

# Sports Vision Practice of the Year

The *Optician* Sports Vision Award, sponsored by BBGR, went to Wolverhampton-based Flint & Partners Optometrists.

Joe Ayling reports

**S**hooting enthusiasts are flocking to the *Optician* Sports Vision Practice of the Year from far and wide, while one of its partners is determined to get optics on to more team sheets.

One such shooter who has benefited from a visit to the practice is the captain of the GB veterans clay shooting team, John Nightingale, who recently struggled to see targets come out of their traps soon enough. He is from Rugby but was recommended Flint & Partners through a friend from Newcastle.

‘They’ve been very good. My appointment wasn’t until 5.15pm but I was in the area and phoned ahead to see if I could pick my specs up straight away,’ he says.

Other patients have travelled to the Wolverhampton practice from Finland and Ireland of late, Flint & Partners’ sports vision optometrist Edward Lyons tells *Optician*.

Flint’s Tettenhall Road practice dispenses visual aids including wraparound eyewear and contact lenses to its patients, as well as rooting out refractive problems such as dominant eye changes.

## Marketing opportunity

Lyons, who is now one of five Flint partners, believes word has travelled fast since April’s *Optician* Award. He says: ‘It was a great honour to be recognised by the profession, peers and contemporaries, and from a personal perspective that was fantastic. It has also given us the facility to market this aspect of the business in a totally different way.

‘As an independent we’ll never have the marketing budget or the force of advertising that the multiples do. But to have an accolade of being the best practice in any aspect of optometry immediately gives you more kudos and credibility when approaching either individuals or clubs to offer a service. Patients are also now able to say



Optometrist Edward Lyons (right) with patient John Nightingale, captain of the GB veterans clay shooting team

they had their eyes tested at the best sports vision practice in the country, which is a really nice tag to be able to have.’

Before too long there is another knock on the door. This time it is Alan Williams, a Welsh international Olympic trap shooter.

‘I was shooting well up until 12 months ago,’ he says. ‘I had tried changing my guns but it had nothing to do with that. I was able to read but my far-sightedness had gone.

‘There was a guy on the circuit who said Ed Lyons was the man to see. We shooters are always looking for something to blame but these new lenses should be able to cure it now,’ adds Williams, holding aloft his new specially fitted glasses.

However, despite this steady flow of shooters, plus tennis players, golfers and cricketers, sports vision screening continues to be widely neglected.

‘What is amazing is how many professional teams you will approach who either don’t have any form of visual assessment or have it to such a rudimentary level that they might as well not have any,’ says Lyons. ‘There is still a lot of scepticism.’

Lyons is a key contributor to the sports vision debate and past

vice chairman of the Association of Sportsvision Practitioners. He will be presenting at a sports vision symposium in Las Vegas in January.

He says: ‘In America they’re a whole lot more switched on to the importance of sports vision in performance, whereas here we tend to think that if you’ve got good enough vision to read a number plate, a book or a computer screen, then you shouldn’t necessarily have vision problems when you’re participating. But we know that’s not the case.’

## Sporting mix

Founded in 1935, Flint has now expanded to four practices in the Midlands, with a diverse mix of services to support its sports vision offering.

Lyons adds: ‘We’ve been expanding the business in new directions and gaining more patients through participating in sports vision, low vision work, glaucoma referral and refinement. We get involved in as many of the local schemes as we can in order to attract and retain patients.’

Although Lyons would like to move further into screening professional clubs, it is proving tricky to convince physiotherapists and coaches.

‘The goal would be to get the practice and the ethos of sports vision assessment so widely known that big clubs are saying “come in and help us”, whereas at the moment it is very much the individuals,’ Lyons adds.

However, word of mouth down at the shooting club and a glimmering *Optician* Award is giving Flint plenty to shout about. ●

## SPORTS VISION PRACTICE OF THE YEAR

● **Winner** Flint and Partners, Wolverhampton

● **Shortlisted**  
G T Harvey & Partners, Newcastle upon Tyne  
Susan Park Optometrist, Bangor, Co Down