT ONE

The Green Machine wasted no time reminding the field he is still the man to beat on Night One.

QUARTER FINALS

Rock vs Clayton

Josh Rock made his Premier League debut, while Clayton returned for the first time since 2023. Rock broke early in a scrappy opener, but Clayton hit back with a ten-darter. After a run of holds, Clayton broke for 4-2 and powered clear, sealing a convincing 6-2 win and showcasing his Premier League pedigree.

Littler vs van Veen

The second match of the night featured another Premier League debutant in Gian van Veen, and it was the Dutchman who made the stronger impression. Luke Littler eventually found a breakthrough, but van Veen responded immediately. The Dutchman then held throw to secure a 6-4 victory, producing an impressive debut win.

Humphries vs Price

Both started well with Humphries winning the second leg in just 11 darts. The first ton plus finish of the night came in leg three with Price pinning a 114 to go 2-1 up. A string of holds right up to the end followed before eventually the Price throw was broken. In the deciding leg both players missed a handful of darts before Humphries finally hit double two to claim the win.



Van Gerwen vs Bunting

With Bunting's run of poor form and a recent tour title for van Gerwen, there really was only going to be one winner in this match.

A first leg break of throw saw Bunting take the lead which he then backed up to go 2 ahead. That was before MVG ran away with it and won the remaining 6 legs on the spin. A hold and a 117 out got him started, before he began to pull away. Another four straight legs followed, in what ultimately was a comfortable win for the World Number 4.

SEMI FINALS

Van Veen vs Clayton

The match got off to a slow start with both players trading a break and a hold across the opening four legs.

Clayton's scoring then started to falter, and van Veen capitalised with full effect, surging into a 5-3 lead with no fuss. Clayton briefly reignited his challenge with a clinical 98 checkout, before holding throw to narrow the gap.

But Van Veen's class shone through as the Dutchman closed out the match in style, firing in an 11-dart leg to claim his spot in the final on his opening night.

Van Gerwen vs Humphries

A sublime opening leg started the game with Humphries closing it out in 12 darts. Van Gerwen hit the first Bullseye finish of the tournament in a third leg break of throw before strolling into a 3-1 lead. A pair of holds then followed before MVG ran away with it closing out the match in style with a 114 checkout.

FINAL

Van Gerwen vs Van Veen

Two Dutch Darters made the final. One on debut, the other a seven-time champ.

Van Gerwen started the game in style with an early break and went two up inside three minutes. The Dutchman had the chance to extend his advantage further but missed the bull for a stunning 170 checkout.

That let his opponent back into the contest as van Gerwen briefly lost momentum, but still he managed to retain a narrow 4-3 lead. MVG made amends for a previous missed match dart by taking the next leg to seal a 6-4 victory and claim Premier League week one.

By Jacob Bailey



GEMMA HAYTER: "THERE IS SPACE FOR WOMEN IN DARTS NOW"

Women's darts is stepping onto the big stage. The sport is becoming more popular, developing elite players, and gaining recognition on the professional scene. The women's game is entering a new era with more tours, televised events, and ways to participate.

Gemma Hayter, a player whose career demonstrates both how far women's darts has come and how much more it still needs to go, is at the centre of that evolution.

After returning from an eight-year break, Hayter has re-established herself as one of the most competitive figures on the PDC Women's circuit. Her rapid rise has been fuelled by expanding opportunities but also by her belief that the sport must now match its growth with greater visibility and investment.

"I think it's just the more tours now," Hayter says. "Back then, it was just the BDO tour. Now you've got the Women's Series, the World Darts Federation (WDF), and the Women's Amateur Darts Circuit.

"For modern female players, that variety is crucial."

"There's just more opportunities."

The PDC Women's Series has provided consistent high-level competition, while the WDF and amateur circuits offer development routes for emerging talent. Together, they form a structure that simply didn't exist a decade ago.

Yet Hayter believes promotion has not kept pace with progress. She said, "They need to advertise it more. They'll promote the Match-play in Blackpool but say nothing about the women. It's little details like that."

In a sport driven by sponsorship, television exposure, and fan engagement, visibility is everything. Without it, the growth of the women's game risks stalling.

Hayter said, "At the same time, the women need to support it. We need a consistent 128 players. It can't just be down to the PDC."

Competition in women's darts has never been stronger. Beau Greaves currently sets the benchmark.

"Beau's obviously the hardest to play", Hayter laughed, "She's insane."

Yet alongside fierce rivalry sits mutual respect. Hayter also highlights matches against Trina Gulliver as some of her most enjoyable.

