

Great Athletes

Kokomo has had its share of great athletes and some of them even bowled. Kokomo was a center of industrial activity and attracted workers that participated in bowling. One time ABC Doubles Champion Eddie Schupp would later roll in Kokomo for a time and set a new Kokomo average record of 202 in the 1946-47 season. But the one that I find most interesting is the story of George Mullen.

The Kokomo Bowling Association was formed in 1916. That first 1916-1917 season of sanctioned bowling in Kokomo had 2 leagues one of which was the Industrial League. That first season the Industrial League champions were the Haynes team. They won 64 games and lost 17. This team consisted of Carl Heady, Russell Kelley, C. Walker, "Skeeter" Davis and George Elliott. Homer Kilbuck led in average with 185. Second was George Mullen with 184. Mullen had high game for the season with a 246 and Kilbuck had high series with a 628.

So here is the rest of the story - Mullen, a Wabash native, was a star baseball pitcher for the same Detroit Tigers team. In 1909 he won 29 games as a right-handed pitcher and outhit teammate Ty Cobb in Cobb's first year. He twice hit over 300 in a season and his career average was 262. Mullen also holds the Detroit Tigers' all-time club records with 3,394 innings pitched and 336 complete games and pitched the first no-hitter in Tigers' history on July 4, 1912. On September 18, 1906 he tripled pinch hitting for Ty Cobb! In 1916, in the twilight of his career, Mullen became playing manager for the Kokomo Red Sox minor league team. And he bowled league right here in Kokomo, Indiana. So as Paul Harvey used to say - now you know the rest of the story. Good day!

Evans Academy

For the first time ever, Kokomo saw a reduction in the number of lanes available for league play. The Recreation Alleys was a 10-lane center owned by Harry Schneiderman and Sam Phillips. In the summer of 1932, Schneiderman took four of the lanes to Peru to form the Peru Recreation. This left Kokomo with only six lanes for the 1932/33 season.

In the summer of 1933, the remaining six lanes were moved from their Buckeye Street location. Their new home would be in the old Odd Fellows building at the southwest corner of Taylor and Main Street. In the summer of 1935, six more lanes were added in the basement. This increased the number of Kokomo's bowling lanes to a total of 12. This made the Kokomo Recreation Alleys unique in that they had six lanes in the basement and six lanes upstairs.

"Jerry" Evans issued an open letter to Kokomo's bowlers in the Kokomo Tribune on April 23, 1937. In it, he identified what it would take to open a new bowling facility with lanes like those recently used in the ABC Tournament in Indianapolis. In order to determine the level of community and bowler support, Evans offered a 50 game practice ticket for \$10. Evans looked to sell 400 of the tickets which would be an indication that at least 400 bowlers were interested in a new first-rate bowling academy.

Evans must have found the support he needed for he opened the Evans' Bowling Academy on September 9, 1937. The alleys were located at 212 East Sycamore where Button Dodge was located more recently. This provided Kokomo bowlers a state-of-the-art eight-lane bowling center and helped fuel bowling's continued growth in Kokomo.

Less than a month after opening, bowling great Andy Varipapa conducted an exhibition and bowled against four of Kokomo's top bowlers. The popular trick shot artist defeated all four Kokomo aces in two game matches. The victims of Varipapa's 228 average performance were Fred Hurstel, Lefty Willer, Jim DeVinney and Bobby Overton.

The success of Evans Bowling Academy led to a four-lane expansion in June of 1938. This increased the number of bowling lanes in Kokomo to 24 for the first time. In the 1939/40 season, Kokomo had 26 men's leagues and 4 women's leagues. Bowling was growing at a rapid rate!

Evans Academy would host the men's State Tournament in 1940 and would see record-breaking scoring.

Rules are Rules

Peg Hawkins published a KWBA newsletter called Maple Splints from September 1947 to March 1948. In the October 1947 issue she addressed "failure to appear forfeits". Apparently some of the women bowlers did not want to follow WIBC rules related to showing up to compete for points. Here is a quote from her newsletter.

"You might say – so what – who will ever know about any rule we might not abide by? That sounds quite logical but past records show they do know these things. For instance, a few years ago the whole city of Chicago was suspended from the WIBC for a year because of an infraction of one rule. Naturally they were barred from the state, national and all tournaments – so you see it could happen to us."

Bowling Stories

One fund-raising idea raised by the late sportswriter Gene Conard was to compile a book of bowling stories. When we solicited stories, only two responded.

Bill and Ida Reel indicated that the highlight of travelling to all those ABC Championships was going to Corpus Christi, Texas in 2006. It was memorable for him because three of his four children and their families came along. They did a lot of sightseeing and had a lot of fun with the grandkids.

The other stories were turned in by Sue and Tex Thornton – both local bowling Hall of Famers. In addition to their travelling to help and watch various tournaments including the State Queens or the pros at Terre Haute she indicated that many were not noteworthy unless "you were there".

She highlighted when Tex bowled with his team in the BPAA Tournament in St. Louis they bowled against and met Steve Nagy, Billy Welu, Dick Weber, Harry Smith and Don Carter. Now there is a who's who of classic bowlers!

Sue and Tex Story #1 – We have an idea!

Here is one story in Sue's words.

It was February 1959 and it was a bleak, cold and snowy winter day. Ten Kokomo bowlers trudged through the snow-covered parking lot of a Canton, Ohio bowling center. Frustrations were high because they had just "bombed out" in a "big money" team event. It was especially galling because the top ten scores posted seemed well within reach of both teams. Despite being experienced tournament players and crossing lanes with each other, only two of the ten had been able to get to the pocket and carry regularly, and as usual in their circumstances they were on different teams. It was clear there was no need to check the prize list.

To make matters worse, they were hungry and faced 300 miles and 7+ hours on the road home. None of the ten were fast-food advocates and stops at two restaurants revealed long lines, typical of Sunday afternoons.

As we were leaving the second of the two restaurants, two of the guys – one in each car – told the drivers to pull over THERE – pointing to another restaurant. "We'll get us seated" telling the other 8, "wait here" and we will call you over. They headed for the entrance and the rest were shaking their heads. Someone suggested they drive off and leave them. Then another replied "give them ten minutes".

Within the allotted time – one showed up at the door waving us in. We walked past the line, through the main dining room into one half that size where two waitresses were clearing a large table. We were seated, orders taken, food served and we on our way home again. Only then did the rest of the story unfold.

The two front men, due to their jobs had shiny badges pinned to fancy government-issued leather ID cases. Showing them to the manager, they explained they were transporting witnesses to a federal trial in Indianapolis.

Due to the bad weather, they needed to eat and get back on the road. They added that none of the men were violent or shackled and would attract no undue attention. "Could he help?" He says "Bring them in"!

The "marshals" will not be identified but the ten bowlers eating in that upscale Canton restaurant on a snowy Sunday were: Don Lowry, Francis Fisher, Harry (Doc) Sloan, Tom Dinwiddie, Wayne Kitts, Bud Hobbs, Lee Richards, Lyle Martin, Paul Ratcliff and Tex Thornton.

I have often wondered what that manager thought when the coats came off to reveal matching bowling shirts with Kokomo, Indiana plainly visible across the back.

Yes, strange things happen on bowling trips and they are not all on the lanes.

Sue and Tex Story #2 - Bowling Deep Dive

Here is another story from Sue Thornton.

We always felt like Don Johnson was a son we didn't have. He started bowling in Adult Leagues with his dad sponsoring a team and Tex having four "kids" on the team. When things got quiet in our basement – pool table – you would find Tex and Don practicing – to see ball rotation etc. with the pool balls.

I can just visualize them releasing pool balls like bowling balls with different axis rotation to watch how the balls skidded, hooked and rolled.

There is the secret to becoming a great bowler!

