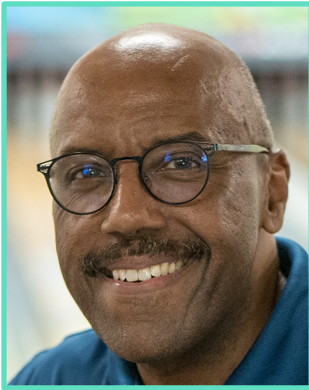


# The Best Bowling Tip I Ever Received

By Howard Marshall



The best bowling tip I ever received came from a non-bowler, my late father, Howard Marshall Sr. My parents enrolled me in a junior program at Fair Lanes Woodlawn in 1970 when I was eight years old. They would not only drive me to the lanes each Saturday afternoon, they would stay and watch me bowl. I took to the sport quickly, progressing to a 160 average by age 11. My mother was my main cheerleader; however, my father monitored my attitude and temperament on the lanes.

One Saturday afternoon, things weren't going so well. After rolling a game that was way below my average, I kicked the ball return and pounded my fist on the score table. Immediately, my father called me back to the concourse to see him. When I did, he sternly warned me, "The next time I see you act that way, I'm taking your ball and shoes away, and you're not bowling anymore!" My anger turned to fear because I loved to bowl and couldn't imagine life without it.

Later that evening, my father sat me down and explained that I would never become a good bowler with a poor attitude. He explained that bad shots were part of the game and what counted most was the end result. My father also said he was okay with me rolling low scores sometimes, as long as I learned from the experience. He stressed that a league or tournament session consisted of 30 or more frames, and, instead of getting angry because of a bad game, take things *one shot at a time*. He agreed to take me to practice bowling on days when schools were closed for holidays, during winter and spring breaks, and on occasional Sunday afternoons.

When I practiced, I bowled two three-game blocks, and my father kept score. After each game, we talked about the mental aspect: *How did it feel to roll consecutive strikes as well as missed spares, including the dreaded 7-pin?* He also asked how I felt rolling a 200 game versus a 130 game. Little did I know, my father was programming my mind to slow down and focus on *one shot at a time*. These lessons paid me dividends over the course of my adult bowling career.

In total, I have had the good fortune to win over 40 tournament titles. Included in these are three Professional Bowlers Association regional titles, a Maryland Open title, a Greater Baltimore Masters title, and over 20 local and state association titles. In an era where the handicap tournament format is dominant, I am especially proud to have won six scratch All-Events titles, the last of which occurred this year in Easton, Maryland at the age of 59. With each tournament, I've had to roll as few as nine and as many as 25 games in securing the title. Accepting the good with the bad and concentrating on *one shot at a time* has helped me to outlast my competition time and time again.

I have also had my share of performances over the years when I didn't bowl my best. Sometimes when one bowls poorly, they would rather not finish or, at least, mentally "zone out" before the last ball is thrown. For me, the early mental lessons learned from my father compels me to focus until the last ball is thrown. Striving to take note of what worked and what did not is key. You never know when, in the future, you'll have to conquer the very condition that defeated you in the present.

As you progress in the sport of bowling, the mental aspect of your game will carry you well beyond your physical gifts. Learn to calm your mind, stay focused, pay attention to each ball thrown, and remain mentally present during competition. If you do these things, you will be well on your way to becoming a champion.

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Howard Marshall, who averaged 233 for 102 games in the Polish Open at Crofton Bowling Centre this season, is a member of the Greater Baltimore USBC Bowling Association Hall of Fame and the Maryland State USBC Association Hall of Fame.