

ON TARGET

... one arm, one eye
(plus hollow leg)
all you need

By JEFF GAYDOS

The boys 'ad at a bit of sport yesterday, wot? Y'know, some darts and a spot of Guinness to loosen the nerve? The whole lot was there at Sgt. Pepper's Disco, 4419 Dewey Ave.

For instance, Joe Richardson, a Kodak electrician who came to Rochester from Manchester, England, 15 years ago "to 'ave a look around," was playing. In fact, 26 of the 32 "boys" participating in what was billed as "Rochester's first singles dart tournament" hailed originally from Britain.

It makes sense. The game hails from Great Britain. First reports of dart matches were recorded in the 16th Century there, and the Pilgrim Fathers played a bit on board the "Mayflower" in 1620.

HERE IN "THE COLONIES," the game is enjoying a growing popularity in certain pockets of the country. It's big on the West Coast, in Chicago, Philadelphia, and in the Washington D.C. area.

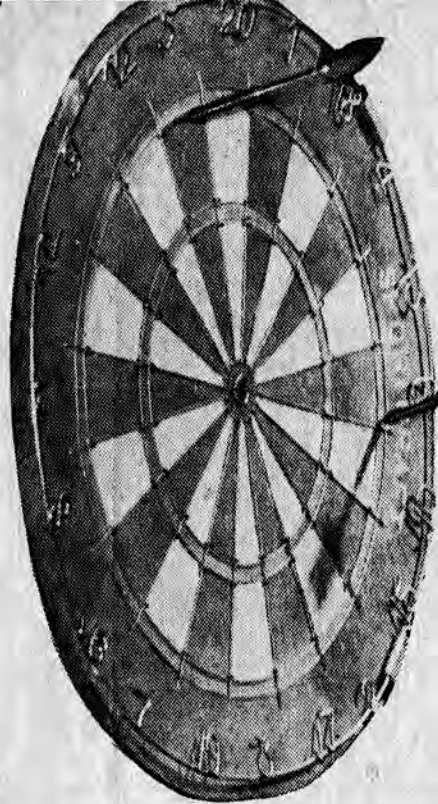
"Anybody can play," said Ron Weismann, who is in town temporarily from Chicago as a special consultant to the city. "All you need is one eye and one arm."

And a hollow leg wouldn't hurt. Seems most of the dart throwers are drinkers too. In fact, Rochester attorney Bob Kelly, a newcomer at the game, said he'd heard of a recent study that showed Philadelphia bar owners felt dart enthusiasts could account for about \$3 million of the pub's annual business.

Weismann and Kelly said they were informally representing the Bench and Bar, a tavern at 34 N. Fitzhugh St. which recently installed a dart board.

KELLY TOOK UP the game two weeks ago, he said, and has already invested \$65 in equipment — three darts and a board, that's all it takes.

Tournament boards, like the two used in yesterday's match, are made of compressed pig



T-U Photos — David Cook



Joe Richardson, top photo, and Ron Weismann, above, take aim.

bristle and cost about \$40. They can also be made of cork or wood.

It's the darts that can run into big money. Kevin Simms, part owner of Sgt. Pepper's and yesterday's tournament organizer, said you can buy them for as little as \$3 and as much as several hundred dollars.

Most good ones are made of tungsten, a dense metal that makes for heavy, small darts. Each dart weighs between 16 and 32 grams, he said. (That's about one ounce.)

Simms, a Liverpool native, would like to see tournament competition among city taverns just like in the Old Country. He said he gets a nice crowd out during the week and thinks other tavern owners could build a steady trade around their dart competitors.

Art Mather, personnel director for Sear's East View Mall store, is a good example. He said he spends about 6 hours a week keeping his game in shape. He learned to play three years ago in Washington, D.C. His brother is Secretary to the American Dart Association and encouraged him to take up the sport.

"I'D LOVE TO SEE local interest in league play — just like softball leagues or bowling leagues," Mather said. "In Washington, there are mixed doubles leagues — a lot of women compete. It's the type of game where people are friendly, and just enjoy each other's company. What you are actually doing, is competing against yourself," he said.

In some cities, the seasoned players said, there are big money tournaments and there are players who make their living hustling at the game.

In Rochester, there is only a handful of "dart" bars. At Sgt. Peppers there was no hustling evident. In fact, when we heard there was a "singles" dart tournament on, we expected to see the kind of hustling that goes on at the singles bars.

None of that. Singles darts matches have nothing to do with marital status. Singles means one-man teams. When there are more Rochesterians playing the game, there'll be "doubles" matches, too.