New generation of Aberdeen junior darts players built on foundation of program started in 2011

By **Jason Lopez Martinez** · September 9, 2026 in **News, Sports** Reading Time: 5 minutes



An Aberdeen team composed of Brandon Moffenbier, Tyler Moffenbier, Kyle Johnson and Jordan Schaunaman took second place in their division at the 2013 South Dakota State Dart Tournament. The players were teenagers at the time. Courtesy photo.

A runner-up trophy has followed Alvin Gerlach for 13 years, and he still appreciates its significance.

The award commemorates when four Aberdeen area teenagers came within a shot of winning their division at the 2013 South Dakota State Dart Tournament in Sioux Falls.

Brandon Moffenbier was 15 then. His brother Tyler and teammates Kyle Johnson and Jordan Schaunaman were also teenagers.

They battled through the Division K team tournament and forced a second championship game. Near the end of the decisive matchup, Moffenbier remembers one teammate missing an out that would have won the game.

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Brandon Moffenbier then stepped to the line, but missed his mark by the slimmest of margins.

“It was kind of devastating, but also a cool moment,” he said.

The team finished second, an accomplishment that still resonates today.

When they were given the glass second-place trophy, they handed it to Gerlach for all he’s done for the Aberdeen area darts community.

“I’m a softy. They made me cry,” said Gerlach, owner of Hub Music and Vending in Aberdeen.

For him, the trophy represents something larger than a strong finish. Two years earlier, in 2011, he helped start Aberdeen’s junior darts league, hoping to give young players a place in a sport largely dominated by adults.

Former junior players now compete in adult darts leagues

Gerlach estimated that 18 to 20 former junior players now compete in adult leagues in town. He said more than 55 kids participated in junior programs in Aberdeen and Roscoe last season.

Moffenbier started playing around the time the junior program began.

He remembers a league so small that players sometimes needed to throw multiple matches because there weren’t enough kids to fill out a competition. The league moved between locations in its early years as the program began to grow.

The 2013 state tournament offered an early glimpse of what those young players could accomplish.

Moffenbier remembers some adults being less than thrilled when the Aberdeen teens started beating them.

“Why are you so upset about a 15-year-old whooping up on you on the dartboard?” he remembers thinking.

Some competitors appeared to believe the teenagers were sandbagging, Moffenbier said. But they had little competitive history that showed how good they were.

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Gerlach remembers similar reactions at state tournaments years ago, but said attitudes toward youth players have gotten better.

That’s not to say the young Aberdeen team didn’t have any support during the state tournament some 13 years ago.

Moffenbier remembers adult players gathering around the teens during their run. Some had finished playing and could have left, but stayed until the young throwers finished.



Alvin Gerlach helped form a junior darts program in Aberdeen in 2011. That’s why a team of Aberdeen teenagers gave him their runner-up trophy when they placed second in their division at the 2013 South Dakota State Darts Tournament. Courtesy photo.

When the tournament ended, Moffenbier and his brother barely needed to discuss what should be done with the trophy.

“We’re giving this to Alvin, right?” Moffenbier recalled. “It’s the only thing that makes sense.”

They wanted Gerlach to know what starting the junior program meant to them.

Today, Moffenbier is nearly 29 and still throws darts. His son Aiden participated in the junior league last year — another generation entering the local darts community.

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Young darts players have successful state tournament

This summer, three members of another Aberdeen family — Dyllon and Ethan Burgess and their cousin Logan Romeo — found success of their own at the state junior darts tournament.

Dyllon, then 20, won four events during his final junior state tournament. He teamed with Romeo to win the triples event, won the 01 singles title and partnered with Ethan to win both cricket and 01 doubles.

In 01 darts, players shoot to reduce a score, often 301, 501 or 701, to exactly zero by throwing darts at numbers on the board. The total score of the darts thrown by a player are subtracted from the 01 total.

A year ago, Dyllon said he and Ethan finished second in every event they entered at the state tourney.

“The first couple, it was relief,” Dyllon said of the wins at this year’s event. “We put a lot of work in over the last year to make sure we could actually get the job done this year.”

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As his final events approached, the victories felt different, he said. Dyllon has thrown at the junior tournament for more than half his life and knew he was playing his last games in the division.

“Even though I was winning and it felt great, it also was bittersweet,” he said.

Romeo’s success carried a different significance.

He said he returned to darts this year after stepping away when he was about 12 because the sport started to feel repetitive for him.

“I didn’t think I was gonna get a lot better,” Romeo said.

Before the July 24-26 junior state tournament in Pierre, Romeo practiced for an hour or two nearly every day, often throwing alone at home. He went on to place in four of his five state events.

The realization that his comeback might be successful came during singles play. Romeo said he won his first three matches, including a 3-0 victory in his third match.

“It was pretty much just one-sided,” he said. “And I was like, ‘Oh, I’m really doing good.’”

For Dyllon, winning with his brother and cousin was about more than collecting another trophy.

“We made memories again that we’ll remember for the rest of our lives,” Dyllon said.

Asked what he would have missed had he never returned to darts, Romeo didn’t mention the top finishes. Instead, he said he appreciated being “surrounded by people that … enjoy doing the same thing I do.”

Teenagers can compete alongside adults in some Aberdeen events, although Gerlach doesn’t allow minors in adult leagues in bars.

Adults understand importance of young players to future of darts



Jesse Gruenstein, Logan Romeo, Dyllon Burgess and Ethan Burgess of Aberdeen all had success at the 2026 South Dakota State Junior Dart Tournament. Courtesy Photo.

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He said adults have come to understand how important younger players are to the future of the game.

“You’ve got to start them young in order to get them playing,” he said.

Dyllon’s junior career is over, but he’s not finished. He said he’s competed in adult events and circuits for several years and intends to continue.

That’s the result of joining the Aberdeen junior league when he was about 8, he said.

“I wouldn’t be throwing darts if it wasn’t for the youth league,” Dyllon said. “If it hadn’t been for Alvin, I wouldn’t have started then.”

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There’s also been a shift in the relationship Dyllon and Moffenbier have. Dyllon said Moffenbier was one of the players he and his brother looked up to when they were younger. Now, they compete against each other, and Dyllon said he’s worked with Moffenbier to help improve his game.

The student is now the teacher.

And that’s the cycle Gerlach said he hoped to create when he started the junior darts program.

“If you help them, you never know — it might be your teammate someday,” he said.