Sue and Tex Story #3 - Oops

Sue relates – in the late 1950's we are bowling in a tournament at Hindle Lanes in Indianapolis – the Indy Star Tournament. We were all bowling reasonably well and crossing with a good team from Indy. Several of both teams knew each other from softball and previous bowling experiences. Jeniece Kasey had an all spare game going – final ball in the 10th frame – lines up and delivers the ball and Jo Hooper from the opposing team mistakenly hits the rerack button. Sweep comes down, the ball hits the sweep and have to reset the 10-pin. Then you guessed it, the second time shooting the 10-pin Jeniece misses the pin. Jo was apologizing all over the place but I don't think Jeniece ever believed her.

Sue and Tex Story #4 - Tight-knit group

There was a lot of excitement with Peg Hawkins rolled her 298 game and the first 700 series by a woman in Kokomo. It was the highlight of 1959 and rolled at Play Bowl Lanes. Later a "surprise" party at Sue & Tex's had all the Kokomo elite bowlers there and a few that weren't so elite and some that didn't even bowl, relatives, pin boys and loyal followers.

More of Sue and Tex's Stories – The Trip Experience

Jeniece Kasey and Sue Thornton won third place in the National Tournament doubles at the Meadows Lanes in Indianapolis in 1975. Jeniece had the higher average but Sue did the best bowling. Jeniece

missed in the tenth frame of the third game and to this day insists that "I dumped her". I always tried to convince her that figures don't lie.

We were in a Buddy tournament at Lafayette for the 600 Club. We had 5 people with bowling balls all crammed into a Volkswagen Bug. Snow, ice and State Road 26 - there were several places we all pushed to get the car up the hills!

Sue Thornton and Joy (Burrows) Burton and three kids were returning from the state tournament in Fort Wayne in April. A flash snowstorm came up and we used back roads and State Road 18 stopping several times to clear the windows as we couldn't go fast enough to have the heater in the VW Bug function. We got to 31 and 18 and they were closing 31 North. They let us through to try to get to Kokomo. We did. However, Tex and his team returning from Chicago got stopped on State Road 35 north and spent the night on a friendly farmer's floor. We women got home.

One beautiful spring day the three of us were going to Paulding, Ohio for a tourney. I had a yellow convertible that is what we were driving. We ran out of gas on State Road 24 east of Peru. Since it was my car, I got to do the walking to see about getting help. Approximately 30 minutes later I returned with an old farmer on his tractor and a can of gas. It was bad enough them making me do the walking but when I returned they were driving my golf balls across the Wabash River. Needless to say, most of them didn't get across, and even if they did, they were GONE as we couldn't get across the river to get them. Needless to say, they were lucky to make it to bowl as I could have cheerfully "killed" them both.

Tex Story

Tex Thornton told me of this story from the 50's or 60's. There was a bowler that would slam the wall paneling when he was upset which resulted in ongoing damage. The proprietor decided to fix him the next time he bowled on lanes 1 and 2. He put a nail below the surface such that if the bowler slammed it again with his hand he would get a sharp warning to not do that again!

Cyndy Trent Story

Several years ago, my team of Peg Lowe, Rhonda Ballee, Clara Boruff, Michelle VanMeter were in Anderson bowling the state tournament. We had made a trip to the store and upon leaving the store got on the highway. Clara had a troll doll for team good luck in her bowling bag. Rhonda I believe was 7 months pregnant at the time. As we were running down the highway the car's lift gate swung open and out came our bowling bags.

As I was stopping, Rhonda jumped out running down the highway chasing the bowling bags. Imagine what that site must have looked like.

The only damage was to Clara's bag. When we finally got to it, the troll's nose was sticking out of the bag with road rash.

Watch Out for the Snow

This story comes from Don Lowry's bowling column published in the Kokomo Tribune on March 1, 1961.

"Four local gals had a harrowing experience in the big storm Saturday trying to keep a tournament bowling date in Cincinnati. Jeniece Kasey, Jan Jones, Loretta Guillot and Kay Raemy got stuck in a snow drift about noon some 25 miles out of Indianapolis. They stayed with it until dark and then hiked to a farm house that proved to be deserted. Loretta and Jan finally got a ride into Morristown and spend the night at the Kopper Kettle restaurant while Kay and Jeniece took refuge in a farm home. They returned to Kokomo last Sunday afternoon with a slightly battered car that had been sideswiped twice and four mighty tired girls."

The Stars Must be Aligned

It is hard to imagine that someone could skip by an entire scoring tier but that has happened on a couple of occasions.

On January 23, 1980 Jay "Peanut" Lawrence took a giant step when he rolled an 814 series setting a new Kokomo record. This made him the first person to shoot an 800 series before having shot a 700 series.

A similar occurrence happened on the women's side a little over a year earlier on November 28, 1978. Jerri Ohlemacher rolled a record 714 series without ever shooting a 600 series!

How NOT to Pick Up the 7-10 Split

Every bowler hates to leave the 7-10 split but they all would love to pick up the 7-10 split. The only time this would not be the case would be on their first ball of the frame. Jack Malson would accomplish the feat at Cedar Crest when his first ball hit the 7-pin which bounce out hitting the 10-pin leaving the other eight pins untouched. I have heard other stories indicating that this has happened to several bowlers.

Another 7-10 Story

This 7-10 story occurred during the years that the Challenge League was being conducted at Cedar Crest. That league rolled on tough lane conditions that we "designed" – for example a 40 foot flat pattern. Each pattern was used for eight weeks. That league also used gold colored pins which were the pins the pros used. They were heavier at three pounds and ten ounces.

On September 11, 2001, the day of the terrorist attacks that brought down the World Trade Center, the league decided to go ahead and bowl that night. And something happened that made this day more memorable for Jon Kelley. He picked up the 7-10 split with those heavy pins.

High Scoring Night with New City Record

The pins at Cedar Crest Lanes took a beating on the night of February 3, 1981. In the Big Payoff League, Steve Preston rolled a 728 series. Jon Kelley rolled a 751. Dick Armstrong fired up a nice 761. John Kaelin tossed a terrific 790 series. However, Kaelin's opponent for the night would shoot the score they still talk about today. That opponent was Dan Preston and this was the night that he shot the then city record of 856! It was only the city's third ever 800 series. Preston rolled games of 287, 269 and appropriately finished off the perfect night with a 300. The record would be broken by Kelly Beale in the 2002 City Tournament when he rolled 287 279 and 299 for an 865 series.

Change in Work Environment

Back in the earlier days of bowling, it would have been common for top business people to participate on the bowling teams representing their organizations.

An example I like is that former Delco Radio General Manager (the top General Motors position in Kokomo) bowled in leagues. In fact he was an excellent bowler. As an example, he made Don Lowry's Kokomo Tribune article for top weekly score in the February 10, 1960 edition with his series of 659 rolling games of 206, 226 and 227 rolled in the Delco Major League.

When I was rolling on Bill Davis' Mark V team in the Delco Crown League at Don Lowry Lanes, our team consisted of several managers. My staff head B. J. Raskauskas and our Chief Engineer Bill Rodda bowled in the league.

For the past 20-30 years and nowadays, it would be difficult imagining top managers and executives bowling in a league. With global operations and cell phones it seems like a 24 hour business. I don't think that is a good thing. Participating with your managers in a fun social setting helps everyone know each other better and helps each want to make the other successful. Unfortunately those times are long gone.

Bad Timing

Many of the teams that bowl in league had "coke" or "beer" frames where the bowler that rolls the lowest count on the first ball in the 5th frame has to buy a coke or beer. Another variation is that if all the bowlers in a frame strike (or pick up a split) in a frame except one bowler, that bowler needs to pay

everyone or the “kitty”. Some team even have a variation allowing the “coke” as long as it is five consecutive bowlers even if not done in a single frame.

Bowling with Carl Babb’s Lowry Pro Shop team in the late 1980’s, Jon Kelley rolled a 299 game and got “coked” in the 12th frame. The rest of the team certainly pounced on their opportunity!

Ssshh Ssshh

It was January 1989 and I was rolling for my first 300 game. It was in the Friday Night Misfits league at Astro Bowl. It was a full house and I was rolling at the high end. When I stepped onto the approach to throw my last ball what do I hear? Ssshh Ssshh! It’s a bowling alley and there is supposed to be noise not deathly silent. I did manage to hit the pocket with my black urethane Hammer ball to get the ring.

