



Idle Bowling Thoughts

By Chuck Pezzano

What do non-bowlers have against bowling?

Nothing, really, except maybe ignorance of the sport as a competitive challenge. Almost everyone bowls or has bowled at one time or another. And it seems sure that everyone who bowls or has bowled has scored a strike.

A strike is it in bowling. It is the best you can do on a single ball. And a child can roll as perfect a strike as any pro.

Most people never hit a long home run, toss or catch a touchdown pass, score a knockout, sink a long one, score a goal, or actually do any of the one shot performances that constitute precision or perfection in a sport.

Therefore, because they can accomplish what the top pros strive all their lives to achieve, roll a strike, and they usually succeed the first time they go bowling, they don't seem to consider bowling too seriously. It is only when they try to put a few strikes together that they appreciate how difficult it can be.

And when they see a wide assortment of spares, with pins peeking up at them from all areas of the pin deck, they begin to realize that spare shooting is indeed an art.

Add to that the many paths a bowling ball takes, from gutter to gutter in the hands of a novice, and the difficulty grows larger and larger.

There is a certain monotony to the sport unless you're into it. Watching it is not the same as doing it. Doing it casually is not the same as worrying about it, and even the serious bowler can't know what enters a pro's mind and body when it becomes his livelihood.

The high scoring hasn't helped. In no other sport can the best in the world move into a town, and find that local juniors carry the same kind of average as the best.

In few other sports can there be a competition in which kids can beat their parents and grandparents, or the other way around. That can be good for a sport in many ways, but it also makes for less gaps between the best and the rest, at least on paper.

Bowling is the only sport in which pros can be barred from amateur tournaments paying more prize money than the pro tournaments. Read that one again. Now make believe you're sports editor who knows nothing about bowling. He finds it hard to believe. And it is only through a long process of education that he can be convinced that though bowling might be a little strange in ways, there is a method to all the madness, and that the bowling product today is the result of a long historical march.

I've seen a few heads shake when non-bowlers discover there are many bowlers who don't know how to keep score. And because there are automatic scorers and someone always willing and able to keep score you can get by as long as you wish without knowing much.

Bowling is a sport in which the participants range from those who have no athletic ability at all to those who rate as world class athletes. It is a sport in which you can get by not knowing a thing about it, and one you can spend your whole life learning more and more about.

Bowling is many different things to many different people, and that is why it doesn't have any real enemies among non-bowlers, but neither does it have that many diehard supporters and backers.

Make yourself a more educated bowler in every way. It can be a fascinating experience, and then slowly but surely, impart that know how to that non-bowler relative, friend, anyone, and everyone.

The beginning field had included such as Buzz Fazio, Ed Lubanski, Bob Strampe, Ed Bourdase, Ray Lown, Harry Smith, Robby Robinson, Bill Bumetta, Ray Bluth, Joe Kristof and Lou Frantz. And there were the likes of Les Barrett, Al Fajol, Gordy Coletti, Chet Dziedzina, John Kanalis, Carl Richard, Fuzzy Shimada, Don McClaren and Frank Varipapa and so many other fine national and regional bowlers and movers of the sport.

You could almost see the competitive juices flowing, and you could see how they dug down to find that combative spirit was still there.

There was frustration, the aggravation of knowing what to do but not being quite able to, and the same hurt of a solid rap on a good hit, a split popping up—to cause a close loss.

You can't hide class.

In all you could see why they once were on top, why they were pioneers, and why they could still bowl with the best, though maybe not over a long route.

They had nothing to prove. Their titles and honors filled the record books, but they still had the pride to add to their records, and in some cases, make records for the first time.

Many of the bowlers who rolled in that first historic pro event have passed away. Most didn't feel they were born too soon. Most had kind words for the current stars of their day as do most of today's seniors about today's stars. Most agreed that a champion or star in any era would have been the same in any other era.

The first senior pro event brought the past, present and future together. Senior tournaments still do.



