

1997-1998 NCABA nominees

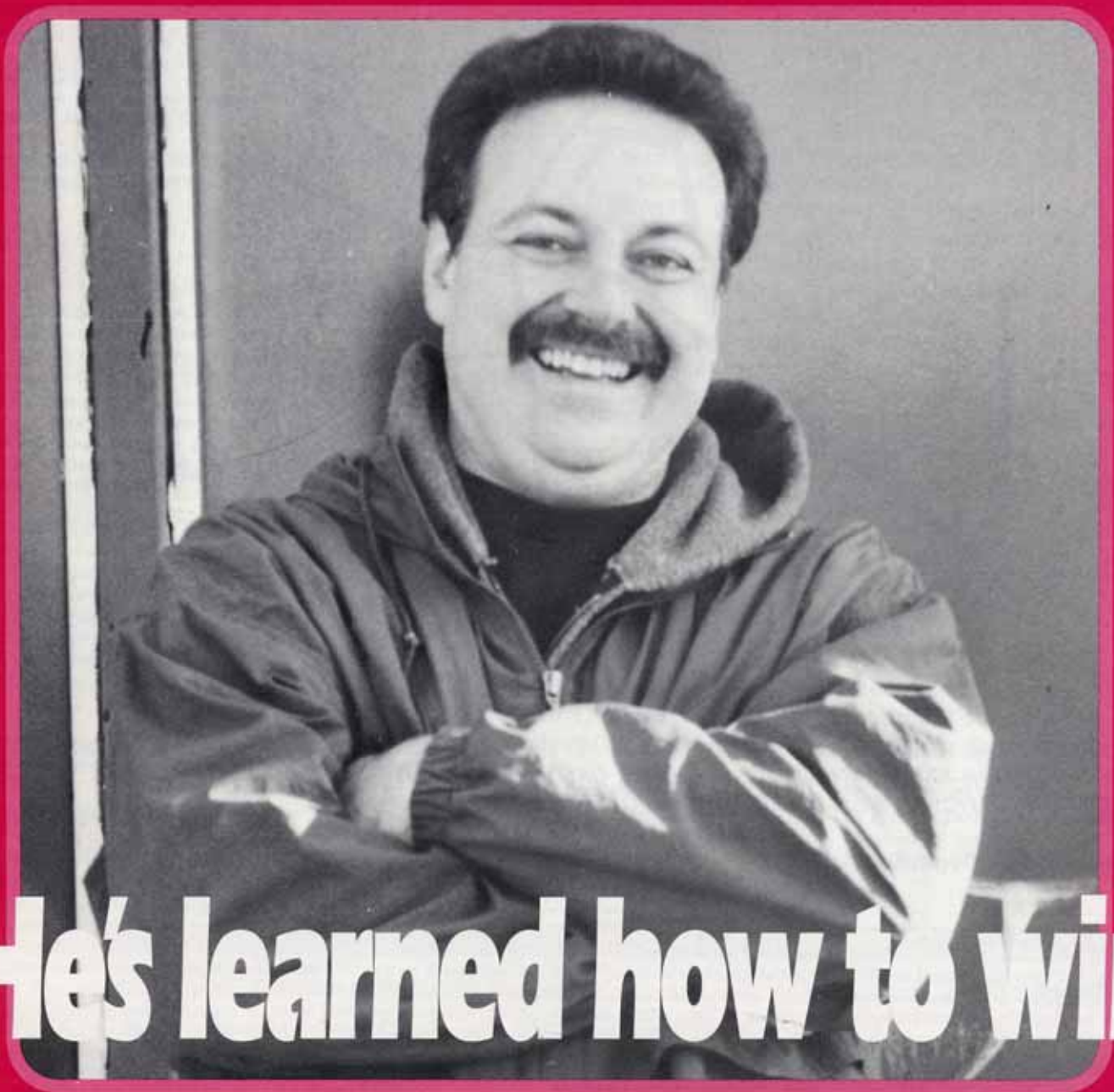
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# BOWL MAGAZINE

