

South Point Bowling Boss Mike Monyak Looks Forward to Many Great Events at the New South Point Bowling Plaza Arena

The Main Man behind the new 60-lane South Point Bowling Arena in Las Vegas is Bowling Operations Manager Mike Monyak. He is the bowling expert that South Point owner Michael Gaughan and General Manager Ryan Growney will turn to whenever a large group visits the property for a weekend or for a several-month run. We first met Mike about 20 years ago when he was named manager of the Orleans Bowling Center. We worked with promoter Steve Sanders at the time, and he had moved his Mini Eliminator event from Sam's Town to the Orleans. He is one of the hardest working bowling center managers we have ever met, and one of the best bowlers we have seen among all of our friends who manage centers. While CJ and I were in Vegas for Jeanette Robinson's 25th Annual Golden Ladies Classic Tournament, we spent some time at South Point to see the magnificent new South Point Bowling Plaza Arena and catch up with our dear friend Mr. Monyak.

You must be extremely proud that you have been such a big part of taking the idea of a Las Vegas Bowling Stadium from the concept stage to reality?

Yes, absolutely – it is really cool that our owner Mr. Gaughan believed in it. It is really cool that it was an idea that, as you know, really started 10 or 12 years ago and has been through several versions of itself; and it finally came true. There are days when I walk through here and I can still hardly believe it is here. There are other days I walk through and think, 'Oh God, what have we done?' because it does get a bit daunting at times. We already have events scheduled, and not just USBC events, through 2022. It all really starts in 2016, which is only nine months away. It's like a steamroller, but we will be ready.

What's really even better about this place, is that the ideas that you see came from all of us . . . my whole staff of great people – assistant manager Johnny Debenedetta, our Group Coordinator Angie Bonifazi-Dobson, Shannon Dado, my head mechanic, Je Steart, head mechanic for the Plaza Arena, Roe Reynolds, my league coordinator, we all sat down and added up all of the tournaments we had collectively bowled in, and first of all it told us how long we have been together, but it also gave us a basis for questions. We made a list of what we liked and did not like. And in the end, what you see here is a product of everyone's ideas.



Mike Monyak

What I think you are saying is that actual bowlers had tremendous input into the functional details of how the new arena was laid out and how it works? I see that you have a plaque on your new office wall that says that you have bowled in 26 USBC National Championships, and I also know you have a lot of PBA experience, so when it comes to tournament experience, you are the leader of the pack.

Being bowlers ourselves was a big advantage. Johnny D has been around tournaments forever as a bowler, and he worked at the National Championships, so his input was priceless. I am 56, and I have been a bowler since I was five, so there is another half century of being around the sport. I started my first job in a bowling center when I was 12. Our whole core staff has been around the sport; I think we figured that collectively we have about 240 years of experience in bowling.

Many people think of you as a good bowling center manager, but they may not know how hard it is to balance a love for the sport with a love for the business, but you have done that well. Tell us a little about your record as a competitive bowler.

I think I have 40-some-odd 300 games, a couple of PBA regional titles; I've won a couple of State things . . . I've bowled decently in my life. I bowled on the tour for a couple of years, and I think I broke even. I was happy with that. Fortunately, I realized that as a professional bowler, breaking even was not good enough. I was joking with Randy Pedersen during the WSOB. I told him I probably had more shows under my belt than most of the players without ever throwing a ball.

Have you lived in Vegas your whole life?

No. I first moved here in 1982. I was working for AMF at the time. I am originally from Tacoma, Washington. I grew up with Mike Anthony. Earl signed my application to be a PBA member. The first time I met Earl, I was 14, and the bowling center I was bowling in kicked me off the lanes because Earl wanted to practice. I was mad. But then, Mike and I started bowling junior leagues together and traveling; and I got to know Earl. What a shame he is not around. What a great guy.

I came to Vegas to manage a little center called College Park. At 23, I was one of, if not the youngest managers AMF had. I had been here about a month, and Roy Ryan, my boss at the time called and said “I must be out of my mind – I just put a 23-year-old single guy in Vegas.” I told him not to worry. All I brought was my car, my bed, and all of my bowling balls. I didn’t gamble much because I was bowling all the time; but that’s how I got to know a lot of people in Vegas. At the end of the 80’s I went back home to take care of my dad before he passed away, and came back in ‘91. I’ve now lived here longer than any other place in my life.