"I have a really good laugh with Trina. Sometimes she's

battered me, and then I've gone on to hit a big checkout, and she's like, 'What are you doing?'"

Such relationships reflect the tight-knit nature of the circuit.

In the short term, Hayter's focus is clear.

She said, "I just want to keep progressing. I'm playing four tours this year. The Challenge Tour is new for me. I want to see how far I can go."

Qualification for major events and further appearances on televised stages remain key targets. But she is also thinking beyond herself.

When asked about the pathway for young girls to get into darts, Hayter believes girls' darts still needs more players, but the influence is there for women who have made the jump to play professional darts. Hayter said,

"A lot of academies struggle to get girls, but the sport's changing. Fallon paved the way. Beau's doing what she's doing. There is space for women now."

Hayter was immersed in darts from a young age.

She said, "I started when I was about 12 or 13. My grandparents ran pubs too. My dad played for Hampshire Darts."





Credit: Taylor Lanning/PDC

"Darts was always there for me." Surrounded by league players and competitive environments, she developed early technical skill. That soon translated into county and national honours, culminating in selection for England youth in 2016.

Then, unexpectedly, she stepped away.

"It's the same year I got picked for England," Hayter recalls. "And later that year, I gave up."

For eight years, she was absent from the competitive scene, a period during which women's darts quietly began to professionalise and create more opportunities for its players.

The catalyst for Hayter's comeback came through a former youth teammate and World Champion: Luke Humphries.

She said, "I played Hampshire Youth with

Luke. When I saw him win the world championships, I thought, if he's doing it, why can't I do it?"

Inspired by Humphries' journey, she returned in 2023. Uncertain but motivated. The response was immediate. Within months, she claimed her first Women's Series title.

Hayter said: "It was surreal, I'd only been back for less than six months. To win that was massive for me."

Her success demonstrated how the improved pathways for women can accelerate development for committed players. With frequent competition, form can be built quickly, something that was previously far more difficult for Hayter.

Hayter's comeback reached a new level when she appeared at Alexandra Palace, facing Josh Rock on darts' most iconic stage at the 2025/26 PDC Darts World Championship.

She said, "It was crazy. Something I never thought I'd do."

Mixed gender showcases and major televised events are becoming more common, reflecting greater confidence in the women's product. For

Hayter, preparation came through regular stage time at events such as the Modus Super Series.

She said, "The Modus has been massive for me. Playing in front of crowds helps when you move up to the bigger events"

But Hayter's rise to the top brought new pressure.

She said, "When I first came back, I was the underdog. Now people expect me to win. That's harder to deal with."

Managing expectation is now part of her professional development, a sign that she has moved from outsider to contender. Gemma Hayter's journey mirrors the modern women's game: interrupted, rebuilt, and now accelerating. Her future, like that of women's darts itself, depends on continued promotion, investment, and ambition.

The foundations are in place, the talent is there, and the audience is growing.

Now, as players like Hayter continue to deliver on the oche, the challenge for the sport's leaders is simple: to make sure the platform matches the potential.

By Alex Tracy

A NEW ERA AT THE OCHE

BLADE X BOARD REVIEW

The latest addition of Darts tech has been released, with Winmau launching their newest Dartboard - the Blade X. It features a triple core sisal base, utilising sixth-generation technology with enhanced density and a 13% longer sisal bed for improved durability and dart retention. Winmau say it is the deepest and most responsive sisal bed ever produced. This means that the board will heal itself quicker than ever before, making it more durable.

It also features a laser cut anti-glare ring, providing better visibility. The number ring rotates without the need of removing it, making it much easier to turn the board to even out wears and tears.

Another piece of technology to the Blade X is its ultra thin wiring. Wires are angled at 60° and do not feature staples, to guide darts into scoring zones and reduce bounce outs. The 60° angled wire deflects darts into the board, rather than out. There's not anything new when it comes to the mounting system, but

Winmau do have a quick and easy mounting set up for all of their boards.

Let's talk about the price. Now generally, the price of a good quality dartboard is around

£50 on average, and you can probably buy a surround to go with it for an additional £30. We'll use the Winmau Blade 6 for this example. The board is currently available for £49.99 on Amazon and a plain surround is available for £26.95 on Dartshopper. That comes to a total of £76.94, and occasionally there are bundles to get a cheaper deal.