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## DAVE HART



He's learned how to win



# BOWL MAGAZINE

## INTERVIEW:

# DAVE HART

Dave Hart first bowled duckpins at Wheaton Triangle at age 9, but he soon became frustrated throwing two-counts and opted for the bigger-ball game. Excited at the chance to bowl at a spacious 48-lane ten-pin center, he soon moved to Wheaton Plaza, where his average jumped from 125 at age 12, to 175 by age 15, and to 190 the following year.

He graduated from Northwood High and attended Frosburg State for a couple of years—only to make his parents happy. He majored in business, but the “B-C” student had no goals and actually spent much time hustling pool with money earned from a school newspaper delivery job.

After leaving college in 1977, he bowled pot games at Bowl America Silver Hill and Bowl America Falls Church, where he put in his dues and believed it was a good night if he could break even and get some experience bowling for money.

In the summer of 1980, while living with his parents and going from paycheck-to-paycheck in a variety of jobs, Hart had his first major financial success in tournament competition in Monroeville, Pa. Borrowing \$25 from a friend to re-enter the event, Hart scored 1,198 for five games to put himself in line for the \$20,000 top prize. He ultimately was edged out by four pins, but the \$10,000 he collected put him on what he thought was easy street—but not long after, the dollars were gone and all that remained were the memories.

Thus, he joined a courier business and later formed his own company, Earlybird Courier Service, which primarily serves offices in the District and usually allows him afternoon practice time on the lanes if he so chooses.

The practice has paid off: In the last two years, he clearly has joined the upper echelon of area bowlers and is a threat to win any competition. In 1996, Hart won four Nation's Capital/Baltimore Area Masters tournaments and dominated the prestigious tournament club in earnings and points despite competing in only two-thirds of the events.

Following a recent Saturday morning youth league session at AMF/Fair Lanes

Laurel, where Hart coaches his son, Travis (pictured below), and other youngsters, he talked about his life, bowling career, and other subjects with BOWL Magazine Editor Bob Cosgrove.

### Do you regret leaving college early?

At the time I went to school, I didn't see the reason to go to school or see how it would help me in later life. Now I can see more. That four-year degree to a large degree is just showing that you had the dedication to stick out four years and learn the process of what you need to do and how to learn how to study.

To be honest, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I only bowled in one league while at Frostburg, but since then, I've been bowling ever since. I *did* like bowling.



### Did you take lessons to get your average that high as a teen-ager?

I've never had anybody coach me. My approach and my style and everything—I've always just sort of done it. The way I throw today is sort of the way I've always bowled. I guess I was lucky to have good fundamentals.

I've adapted some to the lane conditions and balls, but my basic approach hasn't changed too much.

### What changes have you made because of the modern equipment and lane conditions?

I have a higher backswing than I used to, and I have more ball speed. You need more ball speed with the reactive equipment.

### Would you say that the balls have been to the advantage of a player like yourself?

Definitely. My average has jumped probably 15 to 20 pins in the five years that I have been throwing reactive equipment and started to take the game seriously again.

### After Monroeville, did you think about a career on tour?

I didn't feel I was good enough. I didn't know if I wanted to do that type of life—traveling, living out of a suitcase. I had other distractions which I do regret now. I feel like I sort of lost 10 years on my bowling that I can't get back. I guess now I'm sort of grasping.

Personal problems and other things—things just sort of kept getting in the way, and I never got out there. I never got a PBA card; I was sort of content to just bowl other tournaments around and do things like that.

### Are you happy you didn't get a PBA card?

I always had in the back of my mind that I would always bowl the megabuck tournaments because they started in the early 1980s. In fact, I bowled in the first High Roller. I shot a 230 game with two opens, and I lost my first match. It just sort of left a bad taste in my mouth. Anyway, I didn't have the money to go back out and do that again, but I always felt that it was a better, easier way to go than to try to grind it out on the tour.



