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JANUARY 2024 INTERNATIONAL

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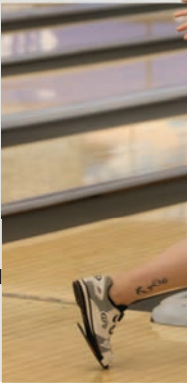
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Baking shares time with Junior Gold champ Larielle Tharps' bowling ambitions, creating a tasty duo.

photography
Simone Amaduzzi



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The Tiger Effect

One sure way to know that a sport is in trouble — in this case, golf — is a headline such as the one *The Athletic* ran last month: “Tiger Woods is back. This time, the future of golf is at stake.”

There you have it, the gasping hopes of a storied pastime pinned to the whims of a single individual. It is a precarious position for golf, to be sure — one intensified by the PGA’s much-publicized rivalry, then attempted partnership with LIV.

“I would say that the answer is murky,” Woods said when reporters asked simply what the future of professional golf would look like. Yikes.

Woods’ role within the golf world for which he long has served as the face transformed in August when he joined the PGA Tour policy board. Jordan Spieth, a three-time major winner on the PGA Tour, said, “He’s spending most of his waking hours thinking about how to better the PGA Tour for the players. And he doesn’t have to do that. He could ride off into the sunset if he wants.”

Having survived the existential crisis posed by a global pandemic, bowling would seem to be better positioned than golf to face down future

crises. While golf breathlessly pins its hopes on its one overarching star, bowling’s moment as we enter 2024 appears to be one in which numerous stars could fill such roles when their competitive careers wind down.

While closest in bowling to the status Tiger Woods achieved in golf, Jason Belmonte no longer is the only person our sport can look toward as credible enough to fill the behind-the-scenes role Woods now performs. At age 40, perhaps he is the closest to that point in his career. But EJ Tackett (age 31) and Anthony Simonsen (age 26) seem poised to rival Belmonte’s greatest glories on the lanes.

In addition to Shannon O’Keefe, the emergence of players like Bryanna Coté and Jordan Richard as faces of women’s pro bowling would seem to position them for calming and consequential influence in the later years of their competitive careers as well.

Professional bowling often is compared unflatteringly to professional golf, particularly with regard to prize funds. But one thing we can say for our sport is that our search for leadership among transcendent stars likely won’t, as it does for golf, yield a number as lonely as 1.

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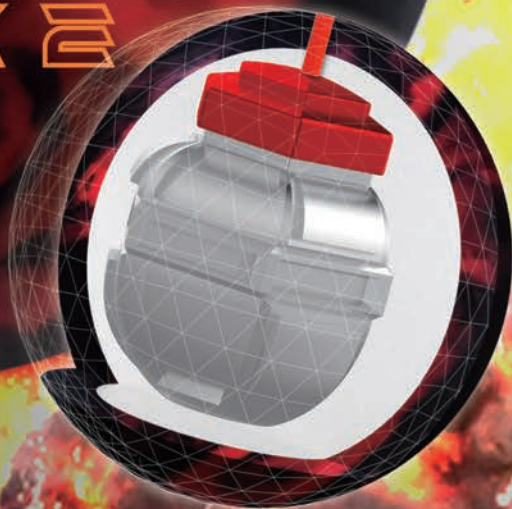
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HAIR-RAISING ACTION

Intensity and emotion on the lanes manifests itself in a variety of ways and looks. For 2023 Pan American Games double bronze medalist Sandra Gongora of Mexico, a critical strike drew clenched fists and teeth, and seemed to stand her hair on end.

photography
Pan American Games

Showstopper

'I'm Living My Dream'

Why Kerry Smith's PWBA Regional Showdown win is a life-changer.

KERRY SMITH'S CONVERSATIONS

with media during and after her victory at the 2023 PWBA Regional Showdown, held Dec. 7-9 at Aloma Bowl in Winter Park, Florida, included no inquiry into her religious views. But it's likely that she left Aloma Bowl a little more faithful than she might have been before she got there.

That's what the guiding hand of God does when it comes to your aid on the lanes. Just ask Smith, who watched arguably the most consequential shot of her life unfold in a manner so bizarre she never will forget it.

"I really hit that one at the bottom, and I was prepared to shoot the spare, but I guess the bowling gods were looking over me at that point and said, 'Hi-Yah! There you go!'" Smith recalls of her dramatic first shot of the 10th frame in a match against 2 seed GG Mason that had been, for the most part, neck-and-neck to that point.

With the match tied at 125 apiece in the seventh frame, Mason pounded strikes in her eighth and ninth frames — shouting "Please!" as the first of the two split the 8-9 to put all 10 back — to put as much pressure as she could on her opponent.

In that must-strike situation, Smith sent her ball sailing left of her intended break point, then watched it cut Brooklyn and, initially at least, leave the 3-6. But before she could turn back and gather herself for what would have been a crucial spare attempt, a tomahawking messenger lasered across the pin deck and took the knees out of that 3-6 combo to deliver the most improbable strike Smith could have imagined, and in a moment when she needed a good break to come her way as much as the 38-year-old veteran competitor ever had before.

"I don't know," a bemused Smith shrugged in the aftermath of her 203-181 victory, which came with \$4,000 and,

more impactfully, all her entry fees being paid for every singles event she bowls on the 2024 PWBA Tour. "I just tried to throw the best shot I could, and I threw it a little too good, and it broke loose. You know, sometimes, luck is on your side."

Mason, the Team USA veteran who had finished runner-up in the only prior PWBA Regional Showdown event held (2019), left a 2-10 split on the first ball of her 10th to seal her own fate.

Of the unique award of having all her entry fees paid next season, Smith said, "It's huge, because a lot of people don't realize how expensive it is to pay the entry fees plus your airfare, your hotel, and food and everything else. It really adds up, and you have to bowl really well to make

money. So, it's huge, and any of the girls will tell you the same thing."

The 2023 PWBA Regional Showdown prize may be, in that respect, one of the most coveted to be awarded in PWBA competition in recent years. And Smith, who attained the top seed in the event, has three PWBA regional titles to her credit, and enjoyed a fifth-place finish on the national tour in 2023 (Waterloo Open), has all the talent, work ethic, and experience necessary to parlay that prize toward greater riches to come.

Fee and Clear
Having all entry fees paid for 2024 will loosen Smith's armswing all the more this season.





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“The community support is incredible. There are strangers that I’ve never met before helping. They just showed up. The people that helped us were the owners, managers, and employees of that bowling alley that had just lost everything.”

— Taylor Reed of Nashville on the aftermath of the Dec. 9 tornado that tore through what had been a new bowling center in Henderson, Tennessee, called Big Play, where approximately 200 people hunkered down as the twister barreled through. Everyone in the building at the time was spared, and Big Play, a space that offers go karts, an arcade and other entertainment options in addition to bowling, reportedly will rebuild.



252.27

Reigning PWBA Tour Player of the Year Jordan Richard’s average for 69 games in the Sportsman League at Monroe Sport Center in Monroe, Michigan, earning her the women’s national high-average award for the 2022-23 season. The number also places Richard in the top spot on the women’s all-time high-average list, a position previously occupied by fellow PWBA Tour standout Shannon Pluhowsky and her 250.7 average for the 2017-18 league season.

Other national award honorees for 2022-23 include men’s high-average winner Ben Trueg (253.52 for 69 league games), Melia Mitskavich (female youth high-average award with 236.12 for 75 league games) for her second consecutive such award, and male youth high-average winner Ethan Crouse (251.37 for 78 games).

David Morgas and Joe Susaneck each shot 899 to share the male high-series award, while Nikoletta Battistoni won female high-series honors with an 866.

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The One Board

Lacking Suspense

by JEF GOODGER



ONE OF THE FEW great features of pop culture is the generic sitcom plot: the person who abhors gambling accidentally finding a lucky streak and becoming addicted on a trip to Las Vegas or Atlantic City, the husband trying to watch the big game when he's supposed to be on a date with his wife, kids throwing a party that goes way too far while their parents are out, to name a few. And, of course: The Bowling Episode.

In *The Bowling Episode*, the character portrayed as being new to or bad at bowling inevitably ends up facing a 7-10 split in the 10th frame. This split must be converted to win the league or a bet with his spouse or some other ultimately meaningless pursuit. We need to ignore the writers' ignorance regarding bowling scoring and strategy (if converting the 7-10 wins, then knocking down one of the pins ties, resulting in whatever detailed roll-off procedure the Writers Guild negotiated in their last contract). The smart strategy would be for the inept character to be content with knocking down one pin and hope for the best in the roll-off.

In fairness, there may have been a roll-off in waiting on at least three dozen of these episodes, but thankfully our character converts the split every time, then celebrates wildly. Sometimes, the character strikes on the first ball in the 10th and

the 7-10 split is on the second, meaning his spare attempt is the final shot and celebrating is acceptable. Other times, the split comes on the first shot in the 10th and the conversion on the second, meaning the TV crew should be just off camera shouting at the elated individual, telling him to stop being happy and immediately throw his meaningless fill ball before resuming his enthusiasm, but maybe that happens during the credits.

Regardless, what we've learned from all this is what TV writers, who write for the masses, believe: the most compelling way for a bowling match to be decided is by someone converting the 7-10 split in the final frame to win.

Of course, such a thing would be exciting in a real bowling match between two top professionals. But take a week or so and ponder: Has it ever happened in the history of the PBA Tour? Not the 7-10 split, necessarily, but a big split like a 6-7 or even 2-4-10. And not one of those third-frame conversions we're told to remember because that might prove to be big later, and not a ninth-frame conversion that kept the guy in the match he eventually won, but an actual, winning shot.

Mark Roth's 7-10 conversion happened in the ninth frame against Bill Straub. Had Roth not converted the 7-10, Straub

could've won. Kris Prather made the 3-4-6-7-10 in the 10th frame of Game 1 of the race-to-two 2019 PBA Playoffs, which was important but was not the winning shot of that game, let alone the match.

Pondering further: Why would it happen? If a pro needs to convert the 7-10 to win, he's going to be happy taking out the 10 and going to a roll-off. If he needs to convert a big split to earn a fill ball, still needing at least one pin, then sure, he'll go for the split. But has that ever happened? Has professional bowling ever given society what they allegedly crave based on generic sitcom plots?

In *Kingpin*, which is not a sitcom, Big Ern needed all three strikes in the 10th. That is far more common in professional bowling and one could argue even more compelling. A hypothetical 7-10 split conversion to win a tournament would be met with disbelief and euphoria from the player and the crowd, but drilling all three strikes when they are required showcases the athleticism and determination of the player, which is better for many reasons.

Sitcoms, you've been getting it wrong, but it doesn't matter. We only watch sitcoms if they're aired live so we can record them and watch later while chastising some stranger on social media who posted about what happened.

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Generation Next

Nick Vuono

NORTH BABYLON, NY

AGE 15

NEW YORK STATE H.S. RECORD SERIES

NICK VUONO'S DAD Frank had one word for his experience watching, in person, his son smash the New York State High School series record with a blistering 867 he fired in competition on Dec. 5: "Surreal."

Indeed, it was, as the seemingly unconscious Nick robotically connected with the pocket on every ball for scores of 278, 300 and 289. And to think it even could have been more.

"In the third game, with the 289, on his 11th shot, he threw a great shot and left a stone 9 pin. He was in a zone. He was just on. He couldn't miss."

Frank says Nick, a two-hander, is a big fan of PBA Tour champion Packy Hanrahan "and watches lots of his videos," though Nick, unlike Packy, is a righthander himself. For a player who only has been competing for two-and-a-half years, Nick, says dad, possesses the composure of one who has been at it far longer.

"It's just the way he conducts himself. He's very calm and cool. He doesn't get rattled," Frank says.

And he's had coaching from one of the coolest figures in pro bowling — two-time PBA Tour champion Tommy Delutz Jr., who "has a pro shop not too far from our home."

With scores like the ones Nick Vuono has been posting in his mid-teens, it seems entirely possible that he will, someday, follow in the footsteps of national champions like Delutz.

Nick's Knack

Dad Frank says Nick is an avid student of every aspect of the sport.



Stunner

Nick's 867 series stunned the New York state high-school bowling scene in December.

Know of a promising youth bowler who belongs in **GENERATION NEXT**? Let us know! Email the editor at Gianmarc.Manzione@bowl.com.

Hot Hand
From PBA regionals to the youth ranks, Jake Bockstie has staged some statement-making performances of late.

Jake Bockstie

NOTTINGHAM, MD

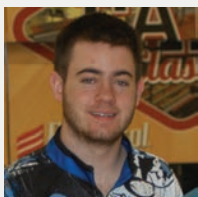
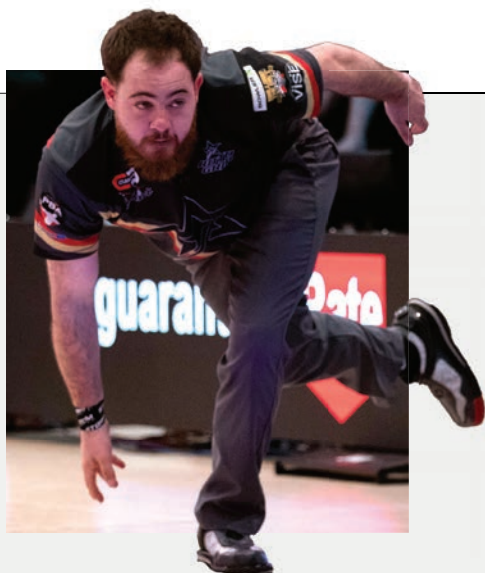
AGE 16

STORM YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS TITLIST

This product of Billy Gasn's always-challenging Mid-Atlantic Junior Bowlers Tour became a rather hot hand in 2023, having won Storm Youth Championships Coastal Classic (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina) in November after having finished runner-up in the SYC New York (Rochester, New York) event months earlier. But there is so much more to this young gun's talent. Dad Scott explains.

"He was a two-time youth-bowler of the year in Billy's events. In September [of 2023] he won Parker Bohn's event in New Jersey. He has bowled in three PBA regionals and led qualifying in two of them, with a 300 game in his second PBA regional, and he's cashed in all three," Scott says.

And, Scott adds, some college program will be bringing aboard this teen phenom in the years to come, as Bockstie has interest in, among other programs, Mount Mercy and Webber International University. Wherever Nick ends up as a college player, a talent like his is destined to make an impact, and quickly.



2015

WHAT ARE THEY UP TO?

ANTHONY SIMONSEN

26 | Las Vegas | **GENERATION NEXT DEBUT** December 2015

It is hard to imagine now that this outright assassin on the PBA Tour once was an 18-year-old kid being celebrated here in the pages of Generation Next for having won a doubles eagle in the 2015 USBC Open Championships with partner Mark Sleeper Jr. and earned Player of the Year honors for the PBA Southwest Region's 2014-15 season. That a titan of his caliber did pass through these pages on his way to stardom demonstrates that any Generation Next bowler truly can go on to soaring heights in the years to come. The phenom now known as Simo had, at that time, just broken onto the national scene with his first PBA Tour title at age 18 — a Mark Roth/Marshall Holman Doubles Championship title with partner Connor Pickford that came within days of eclipsing Norm Duke's record for youngest to win his first PBA Tour title. Today, that theme of precocious accomplishment continues to undergird so much of the native Texan's career, as his most recent major title — the 2023 USBC Masters, which he won for the second straight year and third overall — made him the youngest player to win five majors at 26 years and 86 days of age. With potentially decades left in this superstar's career, one almost shudders to think what meteoric feats are yet to come from the fiery two-hander.

Conversation

GLENN GERSTNER

This academic has taught economics and sports management at a variety of colleges and universities, including Hofstra and St. John's, but says that, "What I'd like to do now is write more books about bowling." His first book about bowling — indeed, his first book of any kind — provides the only biography of one of the Sport's most inimitable figures: Andy Varipapa. Gerstner spoke with us about Varipapa's fascinating story and his experience writing the book.

Q Congratulations on the publication of this, your first book, and devoting it to a bowling legend in Andy Varipapa.

A Thank you. I took a sabbatical to write it. It took me about 10 months. The first person I talked to was Andy Varipapa II (Varipapa's grandson), and then he put me in touch with John LaSpina, who put me in touch with Johnny Petraglia, and off I went.

Q Those certainly would be the right individuals to talk to about Andy Varipapa!

A Right. The project was, in part, the result of the resurgence of Andy around 2015 when his trick shots on YouTube kind of got him back into the public eye, and then Wheaties hired the estate to use him in their commercials. It was pretty cool.

Q What was the time frame in which Wheaties produced those commercials featuring Varipapa?

A Wheaties did those in 2015. What happened was — and I talked to [PBA Tour Commissioner] Tom Clark about this — the PBA had done one of their trick-shot challenges in 2015, and they put up some videos and had fans vote for their favorite trick shot. I think it was Norm Duke with the spinning ball shot, Chris Barnes with the Flying Eagle, and those both happen to be shots Andy invented in the 1930s. They had Osku Palermaa throwing the ball over the chair. And then, the last one was Andy making the 5-7-10 throwing the spinning ball down the center of the lane and then throwing a ball with each hand to cover the 7-10, and that was the shot that won the vote.

Q Which drew the attention of Wheaties?

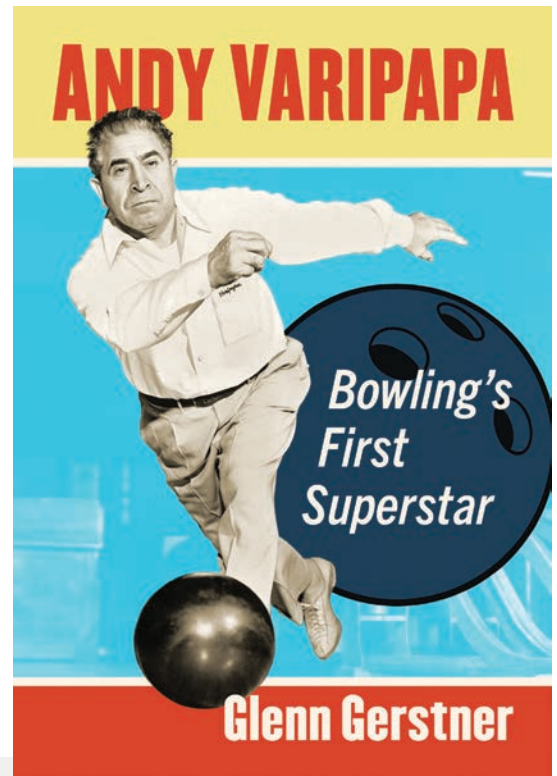
A Yes, some marketing guy over there — I have his name in the book — he saw that video and said, 'Let's do a kind of nostalgia thing about Andy.' Then they ended up putting a Wheaties squad in the team event up in Portland (Maine) and it became a whole thing.

Q What does it say to you that Andy's abilities as a trick-shot artist and as a talented public performer continue to resonate with people well into the 21st century?