Timing is Everything

Okay. This story is not about bowling but does have a bowling connection. There used to be a GM of Indiana Bowling Association and they ran a tournament for bowlers that worked at GM facilities. There were many of these divisions in Indiana. The tournament was first held in 1948 and continued through 1994 when it was disbanded after the closure of many GM divisions. Lou Wenisch, who was a past-president of the Kokomo Bowling Association (1975-1976 season), was a member of the association and wanted to get Jon Kelley onto the GM of Indiana Bowling Association’s board as well and to conduct the tournament scheduled for Kokomo.

Wenisch brought up an investing opportunity for Jon. There was an upstart called Telecate who was trying to start an internet shopping capability for grocery store goods. This was in the early 1990’s. It was a great idea. Order your goods on the computer and drive to the store to pick them up – or even have them delivered. It was either a good idea ahead of its time or the upstart did not have a good leader. Today, we have Amazon and all the other stores that sell online. Too bad Jeff Bezos (Amazon) didn’t lead Telecate. Jon might not have lost his investment dollars!

Oh No!

I was rolling in the 1994 ABC Tournament in Mobile, Alabama. I had just purchased a new Nitro R squared bowling ball from one of the vendors at the convention center. I got off to a great start. I rolled the first six strikes. Things were going so well that I didn’t realize that my grip was getting looser and looser. In the 7th frame the ball dropped off my hand and went into the gutter! Great, now the whole center is watching this guy roll a gutter after six straight strikes! I did manage to finish the game with a 216 and a 621 series. I will take that. Our team of Jon Dieterman, Charlie Mills, Tom Power and Truman Power managed a 2922 and we got a nice check for a prize.

Surplus of Oil

The setting for this story was the 1995 City Tournament being held at Cedar Crest. On one of the squads of the Team Event, the center “double-oiled” the lanes. Since the lanes were not stripped between the runs, it amounted to having some very “greasy” lanes. Scoring for the overall tournament was very high. However, those that bowled in this particular squad were surprised with what they saw.

I bowled a hard-earned 602 series for that team event. Unfortunately, it was my first team event of the tournament and would count towards my all-events score costing me the title. I came back under the normal conditions to shoot 717 in Singles (which was the tightest event in tournament history) and 685 in Doubles for an all-events total of 2004 and 3rd place – only 29 pins behind the ultimate winner Bob Dunn. I did roll two additional team squads and scored 669 and 667 in those.

Regarding that Singles score, after having posted that score for the lead, I watched Bob George, Richard Santos and Trent Marner shoot great scores in an attempt to beat it. Santos barely succeeded with his 718 series.

No Oil

I can't recall the year but the location of this particular City Tournament was at Don Lowry Lanes. Bowlers rolling on the low end of the house basically had little oil on the lanes. When the temperature is cold, the lane conditioner needs to warm up in order to dispense the cold lane oil. The first two or three pairs of lanes received insufficient oil. Since those lanes were not selected as part of the two lanes where tapes were run (to measure the amount of oil to demonstrate lanes were oiled as expected), no one knew there was an issue. That is until bowling started.

Bowlers on 1 and 2 couldn't keep the ball on the lane. Any amount of side turn would result in the ball quickly grabbing the lane and turning left (for a right-hander) and working its way to the left gutter. Needless to say, the bowlers affected by this were not happy. Standard practice is to “burn up to four lanes” to make sure the equipment is warmed up and then to restart on lane one.

800s – Again and Again

A lofty goal for a good bowler is an 800 series. It is generally tougher to shoot than a 300 game because it takes three excellent games to reach 800. Up until the 1994-95 season, there were only five 800 series ever in the association. By the time the 1995-1996 season ended, there would be ten and three of them were shot by Brian Graham. In his 847 series, the only pins he left were solid 8 pins in his games of 268 279 and 300.

The next bowler to get on an 800 streak was Jeff Butler. Butler would roll 803, 821 and 810 within a four-month span from December 2003 to January 2004.

Then Wes Gamblin had four 800s across three seasons between December 2011 and January 2014.

Trent Marner would get three more 800s within an 8 month span from March to November, 2019.

These scores should not surprise any bowler as each of them had put a lot of revolutions and speed on the ball.

White Man Can't Jump

Mike Butler organized a trip to Louisville for the Louisville Derby Tournament in the late 1990's. That is where I saw my first two-handed bowler – Tony Lambert. He was a powerful lefty and shot over 800 as we watched!

One year the team of Dave Turner, John Vote, Don Spall, Jon Kelley and Butler shot 3246 actual and 3566 handicap which was good enough for the 2nd place prize of \$3600.

That same year after shooting the good team score, there was an incident best recalled by Don Spall.

"I was too excited about the team bowling good and we ended up at Hooters like all the previous years with Earl Snodgrass. John Vote and I were celebrating with a lot of beer and wings. Butler's 2 boys made the trip with Mike and after the boys finished eating, they got a Hooters frisbee and went outside to toss it around the parking lot."

"As John and I walked out, we caught them banging the frisbee off of cars and trucks in the parking lot. I got the frisbee and shot it right into a windshield and we all laughed. One of the boys yelled "hit me" as he ran towards the BB goal in the parking lot of Hooters, and someone slung the frisbee towards the goal, but it was a bad pass."

"What happened next is a mystery to me."

"I will never understand why I yelled out, pointed at the goal, and started running towards it. Jeff Butler tossed the frisbee at the goal and I attempted to lift my 300 pound body towards the rim. Had to be quite the sight to see a drunk, 300 pound man, trying to jump and catch a frisbee. I did manage to grab the frisbee but couldn't complete the landing. My ankle bent over and I rolled it. I do remember that I knew immediately that my bowling tourney was over."

"I never said anything to anyone about how bad I was hurt. I remember I got up and looked at my ankle and it was already swelling up. By now everyone was making their way out of Hooters and the boys were laughing at me and trying to tell everyone what happened. Then to add a little salt in my wound, I

remember Jon Kelley walking past me and right up to the BB goal. Jon got the frisbee, took a quick look up, leaped right up to the rim, and thunder slammed that damn frisbee through the net.”

“This is how I remember it considering it was more than 25 years ago.”

Obituary - Astro Bowl - Don Lowry Lanes East (1978-1998)

Don Lowry Lanes East, born Astro Bowl in 1978, died this May at the young age of 19 years after a long illness. Cause of death was listed as excessive value syndrome compounded by loneliness. In other words, the original builders picked a great location. That coupled with less than 50% league utilization spelled its demise. In less than 20 years, the real estate alone was worth almost three times the original cost of Astro Bowl. To the bowlers, it was worth much more. And for some, this establishment was the site of some priceless memories.

Astro Bowl III opened for business on Monday October 9, 1978. It was the third of the Astro Bowl centers following the opening of the Greenwood and Columbus facilities. The \$2 million complex was the first center in Kokomo to offer automatic scoring. The AMF Magic Score system allowed bowlers more time to socialize while bowling and eliminated the scoring reviews often conducted following closely competed games.

Steve Bain was the original manager and house professional. When asked why Astro Bowl came to Kokomo, Bain replied "We felt there was a need here. The way the population is compared to the number of bowling houses we felt this was the place to come."

For the 1977-78 season, Kokomo ranked 12th in the state with 2739 men bowlers. With the women bowlers included, Kokomo had about 5000 sanctioned bowlers and we are now under 4000. By the 1984-85 season, it was down to 2400. Today we have just under 2000 men for a reduction of about 20% since Don Lowry purchased the facility.

As comes with any new center, notable occurrences and house records get set in droves.

That first season, a women's team joined a "men's" scratch league for the first time. A top-notch Bowden's Flowers team joined the Astro Bowl Classic League. This team set KWBA teams series records in back-to-back weeks. First they shot a 2873. The next week they upped the mark to 2967. The team members and their scores are shown below.