**What are your thoughts when you enter a tournament?**

I go to win every single tournament. If I have my shot that day, if I have my rhythm, I have as good a chance as anybody.

**What local players do you admire the most?**

Lee Brosius pops to mind. He's an interesting fellow. You watch him bowl, and you watch him bowl, and you don't really think he's that much. Then you see at the end of the tournament that's he's won. If you hear Lee talk, Lee's the worst bowler in the world—he's got no game, he's got no luck. I've gotten to a point where I say, "Let me see: Which number excuse is that?"

He's a very competitive person. I think what he might lack in any physical ability of his game, he makes up for mentally. He's a tough bowler.

**Who else do you see as your main competition locally?**

Tony Chapman plays well. He can get on a roll, and he can't be touched. Tony Walton plays well. Jimmy Lewis plays well. Brian Bever plays well when he's out there. Brian's sort of hot and cold, but when Brian's on, Brian's very difficult. Bruce Hollen's a tough bowler. I'm sure I'm forgetting people.

Chris Johnson's another one; he's a young kid who's really coming on. He throws the ball well. I've watched his game develop over the last two or three years, and he definitely has become a more versatile player. He seems to be dedicated and wants to get better. That's something I don't see in a lot of people. There's a continuing process of getting better.

**Not too long ago, there were few weekend events for scratch bowlers. Now, there's almost something every week, yet generally, entries have dropped. What can be done to change that?**

I had bowled in only one league while I was building my courier business. When Mike Hahn started the Masters was the time that I was able to start spending more time on bowling. In fact, I cashed in a tournament here at Laurel. That was good, so I went to the next tournament and cashed again.

In the fourth one, I made the finals at Falls Church. About the third game of match play, I fell apart—just mentally and in my legs. My leg strength was not there to make it through those games.

At that point, there was no point coming out and wasting my time if I wasn't going to be able to make the finals and perform in the finals. So I started building up my leg strength, exercising, doing some aerobics, stretching out—I was having problems with my back and having that looked at. I've continued to do that over the last three years.

I feel that I've moved to the next level over these past three years—I've gone from one level to the next level. That was partly because of Mike [Hahn] running his tournaments and allowing me to see how good I was. It was just a personal thing—let me just see how good I am. He allowed that avenue to be opened up for me. I took advantage of it and I worked—I worked hard.

For anybody who wants to say that Dave Hart was lucky out there, I put a lot of work into what I did. There were a lot of hours that people didn't see me at home stretching, working out, and doing all the little things and practicing that you need to do to win.

*Every person has a gift, but not everybody finds out what their gift is in life. My gift is bowling. It's something that I do and I do well.*

And I've got a thing on winning: *You learn how to win.* I see a lot of guys who go out and try the pro tour. I think they get so frustrated and just so discouraged where they get to a point where they just don't know how to win. They're trying to look for something magical or something, and it's really just taking advantage of your situation.

You're not always going to win, but, boy, when you get in a position to win, especially locally, that's how you're going to make big money, getting that first-place prize check. Taking second

or third, you make a little money, but you're not going to make decent money.

**You finished with a 247 average for 36 games in a Laurel league last season. Did you ever feel any pressure knowing that you had to score well over 700 just to maintain that kind of average?**

I never thought about it. All I thought about was that I was coming over here because I was making money. I was just shooting as much as I could to make money. The score just sort of came along.

**How do you deal with pressure situations?**

Usually, if I'm in that position, I'm throwing the ball fairly well, so I just continue to key on the things I need to do to repeat strikes.