A Well, I spoke to Norm Duke, who didn't know much about Andy's competitive bowling side, when he won the All-Star back-to-back, and he said the fact that he's known for being a trick-shot artist means he must have been the greatest trick-shot artist ever, because how could it overshadow his incredible accomplishments as a competitive bowler — you know, winning the All-Star back-to-back? I think people enjoy watching trick shots. Norm told me, 'Me throwing a bunch of strikes, that doesn't get people interested. When I throw a strike throwing the ball out of a towel, now they're all interested, because that's something they can't do.'

Q Plus, in professional sports, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that it isn't just an athletic endeavor; it's entertainment.

A Of course, and what I really get into in the book is that my interest in sports is also hanging on my interest in popular culture.



Past Due

Varipapa hadn't had a biography written about him until Gerstner took up the project.

In bowling, there were guys who did trick shots before Andy, guys that I didn't even know about, but in terms of being someone who toured the country and made a living as a professional bowler, he really was the first. He really became famous in 1934, when his first movie came out. That's what kind of helped him break out publicly.

Q And that's still on YouTube, right?

A Oh yeah. He was in four major films, and they're all on YouTube.

Q As a competitor, not only did Varipapa win the All-Star back-to-back, but he did it at a relatively advanced age for a competitor at the time, right?

A Yes. He won at 55 and 56 years of age in 1946 and '47.

Q That's remarkable.

A It is. You know, Johnny Petraglia says that

Andy winning the back-to-back All-Stars at that age is the greatest feat in sports.

Q Right. Can you put into perspective how big an achievement that was in Andy's day?

A Well, you know how it is with athletes now. They're better trained in nutrition; they understand how to workout. But in Andy's day, there was no 'workout.' Andy basically just bowled every day of his life. That's what he did to stay in shape.

Q How did Varipapa get started in bowling in the first place?

A Let's see, he was born in 1891. He did a bunch of odd jobs for years. He ended up finally getting a job in the bowling alley and started working on his bowling. But it wasn't until the late 1920s that he actually started winning some local tournaments. In 1930, Joe Falcaro invited him to be his partner in a doubles match against two guys from Philadelphia. Andy averaged over 240, with his rubber ball on lacquer. He just whacked them. That's when he started getting known as a great bowler, but then he started working on his trick shots, and in 1934 he went on to Hollywood and made the movie. Now, at this point, he's 43 years old, and he's just really starting his career at age 43.

Q What compelled Andy to make this career transition from competitor to tick-shot artist.

A Competitive bowling really wasn't a good way to make a living back in the 1920s and '30s. The only way that he could make a living from bowling was to tour. And the only way to get people interested — kind of like Norm's quote — Andy going out and throwing a bunch of strikes, nobody really cared. But he goes out and he makes these crazy shots, and it really is crazy what he's able to do with both hands. He made a very nice living doing those trick shots. Because, in that period — from the time that The Pedersen folded in 1934 until the All-Star started up in 1941, there really wasn't much to bowl in other than head-to-head matches. He didn't have much interest in action bowling.

Q Oh, really?

A The one great action-bowling story of his is he's bowling some guy they brought in;

they called him Pittsburg Joe. So, the gamblers bring him in and Andy loses the first two games. Now, his backer is down by more than \$2,000. Andy said, 'I don't want to bowl anymore. I feel bad that you lost all this money.' And the guy's like, 'No, no. You gotta keep going.' Well, the way that Andy tells the story is, he wins the next three games and the guy quits, so he goes to his backer and says, 'Well, I got all your money back.' And his backer's like, 'Nah. I bet on the other guy after the first two games!'

Q That's hilarious!

A So, he didn't like that whole scene. He didn't want to bet on himself. He wanted to be able to tour and make a living.

Q You mention Petraglia. He turned out to be one of Andy's greatest pupils, right?

A His father brought him to a lesson with Andy, who was in Long Island, and Johnny lived in Brooklyn. So, you had to take a train or a bus to get out to Long Island. And for Andy's first lesson he says, 'Kid, you want to be a good bowler?' Johnny says, 'Yes.' Andy says, 'Oh, this is what I want you to do. I want you to throw the ball, and when you let go of the ball, I want your left knee to drag along the ground.' And Andy walked away, and he was gone for 20 minutes. So, Johnny's got to do this big, deep knee bend. Finally, Johnny is getting tired. His right leg — his slide leg — is starting

to get sore. Andy comes back and says, 'Okay, I like that. Practice that this week. If, when you come back next week, you can still do it, then we'll work on something else.' This is how he got that beautiful knee bend — even as a 70-year-old!

Q How did you personally become interested in Andy Varipapa's story?

A Andy used to hang out at a place called Sheridan Lanes on Long Island during the last 10 years of his life, and he's in his 80s at this point, and he just hung out at the bowling alley, bowled a few games, gave people lessons, and they were having the Long Island Masters there one year in December of 1979; I'm 19 years old at the time. Me and my buddies go out there to practice, and the shot at Sheridan was always on the gutter. But we're playing inside, going all over the place, and who comes walking along? Andy, ambling over at age 88. He watches me throw a couple of shots, grabs me by the arm, and says, 'Kid, you throw that ball pretty good but you're stupid. Get out to the first arrow and firm it up. We move out to the first arrow and all of a sudden, we've got a shot! That was my introduction to Andy Varipapa, and I never forgot it. When I learned that no biography of Andy existed, I knew I had my book idea.

Twofold Talent

Varipapa's trick-shot artistry overshadowed his immense talent as a competitor



Action

Guaranteed prize fund, challenging conditions generate stars in Barnes Thanksgiving Classic

THE SECOND TIME was the charm for Jacob Lesifko — as in defending his title in the Chris Barnes Thanksgiving Classic, scratch division. The 17-year-old from Round Rock, Texas, beat Lubbock's Jaxon Witt in the championship game at Plano Super Bowl — where the event was held Nov. 24-26 — and got to put \$2,200 in his SMART account.

The USBC and PBA Hall of Fame member started his youth tournament 19 years ago, and the event took off. Since 2005, it's awarded in the vicinity of \$350,000 in scholarships. "With the SMART money set up, we're able to guarantee prize funds ahead of time," Barnes said.

COVID did hurt entries to some extent. "Because we're in Texas, by the time November rolled around, we weren't crushed," Barnes said. "The kids showed up. They were itching to go bowl something. So were their parents."

But entries were up this year, and he said guaranteeing scholarship money is a big reason. The classic borrows a lot from the European model, which has mostly guaranteed prize funds. That model includes awarding six pins a game to girls in the scratch division. However, Barnes said, "This was the first year that we didn't have a girl in the top eight."

Next year, girls may get more than six pins. "Because the scores are a little bit lower, I think we need to add pins back," Barnes said. "I've got a couple of different things to entice more female bowlers and make it attractive."

Like so many young bowlers these days, Lesifko is a two-hander. So is Witt. In fact, when asked if there were any noteworthy contestants, such as having overcome obstacles, Barnes said, "Keegan

Alexander overcame the fact that he didn't use two hands."

Alexander's single appendage notwithstanding, he gets a lot of revs, which has helped him become a force in youth bowling. "He's really talented, and going in, he was one of the favorites."

Big revs helped Lesifko and Witt navigate the challenging pattern that was pretty close to the PBA's Viper pattern, only with a 5:1 ratio, as well as being a little longer. As Barnes explained, "39 feet is not a great distance. But not enough to force the heavy-handed bowlers to move left. We don't have enough ratio to stand left and throw it right." Barnes got some help from conditioning gurus John Janawicz, Nick Hoagland and Sean Parry.

Keegan rolled what Barnes called a "monster" qualifying squad, but he could only finish third. He's the son of Scott Alexander, the 1995 PBA National champion, who called this event, and scholarship tournaments in general, "amazing. Never in our wildest dreams did we think that this early in life Keegan would be signing a letter of intent to go to college to bowl." Keegan, who graduated from high school early, will soon be leaving for Mount Mercy University.

Barnes, who won the 2018 Tony Reyes Community Service Award, was applauded by more than a few parents. "I'm happy that bowlers of Chris and Lynda's stature do this for the kids," said Jay Burgess, father of fourth-place finisher Ryan. Scott Alexander said, "the effort of Barnes and Plano Super Bowl was amazing."

The Chris Barnes Thanksgiving Classic raised some \$20,000 for the SMART program, money that will go a long way for soon-to-be collegiate bowlers.

— Dennis Bergendorf



Two Down

Jacob Lesifko won his second scratch title in the annual Barnes event.



Cloud Nine

Asai Gonzalez was on cloud nine after winning the 13-and-under title.

WATCH ON

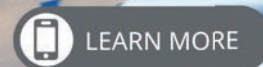


Watch live on BowlTV.com May 24-26.
Finals live on BowlTV May 27 at Noon Eastern

*Times subject to change. Check local listings.



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Action

Experience Reigns in Latest Senior 'Shootout'

RON MOHR'S South Point Senior Shootout is the seniors' version of the World Series of Bowling. A total of five daily tournaments feed into a pair of championships for two divisions: senior and super senior. And there are paid spots for the over-70 warriors called Super Dupers.

The two big winners this year, when the event again was held at its usual home of South Point Bowling Plaza in Las Vegas Nov. 11-19, were Tom Adcock and Mike Diaz. Adcock ran the match play table in the I Am Bowling Championship, while Diaz, a PBA50 Tour champion, lost only one game in match play in claiming the BowlTV Championship for supers.

Like the World Series, the senior shootout featured different lane patterns (three) that had some of the competitors scratching their heads. The Roto Grip Challenge "was on the longer pattern. I wasn't sure where I was going to go with it," said winner Dino Castillo. "I didn't feel comfortable going in, but once I caught the groove, I felt really good match to match."

For the two big championships, Mohr picked 35 feet for right lanes and 44 feet for the left, which "made sense because those were the patterns the bowlers saw on the first two days of qualifying."

And it was a test, both physically and mentally. "When you bowl a mixed pattern final, you've got to be a little creative," said Diaz. "You're trying to do two totally different things on each lane."

Adcock is making a comeback of sorts. Early in the PBA50+ season he suffered an

injury and had to "bow out" for treatment. Then he worked with Brad Angelo and BowlU, learning "a bunch of stuff" and getting "charged up." (He won at the Villages.)

The 67-year-old Diaz is "regaining some skills" after dropping to 14-pound equipment. Diaz had lost grip strength, and the lighter balls have "allowed me to keep my hand in position."

Mohr, a PBA and USBC Hall of Famer, feels that the 10th edition of the shootout was the best yet. A strong stable of sponsors allowed the event to pay over \$31,000, which he said was spread around. There were 279 competitors, and Mohr was pleased with the patterns, which he said were fair. "If you play well, they seem easy enough, but if you don't play well you are going to be punished."

Castillo called the shootout's format "unbelievable. It gives the guy who doesn't bowl competitively like (the PBA50+ tour) the chance to take a competitive ride and win some money. Maybe win a tournament."

Adcock had nothing but praise for the shootout and its creator.

"Ron really runs a great ship out there. Everything is on time, and they don't have any problems."

As of early December, entries for the 2024 event were nearly 2/3 filled. Of course, one of them is Adcock, though if he wins two more PBA50+ events, he won't be eligible. "I hope I'm not," he told Mohr. But he is looking forward to it, because he loves Las Vegas. And winning.

— Dennis Bergendorf

Dino the Dynamo
2022 USBC Senior Masters champ
Dino Castillo was among the big winners in this year's 'Shootout.'



Rice is Nice
Rob Rice (right) bagged the Haynes Bowling Supply Challenge title (with Ron Mohr).



2024 PBA TOUR SCHEDULE

(ALL TIMES ARE IN ET)

DATE	TIME	TOURNAMENT	CHANNEL
MON 1/15	5:00P	PBA PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS	FOX
SAT 2/3	4:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE AT INDIANAPOLIS	FS1
SUN 2/4	4:00P	US OPEN FINALS	FOX
SAT 2/10	8:00P	PBA ILLINOIS CLASSIC	FS1
SUN 2/18	1:00P	PBA PETE WEBER MISSOURI CLASSIC	FS1
SAT 2/24	7:30P	PBA INDIANA CLASSIC	FS1
SUN 3/3	12:00P	PBA DELAWARE CLASSIC	FS1
FRI 3/15	6:00P	PBA ALL STAR EVENT	FS1
SAT 3/16	1:00P	PBA ALL STAR EVENT	FS1
SUN 3/17	1:00P	PBA ALL STAR EVENT	FOX
SAT 3/23	7:30P	PBA JR. NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP	FS1
SAT 3/30	7:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE AT LAS VEGAS	FS1
SUN 3/31	1:30P	USBC MASTERS FINALS	FOX
SAT 4/6	1:30P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE AT ALLEN PARK DAY 1	FS1
SUN 4/7	12:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE AT ALLEN PARK DAY 2	FS1

PBA WORLD SERIES OF BOWLING XV			
SUN 4/14	12:00P	ROTH/HOLMAN PBA DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIP	FS1
MON 4/15	7:00P	PBA CHEETAH CHAMPIONSHIP	FS1
TUE 4/16	7:00P	PBA SCORPION CHAMPIONSHIP	FS1
WED 4/17	7:00P	PBA SHARK CHAMPIONSHIP	FS1
SAT 4/20	7:00P	PBA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SEMIFINALS	FS1
SUN 4/21	12:00P	PBA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS	FOX
SAT 4/27	4:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE AT FAIRLAWN	FS1
SUN 4/28	1:00P	PBA TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS FINALS	FOX
SAT 5/4	10:30P	PBA PLAYOFFS ROUND 1	FS1
SUN 5/5	12:00P	PBA PLAYOFFS ROUND 2	FS1
SUN 5/12	6:30P	PBA PLAYOFFS SEMIFINALS	FS1
SUN 5/19	2:00P	PBA PLAYOFFS FINALS	FOX
SUN 9/15	5:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE PLAYOFFS QUARTERFINALS	FS1
MON 9/16	7:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE PLAYOFFS SEMIFINALS 1	FS1
MON 9/16	9:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE PLAYOFFS SEMIFINALS 2	FS1
TUE 9/17	7:00P	PBA ELITE LEAGUE PLAYOFFS FINALS	FS1

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Drill Bits

From Injury to Opportunity

Has your body failed you?
That doesn't mean your
game has to.

Disclaimer: *To be clear, listen to what your doctors/trainers are telling you, and listen to your body. I am NOT telling anyone to put themselves at risk for long-term damage by bowling when told they shouldn't.*

I ENTERED THE 2023-24 bowling season nursing a significant injury to my bowling shoulder.

My orthopedist told me that I could bowl if I wanted to, but the only way to actually fix the problem would be to undergo surgery.

Red tape being what it is, I couldn't get the operation scheduled until just after Thanksgiving, which meant I could bowl roughly the first third of the league season.

I recognized immediately that the injury would not allow me to bowl as I was accustomed to — at least not unless I wanted to be in excruciating pain with each delivery.

So, I adapted.

After a little bit of tinkering, I learned how to free up my arm-swing more than it's ever been because trying to muscle the ball just wasn't an option.

Being free with my arm and soft with my hand allowed me to use stronger bowling balls and play straighter angles than I've played in years. And, you know what? The results were good!

No, I wasn't putting up honor scores week after week, but I was mostly pain free, shooting solid numbers and letting my ball roll instead of hitting up on it and forcing it to do what I wanted it to do.

Sure, there were times when I wished that I could take the path of least resistance and fall back on my old ways of muscling the ball, but deep down I knew that the change that the injury forced me to make was actually much better for me and my game — not just until surgery, but afterward as well.

At this point, I've had the operation and likely won't throw a ball again until late next summer. But that doesn't

mean my season is over — not unless I want it to be.

Why? Because I still have the opportunity to learn and grow by showing up, watching the action and helping my teammates each week.

You can learn as much or more from watching others as you can from throwing the ball yourself, so that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to show up, cheer on my teammates and try to help them make good decisions regarding ball selection and lane play.

Part of me always sort of wanted to be a ball rep anyway. Now, I'll get my chance!

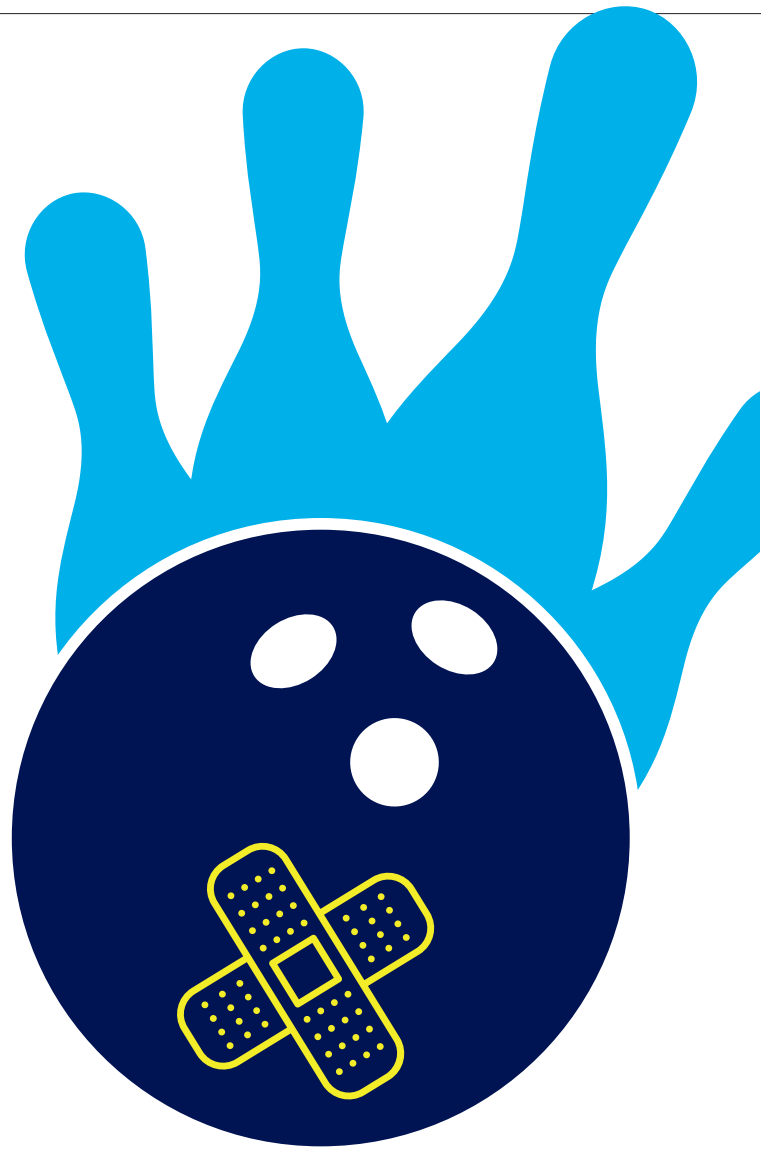
The point here, once again, is that injury can mean opportunity.

