

End of Season Presentation Address (delivered by Mike Bath – 24th May 2017)

SETTING

“Let’s start by thinking about question-setting for a change.

If we got all our questions each week from a book then I for one am pretty confident we wouldn’t have lasted half the 40 odd years that we’ve been quizzing in this league.

Every week one or more of us sit down to create something novel, entertaining and often pretty taxing. The result is a glorious array of the weird, the wonderful, the fascinating and occasionally the downright terrible. We do sometimes miss the target but usually we hit it pretty well.

This season has illustrated all these adjectives - but it has also taken away from us two of our best friends and expert setters.”

RICHARD SEED

“Richard Seed was for many years an Opsimath until, in his later quizzing years, he moved to the Prodigals. When it came to setting and answering, anything about architecture was his forte and boy did he light up when an architecture question came up. He died last autumn and a good few of us were at Southern Cemetery last September to mourn his passing and celebrate his friendship.”

DAVE BARRAS

“More unexpectedly in March this year our great friend, the original Man They Couldn’t Hang, Dave Barras, passed away. Again many of us were at his funeral in Macclesfield. Dave was the best of us. His papers (and let’s be honest a TMTCH paper was a Dave Barras paper) were the most well-researched and beautifully presented works of art. True, not all of us were so enthusiastic about WW2 tanks or NE Conference football clubs but it didn’t matter because along the way Dave always opened the door to his favourite topics with themes and clues that appealed to everybody.

He will be sorely missed. The website really came into its own by reflecting your many feelings about Dave and his place in our affections but I must quote Gerry Collins’ beautiful words as a fitting epitaph....

‘It was dark, dreich and dismal at Macclesfield crematorium yesterday as many of us gathered to say goodbye to Dave. A sullen contrast to the rich and colourful patchwork that had been Dave’s life as we heard described in an eloquent ceremony.

One thing that stayed with me was the description of the little bits of paper left lying around the house when Dave took to setting quizzes. I recently heard Seamus Heaney’s widow saying that she still missed her husband’s untidiness about the house; his clutter of little jottings and phrases that might one day be nurtured and coaxed into poetry.

Good quiz questions are maybe more ephemeral than good poetry but they have this in common: they don’t just happen; they both need a lot of work, a lot of teasing and wheedling before they can be published. Above all they both need inspiration. Dave had that inspiration. An inspiration that made us realise that

there is more to knowledge than knowing the answer; that knowing how to ask can yield a still more rewarding pleasure.

Quizzing, by its nature, will always be about the trivial and the banal. But so is life oftentimes. So take a leaf out of Dave's jotter and make the most of both.

Rest in Peace, Darlo lad. You are and will always be missed.'

In Dave's memory we have introduced a new trophy to our end of season rituals, 'The Dave Barras Superbia in Quaestiones Cup' is what it says on it but it just happens to be a plaque! Dave would have enjoyed this slight error on my part. I have had the previous 13 'Question of the Season' winners names engraved on it and this season according to your votes earlier this evening from the 29 'Question of the Week' winners I can tell you that....

in third place is The Prodigals with their "J'en ai marre" question

in second place is The Charabancs of Fire with their Roberto question

but the winners for 2016/17 are Dunkin' Dönitz with their Spandau Ballet question."

(present 'Dave Barras Superbia in Quaestiones' Cup to Dunkin' Dönitz)

QUESTION PAPER HIGHLIGHTS

"Well the stats as shown in the excellent season's summary prepared by Mike H that you all have on your table show that our setters' preferences for the different types of round have been:

- Pairs (51 rounds)
- Announced themes (41)
- Hidden themes (39)
- Various others (41)

Browsing the website in preparation for this evening I was struck by the pains taken each week by contributors to find new ways of describing excellence so as not to sound hollow or patronising, since by and large excellence was what we wanted to describe.

(By the way I know Rachael has similar challenges finding new ways to say 'convivial' – and Damian new ways to say 'defeat from the jaws of victory').

So what struck me this year?

Well the obvious novelty is the frequent deployment of the 'Run on' round where the answer to the first part of the question runs into the answer to the second part. Usually these questions are not hard but they can conjure up wonderful images. I highlight just 3 that wormed their way into my imagination....

'It Happened One Night....at the Opera'

'The Rite of Spring....Onions'

'500 Hundred Days of Summer....Pudding'

As ever Gerry and the Charas came up with some wonderful stuff. For instance their 'Semper Ubi, Sub Ubi' Round. "What?" we asked, and then the penny dropped "Always wear underwear!" and we were treated to a themed round on bras and knickers.

And what about the week that Roddy's computer managed to create a paper with a question missing and then went on to create 4 other versions of the same paper with

different questions missing in each so that each match contested a slightly different paper. Definitely a WithQuiz first!