**Is winning money in events your primary motivation over, say, gaining respect from your colleagues?**

I bowl to win money. I guess if you bowl and win enough money, people will respect you. I'm not out here for any type of ego thing; I don't have an ego. I'm quiet, and some people might take that as being aloof—I'm just sort of a quiet person unless you get to know me. I don't take any satisfaction in beating somebody here or wish that I beat [certain individuals]. It's merely, *I want to win the money.*

**Is bowling fun for you?**

Yes. It's a release. When I bowl, I don't have to worry about all the problems of reality and life. I can just ... bowl.

**How important is bowling in your life?**

It's becoming more and more important. It's something that you do. Every person has a gift, but not everybody finds out what their gift is in life. My gift is bowling. It's something that I do and I do well, and I haven't really had to work too hard at it. There might be some envy from other people, because people will make comments that I make it look easy and everything like that.

Bottom line is, *it is easy!* It's an easy game—it's a very simple game. When you're bowling well, you only have to



do two or three things because everything else is there. It's when you're in a slump that you start thinking about eight, 10, and 15 things, and then the game becomes complicated.

**When you win, do you hear those comments, "Well, Hart's a left-hander...."?**

I try not to let that bother me. I know that there's an inherent advantage to being left-handed, but that shouldn't be held against me. I'm supposed to go out there and do the best I can with what I'm given. If that means it's an advantage, well, it's an advantage.

I've had certain people come up to me and say, "Dave, I saw you won the tournament. I know it wasn't just because you were left-handed." I've led tournaments and I've won tournaments where there wasn't a left-hander in the finals, and they'll say, "I know you won it because you're good and you have the ability."

When you see five, six, or seven [left-handers] in the finals, well, yeah, obviously, there was a better left-handed shot. But again, you can't hold that against me. I don't really get caught up in the ego stuff or anything like that, I just want to win.

**What would people be surprised to learn about Dave Hart?**

That's a tough question! I hope the people don't take my quietness and maybe my competitiveness that I'm mean, arrogant, or conceited. I'm just quiet and into myself and try to do the best I can on the lanes.

I'm a little different away from the bowling lanes—I'm more easygoing, I guess. But I do have a competitive streak in me. Like I've told people, it's nothing personal, but I do want to win. And I just hope people don't take that and hold it against me or think that I'm walking around with a big head. I'm still the same person I was three years ago. I've just worked hard to try to get my game the best I can.

**How else are you different outside of the bowling environment?**

I'm a family man. I've got four kids [ages 10, 7, 5, and 2]. I go to work every day, do my job, and come home. I help with the kids.

Years ago, I used to be a fairly wild

person. I had my wild streak in my youth. Since I settled down, got married, and started having kids, I've become a different person.

When I was younger, I *was* a bit of a [jerk]. I've changed: I've tried to become a better person, and I try to respect other people's feelings and stuff like that. I try not to get self-absorbed.

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A lot of people might know me from way back, and I'm not the same person I was back then. I'm just trying to be a good person for myself and set a good example for my kids.

**Describe your 1996 season.**

I won the four Masters, and I had a good season at Shady Grove—we won one of the halves [in a league]. Actually, 1995 was my best season. I didn't win as many local events, but I won some things in other areas that got me some money.

**Would you change things in the Masters?**

I don't think there are enough bowlers to keep these tournaments going like Mike [Hahn] or John Parks [of Tournament Concepts] wants them. I think there are enough guys who bowl for a few times, and they realize they're not going to win—they're going to have to really be *lucky* and *on*. They can't continue to put out \$100 to \$200 each weekend to do this, so they sort of fade away.

Like I say, when I was stuck in that position I saw after Falls Church, I had a choice: I was going to come out and do things to make my game better, or I wasn't going to come out. I chose to do

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things that I needed to do to make my game better.

A lot of people don't have the advantage I have. I've put myself into this position with my work so that I have the opportunity to practice and do things I want to do. A lot of people don't have that ability, whether it be their family situation or whatever.

You don't want to be out there with scared money, either—you don't want to be bowling with the rent money, although I've done that, too! That's not a good way to be.