Sure, would it have been nice to have never hurt the shoulder in the first place? Of course. But what I learned while coping with that injury is going to help me on the lanes long after I'm back to full strength.

So, the next time you're forced to contend with a physical ailment that impacts your bowling, instead of focusing on what you can't do, look for opportunities to adapt and possibly add something new to your bag of tricks.

You might just stumble onto something that will make you an even better bowler than you were before.

— Gene J. Kanak



Rethinking the 5 Pin

It is the easiest of spares and the worst of spares.



NOBODY MISSES THE 5 PIN! That has been a mantra among bowlers probably ever since 10 pins were assembled into a triangle configuration with each pin identified by number. The 5 pin's location smack dab in the middle seems to make it the easiest — or perhaps simply the least complicated — of any of the sport's 1,084 possible spare combinations, save the much more unlikely solo headpin shot.

Some basic, linear math indicates that the radius of a bowling ball is nearly 4.5 inches, while the radius of a pin at its belly is 2.5 inches. This provides a bowler just about 7 inches

of “miss room” on either the left or right side of the pin to allow ball/pin contact to be made and a spare to be recorded.

For a 5 pin, the overall 14-inch margin of error represents more than one third of the entire width of lane, or could be visualized as the space between goal posts if they were placed on the left and right 13th boards at the pindeck.

If that's not enough, our evolved version of bowling — given the prevalence of house-shot oil patterns — influences a ball provided some side rotation to track toward the middle of the lane. Given so much extra assistance, for many bowlers



it would be a more formidable challenge to intentionally try to miss the 5 pin than to make it, providing: 1.) The set-up is the same position as the strike shot 2.) The same release technique and same ball is used, and 3.) The ball is required to stay on the lane.

It's a common sight these days to see people raising their hands all around a lane where a 5 pin stands alone, ostensibly to demand some form of liquid refreshment should the shooter dare whiff it. Generally, the most vulnerable to such extra pressure are inexperienced bowlers, especially those who haven't developed a fairly reliable hook. More accomplished players tend to express some embarrassment that they left the spare rather than fretting about picking it up.

But there are situations when even the best bowlers in the world may take pause when shooting a 5 pin. As a case in point, when Kelly Kulick defeated Liz Johnson to win the 2014 World Bowling Tour Women's Finals on ESPN in Las Vegas by converting a 10-pin in the final frame, she made an interesting observation afterward.

"Under these circumstances, I'd rather shoot a 10 pin than a 5 pin," explained the player who has won the Women's U.S. Open three times and the USBC Queens title twice along with accomplishing an historic gender breakthrough by capturing the PBA Tournament of Champions in 2010.

Why would a player of Kulick's stature rate the 5 pin a more tenuous spare conversion than a geometrically more restrictive corner pin? To start, oil patterns used for high level PBA, PWBA and international competition almost always score firmly in the "Sport" category, meaning the accuracy forgiveness built into a house shot disappears.

If an oil pattern is not going to minimize mistakes, there is no tactical advantage to releasing a shot with strong side-roll and a high rev-rate to cover a 5 pin. In that situation, the only argument in favor of applying such technique is one's familiarity with making a strike shot, at least knowing that decent execution will get the job done.

But many high-level bowlers work hard to develop a separate spare technique to cover 10 pins (7 pins for lefthanders), and become highly proficient at it. While they also may use their "flat ball" release to shoot other spares, because they pesky corner pin stands more often, it frequently becomes their most reliable spare to convert.

But wouldn't that straight ball technique work just as well traversing from point A to B down the middle of the lane as it does crossing boards on a diagonal? Theoretically, yes. Visually, not so much.

Kulick wasn't asked how she would shoot a 5 pin if a tournament victory depended on getting the mark. But it was clear she was happier to have a 10 pin to deal with than to be faced with a decision about how to tackle a 5 pin.

Today's lesson: Use your normal strike shot to pick-up a 5 pin if you're playing on a house shot. But for those unafraid to test themselves, playing on a Sport condition offers a vast array of challenges, including the need for more precise execution to convert the simplest spare of all.

— Lyle Zykes



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DON'T BE LATE!

How to address one of bowling's most pervasive problems: late timing.

by **GENE J. KANAK**

IF YOU'VE BEEN bowling for any length of time, you should already know all about the importance of timing.

After all, it's hard to deliver quality shots on a consistent basis if your armswing and footwork are out of sync.

USBC and PBA Hall of Famer Amleto Monacelli has seen a lot of bowling balls go down the lane during his illustrious career as a player and coach, and when it comes to timing, it is his observation that most bowlers have the same problem.

"The problem I see most is late timing, big time," Monacelli said. "When I work with players with timing issues, about 99 percent of them have late timing."

Of course, there is strength in numbers, but this isn't one of those times where we want to follow the herd.

With that in mind, let's take a look at what late timing looks like and see how we can avoid it.

What *is* Late Timing?

Late timing can occur for multiple reasons, one of the most common of which is the bowler taking too long to get the ball into the swing during the early stages of the approach.

During a four-step approach, for instance, the pushaway should begin with the first step. In a five-step approach, the push-away should initiate during Step 2.

During this set of four photos, you can see that Amleto has already taken his third step before starting the pushaway.

That gives the ball very little time to move freely through the arc of the swing before needing to get to the foul line for release.

Being late will likely cause the bowler to pull the ball down from the top of the backswing in order to recover or for the ball to get stuck behind the bowler at the foul line, which is exactly what we can see happening in the final pic in the series.

While a bowler of Amleto's caliber may be able to save the shot and still get it on line, most everyday bowlers like you and me are either going to spray it to the right because the ball is trailing, or we're going to pull it as we sense the problem and try to correct it on the fly.

Neither scenario is likely to yield good results on a regular basis, so follow these four steps to improve your timing:

Step 1 - Set up Your Camera

What you *think* your timing looks like may be drastically different from what it actually is. Which is why, once again, we need to break out the camera.

If possible, set your camera up in front of yourself and slightly off to the side just as it is in the pics of Amleto.

It would be best to do so on an end pair with a walkway, so be sure to ask bowling-center staff for permission ahead of time.

If you aren't allowed to film from that angle, try setting your camera up from the side and far enough back so that you can easily see each step of your approach and what your armswing is doing during each one.

Step 2 - Record a Series of Shots

Once the camera is rolling, throw a series of 5-10 shots employing your normal timing. It doesn't matter whether these shots are at full racks or spares, and it doesn't matter where the ball goes or how it reacts on the lane. We are only interested in your timing here.

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Step 3 – Compare and Contrast

After you've recorded and watched your series of shots, compare what you see on film to what you see in the following series of pics, during which Amleto shows us what proper timing looks like.

Here are some keys to look for:

- Is your pushaway starting on time, which should be during the first step in a four-step approach or during Step 2 in a five-step approach?
- Is the start of the downswing nearly in sync with the beginning of your slide?
- Is the ball just slightly behind the slide-foot leg when you finish your slide?
- How is your shoulder alignment at release?
- How is your balance?

The last two checkpoints aren't necessarily tied to timing alone, but late timing can cause both to suffer, so chances are, if your shoulders are still wide open at release and you're having trouble posting shots, your timing is late.

Step 4 – Plan your Next Move

If your video review shows that your timing is on point, then you're done... for now, that is.

If the video shows that you do, in fact, have late timing, then throw another series of shots trying to make it a bit earlier.

Obviously, if you see that your timing may actually be a bit too early — sadly, that's a thing too — throw a new series of shots trying to slow it down a pinch.

Once you complete the new series of shots, compare the second video to what you see in the pics of Amleto to see if your timing improved at all. If not, keep repeating the process until you see the improvement you seek.

The goal here is to figure out where your timing currently stands and to make whatever changes are needed to improve it if it's currently less than ideal.

Just as you can't out-bowl bad ball reaction, you're unlikely to be able to out-bowl bad timing in the long run.

Get to work, get your timing squared away and get yourself up near the top of the average list or tournament standings where you want to be!

Photo 5

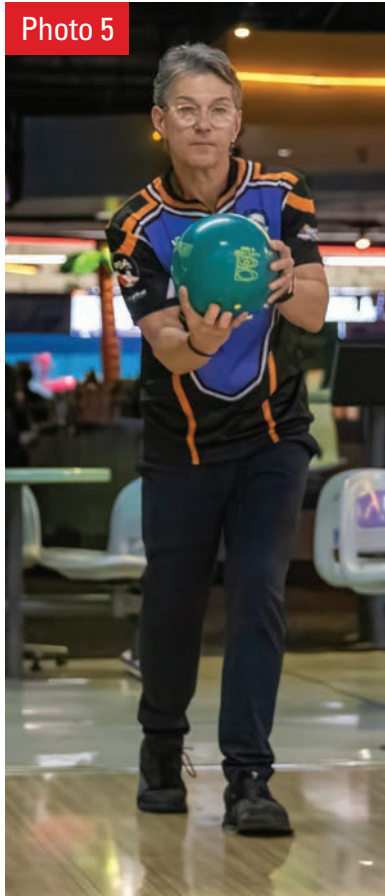


Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



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BALL MOTION POTENTIAL

Hook Potential	Breakpoint Shape																
	10	11	12	12.5	13	13.5	14	14.5	15	15.5	16	16.5	17	17.5	18		
Very Dry to Lighter Volume Oil Patterns	40.5																
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	41.5																
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Light: Medium and Medium-Heavy Volume Oil Patterns	46.5																
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JANUARY 2024

1. ABS Nanodescu Accu Drive III
2. DV8 Violent Collision
3. Motiv Crimson Jackal
4. Radical Zig Zag
5. Storm Summit Peak
6. Storm Absolute Power
7. Track Theorem

RECENTLY REVIEWED

DECEMBER 2023

900 Global Sublime	57.5 / 15.5
C300 Piranha Powercor	63.5 / 14
Ebonite Big Time	64.75 / 14.5
Hammer Hazmat	57 / 15.5
Hammer Nu Blue Hammer	58 / 13.5
Motiv Raptor Fury	64.75 / 14.5
Roto Grip TNT Infused	59 / 17
Storm IQ 78U	55 / 13.5
Swag Big Bro Top Dog	60 / 16

NOVEMBER 2023

Radical Hitter	62 / 15
Radical Deadly Rattler	58 / 16.5
Storm Journey	59 / 16
Roto Grip Magic Gem	63 / 15
Swag Archive	58 / 15.5
Motiv Nuclear Forge	59.5 / 16
Brunswick Ethos	62 / 15.5
Brunswick Perfect Mindset	62.5 / 15
DV8 Verge Hybrid	57 / 15.5
Track Sensor Solid	61 / 15

OCTOBER 2023

900 Global Eternity Pi	63.5 / 15
C300 High Speed	60 / 15.5
Ebonite Fireball	56 / 17
Ebonite The One Encore	62.5 / 15
Hammer Envy Tour Pearl	59 / 16.5
Hammer Extreme Envy	63.5 / 15
Motiv Pride Dynasty	62 / 15
Storm Virtual Energy Breakout	59 / 16.5

Balls with higher breakpoint shape ratings have the potential to react more quickly & angularly when encountering friction areas on the lane. Balls with medium to lower breakpoint shape ratings tend to react more evenly & slowly when encountering friction areas on the lane.

THE BJI BALL CHART/BALL REVIEWS

METHODOLOGY

The Bowlers Journal International Ball Motion Potential chart is designed to help bowlers understand which lane conditions are best suited for the most recently introduced bowling balls in the marketplace. Placement positions on the chart are based on the “out of box” surface from the manufacturer. Surface adjustments can impact a ball’s performance and, thus, its position on the chart.

The chart’s horizontal axis displays a ball’s approximate total hook in the presence of oil. While some coverstocks may have similar maximum, dry lane, or coefficient-of-friction measurements, their ability to traction in oil can vary significantly.

Balls with minimal hook potential are placed on the far left side of the chart. Balls offering a moderate degree of hook are placed in the chart’s middle section. Balls with the greatest hook potential in heavy oil are placed on the right side of the chart.

The chart’s vertical axis displays a ball’s breakpoint shape. Balls offering more skip/snap reaction are placed higher on the chart. Balls offering a smoother, more arcing motion are placed lower on the chart.

Chart placements are based on testing by BJI ball reviewer Vernon Peterson, selected bowlers with varying release styles, C.A.T.S. results, PBA player input, and discussions with ball company representatives.

HOOK POTENTIAL

35-45: Balls with lower total hook ranges, best suited for lighter oil concentrations. Players with slower speeds or higher rev rates may also prefer balls in this range for medium oil applications.

45-51: Balls with medium hook ability, best suited for the vast majority of “typical house shots” and some lower-volume Sport patterns. This hook range should be represented by the “centerpiece” ball in most arsenals.

51-60+: Balls with greater total hook, designed for heavier oil volumes. Players with higher speeds or lower rev rates, who need added lane traction, may also prefer balls in this range.

LENGTH RATINGS

8-12: Earlier rolling balls that read the lane sooner. These products generally come factory-sanded with lower grit surfaces, and match up well with speed-dominant styles and those bowling on longer patterns.

12-15: Medium-length balls that produce easier length through the midlane. Good for most house shots and medium-volume Sport patterns.

15-19+: Balls offering extra length for those bowling on lighter oil concentrations. Also beneficial for slower speed players, or those with higher rev rates needing added push downlane.

BREAKPOINT SHAPE

10-13: Slower-response balls that read the friction areas more gradually. This range may include balls with a urethane or mild reactive cover, designed for a smooth arc to the pocket. Can also help those with higher rev rates control motion and match up well from outside angles of attack.

13-15: Balls rated for slightly stronger and quicker reactions when encountering friction areas (as when the ball leaves the oil pattern). This range offers a balance of control and back-end angularity.

15-18+: Balls that respond more quickly and aggressively to friction areas. This range can help those with less hand action create more angularity near the pocket. Also preferred when playing deeper inside angles, which generally require more entry angle for above-average pin carry.

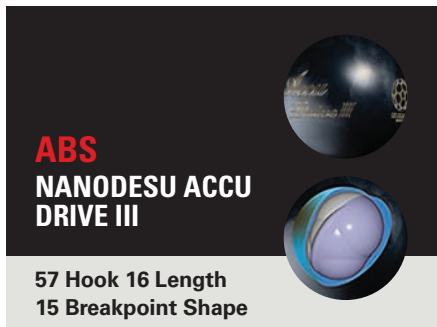
NO HOLES BARRED

Ring in The New Year with These Seven Options

by **VERNON PETERSON**

HAPPY NEW YEAR! May 2024 be better for the bowling world. We lost a lot of important people in our bowling family and world last year, but, as they would want us to do, we are looking forward to 2024 and the tournament season in the next few months. This month, we have seven balls that will help you mostly on medium to drier lane patterns but will give you those strong backend reactions we all crave. May all of our readers have a striking 2024.

THE TESTING: Stephen DeLong and I threw each ball more than 25 times on two patterns: Stone Street, which is similar to what most readers face when bowling in league, and BJ, a modified version of the 2019 USBC Open Championships team-event pattern with more volume, but still falling within the “sport” category. DeLong bowled with Webber International in college, helping that storied squad to two national-television appearances along the way. The two-hander works as a coach at Kegel Training Center. DeLong’s PAP is 5 7/8 over and 3/8 up with an RPM of 450 and a launch speed of 18.5 mph. His testing layout is 50 x 5 x 35. I used the same strong layout I have used for all balls reviewed in this column, but it now has a dual angle of 50/4/35 (4 x 3 x 2.5 in the VLS system). My axis point has evolved to 3 ¾ over and 5/8 up.



57 Hook 16 Length
15 Breakpoint Shape

Manufacturer's Intent: ABS Vice President of Sales and Marketing Jeremy Felton tells us that the Nanodesu Accu-Drive III brings "an ideal balance of skid and stability, making it a standout among other releases. What sets this series apart is its meticulous design, aimed at offering comprehensive support to bowlers across the spectrum of skill levels. Whether you're an amateur just starting or a seasoned pro, this new addition to the Drive series promises a bowling experience that caters to all."

Core: Super Edge Asymmetric. RG: 2.494. Differential: .052. Intermediate Diff: .017. Flare: 6+."

Coverstock: UG Nano-Thane 2.5 Hybrid Reactive (level 2.5). Color: Black Solid and Gun metallic Pearl. Finish: 800 Abralon Diamond Compound 2 Polish. Scan Numbers: Grit: 4400. RA: 2.70.

Overview: The Accu Drive III brings a strong, heavy-rolling hybrid asymmetric bowling ball with strong continuation through the pin deck for medium lane conditions. On the Stone Street pattern, we were able to create a look to the pocket crossing 10 to 11 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 3 to 8 at the 45-foot mark. In the same location as the Accu Rise X, the Accu Drive III was 1 foot earlier with a similar launch angle for a 4-pin reaction. On Stone Street, this ball has a heavy-rolling midlane motion for a good No. 2 or 3 ball when the track area starts to open up. High-rev players will like its predictability off the backend. On the BJ test pattern, we were able to create a good look with hold playing more in the middle of the lane, crossing 16 to 17 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 5 and 12 at 45 feet. In the same location as the Accu Rise X, the Accu Drive 3 read the breakpoint a foot sooner, creating a 4-pin reaction with stronger midlane and more forward motion downlane. Both balls provide a very good look and area for our liking on medium patterns for high-rev players.



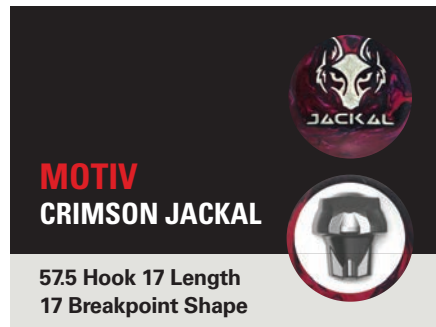
58 Hook 16 Length
15.5 Breakpoint Shape

Manufacturer's Intent: Brunswick Director of Product Management for Balls Bill Orlikowski tells us that this pearl option "offers easier length and a sharper move on the backend, giving bowlers an exceptional option when the Hellcat XLR8 and Brutal Collision are too much ball!"

Core: Collision Asymmetric. RG: 2.462. Differential: .052. Intermediate Diff: .019. Flare: 5"

Coverstock: HK-22 Havoc Pearl Reactive. Color: Bluem Silver and Pink. Finish: 500, 1000, 1500 Siaair then Factory Compound Finish. Scan Numbers: Grit: 4620. RA: 2.90.

Overview: Don't let the vibrant pink colors fool you; this ball will provide a strong skid and flip motion at the breakpoint. On the Stone Street pattern, we created a good line to the pocket crossing 12 to 13 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 5 and 10 at the 45-foot mark. In the same location as the Brutal Collision, the Violent Collision read the breakpoint a foot longer and stronger for a 4-pin reaction. The Violent Collision was lined up 2 boards left with our feet and 1 board left at the arrows with a stronger backend reaction and similar launch angle to the breakpoint. These two Collisions complement each other when your carry needs an angle adjustment and you don't have to move your feet. On the BJ test pattern, we had a very good look and angle to the pocket with hold area and strong recovery off the track. We were lined up crossing 19 to 20 at the arrows with a breakpoint between the 7 to 13 boards at 46 feet. In the same location as the Brutal Collision, the Violent Collision was cleaner through the fronts with a foot longer breakpoint for 4-9 reaction. On this pattern, we could see the much stronger and angular motion of the pearl Violent Collision than the Brutal Collision. The Violent Collision is a very good No. two or three ball for patterns starting to break down later in the blocks for various styles of players.