2873	2967
Judy Belt - 658	Betty Malson - 652
Rosie Currens - 582	Jeniece Kasey - 622
Betty Malson - 576	Sandy Shuck - 601
Sandy Shuck - 540	Rosie Currens - 558

Jeniece Kasey - 517

Judy Belt 534

One week later, Judy Belt shot a 275 game to set the Astro Bowl house record - for men or women!!

Astro Bowl's second season (1979-80) saw Chrysler layoffs and a strike target at GM. League participation waned but Astro Bowl was the least affected. 25 year old Rick Whittington took over as manager. Layoff and strike affected bowlers were not required to contribute to the prize fund. They only needed to pay the bowling fees.

That second season saw many new firsts for the new Astro Bowl.

Ed Martin fired the first 700 series, a 709, while rolling for Slim's Steak House in the Chrysler League. In November 1979, Chuck Smith rolled a house record 747 series. One month later, Martin got the record back with a 748.

On February 9, 1980, Betty Malson set the KWBA series record with her 725. A week later, Gerry Simpson raised the men's mark to 763. Less than a month later, Judy Belt toppled Malson's record by a single pin with her 726. That same week, Martin recaptured - again - the men's house record with his 774. Martin's score also lifted the Fletcher's Steak House team to a KBA series record score of 3318. Other team members and their scores were Larry Retherford (682), Dick Martin (672), Floyd Wooley (597) and Art Bassett (593).

Jim Huffer rolled the first 300 at Astro Bowl while practicing for the Delco Classic League. He continued his hot shooting by rolling 729 that mid-December night.

The first sanctioned 300 game at Astro Bowl was also the last of the decade and part of the last 700 series of the decade. Those honors went to Dan Preston with his 300 game and 740 series recorded on December 30, 1979.

Of the almost 120 perfect games ever rolled in Kokomo, 34 were rolled at this center; eight while called Astro Bowl and 26 as Don Lowry Lanes East. There were six perfect games this final season alone!

Three bowlers have rolled multiple 300 games there. The first to accomplish the feat was Gerard Kelley. Jon Dieterman was a close second and was followed by Bill Schultz. Kelley had the second 300 ever at Astro Bowl – and that was thrown with a blue Columbia 300 White Dot polyester bowling ball. He also had the last, coming this season. That makes him the only person with three perfect games at the center.

Brian Graham holds the house record and the only 800's ever shot at Don Lowry Lanes East. He shot an 803 in March 1995 while subbing for his father in the Friday Night Early Birds League. Less than a year later, in December, he fired an 847 series leaving only three solid 8-pins in the process! This is Kokomo's second highest series ever!

Astro Bowl hosted the men's City Tournament that first season. The center hosted the City Tournament every three years from 1979 to 1997 for a total of seven City Tournaments.

Two families will certainly miss the center for the City Tournament has been very good to them.

Max Snodgrass won a doubles title and two all-events titles. Son Mark won a singles title there. Son-in-Law Jim Mote won a team event and a doubles title.

Gerard and Jon Kelley also fared very well at Astro Bowl - Don Lowry Lanes East. Gerard won a team title and doubles title. Brother Jon captured two team titles, one singles title, one doubles title and two all-events titles. He also won four handicap titles. His 2075 still stands as the City Tournament all-events record.

The bowling center has changed hands several times. Marlin Milligan took over in 1982 and appointed Don Jensen as manager. Many Kokomo bowlers have fond memories of Don Jensen.

In August 1986, Royal Pin from Indianapolis bought the center from a Detroit-based group. This "absentee ownership" had allowed the center to deteriorate. On December 22, 1986 Don Lowry bought Astro Bowl from Royal Pin. Lane breakdowns reduced greatly in frequency following the much needed repairs.

Scores jumped in the short oil era beginning with the 1986-87 season. They receded again when the "three unit" conditioning rule took effect with the 1991-92 season. Scores gradually improved but did not keep pace with the rest of the country during this time frame. Only in the last year, during Floyd Russell's short tenure as as manager, did Don Lowry Lanes East add significantly more conditioner to the middle of the lane. With the new super-reactive resin bowling balls, more conditioner was needed. This boosted the scores in the center to record levels for its final season.

The author will certainly miss this bowling center. It has been the source of many great times and memories. Goodbye my friend!!

League Turmoil Following Don Lowry Lanes East Closure

When Don Lowry Lanes East closed, it created a lot of turmoil for the existing leagues at both that center and Don Lowry Lanes West. Center management indicated that all leagues would be rescheduled which resulted in the disruption of all leagues not just those at Don Lowry Lanes East.

In a scenario like a Black Friday sale, league representatives waited outside Don Lowry Lanes overnight and before they opened on the day stated where "first come first served" would get their new league nights and times. There were many irate bowlers. Some bowlers gave up bowling. Others reduced the number of leagues that they bowled. This resulted in the end of the Kokomo Classic Scratch league that existed for many years. When the league could not get the Thursday time slot they had, the league went through a down-sizing and format change. After another format change the following year, the scratch league came to an end and Kokomo has not had a scratch league since.

There were many "Letters to the Editor" published in the Kokomo Tribune and almost all were very negative about how center management handled the closing.

It seemed like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Bob Colburn stated that Kokomo did not have enough bowlers to keep both centers operating although we had been fully utilized up to then. The closure basically fulfilled his statement. Over the next few years we went from having leagues fill the centers for both 6 PM and 8:30 PM leagues to having fewer leagues with a shift in primary leagues to 7 PM. Data extracted from yearbooks showed a decrease from 122 leagues between the men's and women's associations down to 99 with league bowler counts dropping from 5591 to 5120. Lowry's saw a reduction from 79 leagues down to 54 and a bowler count from 3545 to 2615. By the 2001-2002 season there were only 47 leagues across the city with 28 of those at Don Lowry Lanes. For the 2020-2021 season we only had 17 leagues not counting the youth leagues.

Lefty Discrimination

Local and State Bowling Hall of Famer Jack Bender was the manager at Don Lowry Lanes. Lowry, who was recognized as the "Father of Youth Bowling" while he was President of the BPAA, was careful not to let scoring get too "out-of-hand". On many occasions after a 300 game would be rolled, the lane oil pattern would be changed to bring scoring down. When Lowry was writing his Kokomo Tribune bowling articles in the 1960's, he would often state his concern for the escalation in scoring and the huge number of 300 games. It took over 60 years to get the 10,000th 300 game and in the 1990's they were up to about 40,000 PER YEAR!

In the 1998-1999 season of the Kokomo Sports Center Classic League at Don Lowry Lanes, scoring was very good. So good that Jon Kelley was averaging over 238 after 17 weeks and 72 games including a league high series of 1071 (279, 279, 258 and 255). This league was formed as a four game league after all the leagues were reorganized after the closing of Don Lowry Lanes East – the old Astro Bowl. It was now January and the City Tournament was approaching. Bender decided to change the shot eliminating lefties from the competition. It was noticeable right away. That first week after the change Kelley did manage one high game with a 279. But then, guess what, the shot changed again! Trent Marner added that the righties noticed that the changes only affected the lefties and scores remained high for the righties. Doug Workman and Kelley still talk about this to this day. After having a record average through 72 games the average began a slow decline and Kelley wound up the season with "only" a 227 average after averaging 212 for the last 13 weeks. And no – lefties did not score well in the City Tournament that year.

Check Those Shoes - 13 Strikes for a 290!

The next unusual occurrence came at the State Tournament at Mike Aulby's Arrowhead Bowl in Lafayette. Bryan Ramberger got up and struck on his first ball but stuck at the line and fouled. He then

finished the frame by knocking them all down for a spare. He struck on his next eleven balls to roll a 290 game effectively rolling 13 “strikes”.

A similar occurrence happened in October 1977 in the Chrysler Wednesday Morning League when Mike Evans rolled a gutter ball to start his game. He then proceeded to pick up the spare and then strike 11 times for his 290 game.

Embarrassing Moment

At the 2002 ABC Tournament in Billings, Montana, the Rumpshakers nearly missed their squad.

