



When did bowling ever have integrity?

During the past 15 years, bowling has seen an explosion of honor scores. The reaction by traditionalists and purists has been strongly negative. The outcry has been, primarily by older observers, that the sport has lost its "integrity," and this most recent high-scoring trend must come to a sudden halt and be reversed if the game-as-a-sport is to be saved.

I say "most recent high-scoring trend" because it is not the first time there has been an outbreak of high scoring. Two historical periods come to mind.

One reason for the foundation of a national sanctioning body was the abundance of perfect games being bowled in the later part of the 19th century.

During the 1930s, bowling also experienced a boom in scoring. During this time period, three 900 sets were bowled, a 237 average was recorded, and a near 3,800 five-member team set was shot. Then came World War II and the advent of lacquer coatings to "save the day" from a further outbreak of high scores.

Over the years, for the most part, I have observed that the record averages being recorded are by your not-so-average, twice-a-week league bowler. Did not Don Carter average in the 230s in 1959? Did not a young, pre-PBA Norm Duke average in the 230s as a teenager? Is not Mr. Jeff "261 average" Carter an accomplished PBA regional player?

Over and over, I have seen record-set-

ting scores being produced by sterling participants. Yet, it is true, the honor scores are up, and the sky offers no limit.

Why is this happening? Better-educated, better-trained players are taking this sport very seriously. We live in a high-tech period, and these players are taking full advantage of high-tech education, high-tech training, and high-tech equipment while playing on state-of-the-art playing fields. These factors, in conjunction with a governing body that allowed "soft conditions" to be the norm, resulted in a playing environment that breaks scoring records almost daily.

Yet, has the game lost "integrity"? My *Webster's Dictionary* offers the following descriptive definitions of "integrity":

- ✓ The quality or state of being complete; unbroken condition; wholeness; entirety.
- ✓ The quality or state of being unimpaired; perfect condition; soundness.
- ✓ The quality or state of being in sound moral principle; uprightness; honesty; and sincerity.

Given the above definitions as valid, I ask the reader: *When did this sport ever have integrity?* Was it the turn of the century when there was only one bowler with a sanctioned 200 average? Is that when the sport was "complete, unbroken" and had "wholeness"? Or did the sport have "perfect, unimpaired soundness" before the implementation of the

rangefinder guidance system during the 1940s? Or was the sport of "sound moral principle" and of "upright sincerity" as played when horsehairs were used to block shellac lanes and toilet paper was used to create direct tracks to the pocket in lacquer days?

Did the game's integrity decline, historically, with each new technological advancement, such as, rubber balls, heating and air conditioning, CATS, or milling machines? Has, or will, "the Sport condition" restore bowling to its mythological "wholeness" and an "unimpaired perfect condition"? I think not.

Is "the Sport condition" just another condition or is it, to quote a leading authority on lanes, "the real thing"? If it is "the real thing," it sure is boring to watch players bowl on it.

I submit the sport of bowling never has had a high degree of integrity. Nor can it. Bowling-as-a-sport is too conditional. The basic playing field has been standardized, but the particular bowled-on conditions are comprised of unique particulars that are subject to change and thus allow various styles to emerge, dominate historical and/or geographical settings, and then decline due to the changes new technologies bring on.

Bowling will always remain in a state of unfolding flux. There is no sport called "bowling" that is pure, complete, whole, unimpaired, and "Real." Bowlers live in a world of change that is relentless in producing greater knowledge, new technologies, and new techniques, and this phenomenological process, in turn, creates a different playing environment.

I submit that not only is contemporary bowling the future "good old days," but it is also the more interesting days. (Which is more interesting: a two-hole rubber bowling ball or a four-hole ball that is mica-enriched and has an enhanced mass bias?)

The preceding article is reprinted with the permission of Bowling This Month magazine. The writer is operational manager, Bowling Division, Red Nelson's Bowlers World; Member: PBA, BWAA, IBPSIA, PBPI, The Foundation; Technically Certified Equipment Technician; IBPSIA Certified USA Bowling Silver Level (Gold Pending) Coach; Certified Level 3 Dick Ritger Instructor; Certified Level 1 YABA Instructor; and former Bowling This Month Super School Instructor.