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What you need to know to sell darts

When recommending a dart set, the first question you should ask your customers is what investment they are prepared to make.

- If they are looking for a top quality set, you would recommend an established, credible brand. Look for top quality materials, engineering design and execution.
- The quality of a dart will be determined by its proportions, elegance of design and excellence of finish.
- As a general rule of thumb, the higher the percentage of tungsten, and the higher the price. The top-players, who have been involved in this sport for a few years or longer, generally prefer the higher percentage tungsten darts, as the higher the percentage of tungsten, the slimmer the dart for any given weight.
- Tungsten nickel alloy darts are the products of choice for darts players from club level to professional level.

The price and quality of the dart will depend on the different materials used in the construction of the different components of a dart.

Weight

Before Unicorn started selling darts according to weight in 1949 – their weight accuracy guarantee to within 0.33% on most tungsten darts is still unique to the brand – darts were all dumped together in bins, irrespective of size or weight. Nowadays the most comfortable weight for a throwing style – or size of the player – is an important feature when purchasing darts.

- **Light darts** would, for example, weigh between 16-21gm
 - **Medium darts** usually weigh 22-26 gm
 - **Heavy darts** weigh 27gms and higher
- Heavier darts overcome air resistance more efficiently than lighter darts and provide greater control because they are less susceptible to variations in the throwing release – but thick darts are more difficult to group tightly. This problem is overcome with the more expensive tungsten barrels that are heavier, but slimmer.

Dart barrels

The barrel determines the weight of the dart (see above) and the shape and length can affect your throw. The length affects balance, while the shape determines the comfort of the grip. **Brass** barrels are the most common and least expensive dart on the market. As such, they are often used as the 'house dart' in many places.

Our cut-out-and-keep series to assist retailers with product knowledge

Words: FANIE HEYNs. Compiled with the help of Edward Lowy of Unicorn, distributed in SA by Opal Sports, Francois Plaatjes of De Wet Sports, distributor of Elkadart, Andrew Wentzel of WET Sports, distributor of Datadart and Gary Baker of LGB Distributors, distributor of Harrows darts. The websites www.cyberdarts.com; www.learnaboutdarts.com and www.darts-equipment.org were also utilised.



The metal itself is fairly dense or heavy, though a soft metal, and quite easy to machine compared to others. This type of dart may, however, quickly dull and wear down. They would probably not be a good choice for long term and constant use.

Nickel/silver darts are similar to the brass dart, with the exception that they do not tarnish. It is fairly inexpensive and very popular with the budget-minded beginner.

Tungsten darts are more popular with long term darts players. Tungsten is a dense metal, and is actually heavier than lead. The higher density makes it possible to make a slimmer dart, which creates less air resistance when throwing, and is also easier to group together in a small space like the doubles and trebles. The desired weight can therefore be achieved, without adding bulk.

Categories of tungsten darts

Tungsten darts are also referred to as *nickel/tungsten* darts. They are denser than brass or nickel/silver darts, which means barrels with a smaller diameter, and therefore the ability to group them tighter on the dart-board. There are also titanium/tungsten darts available, with the tungsten used as a surface finish to give the dart a different feel to improve the grip, and hence the throwing style.

There are different categories of tungsten darts:

- 50%-70% tungsten is commonly sold at discount stores. They generally do not specify a percentage of tungsten content, but just say *tungsten darts*.
- 80% tungsten is popular with new league players.
- 90+% tungsten is high density and will feel better to throw, as the darts will be slimmer for any given weight.

Look for the percentage of tungsten on the packaging, a higher number means that the dart is denser. The higher the tungsten percentage, the more expensive the dart, as it is a more expensive material than brass.

There are also a small number of copper-tungsten darts available. This is a much softer material, with about 70% tungsten content. They are generally quite inexpensive.

Shafts

The shaft enables a flight (that provides stability to a dart) to be connected to the barrel. The right flight must be connected to the right shaft to ensure stability. They come in different lengths and materials that balance the length of the dart and the action of the flight. Shafts are inexpensive and can be replaced when they bend or break.

Plastic shafts are the most affordable. They are usually made out of polycarbonate or nylon.

- The main disadvantage of a plastic shaft is weak durability, which usually results in a short life span.
- Entry level nylon shafts often break off when the darts falls to the floor, which frustrates the players.
- Some plastic shafts – depending on what the composite materials are – have the advantage that they have a degree of flexibility so that an incoming dart may push a dart that is already in the board to one side, allowing the incoming dart to reach its scoring target.
- Many top-professionals use

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plastic shafts, such as the Gripper 11 model, used by Unicorn. It is semi-rigid, very lightweight and a plastic shaft. The 15-times world champion, Phil Taylor, for example, uses a dart with a lightweight titanium base with a replaceable plastic flight holder.

Composite shafts are a combination of plastic and metal — either with a plastic base that threads into the dart, combined with aluminium or other metal top to hold the flight; or with a metal base and plastic adaptors.

- Because of the combination such shafts have a longer life span and their top parts are very easy to replace.
- Metal shafts are heavier than plastic, which can adversely affect the balance of the dart. Metal shafts are more expensive than plastic, but they are also more durable.

Aluminium shafts are more rigid and durable than plastic and composite shafts.

- Aluminium shafts almost never break, they can only bend. However, if the shaft is bent, it can change the trajectory of a dart.
- With aluminium shafts the player has the advantage of a better or tighter fit of the flight at the back of the shaft.