The Winmau Blade X alone, without a surround is priced at £120. It is the most expensive dartboard ever, but it is claimed to be the best. A benefit to the pricing of the Blade X, is that astonishingly it comes with a 5-year warranty guarantee. It does appear that Winmau hold their board to very high standards and shows the durability of it. I have had a blade 6 for around 2 years now. It is relatively worn down and my darts sometimes bounce out more often than they used to, which is completely normal for a board over time.

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Now time for the verdict. I personally would say that for the casual player, it is better off going for the cheaper Blade 6 option due to the heavy price of the Blade X. However, for more consistent and regular players, the Blade X is a brilliant addition to your darting set up and may even take your level up a notch. The ultra thin wiring in particular and the strong pure sisal used is an eye catcher. The wiring just allows scoring to be better due to the technology to deflect the darts into the board. Will you be purchasing one?

By Morgan Bennion



BLADEX

BLADE



PREMIER LEAGUE DARTS RETURNS

THE MADHOUSE MAGAZINE - TOP 3 OF THE WEEK: PREMIER LEAGUE WALK-ON SONGS

1. GREENLIGHT - PITBULL, FLO RIDA & LUNCH MONEY LEWIS

Luke Littler's walk-out to Green Light by Pitbull perfectly matches his fearless energy – a bold signal that when Littler steps on stage, it's full throttle from the first dart.

2. SEVEN NATION ARMY - THE WHITE STRIPES

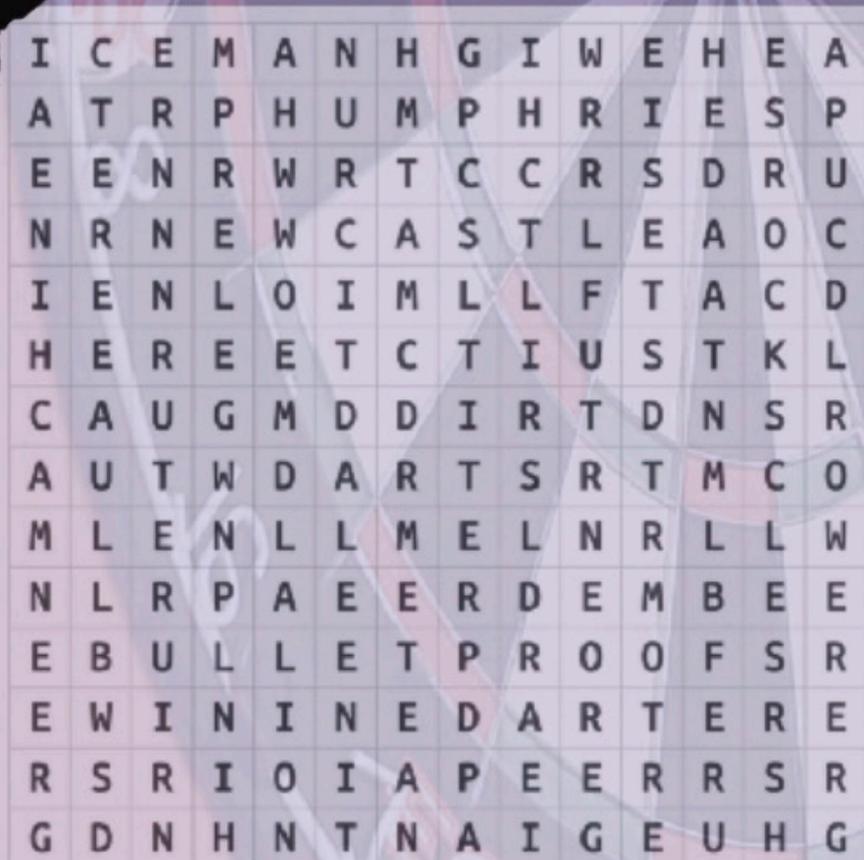
Michael van Gerwen's walk-on to Seven Nation Army is pure intimidation – a thunderous anthem that signals control, confidence, and MVG's dominance the moment he hits the stage.

3. JOHNNY B. GOODE - CHUCK BERRY

Johnny Clayton's walk out to Johnny B. Goode fits perfectly, a crowd pleasing classic that mirrors Clayton's calm confidence and big match pedigree as he steps onto the stage.

WORD SEARCH: 2026 PREMIER LEAGUE EDITION

Find the 10 Premier League Darts clues concealed in this word search.



1. BULLETPROOF
2. ICEMAN
3. NEWCASTLE
4. GIANT
5. HUMPHRIES
6. GREEN MACHINE
7. LITTLER
8. DARTS
9. ROCK
10. WORLD CUP