57.5 Hook 17 Length
17 Breakpoint Shape

Manufacturer's Intent: Motiv Vice President of Marketing Scott Hewitt explains that The Crimson Jackal "delivers fast response in a heavy oil environment ... even when attacking the lanes at steep angles," and benefits from a particularly strong core.

Core: Predator Asymmetric. RG: 2.47. Differential: .054. Intermediate Diff: .015. Flare: 6+."

Coverstock: Propulsion HV+ Pearl Reactive. Color: Crimson, Berry and Black Pearl. Finish: 5000 Grit LSS. Scan Numbers: Grit: 5050. RA: 2.50.

Overview: The Crimson Jackal brings a cleaner and stronger backend Jackal to the Motiv line. It was much cleaner and stronger down-lane than we expected for a core this strong, as it saved a lot of energy for the backend. We were able to create a look to the pocket with some area on the Stone Street pattern crossing 10 to 11 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 3 to 8 at 46 feet. In the same location as the Jackal Ambush, the Crimson Jackal was much cleaner with a longer breakpoint 4 feet down the lane, creating a washout reaction. Here, the Jackal Ambush is your No. 1 ball and this would be your 2 or 3 ball when the track opens up or the heads start to burn up and Ambush loses energy and carry. On the BJ test pattern, we could create a very good look with hold area and strong recovery from the track area crossing 19 to 20 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 7 and 13 at 46 feet. In the same location as the Jackal Ambush, the Crimson Jackal provided a much cleaner and stronger backend reaction with a 4-foot longer breakpoint, creating a 2-10 reaction. The Crimson Jackal was lined up 5 to 6 boards right at the arrows and 10 boards right with our feet with a tighter launch angle to the breakpoint, allowing us to create a lot more hold and better angle on this pattern for our style. Low-rev and speed-deprived players will like this big, asymmetric pearl bowling ball for medium lane patterns.



Manufacturer's Intent: Radical Bowling Technologies President Phil Cardinale tells us that "The ZigZag has a longer hook window not normally seen in asymmetrical balls. Our goal at Radical is to keep increasing the back-end motion while maintaining continuation through the pins, and the ZigZag has exceeded that goal."

Core: Zig Zag Asymmetric. RG: 2.501. Differential: .045. Intermediate Diff: .015. Flare: 5"

Coverstock: HK-22 Hyperkinetic Hybrid Reactive. Color: Black, Silver and lime. Finish: 500, 1000, 1500 Siaair then Factory Compound Finish. Scan Numbers: Grit: 4070. RA: 3.40.

Overview: The Zig Zag brings more responsive down-lane reaction to the Radical line for a big asymmetric bowling ball on medium lane patterns. We were able to create a good look to the pocket area on the Stone Street pattern, crossing 14 to 15 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 5 and 10 at the 45-foot mark. In the same location as the Katana Assault, The Zig Zag was cleaner through the fronts by a foot for a stronger backend reaction, leaving a 4-pin reaction. The Zig Zag was lined up 2 boards left with our feet and 1 board left at the arrows with a similar launch angle to the breakpoint. On this pattern, the Zig Zag compliments the Katana Strike nicely when the fronts start to burn up. On the BJ test pattern, we had to move inside to create some area and hold but were able to open up the pattern pretty easily for a strong asymmetric bowling ball crossing 22 to 23 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 8 and 13 at 46 feet. In the same location as the Katana Assault, the Zig Zag was a foot longer at the breakpoint, creating a 4-9 reaction. It was easy to see the stronger backend reaction of the Zig Zag to the Katana Assault. This HK 22 coverstock has really stepped up the backend and strong responsiveness for the Radical line. "The Zig Zag is a very good piece to have in your arsenal for various styles of players and is very forgiving for a hybrid reactive."



Manufacturer's Intent: Storm tells us that this pearl option with its performance-proven A.I. Core Technology boasts an appeal for bowlers of all skill levels.

Core: Cetripetal HD-A.I. Symmetric. RG: 2.46. Differential: .056. Flare: 5-6"

Coverstock: TX-23 Pearl Reactive. Color: Goldenrod, Mint and Iridium. Finish: Reacta Gloss Factory Finish. Scan Numbers: Grit 5070. RA: 1.70.

Overview: The Summit Peak brings a cleaner, stronger Summit to the Storm line for medium to drier lane patterns. On the Stone Street pattern, we were able to create a good look to the pocket crossing 12 to 13 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 5 and 10 at 45 feet. In the same location as the Summit, the Summit Peak was 1 to 2 feet longer at the breakpoint, creating a 2-pin reaction. On this pattern, the Summit was much more predictable and controlled any wet dry much better, but the Summit Peak is the go-to ball when the heads start to burn up or track area starts to open up. On the BJ test pattern, we had to move into the middle of the lane to create hold area and open the pattern up to the right. On this pattern, we were lined up with a very good look to the pocket crossing 20 to 21 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 7 and 10 at 46 feet. In the same location as the Summit, the Summit Peak was cleaner through the fronts with a 2-foot longer breakpoint for a bucket reaction. On this pattern, the Summit Peak created more hold area and stronger backend with a much more responsive reaction downlane. This ball easily complements the Summit, especially on medium patterns like this that require that clean skid through the fronts when the lanes are hooking, and you don't want to lose the reaction downlane.



Manufacturer's Intent: Storm explains that "The Absolute Power falls in line with what Storm Bowling is known for best: backend reaction," adding that, "This solid version of the Absolute, will give more mid-lane read while maintaining its confident back-end reaction when compared to the original."

Core: Sentinel Asymmetric. RG: 2.48. Differential: .050. Intermediate Diff: .021. Flare: 6+"

Coverstock: R2S Deep Solid Reactive. Color: Berry, Tangelo and Steel. Finish: 4000 Grit Abralon Matte. Scan Numbers: Grit: 3250. RA: 7.20.

Overview: The Absolute Power is a stronger matte version of the original Absolute for heavier lane patterns. We had a very good look and area to the pocket on the Stone Street pattern, where we were lined up crossing 15 to 16 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 4 and 10 at 44 feet. In the same location as the original Absolute, the Absolute Power read the breakpoint 2 feet sooner, creating a Big Four reaction. On this pattern, the Absolute Power controlled the wet/dry of patterns like Stone Street. This is a very good No. 1 ball on the medium to longer patterns. On the BJ test pattern, we had to move deeper into the lane to create an area to the pocket with hold, crossing 22 to 23 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 7 and 12 at the 44-foot mark. The 3000-grit helped save energy for strong continuation from the midlane through the pocket area. In the same location as the Absolute, the Absolute Power read the break 2-feet sooner creating a 3-6-10 reaction. For a strong asymmetric bowling ball, the Absolute Power is a very versatile ball with a very good amount of total hook. This ball reminds me of an asymmetric Phaze 2 with its versatility for tournament players.

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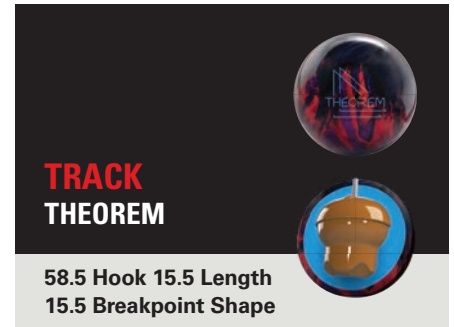
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Manufacturer's Intent: Orlikowski reports that, "The Track Theorem strikes the perfect balance between traction and backend reaction, resulting in exceptional performance on various lane conditions," adding that, "The polished finish of the Theorem will provide a skid/flip type of ball motion on medium to heavy oil patterns."

Core: Mc2 Asymmetric. RG: 2.473.
Differential: .046. Intermediate Diff: .017.
Flare: 5"

Coverstock: Prime Response Hybrid Reactive (HK22). Color Black, Red and Violet.
Finish: 500, 1000, 1500 Siaair then Factory Compound Finish. Scan Numbers: Grit 4690. RA: 2.60.

Overview: The Track Theorem uses the technology from the Triton Elite and that was one of our favorites over the years and this bowling ball easily reminds us of that with its motion, but with stronger backend reaction. The Track Theorem created a good look on the Stone Street pattern as we crossed 13 to 14 at the arrows with a breakpoint between 4 and 10 at 44 feet. In the same location as the Stealth Pearl, The Theorem read the breakpoint 1 foot earlier, creating a 4-pin reaction and stronger midlane. The Theorem was lined up 3 boards left with our feet and 1 to 2 boards left at the arrows with a close launch angle to the breakpoint. On the BJ test pattern, we had to move deeper into the lane to create some hold and open up this medium condition, which was pretty easy to do with this bowling ball. In the same location as the Stealth Pearl, the Theorem read the pattern 2-feet sooner creating 3-6-10 reaction. On this pattern, we could see the stronger mid-lane reaction than the Stealth Pearl. The Theorem is a very versatile bowling ball for medium to drier lane conditions, with strong continuation through the pindeck, and it is a very good No. 2 ball on medium lane conditions for various styles.

THIS CALLS FOR A COLD SNAP[®]



OFFICIAL BEER OF BOWLING

NEW WAYS OF SEEING

How BowlU's bracingly different approach to teaching the sport has become a game-changer for top bowlers.

BY JILL WINTERS

Rick's Roll:

Rick Benoit's BowlU brings a fresh vision to coaching that has been a game-changer for amateurs and stars alike.



The idea behind BowlU since its inception is to provide an informative workshop that empowers students to coordinate what their eyes see, what their minds think and what their body does.

Rick Benoit, PBA Tour bowler himself in the '90s, founded BowlU in no small part from what he calls "a soft heart for bowlers. They are very passionate, they are very devoted, and very few of them make a comfortable living."

The BowlU program's goal is to eliminate confusion that arises from misguided assumptions while respecting the challenge the sport presents, and the process required to meet that challenge.

That respect entails the humility of one who always is open to learning more, always is seeking to improve, and always remains vigilant enough to make the kind of discerning observations necessary to facilitate those goals.

While Benoit is the mastermind behind the program, BowlU's unique methods are amplified by lead instructor Brad Angelo, a two-time PBA Tour champion, at the program's workshops, which occur throughout the United States and around the world. The information Angelo shares, he believes, helps bowlers on any level gain a more granular understanding of the sport.

When Angelo made the decision to pursue competing on the PBA Tour full-time in 2002-2003, he knew there was a significant learning curve and he felt Benoit was the man to help him.

"I had the opportunity to sign a contract with Brunswick so that Rick would be obligated to work with me," Angelo said. "I didn't want any money; I wanted Rick."

During Angelo's first season of adopting Benoit's precepts and applying them to his game, he was named Rookie of the Year on the PBA Tour. He put himself in contention so many times, yet he struggled on fresh oil conditions. At Benoit's prodding, however, a pool cue, of all things, became the basis for an epiphany that turned Angelo's fortunes.

Benoit gave Angelo a pool cue and told him to brush the oil on a bowling lane to where he wanted it. Benoit then told him that the pool cue touches about the same amount of the lane as a bowling ball. After Angelo was done, he stepped back to the foul line to see how he had manipulated the oil and Benoit asked him a question.

"Why, when given a pool cue, you do it correctly, yet when you have a bowling ball you do just the opposite?" Angelo recalled. "I was dumbfounded, so the whole summer, I tried to create with the bowling ball what I did with the pool cue."

After that lesson, Angelo was the points leader the following season despite not winning a title.

“I’ve learned a strategic understanding I couldn’t have gotten anywhere else,” Angelo said. “Everything I do and every choice I make is now based on what I see. I am molding my physical game to match the strategy. I’m not changing my strategy to match what I do physically.”

Angelo began to share what he learned from Benoit and encouraged him to put his thoughts down on paper. That all led to the development of BowlU.

The BowlU Experience

From the use of a rope for a bowler to visualize the ball path and help out with consistency on the lanes to the placement of triangles on the lanes to show different entry angles to get to the pocket, BowlU educates players in a variety of different ways.

Dasha Kovalova, a five-time champion on the PWBA Tour, praises BowlU’s unconventional methods for explaining how bowling really works. The Ukrainian-born star recalls a camp back in her adopted home of Russia where students were asked to step out onto the lane and walk toward

the pins. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. They took their bowling balls, stood 10 to 20 feet away from the pins, and watched how the ball went through the pins. The idea seemed weird at first to Kovalova and the others, yet it showed them how much distance there is between the pins, so you want to make sure the ball goes in the right way or “weird stuff is going to happen.”

When bowling centers around the country and the world shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Angelo invited Heather and Jason Sterner to his center — Brad Angelo Lanes in Lockport, New York — to get some work in while learning about BowlU. Heather, who competes on the PWBA Tour, experienced a light-bulb moment when she was challenged to strike without a 6 pin in the deck.

“That just really showed how much more of the headpin I could be using to strike more often,” Heather said. “It helped me to understand what I wasn’t seeing, which was holding me back from being successful on tour. Now I can see that I understand strategically what I need to be doing and it is just a matter of executing that. It brought more clarity.”

“As a coach, a lot of it comes down to having it explained to you in a way that clicks,” she added. “That is what BowlU does really well. They explain it in so many different ways that it can change your perception and have that light bulb go off.”

Heather is the head coach of the Hobart and William Smith College bowling program in her native Rochester, New York, and Jason is an assistant coach. The program began in 2022-2023 and the Sterners took their team to work with Angelo for a day-long training session.

The Game Changer of New Knowledge

The feedback Angelo receives makes all of the hours and miles he spends traveling the world teaching BowlU worth it in his eyes.

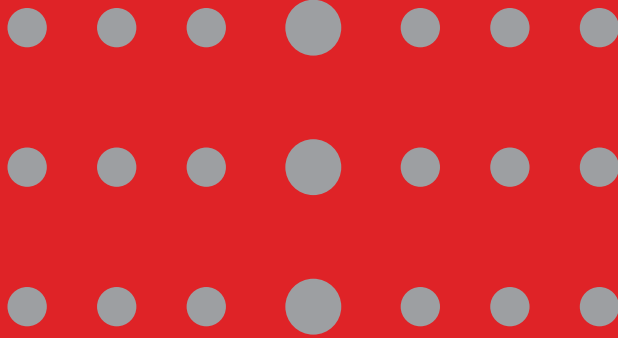
“I get far more joy now sharing BowlU with people and watching what it does for them,” Angelo said. “I want to be a resource for them to help them gain whatever they want out of the sport of bowling. Whether it’s working with professionals who want to compete on the PBA Tour or working with senior guys that still have a job but want to compete on the PBA50 Tour. That is the thrill now.”

Angelo has received phone calls and text messages of thanks from those who have gone to BowlU just so they can better understand what their fellow league bowlers and even professionals are battling on the lanes. It makes him smile when someone took the information and was able to make their first cut or fight through some early confusion to win a tournament or better yet being able to control their thoughts while stepping up and throwing three final strikes for their first 300 game.

“That is what I look forward to as my competitive years turn into whatever the



The Messenger:
BowlU has found in Brad Angelo a disciple who spreads its gospel worldwide.



rest of my life is going to be — sharing BowlU with people who want to learn more about the sport,” Angelo said.

One such moment came during the championship match at the 2023 PBA50 The Villages Classic in Florida. Top seed Tom Adcock would face Angelo, someone he has known for years but more recently became good friends with. Adcock had attended a weeklong BowlU camp in New York, where he got some valuable time working with Benoit. Adcock was struggling at the time with “getting across the finish line and finishing the job” at tournaments. He was asked what he thought was wrong with his game and the one thing Adcock pointed to was anxiety getting in his way.

BowlU introduced Adcock to its PACER acronym, which is part of the discussion on the athletic aura. It’s a thought process to slow everything down. PACER stands for preparation, acknowledge, commitment, execution and reaction. Adcock put it to the test in the title match in The Villages. He likes to sit in a chair and pull himself out of the current situation he is in and relax. He wears an Apple Watch that tells him his heart rate. If it gets above 110-115, it’s way too high. That is when he tries to calm himself down to a manageable 100 during competition. After striking on his first shot in the 10th frame against Angelo, Adcock

and his wife Mary noticed a jump in his adrenaline. It read 132, so he took a re-rack.

“Before, I would have just stepped up there and fired on it,” he admitted. “Instead, it was slow down, take your time, take care of your process and throw a good shot. I didn’t feel any of the anxieties I felt in the past and that has always been a roadblock for me. The overall thought process he got me into thinking about has helped me immensely and, to me, it was priceless.”

Adcock went on to earn his first PBA50 Tour title and despite Angelo finishing in second place, it was easy to notice how proud Angelo was of Adcock.

“He is in your court,” Adcock said of Angelo. “The case in point that really showed that to me was the 10th frame in The Villages. He had ball in hand and, the minute he didn’t strike on the second ball in the 10th, he knew it was over. He was the first person to congratulate me, and he had tears in his eyes as much as I did.”

“That shows the compassion he has for the people around him who want to learn,” Adcock said. “I wouldn’t have known that if I hadn’t started to hang out with him. It is one of the things I like about him the best.”

Adcock’s time with Angelo also changed how the tall right-hander builds his arsenal when competing on shorter oil patterns and further BowlU work added a new way to watch his ball go down the lane.

Tale of the Tape:

Benoit instills in students new and eye-opening ways of seeing the lane.





“Now I am watching the ball go through my target and watching what the transition is,” Adcock said. “You get a better understanding of how the ball physically works when it hits the pins and what the pins do. Once you learn all of that, the game, to me, got simplified and that has helped my physical game.”

When Dan Knowlton made the commitment in 2023 to compete on the PBA50 Tour full-time, he knew his learning curve was steep, but he has taken every opportunity to learn from the best players around him.

“Brad talks about BowlU all the time, whether you know it or not,” Knowlton said. “Me being relatively new to the competitive environment, I’m just a sponge. Trying to absorb as much as I possibly can from anybody I think is smarter or better than me.”

When one of Angelo’s BowlU classes scheduled to be held in Fort Myers last year was in the vicinity of a hurricane, Knowlton offered up Pin Chasers in Zephyrhills where he owns Bowlaholics Pro Shop. This was Knowlton’s first experience attending or hosting a BowlU workshop and, since he was taking it all in from the business side, he wasn’t sure he fully grasped what BowlU was all about. Yet a week later, he noticed he was implementing things he learned while on the lanes. He carried that new knowledge into his first PBA50 title at the Ballard Championship and his first regional title.