Some of those people you have met are pretty special – Jeanette Robinson comes to mind.

For sure – Jeanette is in my top two or three of all time. How many jobs are there where you get to meet and work with people who are your heroes? Carmen Salvino is another. He was my big hero as a kid. When I bowled on the tour, he was still bowling. I went up against him in match play, and I was so scared I think I shot a buck eighty. Over the years, I’ve gotten to know Carmen . . . and what an incredible man he is. He is still my hero, even more now. I met Don Carter and Dick Weber. It just does not get any better. Johnny Petraglia is another. Now his son John Jr. lives here, and he is just like his dad – a phenomenal gentleman, and a hell of a player, just like his dad.

When we travel, my wife teases me because somebody is always saying hello no matter where we are. She says I have a jobby – a hobby that pays me, and she is right.

South Point owner Michael Gaughan is not an avid bowler like the others on your staff, but he is one of the pioneers of seeing the value of having bowling as part of the Vegas casino experience. True?

Yes, absolutely. He really gets it. He was probably the biggest cheerleader for the whole project. Once the idea was re-presented, he saw that all of the pieces fell into place and said “Let’s do it.” He also wanted more equestrian arenas, and this new building provided space for those. Everything just fit, and he enthusiastically supported it all the way.

Some people may think that the arena is only for huge events like the USBC Tournament and the PBA World Series of Bowling, but it is for almost any good size event – right?

Yes, and it solves the problem of having to re-shuffle leagues to accommodate tournaments that are not scheduled too far out. Our first event in the arena was an Amateur Bowlers Tournament, on a weekend with about 2300 entries, where we interfaced both a handicap and scratch division. When we put all the names in for the first time and fired them up; It was the first event where we had them interfaced so the names moved with the bowlers. When all of the names came up exactly as they should have we just sat back and said "Wow!" – It was a pretty emotional moment. I called my wife when all 60 were running and just held the phone up and said "Listen, the baby has life." I actually got a little teary –eyed. I know it is only a building, but . . . it is much more than that. My mechanic, Joe Steart, treats it like a child. He talks to the pinsetters. We just had a little scratch seven game with 83 people, so that is what - about 580 games?; and we had one trouble call for a ball return, and it turned out to be a mistake; and that was using 56 of the 60 lanes. He makes sure everything works.

How will the USBC bowlers experience here compare to what they have had in Reno and around the country?

For the USBC, I think we can give them more benefits for a location than they have ever had before; and that is no slight to Reno. Reno is a beautiful facility, and I think they do a great job. I really do. What we have here is a bowling arena that is connected to its own hotel and casino, so we can offer a little bit more to the bowlers, not to mention that you can stay and play and bowl all under the same roof.

Our hope is that we can pump some momentum into the USBC events, and that the momentum we create will carry over to the years when they are not here. We've got to build the events up again. The USBC Championships should be getting at least 12,000 teams every year, and I think we can help reach that goal and keep it going. That is what we want.

I know that some people on the east coast are not thrilled that they will have to come west so often, but if you look at the big, long term picture, it looks like a beautiful plan and a beautiful partnership. Is that how you see it?

It really is. And Chad Murphy is making some good moves trying to get some events on the east coast. I understand how the folks in the East feel, because it has been in the West for too many years, but Chad is trying to work with centers and cities to remedy that, and we fully support those efforts. We will help in any way we can.

As you mentioned, one of the great aspects of the new arena is that it protects your leagues. How many league bowlers do you have today?

We have just over 2000. We have stayed pretty steady for the past four years, which makes us

happy. It was a little tough after that economic burp, and we lost some, but we got them back and things seem to be back to normal.

How long have you been here at South Point, and how long have you been associated with Michael Gaughan?

I came here eight years ago. It doesn't seem like that long, but it's been eight years . . . and I have worked for Mr. Gaughan for 23 years.

Did you start at the Gold Coast?