#### **What has been your best moment in bowling?**

Probably winning the team event up in Lilac (in Rochester, N.Y.) in 1990 with my father-in-law, Fred Hyatt. He loved bowling, but he didn't win a lot of money. To see the joy he got from winning that tournament, that was nice. Right after that, he was diagnosed with cancer and died a year later.

#### **What is the best thing you like about bowling?**

I do it well. It's one of those things—I've always been able to do it well. If you find something you do well, it's fun, and you want to do it.

#### **Worst thing about bowling?**

Maybe some of the things they're doing to the game—averages going up and up, sort of taking integrity out of some of the game. It's not really a shot-maker's type of game anymore; it's who can carry the most.

#### **Do you feel you're at *some* type of disadvantage when a "shootout" condition is present?**

Not anymore—not with the equipment. I used to feel like that. My average has come up as I've tried to catch up on the learning curve of the balls. I feel that I can be competitive like that. My advantage is more to a tougher condition because I'll grind—I'll make spares and throw my share of strikes.

#### **What part of your game needs improvement or constant tuning?**

I need practice games to get my rhythm and get my body into the game. I need to do more. I had been working out, but I haven't been doing

as much this last year, and I felt it sort of showed in my finishes in some of the tournaments. I've dedicated this year that I'm going to put everything into it. I'm going to do all the little things so there are no excuses.

And I *don't* make excuses. You can ask almost anybody, and you'll never hear somebody say that Dave Hart complained because the lanes weren't right. If Dave Hart didn't do well, he didn't do well because he didn't throw the ball well enough. It's not the lanes—it's me.

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#### **What is the strongest aspect of your game?**

Spare-shooting and then changing speeds.

I heard this comment not too long ago: "Well, Dave Hart last year at Shady Grove bowled 36 weeks and never had to move his feet." I averaged 224 there. I might not have moved my feet—first off, that's not true—but to say that I didn't move my feet, you're right, I pretty much played the same area all year, but I changed speeds and I changed hand position. And it's something that I do instinctively. I would prefer to stay in the same area of the lane and change ball speed and hand position before I make a move with my feet.

To the person who is just observing, yeah, they would probably say, "Dave never had to move. Well, he's a left-hander, and that's how it is."

#### **You need a mark to win the tournament. What makeable spare combination do you *not* want to see?**

A 3-10. I tend to throw my spares fairly

straight; I don't use a hooking ball. A lot of times, what I will do is pull it and miss the 3[-pin] or I will just take the 3 straight off and not get over to the 10.

My spare game is very simple: I throw a hard Blue Dot, and I throw it as straight as can be.

#### **What five pros would you like to watch on television?**

Walter Ray Williams Jr., Norm Duke, Parker Bohn III, C.K. Moore, and Earl Anthony. They're all very versatile. I think Duke is the one who's most versatile. Walter Ray is, as far as what he can do. His game has been helped a lot by reactives. Norman Duke is an incredibly talented bowler—he can do anything he wants with the ball. He has an "A" game, a "B" game, a "C" game, and a "D" game, and he can play them all well.

A lot of guys locally, their concepts of bowling I don't understand. They have an "A" game—and *that's all they have!* I joke with other 30- and 40-plus guys that the younger kids have no concept of spare shooting. *They don't know how to shoot spares!* I probably wouldn't know how coming up in this age of reactive balls.

You get a guy who gets a reactive ball in his hand, and two years later, he's a 200 bowler. But he comes out and tries to bowl scratch tournaments, and he can't understand why he's not making a dime. It takes 220 to make any money now. What a 200 bowler was 15 years ago, a 220 bowler is now.

Just the basic concepts of spare shooting are not understood anymore. Also, if you go back and look at the winners of the Masters for the last year or two, I bet you can't find five bowlers who are under 30.

That [younger] age group, it's nothing against them. I think they feel, "Well, I can just throw a double to make up for that miss."