“When he showed us how the pins fall, which seems overly simple, you look at the amount of angle you have to create. It is a lot less and a lot simpler than I think all

of us have been told,” Knowlton said. “My impression was we needed 7 degrees of entry angle in order to strike. It’s so much less than that.”

“The reality is you have to use the proper part of the headpin for the amount of entry angle that you are using. That is what BowlU has brought to me. Bringing in more awareness and parts of ball motion. It’s clearer.”

Angelo added that, “Over the years, people have come up with ways to describe what they see and because of that there has been a huge disconnect in the information that they are gathering when they are making their choices.”

Kovalova still relies on the guidance BowlU gave her about lane play and the importance of having an arsenal that is versatile, reliable and controllable. She has a notebook that is more than 10 years old filled with notes her mom wrote down from her one-on-one sessions.

These days, Benoit prefers to stay in the background to concentrate on offering even more information as bowlers keep looking for what’s next. He is trying to decide how to put this puzzle together for others to share.

“Trying to piece it together is what occupies my days,” Benoit said.

“I am using all of the information as an artist, not a scientist,” Angelo said. “Great bowlers are artists, not scientists. The truly best bowlers are fully committed to what they think. When you watch them perform, they are willing to make moves so fast, they are just doing it instinctively. That’s just what they do. It’s their creative instinct.” ■

BOWL U

THE BOWL U WAY

How BowlU students are challenged to see the sport in new ways by questioning their assumptions and habits.

BY GIANMARC MANZIONE

The freshness of perspective BowlU students are likely to encounter is akin to that of an early-autumn cold front ushering in a crispness that foreshadows a changing of the seasons. Suddenly, there is a hint of something new in the air, a different energy that changes everything from what you wear to the coffee you drink.

Similarly, much changes in the minds of BowlU students upon first encountering the coaching outfit's curriculum, as they are challenged to see the sport not just from the foul line forward but also from the perspective of the bowling pins themselves. The reasons for this are as manifold as the benefits.

Those new ways of seeing arise from a fresh way of looking at the bowling lane — specifically, its length versus its width — as well as new ways of seeing rev rate, the ways the pins themselves fall in a given environment, the reasons why a certain hit favors your physical game, and so much more.

What follows is a deep dive into three distinct ways BowlU challenges students' longest-held assumptions with facts and philosophy that leave them looking at the sport more differently than ever before. You're in for an interesting ride; strap in and come along...

Put a Pin in it

Today's bowler makes so much fuss about a given lane pattern a tournament is

expected to feature, or how much rev rate this player or that one is bringing to the party, or whose arsenal is loaded with every answer to every conceivable challenge expected to arise.

Too rarely, BowlU curriculum contends, does a bowler pause to consider a given tournament environment from the perspective of the pins themselves. After all, are the pins not the object of the sport? Are the pins not the one unifying concern around which players of any ability, style or background rally? We all want to knock down as many of them as possible, right?

What does this strategy of seeing the sport from the perspective of the pins entail? Well, consider the constant the pins embody in a sport that otherwise constantly is evolving, or a playing environment that begins to transition as soon as the first ball is tossed down the lane, impacting the pattern in a way that will force the oil to behave in ways that leave the players with no choice but to pivot on the fly or continually adjust over the course of a block.

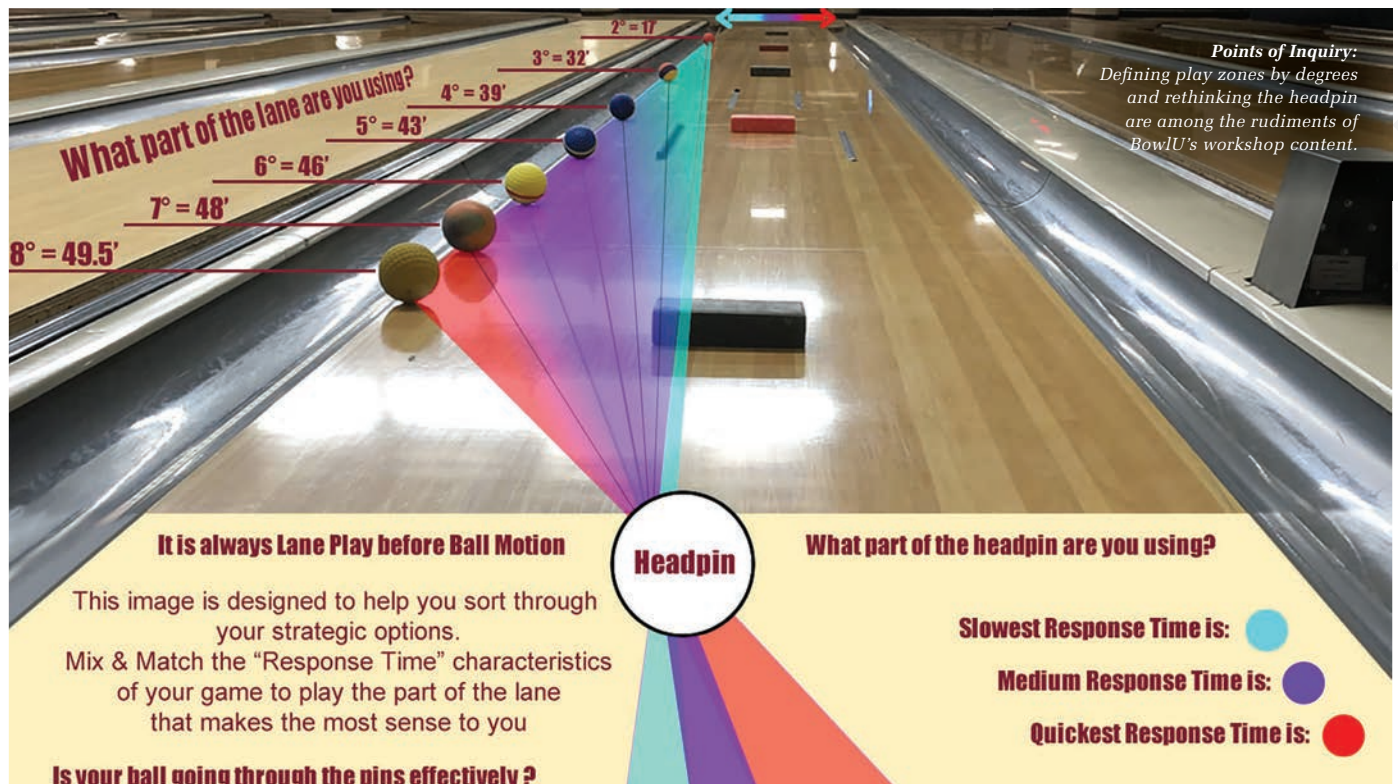
The pins, that great constant in our sport, always are placed in exactly the same configuration from one bowling center to the next, one country to another and one part of the world to another. No lane pattern has any impact on that. No rev rate or ball motion or coach's philosophy does a thing to alter that one gimme in the sport of bowling that has endured through generation after generation. Regardless of

style, right-handers achieve the traditional strike through downing the 1-3-5 or, for lefthanders, the left side of the 9 pin.

From this understanding emerges the kind of questions that can inform a player's strategy. How, for example, do those pins deflect into one another? Once we determine that, then we can ask, what is the best method for striking? As constant as the pins' configuration may be regardless of environment, the answer to that question could change dramatically as a result of a given environment. The circumstances a bowler may face in the United States, or just more generally in the western world, sometimes can be drastically different than those encountered by bowlers in place where, for instance, homemade oils are concocted and loaded into high-dollar lane machines — a real, actual scenario in some parts of the world where lane maintenance and other variables differ from those in the U.S.

Once you have a handle on the unique traits of the environment in which you are competing, then you can dig into the finer questions. How do the pins deflect there? How does the ball deflect? Do the pins deflect off of the side wall or not? What kind of hit can you get as a bowler in this environment?

The answer to those questions begins with some basic inquiries, like figuring out how these pins fall down in this environment. Twister pins, for instance, are going to fall differently than other types of pins.



Know this. Be observant enough to determine how the pins are falling within the environment in which you are competing, and then proceed accordingly.

There is an art to this kind of surveillance as you first enter a given playing environment. You might want to begin, say, by walking up and down the bowling center watching the pins — observing their behavior in this environment, the way they fall here, the way they deflect, how they interact with the side walls or perhaps even how they interact with or travel the pin deck after the impact of the bowling ball. Ask yourself: Is there anything unique about this environment? Does something stand out about the type of hit that will work in this environment?

Find Your Uniqueness

It is a wonder sometimes that the kind of hit Walter Ray Williams Jr. often used to haul in a record 47 PBA Tour titles — that 6 pin laying in the gutter and love-tapping the bottom of the 10 pin, which then drowsily keels over for a strike — is not sought after by more bowlers. One can't be blamed for wondering why more people do not work on creating that kind of hit given Williams's historic success.

Here, too, is a kind of obsession prevailing in our sport that sometimes, if we really think about it, is beside the point. Today's bowler is more given to dismissing that Williams hit in favor of the sexier type of hit that looks more powerful, the type of hit that sends the pins flying like shrapnel ejecting from some explosive device. The ways the industry sometimes responds to this sort of craving also serve to enhance it — those bouncier sideboards you might encounter here or there, pins that are designed to scream across the pin deck and take no prisoners — ingredients that create different environments from one center to another.

But the more relevant concern, and one that BowlU students are steeped in, is this: What kind of hit can you personally get as a bowler? We don't all get the same hit, nor are we capable of the same style with which one generates a particular hit. Find the type of hit that matches your style the best. Find your uniqueness, and have the confidence and self-awareness to not feel pressured to mirror someone else's hit, however more powerful or dazzling it may seem than yours.

Your uniqueness is something that you search for and you develop. The history of the sport of bowling has proven that you

don't have to throw the ball a certain way to succeed. Your hips, your knees, your ankle, your shoulder, your center of gravity all differ from the next person's. We don't all have to have the same physical game; the point is that our strategy has to match the physical game we have, and exploring that is how we find our uniqueness as individual bowlers.

The pins don't care what you do; they care what the ball does. What is your ball doing? What might the 5 pin see if it had eyes? Would it see the rotation of your ball, and would its rotational direction be away from that 5 pin, or is it rolling right at it? That 5 pin is not afraid of a ball that isn't rotating straight at it, but it does get nervous otherwise.

Make decisions that will inform the kind of hit you pursue in a given environment. Do you want to use more of the headpin? Less of the headpin? What part of the headpin is best for your style? Do you want to be more in front of the headpin or do you want to come at it from a steeper angle? Do you want to use more of the side walls? The answers to these questions depend upon plenty of variables, and your knowledge of and mastery over those variables will go a long way toward your success. For instance: What's in your arsenal, and why? What have

Perspective Adjustment:
BowlU students are encouraged to perceive the lane from behind the pins, envisioning the ball rolling toward them rather than away from them.



you observed about the playing environment in which you find yourself?

Think of it this way: A righthanded kid using a 12-pound ball is not going to strike in the traditional 1-3-5 manner. For his purposes, a Brooklyn hit might prove more consistently successful.

Understanding the Lane

Invariably, when BowlU students are asked, “Who uses more of the lane? The person with the lower rev rate or the person with the higher rev rate?” they answer, “The person with the higher rev rate.” And just as regularly, they then are counseled to look at the situation differently.

See, the belief that higher-rev players use more of the lane than lower-rev players proceeds from seeing only the amount of

hook. But think as well of the usability of the lane. The usable part of the lane is 40 times longer than its width. The pocket is in the middle of the lane, right? Look left or right from there and you see that you have no more than 18 inches of lane to work with. But you have 720 inches from foul line to headpin. That is 40 times the width of the lane.

And so, if your objective is to generate the traditional strike, and you consider that objective from the object of the sport — the pins, remember? — rather than considering it from the foul line, you begin to flip the way you always have looked at the lane and develop a clarifying vision that refines and simplifies your approach to the sport as a whole.

Along these lines of flipping the script of how you see the lane and ways to attack it, BowlU students are encouraged to imagine the ball rolling at them. They are encouraged to picture themselves being behind the pins with the ball coming to them instead of, as it will from the perspective of the foul line, going away from them. Really challenge yourself to see the lane from this vantage point, and you may start to see the sport in an entirely new light.

BowlU students are taken behind the pins to see for themselves the difference between a ball that is rotating away from them and a ball that is rolling at them. Time after time, that perspective shocks them.

In Conclusion

You don't have to attend a BowlU event to challenge yourself to think along the lines described here.

Perhaps you have a friendly, familiar proprietor in your area who will indeed allow you to go behind the pins and see, and think about, the lane from that perspective. Perhaps you can challenge yourself to assess your physical strengths and limitations and, from there, develop a more refined sense of your individual uniqueness as a bowler. Maybe, if nothing else, you stop chasing the hit you see that power player in your house get as a matter of routine and instead follow, and maximize, the hit that better matches your own game.

However you choose to apply the information here to your game going forward, it is a pretty sure bet that, at the very least, those who honestly have absorbed it will have thought more deeply about the sport than they have in a long time. ■

PERFECT MIX

photography | Simone Amaduzzi



Larielle Tharps uses her mixing and chopping skills in the kitchen and on the lanes.

by JENN ROBACH

At just 15 years old, Larielle Tharps is rewriting the playbook for teenage success. The year 2023 was a defining chapter in her story, which began with a hard-earned U15 Junior Gold title, followed by her first 300 game on a sport pattern and high school district honors. She capped off the year with a triumphant Florida State Girls championship, and she has no plans to slow down anytime soon.

The future is bright for this young star, and she has her eyes set on unlocking a slew of new achievements. She hopes to compete at Junior Team USA Trials and secure another Junior Gold win, and those around her know that these goals are within reach. The Orlando, Florida, native has been working under former PWBA legend Pat Costello for the past four years, and each day, she is looking more and more like current PWBA pro Stefanie Johnson, whom Costello coached years prior.

“Larielle’s personality is wonderful, it is something so special,” Costello said of the young star. “She’s warm, caring, funny, and she reminds me of my girl, Stefanie Johnson. They’re just fun-loving, great people, who have big hearts. They’re very much alike, and it’s overwhelming to me that this is all happening in my life again.”

When Costello and Tharps first crossed paths, the Gold coach was impressed. She approached the young star to introduce herself and learn more about her, and to her surprise, she was only in the sixth grade.

“I couldn’t believe it,” she said. It was at that very moment that Costello took Tharps under her wing, to mentor her and help guide her through all the challenges that come with being a successful bowler at such a young age, and so far, she has exceeded all of her expectations.

“She’s going to go far,” Costello said. “She’s athletic, she’s dedicated, she has a

lot of determination, and she has the desire to excel. And to only be [15]! I always have to remind myself that she is only [15]!”

Two years before securing the 2023 Junior Gold win, Tharps finished runner-up in the U12 division. She had to move up to U15 the next year due to her age. While that was an adjustment, Tharps and Costello put in the work, which eventually led to the much-deserved title.

“It meant a lot to me because when I was in U12, it was my first time bowling in a sport-shot tournament so I wasn’t really worried about where I finished. But then as time went on, I practiced more and wanted to be able to make it onto the TV show again and when I did, it was a great experience,” Tharps recalled. “I really tried to put in the work and get my mental game together to try and win, and when I did, I was shocked. I was very surprised.”

The two-time Storm Youth Championships titlist comes from a long line of bowlers. Her grandparents bowled. Her mother bowls, and her sister, Brielle Dean, even bowled in college at Southern A&M University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She would spend her days traveling, immersed in a college bowling atmosphere that made her want to pursue her own career.

Her inspiration? Her family, especially her grandparents. They are the ones who got her into bowling and, since then, they have traveled to all of her tournaments, cheering her on from the stands. Her grandparents are joined by her mother, Pam, who couldn’t be any prouder of all she has accomplished.

“It’s amazing to watch her,” Pam said. “She started off as that little back-up-ball thrower and has grown so much. She has worked very hard. She is continuing to raise the bar and move forward and I am so proud of her.”

It’s no surprise that Tharps’ passion on the lanes can also be found in her other hobbies. When she’s not on the lanes, or doing school work, she can be found in the kitchen, baking. If she could compete on any show, it would be *Chopped* — the Food Network series in which chefs are given random ingredients and tasked with making a Michelin Star-caliber meal for the judges.

“I’ve always wanted to be on *Chopped*,” she said, adding that it is the “competition setting” mixed with all the random ingredients that she finds the most appealing.

As for the future, there is no ceiling to this central-Florida phenom’s potential. Tharps has plans to bowl in college, but that is still a few years away. For now, she is focused on improving her game, both mentally and physically, while adding even more titles to her résumé.

“She’s very smart, and just a great athlete to work with. It makes you as a coach know that what you’re doing is the right thing when you have athletes like Larielle. It makes you want to do it more,” Costello added.



Go-Getter
Whether she’s baking or bowling, Tharps isn’t afraid to dig in and get the job done.

FEARLESS



Powerful, determined and unintimidated, Santtu Tahvanainen is poised to add his name to a legacy of great Finnish stars.

by EMIL WILLIAMS JR.

Entering the 2023 Professional Bowlers Association season, Finland's Santtu Tahvanainen had one goal in mind: to prove to himself and others that his 2022 PBA Rookie of the Year campaign wasn't a mirage.

Well, after making four shows in 2023 — including a fifth-place finish at a major in the PBA World Championship — the 27-year-old two-handed righty proved he was more than worthy of his award. Last season's results make Tahvanainen a player to watch in 2024, which could see him win his first career PBA title.

"It feels good that I'm showing up on the stepladders and TV shows," said Tahvanainen, just prior to his opening round match with Jason Belmonte at last season's PBA World Championship. "It's not a question mark anymore for many people at least. Of course, there's some people who say it doesn't count because I'm a two-hander, but they are fans as well."

Tahvanainen, who follows in the footsteps of legendary fellow Finns Mika Koivuniemi and Osku Palermaa, advanced to the TV finals in three of the four World Series of Bowling XIV events, adding a fourth-place finish in the Scorpion Championship and fifth place in the Shark Championship. His lowest finish at the WSOB was ninth at the Cheetah Championship.

And, for those wondering if it was just his love of Bowlero Wauwatosa during the WSOB week that propelled him to much success, two months earlier he notched his highest finish of the season at the Wichita Classic (third) and followed that by just missing the stepladder at the Jackson Classic, finishing sixth.

EJ Tackett, who won the World Championship as one of his five titles and two majors enroute to being named the PBA Player of the Year in 2023, got to see Tahvanainen

up close as both a peer and competitor. The two players are teammates under the Motiv brand, where Tackett has been a mainstay for years.

He was initially taken aback by the power and strength of Tahvanainen, whose bowling ball produces such a violent reaction when his equipment meets the headpin. Tahvanainen's overall hook rating out-distances that of Tackett, which sometimes even leaves Tackett wondering, "Why can't I get my ball to do that?" as he watches the young Finn compete.

Tackett can see the potential and believes the sky's the limit for Tahvanainen as he continues to understand bowling on tour, which is such a different experience.