And whilst we're on about computers do you remember the Bards paper which had the question:

‘Which literary figure's funeral in Dublin in 1964 was said to be the biggest since that of Michael Collins?’ with the answer “An Iron Horse”.

Wherever Brendan Behan was cut from, he never got pasted (and I don't think anyone has ever said that before!).

And what about the comments I came across about one of the History Men's papers: ‘A paper avowedly and unashamedly set by old people for the benefit of even older people!’? Eat your hearts out, Shrimps!”

WIST

“So from the setters to the winning settees(!).

First WIST. We've now been enjoying inter-league matches with our friends from Stockport for 10 years and much of the credit for this extension to our traditional competitions must go to tonight's quizmaster, Mike Wagstaffe. The original format was very much his idea. And to cap it all he has taken the time out to prepare and present this evening's quiz so many, many thanks, Mike.

(present whisky to Mike Wagstaffe)

This season the Pre-season WIST Cup was won back by WithQuiz after a couple years over the other side of the Mersey. Nick captained the winning WithQuiz team back in September.

(present WIST Cup to Nick Mills)

The Cup which the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th placed teams in both leagues play for is called the A-Trophy but from next season Mike and the Stockport League would like it to be known as the ‘Lowly Grail’ – and I agree this is a better name.

This year, however, the final for the A-Trophy was fought out between 2 WithQuiz teams: The Prodigals and Compulsory Mantis Shrimps – and the Prods came out on top.

(present A-Trophy Cup to The Prodigals)

In the WIST Champions Cup competition between the top 4 teams in the 2 leagues the final was contested by The Albert from our side of the fence and The Travellers Call from Stockport. After 5 years in the hands of WithQuiz teams the cup sneaked back southwards to the Travellers Call. We want it back next year but I must say many of us have enjoyed playing the Travellers over the years and are pleased they've got their moment in the sun.”

VAL DRAPER CUP & WITHQUIZ PLATE

“As is the custom now we fought the Val Draper Cup and the WithQuiz Plate competitions based on handicap scores inherited from the final position a team enjoyed in the League table. This worked a treat and very nearly saw TMTCH into the Val Draper final.

As before the paper for the final was a compendium of rounds set by the teams not competing in either of the two finals. Perhaps this didn't work so well this year with a

rather long drawn-out and low-scoring pair of final matches. However the paper did contain some well-liked material and the 4 finalists were unanimous that the Electric Pigs 'Fraternal Round' was the best of the evening.

(present wine and dictionaries to the Electric Pigs for the best round of the 'Knocked Out United' paper)

As it was the WithQuiz Plate final was fought out between Dunkin' Dönitz and The Prodigals with the Prodigals just coming out on top.

(present WithQuiz Plate to The Prodigals)

In the Val Draper final things were even tighter with The History Men just outflanking Ethel Rodin by a single point with a 'steal' on the last fateful question. I set this question and I do regret the fact that it was a tad devious (perhaps unfair) with the answer 'Final Score' actually including the word 'final' which had been omitted from all the other answers in the round. My apologies to Ethel."

(present Val Draper Cup to The History Men)

WITHQUIZ LEAGUE

"And so to the premier competition - the WithQuiz League title.

This year Dunkin' Dönitz have been dominant from start to finish. Indeed it took until January 25th for anyone to beat them (who else but the Bards). In the later portion of the campaign the shine did wear off a tad with the Dunkers suffering further defeats at the hands of The Shrimps, The Opsimaths and Albert.

Nevertheless they thoroughly deserved their title with their unique blend of polymathy allied to self-knowledge - being the acknowledged masters of knowing who in their own team is likely to know what, and so taking all their risky 'twos' in a highly calculated manner.

Last year's winners, The Bards, slumped in form, whilst the Shrimps made great strides up the table. Albert continued to threaten at the top and The Opsimaths were once again Runners Up. But this year's major honour goes to The Dunkers - and Dunkers, for the sake of the webmaster, can you please think of a name for next season that does not contain an umlaut or indeed any other wretched diacritical symbol!"

(present League Shield to Dunkin' Dönitz)

NEXT SEASON

"Next year we celebrate - as far as my research tells me - our 40th season of WithQuiz. We're not great ones for big organised dos but I have chatted to a few of you over the last month or so and there seems to be general agreement that a social evening - perhaps just this side of Christmas - would be a fine thing to do. We could have a small fun quiz and try and make sure that as many former WithQuiz competitors as possible turn up to join our celebration. Perhaps a hotpot supper could be laid on. Some of you know that I used my various contacts to try and inveigle Jeremy Paxman into coming along and being a guest QM but - although he wishes us well for the next 40 - he won't be able to attend. Perhaps another guest QM could be rustled up - any suggestions very welcome.

More of this when we return to the weekly quizzing cycle late in September, but until then have a great summer and back to you, Mike, for the second half of this evening's quiz."