Wright In The Heart Of Texas

By Don Wright

There's an old saying that goes, "You can always tell a Texan, you just can't tell him much." Well, I was told that I might have omitted a few Texans from my research piece of last month.

I got an e-mail from Texan John Jowdy who reminded me that, "I am a TEXAN, have always been a Texan, and, like all real Texan, will always be a Texan."

So my statement on the Mort Luby Sr. award is obviously incorrect since John won it in 1991.

He also reminded me that Gary Dickinson and Norm Duke are Texans and made quite a name for themselves early on in their careers in Texas.

Once again John is right. Gary lists his place of birth as Paris, Texas and Norm as Mount Pleasant, making them Texans by birth.

My error was a common one because I used what is listed, and presumably provided by the individual, to the various media guides, bowling encyclopedia and web sites. Dickinson is listed as Edmond, Oklahoma, Duke is listed as Clermont, Florida, and Jowdy is listed as El Cajon, California.

If you ask people where they are from they usually say, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, or whatever city they come from. Ask a Texan where he's from and he says Texas. That's usually good enough.

I have a good friend who was born and lived in Texas until his eighteenth birthday and he then joined the Army. He has not returned to Texas since that time, over 42 years. We write and stay in touch and he still maintains he's a Texan.

I guess he is. But he registers his car in Virginia, votes there, owns property and pays taxes there and when you ask him where he's from he says, "Woodbridge, Virginia."

Syndicated columnist Molly Ivins wrote, "Texas is an un-self-conscious place. Nobody here is embarrassed about being who he is."

I guess if a person feels so strongly about being a Texan, and desires to live someplace else, when that person is inducted into a Hall of Fame under their name should read TEXAS. Sort of like Ernie Schlegel did when he said he was from the USA.

As they say in the Texas legislature, "Why they don't do that makes for a lot of uncertainty that's not clear in my mind."

But, I do thank that ol' cowboy in El Cajon for keeping me straight. Thanks, John.

On a different subject – Bowling in the ball park! Call me a purist. Call me an old foggy, or whatever, but bowling doesn't belong in a ball park, or anywhere else outdoors. We are supposedly working hard to make bowling respectable and accepted as a sport. Why do we turn to gimmicks? Granted the PBA got about 5,000 butts in a seat, but so what? Having a practice setting in the bullpen and driving the bowler out makes our sport look like some kind of a circus act.

The PBA may want to change the image of bowling, but let's not do it this way. We look foolish and far from professional. Bowling is an indoor sport, live with it.

While I am on the PBA I have to ask the question, "Why do you mike the bowlers?" It seems like a really good idea to mike the bowlers so the folks watching can hear their comments in good and bad situations. But, Pedersen and Ryan never shut up. Both Voss and Himmeler were vocal as was Patrick Allen the week before, but the two talking heads in the booth go on and on like the energizer bunny. Geez, guys, take a breath!

I read an article that stated the Indianapolis Star was dropping bowling because it was a recreation and not a sport. I remember Jim Rome, a sports talking head, taking on bowling in a similar manner and it was a topic of discussion on every Internet message board pertaining to sports. Most of those topics turned nasty and questioned Rome's heritage, but by far they considered bowling a sport.

The action of the Star was a great opportunity for the Bowling Writers Association of America, as the professional body for bowling writers, to weigh in and provide the Star with accurate information to protect the sport of bowling and its scribes.

In a recent column by award winning columnist Dick Evans, he wrote, "In my opinion, the entire bowling industry is guilty of not spreading the word about the PBA, or for that matter, the attributes of the sport itself."

I couldn't agree more with Evans. But, when papers like the Star and sports editor's drop the sport, than the voice of the writers, the BWAA, should stand up, weigh in and work on behalf of the sport and the scribes.

But, I refer back to what I wrote earlier in this column. Maybe that paper watched that PBA event in a ball park and didn't see the sport in it.

G.G. and I send a very Merry Christmas from the Wright house to you and yours. Please keep our service men and women in your thoughts and prayers.

See you on the lanes.