The team of Rob Smith, Dennis Branch, Troy Stanley, Lee Reeves and Mark Snodgrass were enjoying their time at a bar prior to bowling their team event later that evening. They had spent 7 hours (that’s right 7 hours!) at the bar when Snodgrass realized that they were less than two hours from their squad time and they had to get all checked in and such.

So they rushed over to the convention center and when they went to their lockers Stanley did not have the key to his locker. So he runs back to the hotel. While all the bowlers in the convention center are throwing their shadow balls, here comes Stanley marching down the center aisle with his bowling balls!

As it turns out, that was a good night for Snodgrass as he rolled the front nine strikes that first game.

2004 State Tournament in Richmond – Lefty Feast!!

If there was any time a bowler wanted to be left-handed it would have been during the Team event in the State Championships in Richmond in 2004.

Lefty’s would walk away with the top scores led by Jon Kelley sweeping his brackets with an 804 series which was the high series for the entire tournament by any bowler. Rolling that same squad were lefties Gary Brown (768), Ryan Mills (768), Doug Workman (758), Mike Cowell (708) and Kenny Radabaugh (707). No right-handers were able to shoot a 700 series.

Interestingly, Mills and Kelley were rolling on the same team. They combined for 1572 pins. The remainder of their team only totaled 1226 pins. That’s right! The other bowlers scored 393, 400 and 433 for a team total of 2798.

What are you Doing?

In the mid 1980's, Mark Snodgrass bowling in the Chrysler League at Cedar Crest. He had a new Ebonite Magnum 10 bowling ball as did Bill Rubow who was a member of the opposing team. Mark started with seven strikes in a row. When he went up for his eighth frame his ball was not on the rack. He looked back and saw Bill Rubow using sandpaper on a bowling ball. Mark yells back that it was HIS ball. Rubow's ball was not hooking enough and so he wanted to put more surface on the ball. This was in the era where it was allowed to change surface while bowling in a league.

After retrieving his ball, as might be expected, the ball hooked all the way across the headpin ending his strike string.

Since that time, Mark always jokes with Bill asking him what ball he is throwing or asking him whether he has any sandpaper!

Sour Apples

One season in the Slick Trick League at Heritage Lanes, there were a lot of 5-7-10 split leaves. Looking at the data it may have been the 2015-2016 season. That season there were 33 sour apples across all leagues and 9 of them came in the Slick Trick League. After seeing so many, a pattern started to appear. Most of them occurred on lanes 5 and 6 which when recognized led to the discovery that a pin was off spot. After having that fixed the next week, the rate came back to "normal" with one showing up every once in a while.

The frequency of sour apples was actually down that year across all leagues. In 2014-2015 there were a total of 72 with 5 occurring in the Slick Trick League. In 2017-2018 there were a total of 77 with 7 occurring in the Slick Trick League.

Out of Sync

The top team record up for grabs is the highest team series. The current record is 3541 rolled in 2006 by the Rumpshakers team consisting of Scott Shimer, Bob Burge, Rob Smith, Mark Snodgrass and Ted Wooley.

The Marner Painting Team on February 15, 2016 gave the team record a good run. Rolling in the Union League on Monday nights, they scored a total of 3533. Scores were Jon Kelley (597), Rob Smith 717 with a 300 game, Trent Marner (782), Gerard Kelley (723) and Brad Slabaugh (714). The next week they would shoot 100 pins lower with 3433 with Mark Snodgrass back in the line-up for sub Slabaugh. This time Jon Kelley would shoot 722. What a difference a week makes. Had he been "in-sync" with his teammates and rolled that score a week earlier, they would have rolled a 3658 series!

Timing is Everything

Trent Marner set a record in the 2019 State Tournament in Lafayette. He rolled series of 750 (Team), 778 (Singles) and 772 (Doubles). It was a good thing that he rolled that 750 in his first team event. He rolled another team event on a difficult pair and only scored 600.

Jackpot

Cedar Crest was running their strike pot in 2001 and the pot began to grow and grow and grow. It took about 13 specifically located strikes to break the jackpot. It had almost been hit on several occasions most recently when Kristen Graham came within a single strike.

On December 7, 2001 the jackpot was up to \$5140. I was bowling in the Friday Night Misfit and rolling well rolling 269 and 259 to cover all the strikes needed for the first two games. To avoid getting too nervous, I tried to keep my mind off the jackpot and focus on my breathing which is a known technique among athletes. I can't recall if I needed one or two strikes in the 10th frame to break the jackpot but I can remember minutes before getting up to bowl hearing a loud cheer.

The first thing I thought was that someone else had beat me to it. Then a few moments later it was announced that Doug Conwell had rolled a 300 game in the other league at the high end of the house. This meant that the jackpot was still alive. I would go up, focus on the process and get the strike(s) I needed. What a relief. I have never had to throw one ball for so much money!

Storm IQ Tour Bowling Ball

The Storm IQ Tour bowling ball has been around for almost 10 years. This is unusual for a bowling ball as they typically have a life of 2-3 years as new equipment is released annually. This longevity is a sign that this ball performs very well across a range of conditions and has continued to be very popular among bowlers.

A number of local bowlers have purchased this ball during the 2020-2021 season. Trent Marner was the first and his success with the ball resulted in a number of other purchasers. In January Marner rolled an 806 series. In February, Marner captured the True Amateur Tournament in Las Vegas along with it's top \$20,000 prize using the IQ Tour as his "go to" ball. He also used the ball to roll two 300 games and win the City Open Championships All Events with a total of 2176. Rob Smith, Brad Slabaugh, Wes Gamblin, Doug Workman and others would then purchase an IQ Tour. Smith rolled a 750 his first set using the ball and later followed that up with a 299 game. Gamblin rolled a 300 game with his.

But the most impressive of the accomplishments made with this ball belong to lefty Kenny Radabaugh who would go on to the hottest of streaks ever seen in Kokomo. On March 14, 2021, Radabaugh rolled a 794 series with games of 259, 267 and 268. He only left three 7-pins, a 6-pin and a 6-10. The next night he shoots another 794 this time with games of 268, 289 and 237. He left only four 7-pins, two 6-pins and a 9-pin. The next night (March 16) he tossed his first 800 series – an 807. Starting with a 229

leaving two 6-pins a 7-pin and an 8-pin, he picked up the pace leaving only two 7-pins the rest of the way for game of 279 and 299. Then two weeks later he shoots another 800 series – this time an 814 with games of 268, 299 and 247. A sole 7-pin cost him four 300 games in a two-week span.

All of this was occurring in a time frame when carry at Heritage Lanes could be difficult. The author was plagued with tons of 7-pins. This was despite trying about ten different bowling balls attempting to improve pin carry. Even when Heritage Lanes hosted PBA Regionals and a PBA50 event, the carry difficulty was noticeable. The high average pro for the PBA 50 was only 227. The next week in Anderson it was 248! One pro told me that “the carry sure is tough here” and I replied “yeah – you should bowl here every week”! In reality, those bowlers with lots of revolutions and speed have a better chance carrying and there has been some good scoring periodically.

Can You Picture This?

Trent Marner is a large person. Jon Dieterman is not small. Jon related a story about the time Trent and he went to bowl in a PBA Regional in Illinois. It appeared that neither was going to make the cut. However, Jon rolled a 300 game in his last game to barely make the cut. Trent was not happy as he would have to hang around as they travelled together in Jon’s car. The car was a tiny Geo Metro. Can you picture that?

1988 State Tournament

I was having a good 1988 state tournament in Muncie when I came to our final event which was the Team event. In the last game I had the front 11 strikes but came up light on the last ball and left the 3 pin. Future Indiana Bowling Association President and Muncie resident Jim Mansfield went down the lane and fetched the lone pin standing and presented it to me. That 299 total gave me 2091 All Events to finish in 4th place behind some guy named Aulby (future PBA Hall of Famer Mike Aulby).