"Yeah, he's definitely someone who can really overpower the lanes and conditions," Tackett said. "He's very strong and can kind of do anything you want to a bowling ball. But, once he really learns how to bowl on the PBA Tour and learns all the little nuances that go along with it, I think he's definitely going to have some success."

Tackett, who is a sure-fire future PBA Hall of Famer, believes there might even be a hall-of-fame nod in the future for Tahvanainen if he continues to excel and add to his game like the greats often do.

"He's just very powerful. He's kind of different from someone like Jason or Simo (Anthony Simonsen). You know, they're really, really good. They're unbelievably talented and they can do anything to a bowling ball. But Santtu? When he throws it, it just looks different because he is so powerful.

"When he learns a little bit more of the finesse side of things, and still, you know, keeps himself and his base of that power player, I think he will have a lot of success. And, I think we saw early on in Belmo's career it was kind of the same thing, right? He was very powerful, threw it hard and hooked it a lot. But when Belmo learned a little bit of finesse, that's when Jason became Jason Belmonte. And, I don't know if Santtu could be a Jason Belmonte, but I certainly think that he could be a hall of famer."

Brett Spangler, the ball rep for the Motiv brand since 2010, knew how special Tahvanainen could be after

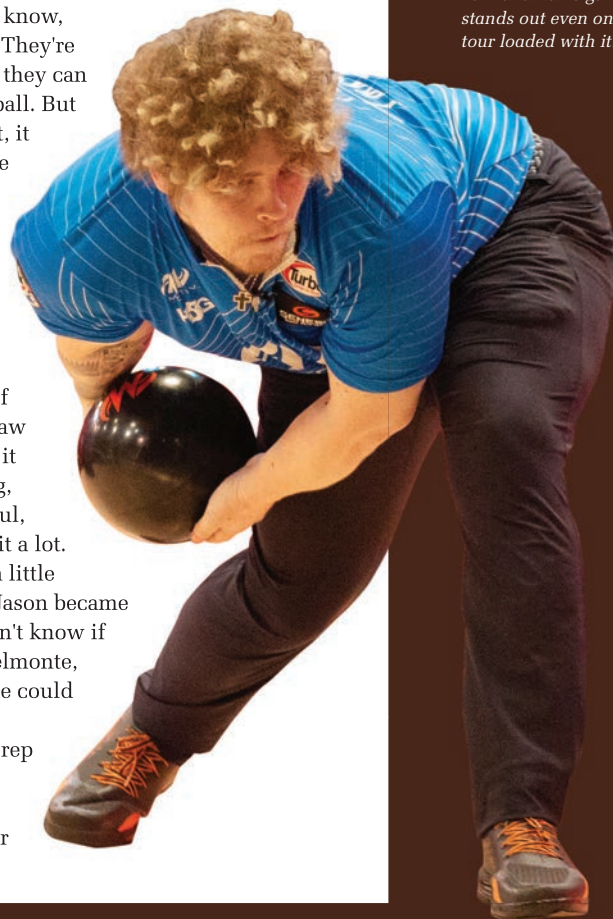
seeing him compete in the first squad of the first event at his first WSOB event in 2022. Spangler called his bosses at Motiv and told them, "There's a kid I've never seen before and he's really good."

Eventually, Tahvanainen would sign with the brand, and Spangler began to peel back the layers of just what makes the 27-year-old Finn special. Spangler saw it firsthand at the WSOB where total pinfall, as opposed to bracket play, determined spots on the shows, and "there wasn't a single show that he made easily."

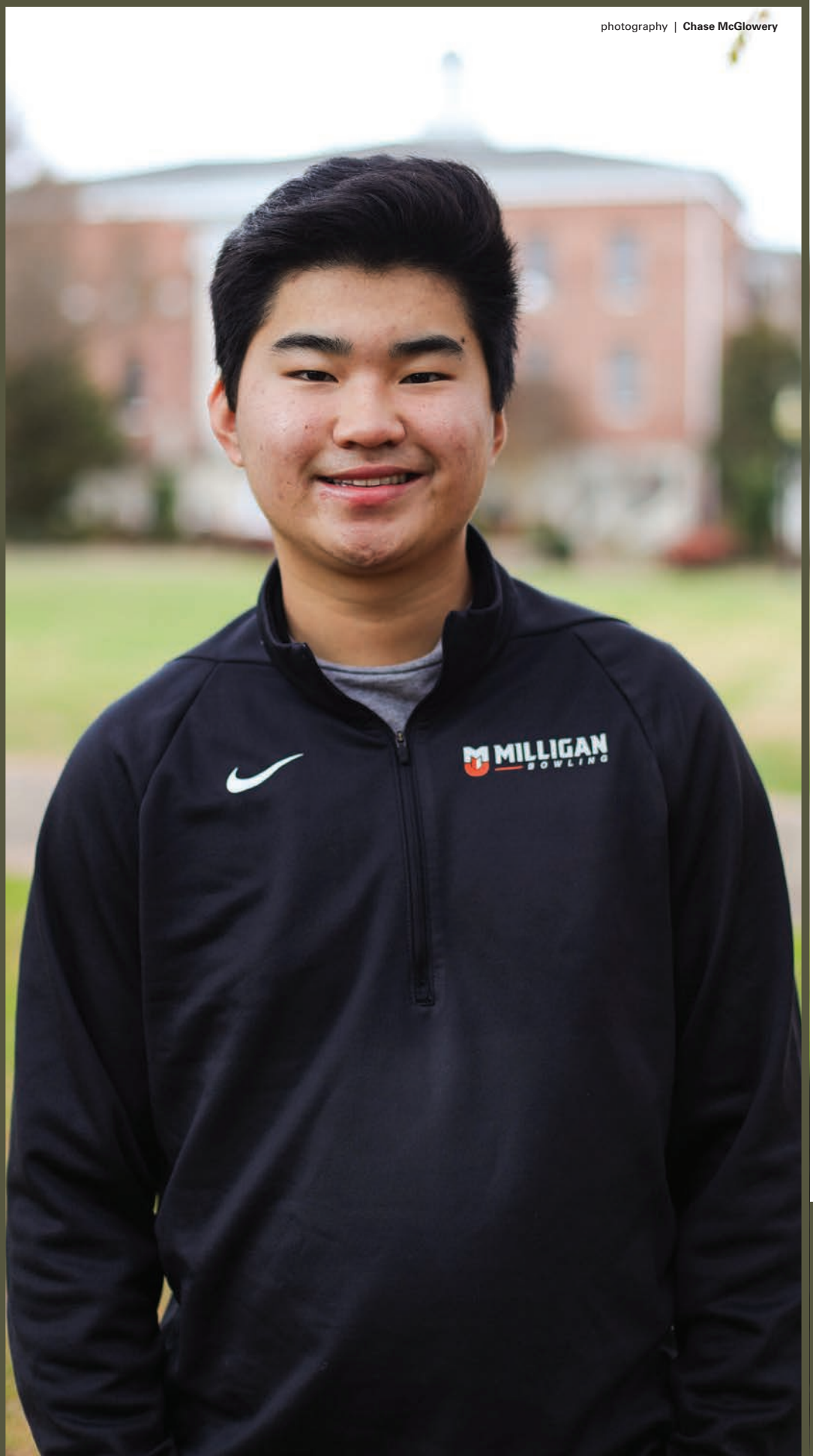
If Tahvanainen wins in 2024, his mental toughness will be one major reason why.

"Beyond having just wild, natural ability, he's also fearless," Spangler said. "He really shined at the World Series. It was genuinely the most grueling event I think I've seen because you couldn't take a single game off. It was total pinfall for each show, and then all of those carried over to the big show. He had to show up the last couple of games of every single event, and that's not something you normally see out of somebody who is in their second year out there."

*The Fit Finn
The power in
Tahvanainen's game
stands out even on a
tour loaded with it.*



— A BORN LEADER —



While Nate Trentler's talent speaks for itself, it's his gift for leadership that shines brightest.

by JENN ROBACH

Three years ago, Brian Rickert set out to create a powerhouse team at Milligan University, where he brought a vision to craft a top-10-level program in a Christian environment. He found the perfect match in Nate Trentler — a player who not only met the mold but exceeded his expectations and did so, importantly, both on and off the lanes.

Hailing from Baltimore, Maryland, Trentler left the city life behind for rural Tennessee, trading buildings for mountains, and solo success for the hustle and bustle of the team atmosphere in which he has shined.

"As soon as I got out of the car and looked around, saw the mountains and scenery, I knew I would end up here and I hadn't even gone into the buildings yet. I knew that I was meant to be here," he said.

He has already collected all-tournament honors this season, but has his eyes set on the bigger picture — a national championship.

"It's a unique situation he came into. He's had the chance to come in and be a leader from the beginning. The guys look up to him. He just brings a natural competitive desire that I think [the team] reacts to. It gets them motivated," Coach Rickert said of the freshman.

He went on to say that Trentler has an "innate desire to succeed." Which is to say that he embodies exactly the attitude he looks for in new recruits.

"I wanted to get players who not only have that desire but also want to play for a group, not themselves. These first three years, we've had more success than I could have imagined, knowing it takes time to build a program and find the right kids. Being that we're a Christian University as well, you have to find kids who want that college experience through that lens compared to what they see at public schools," Coach Rickert added.

Trentler came into the program with a history unlike any of his teammates. He has multiple PBA Regional and Storm Youth Championship titles, but his goals are no longer self-oriented.

"I want to see the team make the ITC finals. That's the goal, to win a national championship," he said of the future.

Trentler is already one of the top freshmen in the country, so it won't be surprising if he takes the ISCs by storm this year. But that's not his concern. As a leader, he just wants to make sure he can be the best for those who surround him.

"For any person who is in a mode in which where you're not just worrying about yourself, it's how you portray yourself to other people that matters," he explained. "It can be a lot, and sometimes it is a lot. It's not easy to be the person everyone looks up to because we're all human, we make mistakes, and I've felt adversity my entire life. But I've always persevered. I always follow the rule, 'Treat someone how you want to be treated.' I know it's cliché, but it's true. I'm more concerned about the team aspect. Making ISCs or winning would be nice, but the next goal is to achieve a national championship."

Trentler's dream of winning an ITC title is not his alone. His teammates, including junior Cameron Shockey, are behind him in this pursuit. They admire his personality on the lanes and his dedication, but ultimately it is his leadership that will help propel them to triumphant heights.

"On the lanes, Nate is very poised, you can always tell during competition that there's this switch [that flips] and his mentality is just focus. I've never seen a bowler who has been as focused," Cameron said.

"Anytime we get down, he's our backbone. He is the person that is going to pick everyone up when we're down and get everyone going again. He is there for everyone, he's never focused on himself, he is always watching everyone and helping. If someone needs a line, Nate is there."

Cameron went on to compare his teammate to 7x Super Bowl champion Tom Brady, calling him "a good leader" who "elevates people" and adding that he is

only going to get better.

"Just his ability to get pumped up, and to pump everyone up in low moments, which is key in college bowling. It's not the high moments that get you places, it's getting through the low moments the best you can. And I can just tell, going from last year to this year, having him [here], it just goes so much better," Cameron continued.

Growing up, Trentler never planned on bowling. But, at the age of two, his aunt got him into duckpin bowling. Around the age of nine, he then started traditional bowling, and three years later, he was competing in national tournaments. The rest is history.

"It's been a progression, but over the last 5-6 years, bowling has been my life," he said.

Star Recruit

In Nate Trentler, Milligan coach Brian Rickert found the perfect combination of team player and titan.



CHOICES OF A CHAMPION



Lauren Russo has driven many recent changes in her life, and the next one just may be a first PWBA Tour title.

by EMIL WILLIAMS JR.

Everything is a choice. The majority of people would agree with the above statement, as life typically is defined, for better or worse, by the choices we make. As 2023 came to a close, few people could express that sentiment with more conviction than Lauren Russo.

Whether it was choosing to become a coach for the first time, choosing to marry the love of her life, or choosing to grow closer to her peers, it was a banner year for the player formerly known as Lauren Pate.

The 27-year-old seems ready for a breakout season on the 2024 PWBA Tour, which could result in her first trip to the winner's circle and the chance to choose where she places the trophy alongside some other recent awards.

A major piece of her 2023 puzzle was taking on a new role as the head women's bowling coach at Maryville University in Maryville, Missouri, a St. Louis suburb. It was an opportunity filled with new challenges for the former two-time national champion as a player with McKendree, which "opened her eyes and changed the way she looked at things."

"I had to play a different role that I've never played before in my life, and it kind of propelled me to just bowl with more confidence," Russo said. "I didn't know that I was good at this (coaching) until the year kept going on and on."

Maryville's 2023 season resulted in Russo garnering two end-of-season coaching awards — Division II/III National Tenpin Coaches Association Coach of the Year and Great Lakes Valley Conference Coach of the Year. The Saints were selected for the NCAA Tournament for the first time and finished as the women's runner-up at the 2023 Intercollegiate Team Championships.

"Winning the coach of the year accolade really put the cherry on top of what

the season was like, and I just kind of carried that momentum [into the PWBA season] with me."

When Russo ran into trouble with lane play or ball motion on tour, she often put herself into the shoes of her players and asked, "What would I tell my girls if they were experiencing this?" That type of self-talk, and the understanding that seven wonderful student-athletes were always watching their coach, kept her motivated all season on the PWBA Tour.

"I found myself doing that probably every time I bowled, because there were times when I was stuck and I just didn't know what to do," Russo said. "But I would play the roles in my head and it worked. Watching women's ball motion is obviously different from watching men, so being able to read the lanes differently and watching ball motion were things I carried over with me as well."

Russo's husband, Matt, is not only her new life partner, but also her assistant coach at Maryville. After a 3 1/2-year engagement, partially delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Team USA teammates tied the knot in Negril, Jamaica, on Lauren's birthday (Oct. 16).

Matt, who owns one career title on the Professional Bowlers Association Tour, has had a first-class seat to Lauren's development for years now.

He's not surprised by anything his wife has done, but he does believe making a switch to a different ball brand "opened up a larger selection of bowling balls with different reactions" for Lauren, which kept her confidence high as she navigated the sometimes-grueling conditions on the PWBA Tour.

The recent growth of her relationship with Team USA teammates Bryanna Coté and Jordan Richard has provided additional support and growth opportunities.

"I would say changing brands and a fit change were two things that kind of opened her eyes to her being more successful," Matt said. "But, Bry and JoJo, and the friendship and bond they have created, I think is incredible. It's nice to see Lauren have people like that in her corner who are making her better and make it a little bit easier out there."

When Lauren wins her first title, there won't be a dry eye in the bowling center.

Whether it's Matt, whom Lauren believes "will be crying like he was when I walked down the aisle," or her collegiate coach turned mentor and friend, 15-time PWBA champion Shannon O'Keefe.

O'Keefe has advised Lauren as she navigates the new balancing act of the life of a coach and professional athlete. A life that O'Keefe has made look easy to the naked eye.

"Lauren has this internal desire to be great," O'Keefe said. "A deep-rooted confidence in who she is as a person and what she's capable of. When you wrap that all together and put a little bow on it with hard work — the results will follow."

"She is the first girl who ever committed to me in my college career, so we have a bond that most don't understand. Lauren has turned into an extremely incredible friend, and when she wins that first title, it'll be all those years of hard work coming to the surface. I'll be right there alongside her crying with complete happiness watching my friend and kid's dreams become a reality."



High Praise
PWBA superstar
Shannon O'Keefe sees
in Russo "an internal
desire to be great."

Ready to Roll

Chris Via will have plenty of chances to win again on a 2024 tour that resembles the tour of old.



ROUTE 66

The PBA Tour's 66th season is poised to deliver plenty of kicks as the PBA Elite League hits the road, among other developments.

by **DENNIS BERGENDORF**

It was calamity on the right lane and Chris Via didn't even see it. During the PBA Strike Derby at Bayside Bowl last fall, on what very likely would have been his 14th strike, the pinsetter sweep came down inexplicably, his ball ramming into it and bouncing off to roll anemically back down the lane and to the foul line.

"I was in such a rhythm that, after the ball went 15 or 20 feet down the lane, I wasn't looking any more, so I wasn't sure what happened," he says. "I heard it. I heard the crowd, and I turned around and wondered what the heck is going on."

Via calls it "kind of funky," and he is glad it happened near the end, and not at the start. The 31-year-old went on to beat EJ Tackett to claim the Strike Derby and its first-place check of \$20,000 — decent money, but it didn't count as a title. And it was his only victory in 2023.

Via will have plenty of chances to win an official title (his third) on a 2024 Tour that resembles the tour of old: 18 title events that stretch from Nevada to Maine, with eight of the stepladders on what's known as "Big FOX." There will be a total of 60 hours televised on either FOX or FS1.

PICKS AND ROSTERS:

The 2024 PBA Elite League Draft

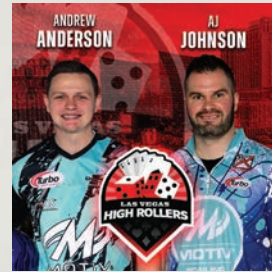
ROUND 1

- 1.01 Dom Barrett, L.A. X
- 1.02 Sam Cooley, Motown
- 1.03 François Lavoie, Akron
- 1.04 BJ Moore, New Jersey
- 1.05 Matt Ogle, Las Vegas
- 1.06 Shawn Maldonado, Dallas
- 1.07 Wes Malott, Portland
- 1.08 Stu Williams, Waco

ROSTERS

**Bowlero L.A. X**

Jason Belmonte
Kevin McCune
Dom Barrett
Tomas Käyhkö
Darren Tang
Keven Williams

**Las Vegas High Rollers**

Andrew Anderson
AJ Johnson
Matt Ogle
Matt Russo
Sean Rash
Thomas Larsen

ROUND 2

- 2.01 Tomas Käyhkö, L.A. X
- 2.02 Jason Sterner, Motown
- 2.03 Tom Daugherty, Akron
- 2.04 Chris Barnes, New Jersey
- 2.05 Matt Russo, Las Vegas
- 2.06 Jake Peters, Dallas
- 2.07 Graham Fach, Portland
- 2.08 Mitch Hupé, Waco

**Motown Muscle**

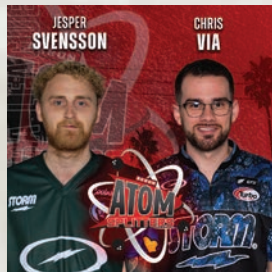
EJ Tackett
Anthony Simonsen
Sam Cooley
Jason Sterner
Justin Knowles
Zac Tackett

**Go Bowling!
Dallas Strikers**

Tommy Jones
Bill O'Neill
Shawn Maldonado
Jake Peters
Jakob Butturff
Frank Snodgrass

ROUND 3

- 3.01 Darren Tang, L.A. X
- 3.02 Justin Knowles, Motown
- 3.03 Dick Allen, Akron
- 3.04 Kyle Sherman, New Jersey
- 3.05 Sean Rash, Las Vegas
- 3.06 Jakob Butturff, Dallas
- 3.07 Tom Smallwood, Portland
- 3.08 DJ Archer, Waco

**Akron Atom Splitters**

Chris Via
Jesper Svensson
François Lavoie
Tom Daugherty
Dick Allen
Nick Pate

**Portland Lumberjacks**

Kyle Troup
Kris Prather
Wes Malott
Graham Fach
Tom Smallwood
Arturo Quintero

ROUND 4

- 4.01 Keven Williams, L.A. X
- 4.02 Zac Tackett, Motown
- 4.03 Nick Pate, Akron
- 4.04 Richie Teece, New Jersey
- 4.05 Thomas Larsen, Las Vegas
- 4.06 Frank Snodgrass, Dallas
- 4.07 Arturo Quintero, Portland
- 4.08 Tom Hess, Waco

**New Jersey Kingpins**

Marshall Kent
Packy Hanrahan
BJ Moore
Chris Barnes
Kyle Sherman
Richie Teece

**Waco Wonders**

Parker Bohn III
Ryan Ciminelli
Stu Williams
Mitch Hupé
DJ Archer
Tom Hess



A lot of the TV time will be devoted to the revamped and expanded “PBA Elite League,” which will be a part of tournaments starting with the Players Championship in January, and culminating seven months later with the Elias Cup finals at Bayside in September.