Spinning shafts allow the flight to turn out of the way when struck by another dart, and as a result, the number of torn flights is significantly lower than for the other shaft categories. This ability also allows for tighter groups by letting the flights align with each other.

Flight

Flights are the wings of the dart and they provide the stability to a dart's path. They come in different sizes and shapes and must be matched with the right shaft to provide the correct drag during flight, depending on the player's throwing style. Larger flights offer more air resistance than the smaller flights, therefore the larger the flight, the slower, your dart. Their vast number of designs offer players the oppor-

tunity to express their individuality.

Injection moulded flights are made out of stiff polythene. During the manufacturing process the layers are permanently sealed together by heat.

- The main advantage of this type of flight is their durability. If these flights are hit by a dart no damage would occur, most likely the dart will just simply knock the flight.
- The size of the flight can make grouping more difficult.
- Entry level flights like the polyester types used by casual and part-time players are inexpensive and replacement costs are not really an issue.

Soft flights are made out of flexible plastic. Adhesive (glue) holds the layers of plastic together. Some flights are made out of flexible polyester and are thin, light and strong.

- If the flight is torn during the game, the layers can be pressed together with fingers and the adhesive will *heal* the tear.
- Such flights are most affordable.

The larger the flight, the slower your dart

Nylon flights are made of ripstop nylon fabric. They are by far the most durable type of flight.

- The stiffness of such flight is roughly midway between *soft* and *hard* flights.
- Nylon flights are rather heavy and thick. It can be difficult to get the flight into the back of the shaft.

Dimplex flights are for players who like to splash out with their darts. They have a rippled finish as this would change the way the dart reacts in flight. They can provide rigidity or stability to the flight of the dart.

Long life flights: Some suppliers offer flights made of a woven fibre, which prove to be very popular, simply because of their durability.

Smaller flights offer less obstruction to incoming darts when in the board, but generally require a more skilled player to get the best out of them.

Larger flights are more stable and forgiving

for amateur players.

Flight protectors

Flight protectors protect the life and durability of the flight as they save the flight from being damaged by another dart hitting the back of the flight already in the board.

The advantage of the flight protectors is that an incoming dart may hit the back of a dart in the board and be deflected by the flight protector and still score. Without this, the incoming dart may actually stick in the back of the dart in the board and not score.

The disadvantage of flight protectors is that they can be difficult to apply and will have an adverse effect on flight dynamics, magnified by their distance from the centre of gravity of the dart.

Dart tips

When it comes to the tip of the darts, there are two main varieties, the steel tip and the soft tip.

Steel tip darts are the traditional darts with pointed tips. Parents may want to think twice about getting a set of these for younger players and you could recommend getting soft tip darts.

Soft tip darts are made of flexible materials like polyester and plastic. They will not do the same damage to a board (or wherever the dart lands) the same way a steel tip dart would. Most electronic dartboards only accommodate soft tip darts.

Dart grips

The actual grip of a dart-player on the barrel of the dart is a very personal and subjective choice. Different players prefer different grips.

- Some choose smooth barrels, as it maximises the contact area of their fingers on the barrel.
- Other players like the coarse grip with finger-grip engineered points.
- Experts also talk about the knurled grip (knurl is a manufacturing process by which a diamond-shaped pattern is cut or rolled into metal). This gives the dart player a better grip.

Variety from Elkadart

DE WET SPORT offers a comprehensive range of darts suitable for every level of play and budget from Elkadart, the UK company that has been manufacturing darts for the past thirty years.

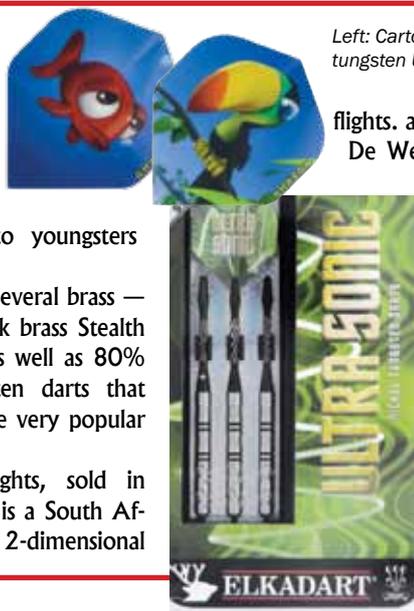
"What would be of interest to retailers is our 90% tungsten Ultra Sonic dart with its unique cutting edge grooved barrel design," says Francois Platjies. The custom designed 2D flights add further interest. It is available in 21, 23, 25 and 27 gm weights.

Another new item that has been very popular amongst retailers that have seen them is the Amazon flights in both trans-

parent and cartoon character designs — the latter would especially appeal to youngsters starting to play.

They also offer several brass — including the black brass Stealth — nickel/silver, as well as 80% and 90% tungsten darts that have proved to be very popular in the market.

Among the flights, sold in packs of 20 sets, is a South African flag design, 2-dimensional



Left: Cartoon character flights and below the tungsten Ultra Sonic dart set.

flights, as well as Turbo Flights.

De Wet also offers a cheaper set of brass darts in a wallet, as well as dartboards, scoreboards and cabinets from the Medalist brand.

The dartboards are available in a championship-quality board with an inserted blade wire and made of high quality bristle; a tournament-quality bristle dartboard; as well as an entry level Flocked dartboard for children and home use.