2001 State Tournament

The 2001 State Tournament was also held in Muncie. I shot 759 in the Team event with a new “Rock-On” bowling ball. When I threw it in practice it seem to go long down the lane and when I thought it was going to miss the head pin it just turned right hard and found the pocket. It seemed like a risky play but the ball kept going in there. I won all my brackets with that score. I was at the tournament later when Mike Aulby bowled and he struggled and didn’t make 600. I guess having the right bowling ball does matter! I wound up shooting 2088 All Events for 6th place.

Clint Being Clint

Mark Snodgrass tells the story of his trip to Baton Rouge for the 2005 ABC Open Championship. Traveling with Mark was Rob Smith and Clint Spencer. After completing play they began heading back to Kokomo. Mark and Rob each took turns driving for about four hours. All this time Clint was sleeping

in the back seat. When it came time for their third leg and Clint's turn, he opened all the windows and turned the radio on high.

Mark asked what he was doing. Clint replied "how am I supposed to stay awake"! Mark responded with "you have been sleeping for 8 hours"!

Splits Are the Pits

After the merging of the men's and women's associations, a new local awards program was rolled out the following year for the 2007-2008 season. Among the awards was one for having five splits in a game. Originally the physical award was going to be a crying towel. But a lapel pin was given instead when a "Splits are the Pits" lapel pin was found to be available from a bowling awards company.

The second split award was also instituted, that for picking up two splits in a game. Past KBA Director James Robison owned the local Dairy Queen franchise and the thought was to give away a banana split for the award. Robison was in agreement to provide the award. Each year about 150 -200 banana split coupons are given to local bowlers.

On March 25, 2026 Gerard Kelley picked up both of these awards when he left seven splits in 11 attempts in a game of 152. That's right! He didn't split on only four balls in the game! His assortment of splits included a 3-6-7-10, two 3-10's, two 4-7-10's, a 7-10 and a 2-5-7-8.

State Tournament Record Scoring

In 2009 when I was President of the Indiana State USBC, the State Tournament was held in Portage and Merrillville. Scoring records were set in all the Actual categories that year. I shot 823 in singles finishing with seven strikes for a 245 the first game and left a 7-pin in the 12th for a 299 the second game. I started the 3rd game with a pocket 7-10 split and went off the sheet for a 279 for an 823 series. This only tied me for the lead at the time. But it will probably be the highest series by a sitting President for a long time. Eventually it took 835 to win. My All Events total of 2250 was 7th place behind the new record of 2326.

Highest Amateur Score for State All Events in 2018

The 2018 state tournament was held in Lafayette in 2018. I shot 2140 in All Events. It held onto first place for a long time. Eventually two pros beat me. First TJ Schmidt shot a 299 or 300 his last game to beat me and then EJ Tackett fired off a 2223 to win the event. Not bad for a 60 year-old.

Stories from the 2022 PBA Tournament in Kokomo

Here are a few stories from my days at the 2022 Storm Cup: David Small's Kokomo Championship.

The Pro/Am was a lot of fun and Dave Small picked the big names as well as other bowlers that interacted well with people for the Pro/Am. They were out there to have fun also. EJ Tackett left some big splits and would throw two balls in an attempt to pick them up. He and Darren Tang had three shots

at the 2-8-10 but never did make the shot with the first two attempts resulting in the balls colliding mid-lane.

Since I was one of the “score runners” capturing scores for 8 lanes, I was able to watch all the bowlers at some point. While the results of the tournament were captured in my Kokomo Tribune article – with Jason Belmonte winning – I will capture some of my other observations here.

It was “humorous” watching the pros react to the difficult carry at Heritage Lanes. We have now had 4 PBA Regionals, a PBA 50 and now the PBA National Tour since 2014 and there have been NO 300 games. The local bowlers recognize this and it was interesting seeing the pros talk to themselves after leaving corner pin after corner pin.

Tournament runner-up Nate Pate had the front nine in one game only to leave one solid nine pin followed by another. Jacob Butturff kept pounding the pocket for 190 games or worse. His expressions after leaving seven pin after seven pin was hilarious. I felt sorry for him and let him know that he was not alone. It was the difficult “Bear” lane pattern and the result was a lot of 2-10, 2-8-10, 2-4-8-10 splits when their balls came in light from a sharp angle (right-handers).

Towards the end of the six-game rounds the right-handers were throwing it over the left gutter cap for a deep inside line. Belmonte seemed to be the best at this and managed to average over 233 for the event.

It was interesting to watch the ball representatives (reps) walk up and down the lanes watching the pros using their equipment. Before and during practice they had their Abralon pads out changing the surface of the bowling balls when the bowlers needed that done. They also kept notes about the scoring and ball reaction on lanes their bowlers would encounter next.

I talked briefly to a few of them to learn what I could. I heard that our older Brunswick synthetic lanes tended to get the ball rolling early. That agrees with my experience as I have to you weak equipment there. I asked the Brunswick (also Hammer) rep about how my Black Widow Urethane ball would compare to the newer Purple Hammer and brand new Black Widow Pink Urethane ball. They would each hook more with the Pink hooking more than the Purple. I will probably get one when public sales start next month.

When the event was down to eight bowlers, it was apparent that lanes 13-14 were hooking less than 23-24. When Belmonte, Tackett, Pate and Simonsen moved to 23-24 from 13-14 their balls came up high. When Dick Allen Sean Rash, Bill O’Neill and Shawn Maldonado moved to 13-14 from 23-24 their balls came up light.

Anthony Simonsen, who would finish in 4th place was not happy with one of his bowling balls the first day. I am guessing he just had it drilled and it didn’t perform the way he would have liked. So he walked back to the trash can and placed the ball inside. A friend of mine was nearby and notified the desk and they retrieved it for one of the youth bowlers working at the center.

Several balls were given to young spectators. One young lady had her cast signed by about 20 bowlers as the Storm Ball rep kept telling his bowlers to come over and sign her cast. When Kyle Troup came over to sign she asked him if she could touch his "afro". When she did she said "wow". A minute later he came back and handed her an autographed bowling ball!

The first day of the tournament there must have been 500 bowling balls lying on the floor in the area cordoned off for that purpose where the arcade games were. After the tournament several balls remained which were given to youth bowlers.

Several of the bowlers host video logs or VLOGs on YouTube. The most popular is Brad and Kyle hosted by Brad Miller and Kyle Sherman. They had a 20 minute video uploaded from the Pro/Am. Packy Hanrahan and Darren Tang also had videos available on YouTube. I saw Gerard and I on Tang's and Gerard was on another when he was walking behind Miller when he was recording.

EJ's brother Zac tried to qualify for the tournament in the six-game PTQ. He missed by two pins. No doubt he will think about the double-gutter he threw in game one and another gutter he threw on a double one or two games later.

While I was watching the event from my chair, I saw this older woman walking around and came up to Francois Lavoie and I took a picture of them. Later she was walking around again and I asked her who she was looking for and she said Francois Lavoie. When he saw her he said she already took a picture with him. I asked her who she "thought" she took a picture with last time and she said Jason Belmonte. I joked and said "they look a lot alike" and Lavoie laughed at that one. I told her that Belmonte was down on lane 24 and practice was just about to start. She walked down almost onto the lanes to ask for a picture. Belmonte looked to be explaining something to her and walked her back to the tables. I thought he might be scolding her but I think he was gently saying that she shouldn't be down here and walked her back where he took a selfie with her. This was another example how the PBA bowlers are great with the fans especially the kids. When someone came up to them before bowling started and asked for an autograph, I saw each bowler drop everything and sign right away. The PBA has them trained well!

One game Sean Rash got up to bowl in the first frame on lane 10. He asked for tournament director John Weber to come around. He explained to Weber that the 9 pin was leaning and not standing upright. They called the back and resolved the issue. A few minutes later I saw center manager Zach Spencer and asked what the issue was. He went back and handed me the pin. The surlyn bottom ring had a thin slice in it that resulted in the sliver being bent at 90 degrees. The strength of the material was sufficient to hold the pin up in a tilted position.