Yes. I started out in the pro shop at the Gold Coast. The shop was leased at the time, and it did not work out, so I started running the shop for the company. I think that lasted about two years, and the Orleans project was underway, and I was named manager of the Orleans, where I worked with Robert Paravia. When Robert left, I got a call one day to meet with Mr. Gaughan. I didn't know him very well then, so I was a little nervous, but we talked, and then I went to talk with his partner Frank Tody, and the next day, I got the job as GM. When Michael and the Boyd Group went their separate ways, he built South Point, which is a privately owned LLC. Boyd is traded publically, so it is a little more difficult to get things done. Michael is a hands-on owner who, when he sees something wrong, he likes to just fix it without the corporate structure getting involved. I'm not criticizing Boyd, it is just the way it is, and some people prefer a simpler way. I learned that from working for both, and when I decided I didn't like the new procedures at Boyd, I asked Mr. Gaughan if he could make a place for me here. I came as the manager of promotions, and two months later the bowling center manager left, and I stepped in; and here we are now, with 124 lanes at one address.

Do you have a long-term contract with the PBA to host their World Series of Bowling?

It has been on a year-to-year basis since we started, and it will probably stay that way. It is a good event. We did the TV shows in the arena in November because the arena was opened ahead of schedule, so that was great. This year, we will do the entire tournament schedule in the arena. The players will have a whole new venue, which will be good because some of them may not have a good look in the bowling center, and when you have that many events together, it can be a long week for some players.

Earlier today, we talked about the new Professional Women's Tour, and you mentioned that you would like to host an event if it makes sense financially. What will it take to get a PWBA event here in the new arena?

First – I am jazzed that the ladies have something to bowl in again. When the PWBA went away, it was sad; and as you know, we had them at our other properties several times. They always generated a great fan base and a lot of spectators. As far as having one of their events it just has to make some sense. I can't be totally altruistic with Mr. Gaughan's money. If we can at least break even on it, I'm OK, but if we lose money, it won't make sense. Hopefully, we can figure out a way where we can work with the new group within the next year or so. They are great people and I would love to work with the ladies organization, and I think eventually, in the next year or two, we will pick up an event and have some fun with it.

One of the advantages of getting into the business at such a young age as you did is that you can reach the top at a relatively young age and have many years to do good work and enjoy success. What are your personal long term goals here at South Point?

I've never really had a long term plan for my work. I have always just gone where it takes me. As long as I am making progress, I'm satisfied. But I know how fortunate I have been, so I don't take it for granted. Because of my association and relationship with Mr. Gaughan, I have been able to do things that 99% of bowling managers and even owners could never do.

Without thinking too deeply about it, it might be safe to say that you have the number one bowling job in the world – running the biggest bowling operation in one of the most dynamic cities in the world – agree?

Yes. I have been blessed. I've been very lucky. But I believe that you create your own luck by working hard, and I have done that. When Mr. Gaughan first gave me the responsibility to run centers, he said "It's OK to make mistakes, just don't make the same one twice." It is pretty hard to mess that rule up. With that in mind, I work very hard to not even make the first mistake. All of us here are also lucky that he allows us to do our work. He is not a micro-manager, but he also knows the business. I remember a conversation we had a few years ago when he started talking about lineage and cost per game. I knew then that he keeps up with everything.

As far as where I go from here . . . obviously, we want to make sure that the Women's Championship and the first Open Championships go well from all perspectives; from our side, from the USBC side, and most important from the bowler's side.

My goal is that we break all of the previous attendance records for the 2019 Open Championships. I don't think we can get there in 2017 because it will take a while for the East Coast bowlers to come around, but they will be going to Syracuse in 2018, and I think we have a good shot at getting them to come here in 2019.

On a personal level, is there a curtain in my future? There probably is. My wife Linda will be retiring next year, on February 29th – our 28th wedding anniversary . . . so I'm thinking that 2023 might be a good time to pass the torch. I'll be 63, and I will have spent 51 years in the business. We just bought a little jeep, so maybe we will put a little tent in it and hit the road and just relax and

enjoy what we have built. Our son Kyle is an executive chef in California, and he is doing very well, so it will be just me and Linda and the five dogs.

Any final thoughts?

As I said before, I've been very lucky. I have been able to have fun; I have been blessed with a phenomenal boss in Mr. Gaughan, I've been blessed with wonderful co-workers, I've met some incredible people along the way, like you and CJ – how long have we know each other – 20 years? I've been involved in some of the biggest amateur and professional events . . . I guess for a bowling bum, you just can't write a much better story – that's me. I am a proud bowling bum.