#### **Are they simply unfortunate products of their environment?**

It could be. The game has become so much strike-strike-strike that they just don't put the same thought into effectively making spares. [To them, spares are] like a nuisance instead of an equal part of the game.

#### **Do you see anything in the games of**



**Parker Bohn III and C.K. Moore that tells you that's why they're touring pros and you're not?**

They both have excellent technique. I'm envious of Parker's knee bend. That was one of the first things I saw when I started doing the video three years ago: *I was a lazy bowler*. I still tend to constantly battle that. I need to do it to continue to build up my leg strength to get down into the shot. That's a place where I know I need to get better—to get that solid finish and strong follow-through. I keep trying to do it, I keep working towards it. It's a constant improvement that you're looking for—to be able to repeat shots.

C.K. seems to have a fairly simple game. He really doesn't hit the ball a lot—just consistent and in the pocket. Sort of how I feel I am.

Parker is just a good athlete. He plays very well.

**Do you plan to bowl in megabuck tournaments?**

I'm definitely looking to bowl in those tournaments. The last three years, I've *always* thought about it, and it seems that something always comes up: Fred Hyatt, my father-in-law passed away, then my father passed away, then my sister passed away who was 10 years my junior—and all this happened in a two-year period. So there was a lot of stuff going on that always seemed to get in my way.

To a degree, I used bowling as a therapy through all that. T[he bowling center] was my place where I could go and forget about all the crap that was going on in my life. And for those few hours that I was bowling, I didn't have to think about it. When I packed up my stuff and drove home, then reality kicked back in.

In particular, my father passing away really in a lot of ways changed my outlook on bowling, on life, on everything. I guess I maybe took it too seriously. What it caused me to do was to not be able to perform the way I wanted to perform.

After my father died, it really didn't

matter if I got a strike or not—you know? You do the best you can. But any nervousness that I had before in a pressure situation, I just don't have anymore because you do the best you can.

If you strike, great, but if you don't, the sun still comes up the next day, you've still got your health. It *is* just bowling—it's not the end of the world. That's a perception thing that in the long run has helped me with what I've been doing the last few years.



**Are you actively looking for sponsors?**

I am looking right now. In the three years that I've been taking my game to the next level, I personally feel that I've done everything that I can do locally. And I'm not saying that as a braggart type of thing, but if you want to continue to improve yourself, you have to keep challenging yourself by going to the next level. Just like in business, people continue to move up until they reach their point of incompetence!

There are a lot of people who are satisfied with where they are, and that's

good. If you've reached the point where you're the big fish in the little pond—it's your bowling establishment and people think highly of you and that's all you want, that's good. You've reached where you are and you're happy.

I want to continue to challenge myself and see how far I can go and what I can do. I don't know if I'm going to bowl megabuck tournaments and fall on my face. I don't think so, but I want to continue and see what I can do. I'm

actively looking for sponsors right now to bowl in the July High Roller, the Eliminators, and other things. I'll be turning 40 a month and a half before the tournament and there are a lot of things available to those 40 and over, and I feel that's an advantage to me.

As far as my bowling, I feel like I'm 20 or 25, after getting myself in good condition and everything like that. I do not feel my age. I feel very young and spry, I guess.

**What are your bowling goals?**

I want to continue to see how good I can get. I want to continue to improve. I want to continue to not have any regrets that I didn't put everything into it—and that means mentally, physically, training-wise, and everything like that. No excuses. If I do well, great; if I don't do well, it wasn't because I didn't put everything into it. You don't want to second-guess yourself or feel

that you didn't do enough to give yourself your best advantage.

**Does that mean giving the pro tour a try?**

I've thought about doing the senior tour in the future. The pro tour is not a thought.

**Any other thoughts?**

I would like to credit Mike Hahn for putting the time in to run his tournaments. I've told him that he's helped me attain some of the goals that I wanted to achieve in my life in bowling. I appreciate what he's done. •