When preparing for the FloBowling live internet telecast of the finals, the person supporting Mike Flanagan the announcer wanted to bring him something while he was setting up a camera down-lane. We tried to stop her before she walked out on the freshly dressed lane but didn't get her attention in time. You guessed it. Down she went. She apparently wasn't a bowler and didn't know that the lanes are "oiled" and certainly didn't read the Caution sign at the foul line. The PBA lane man had to send the lane machine down to redo the lane.

The lanes were breaking a lot on the back end. There were a few bowlers that had two counts on their first ball where the ball takes out the six and nine pins only. Eventual winner Belmonte was one of these bowlers. Belmo was leading by a lot so Indiana great E. J. Tackett bet Belmo a tidy sum (\$100) that Belmo couldn't put his 2nd ball through the opening. Belmo came real close taking out only the three pin and the two pin.

Belmonte averaged 233 to record his 27th PBA title. Ironically, this win put him ahead of Kokomo great Don Johnson on the all-time win list.

Beat THAT!

Every year there is a Beat the Coach day in the youth leagues. This is where the coaches get to bowl with and against their youth bowlers.

In 2007, coach Gary Brown gave the kids something to shoot for when he rolled a 300 game at Don Lowry Lanes.

Brad Slabaugh has a lot to be thankful for this Thanksgiving. After sitting out the last bowling season for a serious illness and surgery, he is now back better than ever. On Saturday November 19, 2022, coach Brad Slabaugh bested Brown's feat and really got the kids excited when he rolled games of 300, 246 and 300 again for an 846 series. It was the first time any bowler in Kokomo managed to put two 300 games together in a three-game series. Not only that, Slabaugh used two different balls for his great score. The first game he used a 900 Global Zen and the last game he had switched to a Dark Code. The career-high series now gives him three 800 series and 12 perfect games rolled on the local lanes. Slabaugh was a 2020 inductee into the local bowling Hall of Fame.

Scotty – We Need More Power!

When Kokomo hosted the 1995 Women's state tournament we had a power outage at the bowling center. This outage was caused by a squirrel – may it rest in peace!

Kokomo again hosted the women's state tournament in 2013 and you guessed it. We had another power outage. Looks like another first for the City of Firsts!

Bowling is Getting Too Easy

Many good bowlers have complained about bowling getting too easy. We now have high tech bowling balls with cover stocks and cores that enhance ball motion. We have lane conditions allowing one to hit the pocket with what sometimes might be 10 boards of area.

This is not a recent trend. On January 16, 1965 Don Lowry noted in his bowling column that the 10,000 300 game was bowled. At the end of the year and at the beginning of 1966 he had articles denouncing what was called "lane doctoring". This was the practice of bowling centers roughing up the outside of the lanes so that balls thrown outside would still hook back to the pocket. Bowling centers started to recognize that high scores could be good for their business.

Later, when centers went away from shellac (fire risk) and went to something more lubricating, they just applied more oil/conditioner to the middle of the lanes and little to none on the outside boards. This served to kind of steer the bowling ball to the pocket – at least for those that curved the bowling ball.

It was a constant battle between bowling centers and the governing body. Many honor scores were rejected resulting in hurt feelings and ill will. Even professional Glenn Allison was victim to this when he rolled a 566 (as I recall) on one league shift only to shoot the first 900 series on the next shift immediately following. His 900 was not certified which probably got him even more recognition. To this day the ABC/USBC still has not recognized the score even though lane conditions are much easier than they were then. They are simply sticking to the fact that the lanes were not compliant with the rules at the time.

After taking 57 years to get to 10,000 perfect games (Art Jellison from St. Louis rolled the first in 1908), it jumped to over 40,000 PER YEAR in the 1990's!

Locally, the scores seem to jump in the late 1970's as indicated by the significant increase in the number of 700 series rolled each year. While there were years of tougher scoring, the trend toward even higher scoring has been clear.

Higher scoring to a bowler is like a drug and results in addiction. The industry cannot take away the scoring as the "withdrawal" will result in bowlers leaving the lanes. The ABC tried a new approach on a trial basis in 1986. The Short Oil rule allowed the proprietor to only apply oil on the first 26 feet of the 60 bowling lane. The ABC would automatically approve all honor scores for those using the short oil pattern. It was thought that this would reign in scoring. Shortly after the trial it became the rule for all bowling.

But scores continued to escalate. This was in the time frame when core designs were being developed to help the balls flare more enhancing their hooking ability. This was before stronger cover stocks including reactive resin were introduced. Later came the 3 unit rule which required a minimum of 3 units of oil on the outside of the lanes. This was intended to prevent ball friction on the outside of the lane to prevent steering the ball back to the pocket.

Manufacturing only used science to give the bowlers what they wanted – more hook and higher scores. They developed even better cores and cover stocks that would dig through the 3 units of oil. So it became an ever escalating game of more oil – more ball – more oil and more ball. Finally the USBC conducted some research into ball motion. One of the key participants was Kokomo's own Nick Siefers. The Ball Motion Study was published in 2008. It showed how important each factor and variable was in ball motion.

In an attempt to put skill back into the sport, the USBC started to develop Sports leagues where a tougher lane pattern is used. A Sport pattern will only have a 2:1 or 3:1 ratio of oil in the middle of the lane as compared to the outside of the lane. A Typical House Shot (THS) might have a ratio as high as 30-50 to 1. A Sport lane condition is now the standard for elite competitions – both amateur and

professional. Some Sport conditions remain relatively high scoring but others are low scoring meaning that averaging 200 is a challenge for the best of bowlers.

Local Hall of Famer Has His Say on Scoring

It was not widely known but a humorous and interesting story was shared by Jon Dieterman during his Kokomo Hall of Fame induction in 2022. He indicated that he had sent a letter to the American Bowling Congress (ABC) about bowling being too easy and that anyone could shoot a 300 anytime they want.

Keep in mind that Jon was an exceptional youth and adult bowler. His powerful release pounded the pins. He felt the challenge and attraction of the sport was being degraded by the ever-increasing scoring. While he did not shoot a 300 “anytime he wanted”, he did manage to shoot six of them including two in PBA Regional tournaments. His first even came with his grandfather’s 35 year old bowling ball!

Following his induction, I followed up with an email asking him for his recollection. Here is what he came back with.

“The story of me mailing the ABC is not one that I am proud of, hence my delayed response. I was upset about the number of 300 games in Kokomo and overall in the US as I felt it degraded the accomplishments of those bowlers in the past that had shot 300 games under tougher conditions. I suppose that bowlers from the 70s could have said that about my shooting 300 games as well. There were only around twenty 300 games in the 80s in Kokomo and there were that many already from 1990 to 1992. I wrote a letter to the ABC that accused the Kokomo Bowling Association of turning a blind eye to the easy conditions (thinking they were not in alignment with current ABC rules about oil distribution). It has been a while so I do not recall the exact wording, but I believe that was the general sentiment of that letter.”

“A few weeks later, Dave Turner (Association Secretary) spoke to me about it since he had been contacted by the ABC. After speaking with him, I wrote a letter of apology to the KBA and the ABC (or a single letter to both, again, this is 30 years ago so I do not recall the exact details). Greg Garretson (the proprietor of Cedar Crest at the time) also received an apology, albeit in person. Cedar Crest, despite its size, had around 1/2 of the 300 games in the early 90s even though there were three other bowling centers in operation at that time so my main issue was with Cedar Crest lane conditions. I had asked Greg to remove my name from the list of 300 games at Cedar Crest (which he did) around the same time that I had sent the letter to the ABC.”

Jon Dieterman was not the only local bowler that felt this way as I am many others agreed. Former Association Secretary Mike Butler went as far as to say the easy house shots were “adult bumper bowling”.

Now That’s Concentration

Okay – this one was of my doing in January 2023. In league one night I left a 7-pin on lane 4. My spare ball was on the lower ball rack on the lane 3 side. I picked up my spare ball and proceeded to cleanly

pick up the 7-pin. Only thing was, I picked off the 7-pin perfectly off the full rack on lane 3. I didn't even notice the full rack until the ball was well down the lane.