The league has been trimmed from 10 teams to eight (with the Milwaukee Pounders and Chicago Breeze saying adieu), but expanded rosters now include six bowlers, with managers making the call on the five who will bowl. Total prize money has been jacked up to \$500,000, of which the championship team will get \$100,000, or \$16,666 per bowler (up from \$15K last year). Commissioner Tom Clark says players will also earn a stipend because they have to stay an extra day.

Johnny Petraglia and Andrew Cain have stepped down as managers, replaced by playing managers Parker Bohn III and Jason Belmonte. Throughout the season, there will be 14 rounds of head-to-head Baker format matches, with each team facing the other seven teams twice.

A nationwide league season “was what we were looking to do when we started 10 years ago,” Clark says. “We’ve been trying almost every year, but economics, the lack of a partnership (plus other factors) conspired to keep the league as a once-a-year type of event.” Clark says it has become a “destination event,” thanks to the “involvement of Bayside Bowl.”

Proprietor Charlie Mitchell says Bayside “is a perfect host for the finals [in large part] because we know these bowlers, and every team will have fans. It’s going to give other people around the country a chance [to see these teams and experience their success].”

Clark is particularly happy about having home teams. “I’m hoping the fans get behind the Motown Muscle (at Thunderbowl’s arena). When we’re in Las Vegas, the High Rollers may have a home team advantage. The Atom Splitters are now in Akron,” and fans in the Rubber Capital of the World may get rowdy when the Splitters take on the High Rollers during Tournament of Champions week at AMF Riviera Lanes.

When asked if this is part of a grander scheme for the PBA League, Clark responded that, “It’s the same scheme that it’s always been. It’s a step toward figuring out which is the way to go, the only way we want to stand out. We want to see what fits, what works. To draw a lot of fans. To build it so each team has a whole league (to work against).”

And he says it’s good for sponsorships.

“The team will have their logo, their uniform, and it’ll pique interest for a sponsor to come out” and see what team bowling is all about.

Clark sounded a bit like former CEO Steve Miller when he said, “It’s also extremely aspirational for kids. I want kids to think, ‘I want to be on one of those teams in the PBA League.’”

League of their Own

With the expansion of the PBA League schedule in 2024 enabling the endeavor to fulfill its original vision as a true pro sports “league” that takes its show on the road throughout the country, as the 2024 PBA Tour season calls for, it is a sure bet that the eventual PBA Elite League champions will have done at least as much, if not more bowling than any prior victors since the league’s inception a decade ago.

What’s more, they will have given a greater variety of fans a taste of the intensity the league features at its beloved home of Bayside Bowl in Portland, Maine, which still will host the championship round when the PBA Elite League Playoffs hit Bayside in September.

While we wait to see which team prevails in this, the most ambitious season in its history, here is a look at past PBA League champions and MVPs...

PBA LEAGUE ELIAS CUP CHAMPIONS

2013	NYC WTT KingPins
2014	Silver Lake Atom Splitters
2015	Silver Lake Atom Splitters
2016	Dallas Strikers
2017	Dallas Strikers
2018	Silver Lake Atom Splitters
2019	Portland Lumberjacks
2020	Portland Lumberjacks
2021	Event not held
2022	Portland Lumberjacks
2023	Waco Wonders

MARK ROTH PBA LEAGUE MVPS

2013	Not awarded
2014	Chris Barnes
2015	Dick Allen
2016	Tommy Jones
2017	Norm Duke
2018	Chris Barnes
2019	Wes Malott
2020	Wes Malott
2021	Event not held
2022	Kyle Troup
2023	Ryan Ciminelli

As for the five-month gap between the last regular season session and the finals at Bayside, Clark says, "That's television and their windows. The best windows for the league finals, where we could get three days in a row for the high-impact finals in bowling."

Still, Clark believes the long break will be reexamined next year. "I think that'll be one of the things we'll address moving forward," he says. "I think they'll recognize that it might be better to be closer."

The reigning Player of the Year, EJ Tackett, isn't too bothered by the break. He just likes the league's expansion. "It gives fans a chance to really connect with teams. Especially the places we go and you're going to have the home team," he says. "Having teams in the cities [we visit] so that fans can have a home team, and be connected to the team to have somebody to root for."

Tackett won five times in 2023 — two of them majors — and led the tour in earnings, with \$458,450, good for second highest in PBA history. Kyle Troup is still on top with \$496,900. Will either bowler duplicate or surpass those figures this year? EJ and wife Natalie were expecting their first child in December.

"I don't know what that's going to bring, what that's going to do to me mentally," he says. "My mind is going to be focused on making sure that my wife and my kid are okay."

During the holidays, the Pro with the Fro was itching to get back on the road. "Having a full schedule, the opportunity for TV, to win some titles," he says. "I definitely plan to do some winning, because EJ and Simo did too much of that last year," Troup says.

Tackett will probably disagree. "I hope 2024 brings more championships like it did this year (2023)," he says.

Second place in POY voting, Simonsen won three times (including the USBC Masters), and cashed checks totaling \$347,500. Can he improve on that in 2024? "I'm not one to set too many goals," he says. "I just go out and just bowl week to week and see what happens. That'll probably be the same mindset as we get going next year. I think if I can just bowl a good first week, it'll settle me down into the year pretty nicely, and we'll see what happens from there."

Belmonte was the third player to crack the 300-grand barrier (\$338,000), while winning two tournaments (the Super Slam Cup didn't count officially). The title in the Tournament of Champions was his 15th major. Last year, Belmo was asked what is next. "Nothing. It's the same, like I'm not done with just beating the record. I want to get to double; I want to get to 20."

The 2024 Tour will again present four classic events with \$25,000 top prizes (64 maximum entries), and the PBA will partner with the PWBA for the Striking Against Breast Cancer Mixed Doubles. Sweden's Lucky Larsen Masters will be back, and there'll be the All-Star Weekend, a bash that Bowlero is putting together. We do know that it's a non-title event with current PBA stars, PBA legends, rookies and celebrities.

But gone are the Super Slam, the Skill Ball Challenge and the Strike Derby, something that Mitchell is convinced served its purpose. "We're happy to do what we can to help the PBA and all of the events here are fun, but the league is really our bread and butter."

He'll be doing his part when the PBA Elite League rolls into town in September, and Bayside performs its frenetic magic. "It's pretty amazing, any time you've got the whole building transformed into a TV studio and all the best bowlers in the world there. It doesn't take much more than that." ■

AT A GLANCE:

The 2024 PBA Tour

The \$4 million in prize money up for grabs on the 2024 PBA Tour entails in no small part five majors spread throughout the country, while fans everywhere from Las Vegas to the Midwest to Maine will get a taste of PBA Elite League action as the PBA Tour's 66th season unfolds. Sometimes, fans will get a twofer — a major championship and PBA Elite League action all under the same roof.

Here are the majors and all stops at which PBA Elite League competition is scheduled to take place in 2024...

MAJORS

PBA Players Championship - Bowlero Northrock

Wichita, Kansas - Monday, Jan. 15 at 5 p.m. ET on FOX - Finals

U.S. Open - Royal Pin Woodland

Indianapolis, Indiana - Sunday, Feb. 4 at 4 p.m. ET on FOX
U.S. Open Finals

USBC Masters - Suncoast Hotel & Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada - Sunday, Mar. 31 at 1 p.m. ET on FOX
USBC Masters Finals

PBA World Championship Finals - Thunderbowl Lanes

Allen Park, Michigan - Sunday, Apr. 21 at noon ET on FOX

PBA Tournament of Champions - AMF Riviera Lanes

Fairlawn, Ohio - Sunday, Apr. 28 at noon ET on FOX
PBA Tournament of Champions Finals

PBA ELITE LEAGUE

Royal Pin Woodland - Indianapolis, Indiana

Saturday, Feb. 3 at 4 p.m. ET on FS1

Suncoast Hotel & Casino - Las Vegas, Nevada

Saturday, Mar. 30 at 7 p.m. ET on FS1

Thunderbowl Lanes - Allen Park, Michigan

Saturday, Apr. 6 at 1:30 p.m. ET on FS1
Sunday, Apr. 7 at noon ET on FS1

AMF Riviera Lanes - Fairlawn, Ohio

Saturday, Apr. 27 at 4 p.m. ET on FS1

PBA Elite League Elias Cup Playoffs

Bayside Bowl in Portland, Maine

Sunday, Sept. 15 at 5 p.m. ET on FS1 - Quarterfinals
Monday, Sept. 16 at 7 p.m. ET on FS1 - Semifinals
Monday, Sept. 16 at 9 p.m. ET on FS1 - Semifinals
Tuesday, Sept. 17 at 7 p.m. ET on FS1 - Finals

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TOPPABLE

Nearly a decade after three back surgeries, Lauren Tomaszewski shines on national stage.

Nothing was going to stop Lauren Tomaszewski.

Not her age, when the O'Fallon, Illinois native landed a spot on the Carriel Junior High School bowling team as a fourth grader.

Not distance, as she scoured the Midwest for the best bowling instruction she could find — attending camps with esteemed college programs such as Vanderbilt, Wichita State and Nebraska.

Not difficulty, as she bowled her way onto two of the nation's most touted college programs later on — Stephen F. Austin and, after coursing through the transfer portal, North Carolina A&T under USBC Hall of Famer and PWBA Tour legend Kim Terrell Kearney.

And Tomaszewski did not just fill a spot on Kearney's squad; she seized her moment at the program as commandingly as any player could hope to do.

In her first three years at A&T, she was named a National Tenpin Coaches Association All-American twice including a first teamer in 2022.

She has been part of three consecutive Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference championships, three straight conference titles, finished in the top eight in the NAAs in 2021 and 2022 and second in 2022 and tied for third in 2023 at the USBC Intercollegiate Team Championships.

She bowled her first collegiate 300 earlier this year in New Orleans and was selected as MEAC Bowler of the Week for the fifth



*Help of a Halo
Tomaszewski spent three
weeks in something called
"halo gravity traction."*

time in her career on Nov. 8.

Oh, and, in the meantime, let's also bear in mind that fourth-place finish she enjoyed as a U20 competitor in the 2021 USBC Junior Gold Championships in Indianapolis.

No, nothing was going to stop Tomaszewski. Not even the day she learned something about her body that could have stopped anyone.

A Mystery and its Unpleasant Answer

Tomaszewski's mom Kelly always had wondered why, as she put it, Lauren's "growth was stunted." Kelly watched Lauren transition from consistently being one of the tallest in her class to virtually having stopped growing. What happened?

The answer started to come into view when Lauren had just returned from a bowling camp at the University of Nebraska. The then 12-year-old was seeking more knowledge to utilize on the lanes at St. Clair Bowl in nearby Fairview Heights as she prepared for seventh grade. Before the season started, she needed to have her annual sports physical done.

With her regular doctors unavailable, her parents Kelly and Dan took her to a walk-in clinic. What they expected to be a routine exam turned into something much bigger when the doctor saw something in her back that caused concern and sent her to a specialist.

"Despite years of annual physicals and sports physicals, no one ever palpitated her back to feel her spine," said Kelly.

The follow-up palpitation found their answers — a 90–95-degree S curve. Turns out she had a severe case of scoliosis that nobody previously spotted.

"We were grateful for that because, while she could have gone a little longer, time was ticking," Kelly said. "She was turning 13 in October of that year. With girls, once you hit a certain point, you've got about a two-year window once they start to get this done. The longer you wait, it's harder to manipulate the spine."

A competitive swimmer who overcame metabolic syndrome discovered at age 4, Lauren said she never had any back issues growing up. But she did suffer from migraine headaches after the flip turns during vigorous workouts and swim practices.

"We just thought it was too tight of a swim cap or all the flips. We never thought anything of it," Lauren said. "I had a curve, but it was balanced. I ran cross country, and I rolled my ankle sometimes and we just thought it was because I was clumsy."

"Seeing a neurologist, they never took an X-ray. Nobody ever, ever did an X-ray of her back," Kelly said. "I think had they done one simple X-ray, it would have shown this. Her pediatrician just had her stand across the room and bend over. They never felt her back. Unless you are a skinny kid you can't feel their spine."

A Career Hangs in the Balance

That was at the end of August 2013, and she quickly spent three weeks in halo gravity traction with a titanium halo anchored by six screws drilled into her skull and about 40 pounds of sandbags attached to her head. It stretched her spine three full inches and prepared her for her initial back surgery in December.

The first spinal fusion procedure to place titanium rods in the back had to be aborted after losing the signal in her left leg, which caused temporary paralysis. Following an immediate MRI, Lauren was placed on complete bedrest for one week. Two more surgeries fused T2 to L4 vertebrae after which she spent five weeks at Children's Hospital in St. Louis.

Renowned surgeon Dr. Keith Bridwell, who wrote textbooks on spinal surgery used in med school, performed the surgeries.



True Grit

Both before and after her body let her down, Tomaszewski's talent has shined brightly.

“He was very troubled about Lauren’s spinal cord injury. After her first surgery, he thought he had missed something on the MRI, which is why she went straight to get another one right after surgery,” Kelly said. “It was nothing he did. There is a laundry list of complications that can happen with spinal surgery, especially one as complex as Lauren’s.”

Though they didn’t convey those potential issues to their daughter, Kelly and Dan knew nothing was guaranteed and there could have been further complications. But they didn’t want to scare their daughter. So, Kelly spent countless hours online seeking information about other athletes who had a scoliosis diagnosis and spinal fusion.

“I wanted to know if her career that had just started was going to be over before it had a chance to take off,” Kelly said. “Would she be able to have a college career as she had dreamed? Would she potentially be able to have a pro career if she chose to? There were so many questions and so few answers to be found.

“I wanted to be able to reassure my child that the sport that she had come to love and was good at, and that gave her confidence and purpose, could still be a reality despite her disability.”

Kelly did learn of one athlete with a similar story. Golfer Stacy Lewis was diagnosed with scoliosis at age 11 in 1996 and underwent spinal fusion surgery while in high school. Lewis redshirted her freshman year at the University of Arkansas while recovering, then persevered for four years there before a highly successful professional career on the Ladies Professional Golfers Association Tour. She will captain the 2023 and 2024 U.S. Solheim Cup team.

“When a child was going through something like that, I wanted to be able to show her that there were others out there like her,” Kelly said. “I wanted to reassure her that college coaches would understand and hopefully not hold her disability against her. There are no guarantees in life, but when you can show your kid that there are other children who look like them, kids who have similar circumstances and even similar disabilities, it matters.”

Fortunately, everything ended up fine after the three procedures. While Lauren’s doctors told her not to lift a bowling ball for an entire year to give her body time to heal, she came back in 11 months.

“Little me was a little impatient and I maybe started back a little earlier than I was supposed to,” Lauren said.

“It really killed her to have to take the time off because she really had a fire lit into her the summer before,” Kelly said. “She had gone to Vanderbilt for the last camp they ever held plus one at Wichita State and the one at Nebraska.”

Lauren visited her seventh-grade teammates during tryouts and some matches while using a walker. She also took part in a clinical trial of a drug called Riluzole, which she took for 10 days to speed the healing.

“We are grateful that Lauren was able to be enrolled in the clinical trial and was lucky enough to have been given this drug,” Kelly said. “It could be the reason why she was able to recover as quickly as she did and not have any long-term neurological deficits in her left leg as a result.”

Besides in-patient therapy, Lauren spent some of the initial time after her surgeries trying to catch up with what she missed in school with the aid of an in-home tutor.

“At one time, they put a PICC line in my right arm so I couldn’t do schoolwork for about a week with that in because I’m right-handed for just about everything,” Lauren said. “I write right-handed and bowl right-handed so I just kind of watched TV.”

She returned to the classroom after more than two months away. Teachers would place her textbooks in the back of their rooms to make it easier for her to access and carry them between classes and home. She also was able to use the elevator instead of the stairs.

“Even though I was in class, I was trying to catch up with what I had missed before,” said Lauren, who finished seventh grade with a 3.0 grade point average.

Comeback

Once on the lanes, she showed few, if any, visible ramifications, making her ready to come back strong in eighth grade.

“I started out a little slow doing some drills here and there and slowly getting into the rhythm,” Lauren said. “But once I was fully back into it, I finished second in state after taking that entire year off.”

Sherri Tadlock was right in the middle of Lauren’s challenges as bowling coach at Carriel where she also continues as a physical therapist focused on children with disabilities.

“The thing that stood out when she came back was how good she was after being out for that year with surgery,” Tadlock said.

“She came back with a vengeance. She came back bowling and doing well. Everybody was a little on edge on what’s this surgery going to do but she came back well.”

When Tadlock heard Lauren was having her surgeries, it naturally produced concerns.

“In my mind, I’m thinking, ‘Wow, that’s a huge surgery,’ especially since I work in physical therapy and understand the whole process of it,” Tadlock said. “It was so nice that her mom was able to let us follow the process and to see her come back the next year so strong it was just a positive moment for all of us.”

“And to see the pictures of her in the hospital walking but having this whole system pulling on her spine to keep it straight and she’s got weights hanging on her, it was amazing.”

The summer after eighth grade, Lauren competed in the first of multiple United States Bowling Congress Junior Gold events. While she didn’t make the cuts in the U15 division, she did place fourth in her final year of eligibility in U20 in 2021 in Indianapolis.

At O’Fallon High School, she led her team to four consecutive trips to the Illinois High School Association championships. While the team missed the cut in 2016, it placed fourth in 2017 and 2018 and captured the school’s first state title in her senior year in 2019. Individually, Lauren made the all-state team by placing fifth in 2018 and second in 2019, the latter with 2,552 for 12 games, a 212.7 average.

