



## ***Skill? Technology? Easy Conditions?***

Is technology influencing the degree of success in today's bowling game?

The United States Bowling Congress recently issued two newsletters. The first one, dated June 22, 2006, was refocusing its efforts on research and testing relating to the System of Bowling. The second one, issued August 4, 2006, will be addressed in a future column.

In regard to the first newsletter, USBC's major concern was the explosive increase in scoring in recent years. It has renewed emphasis on testing that will concentrate on four elements of the System of Bowling, a USBC-driven study of the key components that affect scoring in tenpin bowling balls, pins, lane conditioning, and lane surfaces.

I would like to address two of these concerns.

### **Has our governing body sacrificed the game's integrity to placate youngsters, seniors, and women at the expense of proficient bowlers who have spent time and money to hone their skills? Where, in any sport, are rules relaxed to accommodate less talented athletes?**

#### **Bowling Balls**

USBC is working on a study of bowling ball motion. Its goal is to learn and understand today's high-tech bowling balls with complex cores and weight blocks and inner motion characteristics of the balls.

For the study, USBC's researchers are using advanced testing equipment such as the robotic precision bowling ball thrower named "Harry"—a similar machine to the United States Golf Association's robotic golfer called "Iron Byron." USBC also uses the Computer Aided Tracking System, commonly referred to as C.A.T.S. This computerized mechanism uses information that determines ball speed, how much and when the ball hooks, entry and launch angle, and relative friction.

In this ball motion study, USBC is testing bowling ball samples in random groups, such as balls with low and high radius of gyration (RG) and differential and coverstock material.

At the risk of possibly alienating USBC officials and testers, I believe that arriving at any conclusion regarding changes in bowling ball construction would be an exercise in futility.

First of all, it seems far too late to legislate against sophisticated cores that tend to add incredible revolutions to a ball unless, of course, the regulatory body abides by the original rules; such as:

✓ No extra holes in the ball other than those used to grip the ball. The extra hole to balance a ball on the outside *only*. There is no way to measure the inside of the ball. Modern cores greatly increase the hooking motion of the ball.

✓ It was absolutely illegal to tamper with the surface of the ball. No sanding whatsoever. Sanding greatly influences ball traction on the lanes.

✓ Balls had to be drilled within three inches of the manufacturer's label. Shifting the label can place cores in harder-hitting positions.

✓ Foreign matters were not permitted in coverstocks, particularly viscous, clinging materials that would aid in extra traction on the lanes.

What happened to all these regulations? When and how did the rules committees relent and permit the game to get out of hand?

Now, with millions of dollars spent by bowlers on equipment and millions of dollars spent on research and develop-

ment for modern bowling balls by manufacturers, it would necessitate a grandfather clause to legalize current bowling balls if new rules were legislated for future bowling balls.

#### **Bowling Pins**

USBC is engaged in a new round of research intended to test the scoring impact of bowling pins with various specifications; that is, samples of different weights and centers of gravity and certain characteristics of bowling pins such as base diameter, base radius, and base attachment.

Results from recent testing support the conclusion that altering the specifications of bowling pins may have too great an impact on many bowlers.

"So far, the data indicate that lowering the center of gravity of bowling pins would have a disproportionate impact on the averages of youth, senior, and many women bowlers," said USBC Technical Director Neil Stremmel. "Minor adjustments to bowling pin specifications, in conjunction with specification changes to bowling balls and/or lane dressing patterns, may have the appropriate effect. Continued testing will give us more functional data."

Here are my thoughts on bowling pins: Inasmuch as it appears that USBC faces an uphill battle legislating bowling balls, why, after all these years, hasn't the governing body addressed the subject of pins, once the immovable object that stemmed the tide of the irresistible force?

Over 45 years ago, Bill Taylor, one of the most knowledgeable critics in the game, described pins as "pinettes" due to their fragile structure. Taylor cautioned and predicted the present onslaught of scoring records, yet pins have been given a free pass on legislating the skyrocketing scores for the past 20-25 years.

Shamefully, a number of pin manufacturers ran full-page ads, boasting and depicting the record-setting scores of their easy-toppling pins. And yes, they even ran these ads in ABC/WIBC magazines!

I am mystified by ABC's/WIBC's and now USBC's failure to address the legislation of pins.

For those who are unaware, bowling pins are constructed with voids to control the weight of the pin. Unfortunately, the governing bodies have failed to lower

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the voids that would control the center of gravity and place heavier weight in the lower section of the pin. This would definitely prevent the scattering effect and easy toppling of the pins, much like attempting to knock down wooden milk bottles at carnival stands.

Regulating pins would be a simple process. It would not affect manufacturers, nor would it necessitate a grandfather clause for pins currently in use.

Sadly, USBC hasn't purposely overlooked the pin situation in bowling. In an aforementioned paragraph, Neil Stremmel expressed concern over the effects pins with a lower center of gravity would have on youth, senior, and some women bowlers.

Isn't this a shocking revelation? Has our governing body sacrificed the game's integrity to placate youngsters, seniors, and women at the expense of proficient bowlers who have spent time and money to hone their skills? Where, in any sport, are rules relaxed to accommodate less talented athletes?

Naturally, in many sports, a separate set of regulations and perimeters are established to distinguish men from women, seniors, and youths. Shouldn't bowling do the same?

If Roger Dalkin, the head honcho of USBC, approves the three levels of bowling—Sport, standard, and bumper bowling—why not segregate the three multiple levels and use the pins that fit these categories? This would require only two type sets of pins; one for Sport and classic league competition, the other for recreational players. Seems pretty simple to me.

But, alas, I have always suggested this plan and the answer is always the same: *Proprietors do not want to stock and alternate two sets of pins.*

Proprietors own the playing field. To quote an old professional poker player, "Amarillo Slim," on the "Tonight" show about 20 years ago, "We play by the Golden Rule: Them that put up the money, make the rules."

During the past 15 or 20 years, when the governing bodies were rejecting high scores due to illegal lane conditions, proprietors threatened to withdraw their ABC sanctions and set up their own rules. Bowling proprietors have exerted enough clout and influence to reduce bowling from a legitimate sport to a mere recreation. Easy scoring conditions have permitted mediocre bowlers (in numerous areas) to record far better averages than PBA stars and top-rated amateurs.

Is it any wonder bowling is held in such low esteem by sports editors and leading sports authorities around the country?

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