The Approaches are Sticky

This one happened to Mark Snodgrass in January 2023. Mark was complaining about the approaches being sticky but managed to shoot games of 258 and 189. After six frames in game three, he went into his bowling bag for something and saw that his bowling shoes were still in there! That's right. He was bowling in his tennis shoes.

3 -6- 9 Strike Pot

In addition to brackets, the Indiana State USBC included a 3-6-9 strike pot that bowlers can enter. The objective is to strike in the 3rd, 6th and 9th frames of each game in the series. Winners of this pot would typically win over \$1000 at the end of the tournament.

In 2023 bowling at Richmond 40 Bowl, I achieved something much tougher – at least for the first game. I struck in all the frames EXCEPT the 3rd, 6th and 9th. The nine strikes were good for a 235 game. Then the next game the pins just wouldn't cooperate. After starting with two solid eight pins, I would go on to leave a light hit 3-7-9 split, a 10 pin and six 7-pins. I rolled a good game and wound up with NO strikes even after changing balls later in the game. I changed balls again the last game and did get some strikes for a 203. That middle game was memorable for all the wrong reasons.

It's Not Mine!

This story was shared by Hall of Famer Alan Anderson. Tex Thornton was one of the most knowledgeable bowlers in Kokomo. He also liked to experiment. One time he took a ball and put 8 ounces of lead in it. One night he was rolling with it and Don Lowry accidentally picked it up on the ball return. Lowry exclaimed "what the heck is this". Tex never touched that ball again!

Keep it on Your Side of the Road

Hall of Famer Bob Webb shared the story of fellow Hall of Famer Ed Martin not bowling well with a certain bowling ball. After play that night, Martin took the ball and rolled it down Lincoln Road. Hopefully it didn't strike (anything) there either! Someone found the ball a few days later.

I'll Take That!

At Matt Wallace's Hall of Fame introduction, Cory Monroe relayed the following story.

Matt was new to the Motiv bowling ball staff and bowled league with Cory. Matt asked Cory when he was going to try some Motiv equipment. Since their bowling ball fittings were nearly the same Cory took Matt's new Venom Shock and used it in league. He shot a very high series in the 770's. Cory told Matt that he was NOT giving the ball back.

So Matt had to buy another Venom Shock. Shortly thereafter, Matt would shoot two 300 games and an 804 series in less than 2 months. So Cory asked if he could have THAT ball too! Matt had some choice words to use in saying no!

I've Got a Secret

Lee Reeves tells the story about the night he was bowling with his father Edd and Edd was having a career night. Edd had never bowled a 700 series. After starting with a 289 and following it up with a 256 Edd continued to roll well. After Edd struck again in the 8th frame of the last game he said something about having a chance. When Lee asked him "a chance for what" Edd responded a 700 series.

Lee didn't want to tell him what he could really shoot just encouraging him to keep going. Lee was "sweating bullets" as he was nervous for his dad. Edd would shoot a 257 the last game for an 802 series. It was the only 700 series he would ever roll.

I'll Take Care of It

This story comes from Mark Snodgrass. He was bowling in a league when one of the opponents unexpectedly opened the game with 6 or 7 strikes. Mark's teammate – a future Kokomo Hall of Fame bowler – said he would take care of it. This bowler proceeded to take his "easy slide" and rub it into this player's thumbhole.

When that bowler got up to bowl in the next frame, he dropped the ball at the foul line and rolled a gutter ball. The bowler just simply said that "it looks like I dropped one" and had no idea what actually transpired.

Second Chance

On January 16 Ryan Mills was on track for his second 300 of the season. After completing his 10th strike, he stepped up for his 11th and pulled it leaving a 4-10 split. Behind the lanes Holly Workman noticed

that the 9 pin was missing. She informed manager Zach Spencer who went back to see the captured video. Sure enough, the 9 pin was missing.

At this point no one had told Mills. He proceeded to make the 4-10 for a score of 288. At this point everyone was trying to determine what should be done.

USBC rules state that a dead ball occurs when a pin is missing but also stipulates that “a ball shall be declared dead if...after a delivery, attention is immediately called to the fact that one or more pins were missing from the setup”. The rules say nothing about who is immediately notified – as two people did/were notified. The rules also don’t provide any clarification as to the definition of immediate. Mills didn’t know that the pin was missing until after he quickly shot the spare. In this case, video was being checked to confirm. Since Mills was the anchor, no other balls were thrown as this was the end of the game.

At this point everyone was told to hold off starting the second game. Based on our interpretation of the rules it was decided that Mills should re-throw his 11th frame again so that a decision could be made later. He did so and struck on that ball. Now going for his second chance to get his 300 game, he pitched the ball wide leaving a 6-count washout for a 296.

Since there was no disagreement that a pin was missing, USBC would not get involved. Therefore the 296 would stand.

Good Decision

When sisters Donna and Barbara were young, Barbara wanted to start learning to bowl. Donna was a little older and already bowling. There was only one problem. Donna was right-handed and Barbara was left-handed and Donna said she couldn’t teach Barbara left-handed. No problem – Barbara learned to bowl right-handed.

It was a good decision. Barbara DeShon would go on to win 10 city tournament titles between 1965 and 1975. Her accomplishments would eventually put her into the City of Firsts Hall of Fame with her Hall of Fame competition including Judy Belt, Rosie Currens, Peg Hawkins, Betty Hubert, Jeniece Kasey, Kay Kelly, Betty Malson, Duggie McCoy and Sue Thornton.

Luck of the Draw

Bob Webb shared this story regarding brackets at the ABC/USBC Open Championships. Webb and Alan Anderson didn’t bowl particularly well and weren’t optimistic as to winning anything in their brackets. Anderson came back and said that he won \$100 in the brackets. Since Webb beat Anderson in every game he figured he must have cashed also only to find out that he won nothing.

You Never Know

Here is another brackets story this time from the 2025 USBC Open Championships in Baton Rouge. There were a couple of tough lane patterns and scores were down. The minors scores were better than the team event for almost all players.

Jon Kelley put in \$250 in the team event brackets divided equally between 60+ Forward and Reverse brackets. After shooting a miserable 146-191-146 he was sure that he would be getting nothing back. He was pleased to see that he did get back \$65.

Then in the Doubles and Singles he puts in for 15 Forward and Reverse brackets for each for a total of \$300. He gave instructions to "roll" the monies into the 50+ age category if they didn't have enough 60+ brackets. It turns out that 48 of the brackets were converted to 50+. After rolling a more miserable 162-147-135 and 132-172-163 he was sure he would get nothing back. However he managed to get back \$125.

How low was the scoring that year? Only 5 bowlers in that Kokomo squad broke 1500 for All Events. So when you have a low scoring tournament you never know what it will take to get through a bracket.

"Corner-pin-itis"

Back in 2014 when Dave Small bought Don Lowry Lanes and turned it into Heritage Lanes, he indicated that he intended to make it the highest scoring center in the area.

While there have been pockets of good scoring included new average records, it never reached the level he intended. There were some complaints in prior years – including by the PBA pros that bowled in the Kokomo tournaments – as our synthetic lanes are getting quite old resulting in more mid-lane friction and an energy reduction in the back ends.

For the 2025-2026 season, averages are down significantly for many bowlers. We are talking about 10-25 pins. The main culprit is the high frequency of corner pins.

Personally, I have had 10 or more 7-pins in a league multiple times. It is tough to put off big numbers when only one out of three pockets hits strike. In one game I left six 7-pins in a row – with four different bowling balls! Certain high-rev and two-handed bowlers still seem to have decent carry and post the highest scores.

The good news is that this has the attention of management. Beginning in January 2026 they have been experimenting with changes such as the lane pattern and lane oil. Hopefully they will get it resolved and a broader cross-section of bowlers can get their scores back where they used to be.

LOOK AT END OF SEASON AVERAGE DROPS for 2024-2025 TOP BOWLERS

Next Story

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