



Rohit gets ready to 'Rock It' on the oche

DARTS STAR RABADIA TARGETING TITLES IN 2012

EXCLUSIVE

by **RONNIE RUFF**

BACK in the 1980s and 1990s, the 'sport' of darts was more known for its 'pub' culture of beer bellies, drinking and smoking than dedication and professionalism.

Fast forward to 2011 and the art of throwing three arrows into a board has quickly transformed into one of Britain's most popular night-outs thanks to familiar names like Phil 'The Power' Taylor and Adrian 'Jackpot' Lewis.

Barry Hearn and Sky TV's Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) darting revolution has led to sell-out arenas, record viewing figures and million pound tournaments – but despite its crossover into the mainstream, the sport has still yet to unearth its first Asian star.

That though may be all set to change if Rohit 'Rock It' Rabadia has his way. The 31-year-old from Hendon in London is making waves on the rival British Darts Organisation (BDO) and World Darts Federation (WDF) circuits and could be set to break the mould.

Rabadia recently made his mark by collecting his first WDF ranking points after reaching the last 32 at the Latvian Open and hopes to continue that form into the New Year and beyond and become a trailblazer for wannabe Asians.

"Darts has really blown up of late," Rabadia explained. "It has now become a household name; the past few years have been just phenomenal. The sport is getting huge backing from sponsors and TV channels, and the competitions are getting bigger and tougher."

"It means a lot to me to be the first Asian player on the circuit. I want to be the one who sets the trend."

"Getting my first ranking points on the WDF circuit was the best feeling ever. I don't think any of the trophies I have won come anywhere near."

Rabadia first began playing darts with his brother at 15, when his parents bought him his first board after 'nagging them' for it after watching BDO legends Eric Bristow and Jockey Wilson on the BBC.

He continued to hone his skills at the Shree Swaminarayan Temple in Golders Green and won his first tournament there a year later. But just when Rabadia thought he had found a career path, he was forced to give up the game for that age old Asian priority – education.

"I gave up darts when I started college as my parents wanted me to concentrate on my studies, as all Asian parents do," Rabadia recalled. "After that, I didn't pick up a dart again for eleven years."

But luckily for him, that wasn't the end of the story. "In 2007, I got my board back and started throwing again, and the touch was still there. After winning a few more titles at the temple, I signed up to some local leagues," Rabadia said.

"After a while, I felt so comfortable and confident with my darts that my wife urged me to take it to the next level. So I signed up to the BDO and travelled to their events up and down the country. Then towards the end of 2009, I started playing on the European WDF circuit."

Every Christmas and new year, the PDC and BDO stage their respective world championships, with Alexander Palace and Lakeside the iconic venues.

Rabadia hoped he'll be the one stepping out 'onto the oche' in front of a TV audience sooner rather than later.

He said: "My darts come first and my job comes second. I'm committed and want to become the first Asian to hit the Lakeside stage. There are lots of ups and downs and it costs a lot of money to get to all these events."

"There are a lot of sacrifices. I spend a lot of weekends away from home and my little boy. The dream is to get to the televised stages of events, I believe I am capable of doing it and that the hard work and practise will pay off one day."

"At present, I get to practice for a few hours everyday regardless of what time of the day it is, I think in any sport, no matter how many hours you put in, it's never enough. The more you do, the better you will be."

Rabadia added: "I am lucky to have the sponsors that I have (Cricklewood Timbers, RedDragon Darts and NSC Media) as they help with some of the costs, equipment and my website (www.rohi

trabadia.com). Another major sponsor would be perfect so I can do the entire circuit (next year)."

"Until then, I am restricted to how many events I can do. If I can get the backing, I am confident I can compete with the big boys."

Rohit said he wants to inspire more young Asians to get involved in the sport as there is potentially big money to be made, but are there any more out there coming through the system? "Not that I have seen," Rabadia said.

"I think it still comes down to the fact that Asian parents still think like the olden days, where they want their kids to study and the fact the sport is still associated as being a pub sport. I know a few in the local leagues and I am always trying to urge them to join me on my tours."

"I hope more Asian darts players do follow because there is always a future if your hearts set on it. I want to see more on the circuit. There are great players out there who just need that push to do it."

Rabadia also likes to do his bit for good causes and recently organised a 24-hour darts marathon to raise money for two cancer charities. "I continuously played darts around the clock for 24 hours along with a few friends," he explained.

"I had Dean Winstanley, who was BDO world number one at the time, and Stephen Bunting come down for an exhibition too. We also had raffles, competitions and an auction. Currently, we have raised just over £4,000."



Joy and pain for Nehwal

SAINA NEHWAL created Indian badminton history in Liu Zhou, China, last weekend, but still ended up empty handed after losing in her first BWF Super Series Final.

The badminton star became the first Indian woman to reach the final of a Super Series singles event in her three set defeat to world champion Wang Yihan on Sunday (18).

Nehwal, who hadn't beaten the home favourite in their three previous meetings, won the first game but couldn't finish the job, losing 18-21, 21-13, 21-13 in just over an hour and 10 minutes.

The world number four became the first Indian to play in a Super Series final since mixed doubles pair Jwala Gutta and V Diju, who lost to Christinna Pedersen and Joaquim Nielsen back in 2009.

Nehwal has struggled this year to regain the form that won her six major titles in 2010, but will gain comfort from the fact she beat four of the world's top eight players on the way to the final.

Sutil leaves Force India

ADRIAN SUTIL has been dropped by Force India for the new Formula One season and will be replaced by their reserve driver Nico Hulkenberg.

The German racer, who had been with the Subrata Roy-Vijay Mallya co-owned outfit for four years, is now expected to switch allegiances to Williams in 2012.

Hulkenberg will partner Paul di Resta in a new look line-up after the Scot retained his place after a successful first season in F1.

"I think Paul caught the eye of everybody in the pitlane during his rookie season," Mallya said.

"His speed, maturity and racecraft confirmed that we were right to believe in him. We look forward to working with him again next year."

"As for Nico, we identified him as a rising star at the end of 2010."

"Despite having only limited time in the car, he convinced us that he deserved a race seat for 2012."

Hulkenberg, who made his F1 debut with Williams in 2010, said: "I'm obviously delighted. It wasn't easy to watch from the sidelines, but I did my best to help the team and show what I was capable of."

"I am extremely motivated for 2012 and would like to thank everyone for believing in me and giving me this chance. The first test in Jerez can't come soon enough!"

Mallya went on to thank Sutil for his contribution: "Our new line-up means we have to say goodbye to Adrian Sutil."

"He has been an integral part of our success over the past four seasons and we wish him well for the future."