

# HIGH VOLTAGE TIMES AHEAD

**E**lectrician Rob Cross shocked the sports world after defeating playing legend and 16 times champion Phil 'The Power' Taylor in the final of the PDC World Darts Championships in January.

At just 27, the same age Taylor first donned the darts crown, Phil, a 125-1 outsider at the start of the tournament, is applying some of the strengths he gained in the electric sector to his new career, as Greg Rhodes discovers

A professional for just a year, Rob left his old job at the start of 2017. Then, he was winning £7 as one of a pairs (£14) darts night in Littlehampton, West Sussex after failing to qualify for the World Championships in both 2016 and 2017.

His first major tournament was the UK Open in 2016, where he reached the fourth round. In 2017, he reached round five but started to impress at the backend of 2017, reaching the quarters of the Grand Slam of Darts and the semis of the Players Championship.

Rob lost to Michael van Gerwen in the final of the European Championship in October, being ranked 20th at the start of the tournament.

## So many questions

When did you first know that darts was for you? What prompted you to move from backroom player to the centre stage. Is there a single tournament or moment that drove your decision to compete in the Worlds?

I managed to qualify for the UK Open in 2016, losing to Michael van Gerwen but that was the first time that I thought 'I belong in the darts world'.

"My family have been my inspiration. They've been so supportive and I want to win as many tournaments as I can to repay their faith in me and to give them a better life." The £400,000 winner's pot should certainly help there.

But the prospect of staying at the top for as long as Phil Taylor is not one he entertains. "In 30 years' time I'll be Phil's age. I'm living my dream and hope for a successful career but I can't see me lasting at the top like he has."

## Why did he move into a career in the electrical sector?

"My family believed in a trade and drummed this into me when I was at school, so I gained work experience early on and am fortunate in having the high work ethic that my parents held.

"Working as an electrician encouraged that work ethic – you had to get up early to get on site on time and I had a purpose every day, achieving things."

So how did his darts career evolve?

"It was first focused around the weekends, so I had weekdays off to take my children [Leyton, 6 and Imogen, 3] to school but then life changed as I began to move up and I've had to adapt to that.



I'm unable to devote so much time to the family in that sense now and my wife Georgia looks after Madison, our eight-month old."

Now living in Hastings, although originally from Edenbridge, Rob devotes time to the family when he can – "walking on the beach is a favourite for me. I'm already recognised in the street now – it's a transformation for me. It doesn't feel real but I'm beginning to get used to success although there's a learning curve to go through."

How does he plan to shape his darts career?

"I want to stay grounded and work harder at my profession because I believe I can become 30% better than I am now but the key is to stay mentally strong, to always push for greater success and always play to win."

How is this self-imposed pressure impacting his lifestyle now and in the future? Those earlier portrayals of pint-swilling portly darts players have gone.

"Playing darts at this level burns energy so you have to eat right. My goal is to lose a little weight, join a gym and become a bit trimmer and maintain a healthy diet definitely. If you want to maintain form you have to keep fit and healthy. Many darts players suffer from bad backs, for example."

Rob returns to the key to prolonged high performance. "Concentration is everything – it's about 90% mental strength and 10% ability I believe. I practised a lot when I was a kid and that

helps you develop that strength but you have to take in all these different aspects – feeling healthy and good in yourself."

If his darts career fails to progress along the lines he plans, what then?

"Well, I have a trade to return to – working as an electrician was fantastic. I took pride in what I did and was a perfectionist – and was a lot fitter than I am now!

"But I'm still learning and there is so much to achieve. The Premier League is coming up so I'll be busier this year than last, pushing my boundaries."

He has Michael van Gerwen in his sights though. "He is world number 1 and has won everything. He's my age group so we could be battling it out head to head for some time."

## Fast facts

**Nickname:** "Voltage. I struggled on picking a name to begin with. PDC [Professional Darts Corporation, which runs tournaments worldwide] was pressing me to come up with one and the link with my electrical background was a logical one."

**First team you played in:** "The Fountain pub team in Cowden, Kent"

**Favourite player:** "Phil Taylor – of course, because of his drive and mentality"

**Favourite tune:** "The Desire and Hot Hot Hot"

**Football team:** "Chelsea"