“My determination was for us to do well and go on to win the school’s first state title in any sport,” she said. “After my freshman year at state and seeing everything there, I had the determination to want to go get better. It lit the fire and I always wanted to get better as you grow and improve. I was always working on my game. Even today in college, we’re always looking at things to do better.”

“For us to win the first championship in OHS history was pretty, pretty awesome. To finish second in the state, I really didn’t know I was second until I was done. I remember hugging my dad and my coach. It was quite an experience and a pinnacle of my high-school career.”

Her coach, Gary Spencer, knew Lauren was special the moment he first met her.

“Everybody has some adversity in their life from time to time that they have to fight through,” Spencer said. “She was already through all that by the time she got to high school, but what made her successful despite all that was her love of bowling. You have to love what you do so you don’t get burned out. And she had grit and determination. She didn’t let that stop her.”

“Knowing Lauren, if you didn’t know that about her, she never brought it up or complained about it or anything like that. She didn’t make excuses, let’s put it that way.”

In addition to her own success, Spencer said Lauren fueled the team by pushing others to do their best.

“She loved bowling, and she was a competitor,” he said. “She knew what she needed to do and quite frankly outworked other people to get where she was.”

When Lauren became more serious about the sport, her father — a past league bowler — did too, earning both his USBC Bronze and Silver level coaching certifications to help her. He even assisted with O’Fallon’s girls’ and boys’ teams her senior year.

“With bowling, her self-esteem soars,” Dan said.

College Bound

That was evident when she would watch bowlers at McKendree University, which also bowled at St. Clair Bowl. It fueled an early desire to compete in college herself. It didn’t hurt she was often able to practice on McKendree’s burned out lanes just for the chal-

lenge. She also was able to roll alongside McKendree’s legendary former head coach and PWBA star Shannon O’Keefe. And she took lessons from Dennis Knepper, McKendree’s men’s head coach.

Though she could have stayed home and bowled for two-time National Collegiate Athletic Association champion McKendree, she was determined to make a name for herself at a Division I school elsewhere.

“I didn’t want to bowl in the same center as I had for the past eight years,” Lauren said.

Plus, wanting to ultimately be a veterinarian and with McKendree not having an animal science program, she accepted a scholarship to attend Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, Texas, for her freshman year. It also put her closer to her parents who had relocated to Wylie, Texas, in 2019 for Kelly’s former job with AT&T. After that position was eliminated in August, Kelly and Dan moved to Nashville from where he works for State Farm.

When Lauren realized the Texas school was no longer a good fit, she entered the NCAA transfer portal late in the season and chose North Carolina A&T University, a school she had previously visited. With coaches Kim and Eric Kearney unable to offer a scholarship in her first year, she competed as a walk-on before earning a scholarship the next season.

“Kim and Eric have done a tremendous job with Lauren refining all of those little things,” Kelly said. “Lauren has always wanted to get better, and they want to do what they can to help you. They want you to be the best version of yourself on and off the lanes. Kim really takes the time to help her, and Lauren has really flourished under their direction.”

“I was excited and grateful they decided to take a chance on me and come that year,” Lauren said. “It’s paid dividends more personally and bowling-wise, it’s been a great experience here.”

In her first three years at A&T, she was named a National Tenpin Coaches Association All-American twice including a first teamer in 2022. She has been part of three consecutive MEAC championships, three straight conference titles, finished in the top eight in the NCAAs in 2021 and 2022 and second in 2022 and tied for third in 2023 at the USBC Intercollegiate Team Championships. She bowled her first collegiate 300 earlier this year in New Orleans and was selected as MEAC Bowler of the Week for the fifth time in her career on Nov. 8.

The Kearneys didn’t really know much about Lauren’s challenges until after she arrived at A&T.

“There doesn’t seem to be any restrictions when she’s bowling,” Kim said. “Certainly, there are some exercises her strength coaches are aware of and make accommodations. But overall, you wouldn’t even know.”

The two exercises Lauren can’t do — standard pushups and standard sit-ups — are challenging for her because they put too much stress on her back. Fortunately, her trainers have understood that and made appropriate adjustments in her workouts.

“She’s just tough as nails,” Kelly said. “She got her pain tolerance from her grandma.”

Kim Kearney has been impressed with how Lauren’s performed in her four years with the team.

“The kid has worked so hard. She just wants to learn more. She wants to be better,” Kearney said. “She has aspirations of going out on tour as well as veterinary school. Eric and I do all we can for whatever’s next, whatever direction she wants to go with her game.”

Like her junior high and senior high school coaches, Kearney has noticed Lauren’s drive to success at whatever level she is at.

“She’s sort of stepped up. We’ve put in the work to get her where she is [and everyone appreciates] the energy she brings to

Comeback Kid
Tomaszewski's post-surgery comeback has turned many heads among fellow players and coaches.



campus, the desire to be one of the best players in the country," Kearney said.

"She's found her way there. There's been many a long practice. All you see with the work ethic that the best in the world put together. She knows how to work hard and fight for her dreams. It's been incredible to watch her growth and improvement year to year. It's what we hope for. We hope they are better and smarter as they prepare for what's next."

Tomaszewski's efforts were recognized by her school's athletics department earlier this year with the Catherine Bonner Award as the student-athlete who has overcome major obstacles to thrive as a student-athlete.

Through her first 10 games of regular competition, she has averaged 216. As anchor the last two years of an experienced A&T squad, the team has lofty goals in 2024.

"We have shown we are one of the best teams in the country (ranked fourth in the pre-season poll)," she said. "It's showing to be a promising season. We hope to win four MEAC championships in a row. We have the fire, and we know in our guts this is going to be our year to make it into the Final Four (at the NCAAs).

"Each year is a learning experience, and we keep getting better and better. To win two national championships the last year here would be amazing. Hopefully this year is our year."

Dreams of the Future

Besides the pro tour, Lauren also hopes to make Team USA preferably at the Team Trials in January. In the meantime, she has applied to about a dozen veterinary schools.

"She's always wanted to try the tour and I think she has the abilities and determination to do it," Kelly said. "Having gone through what she's gone through in her life has given her a different perspective that when things get hard or she's going through a slump, she's as tough as nails."

She got a taste of the PWBA in Smyrna, Georgia, in 2021, and Dallas in 2022 and though she didn't make any money, she learned enough to want to become a member and shoot for rookie of the year in 2024.

"I didn't cash but you look around at all these names I'm surrounded by and realized I can compete with the best of the best," she said. "A lot of my hard work has paid off with what I've done so far here at A&T but there's still work to be done. It never ends. I'm excited to see what more success the work has in store."

Her mom knows whatever she does, she'll be a success.

"Part of it is she's gone through some really tough things," Kelly said. "I hope nobody goes through what she's gone through as it was brutal. She's just shown a lot of resilience in her life. She's worked for a lot of hard things. You appreciate what she's accomplished a lot more understanding where she was and where she is now." ■

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Yesteryear

DETERMINING BOWLING'S 'WORLD CHAMPION'

by J.R. SCHMIDT

As Norman Mailer once put it about boxing, “The heavyweight champion of the world is either the toughest man in the world or he is not. But there is a real possibility that he is.”

Well, then who is the best bowler in the world? For many years, there was a real possibility that it was the match-game champion.

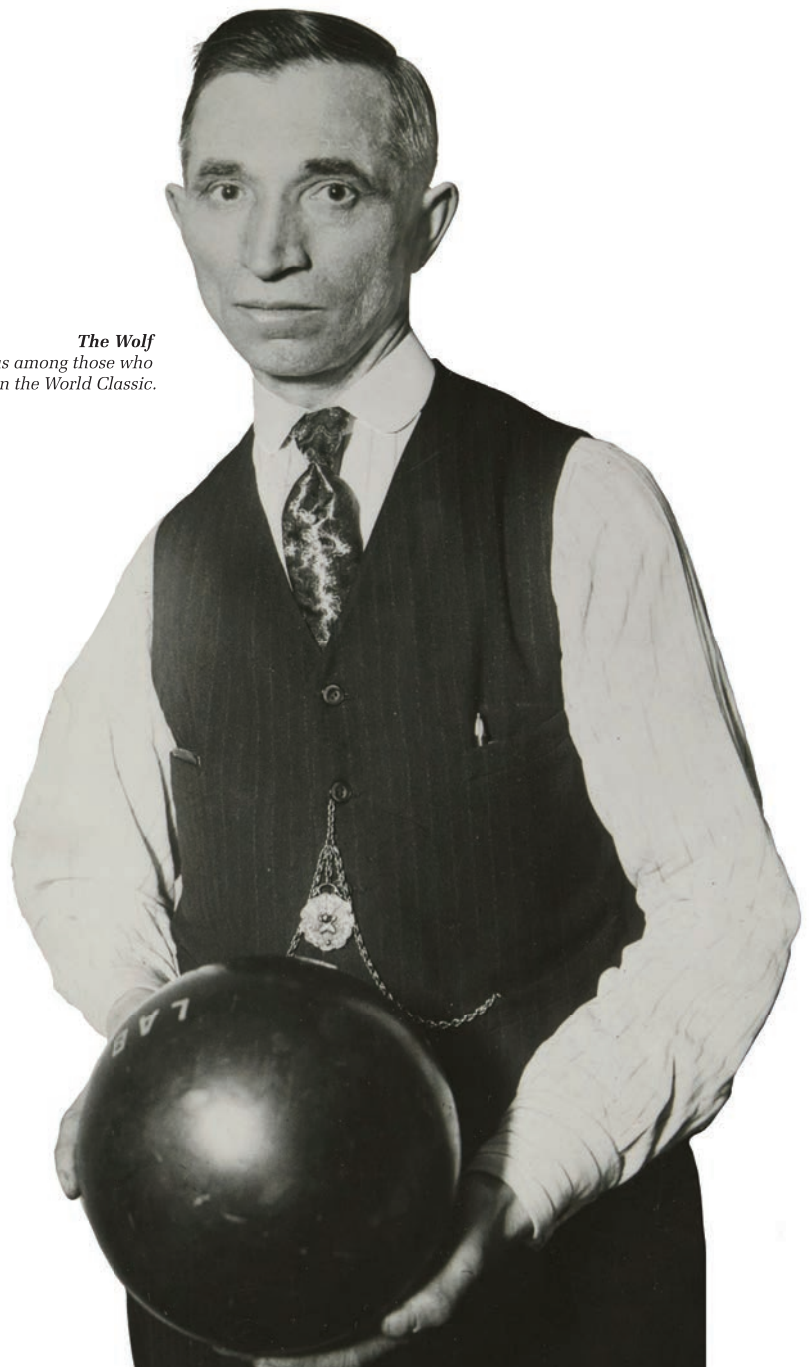
Bowling's rules were standardized in 1895, with the founding of the American Bowling Congress. In the years that followed, nearly every “bowling city” had one man who was recognized as top dog. Brooklyn's Johnny Voorhies was the first bowler to establish a national reputation. Nicknamed “The Little Wizard,” by 1906 there was nothing “little” about his moniker. He was, by then, commonly referred to as “the world champion.”

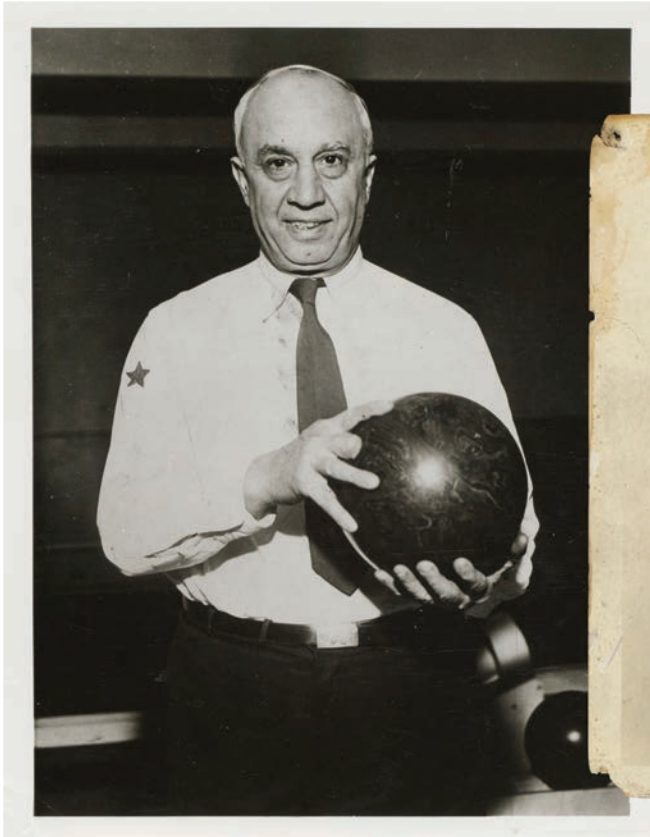
Jimmy Smith was a one-time teammate of Voorhies. In March 1906, Smith trimmed the Wizard on a best-of-eleven match, and announced that he was “claiming the world's championship.” Though Voorhies bested Smith in a 45-game showdown the next year, that didn't seem to matter. The sporting press recognized Jimmy Smith as the champion.

Still, west of the Alleghenies, some skeptics weren't convinced. Smith took care of that in 1909 by annihilating Cleveland's Louis Franz in a 60-game match. Now there could be no doubt who was bowling's heavyweight champ.

During the 1910s, Smith cashed in on his celebrity. He toured the nation, rolling exhibitions and giving instruction. Along the way he did lose an occasional match. But again, that didn't seem to matter. Every-

The Wolf
Phil Wolf was among those who made their mark in the World Classic.





Joust of the Jimmys
Few rivalries in bowling's early days overshadowed Jimmy Smith's (left) tangle with Jimmy Blouin (right) in the World Classic.

one knew that Jimmy Smith was the greatest bowler in the world. Just as everyone knew that Enrico Caruso was the greatest opera singer.

All along, Jimmy Blouin had been trying to goad Smith into a match. The two men finally faced off in April 1921 in a 60-game set. Blouin won, and immediately declared he was the new champ. Yet in the months that followed, Smith continued to advertise himself as the world champion. That was still the consensus, right?

Then, in August, Caruso suddenly died. Coincidence, but symbolic. Maybe it was time to settle the question of bowling's champion once and for all.

Enter Chicago proprietor Louis Petersen. In October 1921, he staged bowling's richest tournament so far, an eight-game sweeper that paid the winner \$1,000 — double the top prize in the U.S. Open golf tournament. Fresh from that triumph, Petersen

announced a new event to determine who was the top tenpin toppler. He called it the World Classic Bowling Tournament.

Twenty-four of the nation's foremost bowlers — including Smith and Blouin — accepted invitations to compete in the World Classic. They began rolling on four specially-built lanes in the Chicago Coliseum Annex on February 9, 1922. The format called for a round-robin of 23 five-game matches over 16 days. Standings would be determined on Petersen Points, a combination of total pins plus games and matches won. First prize was \$1,200 — a princely sum at the time.

The World Classic received press coverage unheard of for a bowling tournament of the era. Spectators packed the Coliseum Annex during the event's 16-day run. On the lanes, local Chicago favorite Frank Kafora jumped out to an early lead, then faded after suffering a split thumb. Hank Marino

and Otto Stein surged for a while. And always lurking just behind the leaders was Jimmy Blouin. At the end of 115 games, Blouin was on top of the board.

Blouin got his \$1,200 and a diamond medal. But he still had work to do. To become the official champion, he would have to defeat the next three finishers in separate 60-game matches. If he lost any one of those matches, the title would remain vacant.

Phil Wolf had finished second in the tournament. Blouin went up against Wolf in September and won easily. In November, he trounced third-place finisher Mort Lindsey. That left only the fourth-place bowler standing in Blouin's way, a bowler by the name of — you guessed it — Jimmy Smith.

Their December match was a nail-biter. But at the end of 60 games, Jimmy-B had beaten Jimmy-S. Bowling finally had an official match-game champion.

Part One of Two Parts

Spare Me

Bill Chrisman: Lessons from a Life Well-Lived

by JASON THOMAS



THE WAITRESS at the diner looked at me and asked for my order.

“Liver and onions, please. And an unsweetened iced tea.”

“I’ll have the same,” said the man sitting on the other side of the table, with a hint of a smile and a gleam in his eye.

After we handed her our menus and she walked away, the man, who just so happened to be Bill Chrisman, co-founder and CEO of Storm Bowling Products, said, “You’re the first person I’ve ever eaten with at this diner who’s ordered liver and onions. I get it every time.”

It was a small thing, but you could see in his eyes that it made him genuinely happy, meeting another person with a common appreciation for the much-maligned dish from which kids everywhere have recoiled for decades.

Over the course of the meal, we discussed many topics, including the nature of success, failure, the meaning of life, and being a parent. He shared his stories and gave his thoughts freely, sometimes contradicting himself, then acknowledging the contradiction by saying that if I asked him the question a hundred times, he would probably answer it a hundred different ways — but only because that’s just who he is.

When we left the diner on that crisp, cool day in March 2022, the snow dusting the peaks of the neighboring Wasatch mountains gave an element of wonder to the monumental task of attempting to boil

down the life and achievements of one of bowling’s most interesting and important individuals into a five-minute tribute video that would be played at the 2022 USBC Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

We drove back to the Storm headquarters in his shiny monster truck, a fun-but-utilitarian toy that he enjoyed and appreciated, which also served as a reflection of the multi-faceted nature of his complex persona. He gave me a tour of his office, which held a cadre of memorabilia, regaling me with interesting tales of each artifact as I filmed. When we sat down for the official interview, he was a bit uneasy, but also completely open, not caring a whit how what he was about to say might make him look.

He told me things that were, frankly, amazing; situations that, if any of us were ever forced to face, most would have given up or simply been frozen in fear and inaction, leading surely to failure and the complete annihilation of the original dream, and likely setting his life on a totally different path. He seemed truly amazed (and amused) that he’d been able to survive these horrific circumstances and scenarios and had made it to the point he was at then. He never gave an ego-based reason for why he was able to accomplish all the things he’d accomplished and didn’t pontificate on how others could do it themselves — he just chocked it up to “good luck,” or “being too stupid to know better,” or “all the

great people around me who were able to save my ass time and again.”

I only saw him once more before he passed, and that was at the induction ceremony a month later, where things were so hectic that we never had a chance to speak. But he did shoot me a text on December 25, 2022, wishing me and my family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. When I received it, I wondered how long he must have been sending texts to people he cared about before he got all the way down to my name on his list.

In getting to know him a little, I learned that his greatest gift to the world was not building a behemoth manufacturing company literally from nothing. Or grabbing the most market share in a highly mature industry dominated by three long-entrenched competitors. Or apple-pie-scented bowling balls. Or the marketing genius of signing the most interesting and influential athletes in the sport. Or selling his products internationally in a way that had never been done before in bowling. No, his greatest gift was his authenticity, which for him was a lifelong pursuit at which he worked every day. He showed us that being your authentic self is the ability to embrace the paradox of welcoming openness to constant learning and change, while having the courage to stand up for your beliefs and the things you love — like a mountain standing tall against a raging storm.

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