



**BOWL
MAGAZINE**

INTERVIEW:

LARRY WALLACE

It was an announcement in 1962 that the local bowling center in Lexington, Neb., would offer free bowling lessons the next Saturday that first got ninth-grader Larry Wallace onto the lanes. At the start, he was shown the four-step approach with no pins standing, and then 20 minutes later, the 5-pin began appearing, and he converted it three consecutive times. From that moment on, he was hooked.

Just three years later, after winning the state scratch tournament, he placed second at the national finals of the All America Youth Bowling Championships at Bowl America Shirley—an accomplishment that convinced him he could compete with the better bowlers.

Joining the Air Force soon after high school, he served 20 years as an administrator before retiring in 1985—the year his Air Force bowling squad won the team and team all events divisions of the Interservice Tournament in the state of Washington and where Wallace also earned a doubles title. He currently is employed with EG&G, Inc., which does contract work for Homeland Security.

Wallace, a member of the association's Hall of Fame since 1993, has rolled approximately 30 perfect games and 14 800 series. He has a PBA regional championship and three PBA Senior Tour regional titles—proudly winning as a relative unknown in his first attempt in each category. The mild-mannered, smooth-stroking left-hander captured the scratch all events in the NCABA Championship Tournament this year for the second time, averaging 237 for nine games.

He recently discussed his career and other topics with editor Bob Cosgrove at Bowl America Chantilly.

How has the equipment revolution of past 15 years affected your game?

I almost quit bowling because of it. When it came out, I was a little bit confused by the ball reactions. I probably had to drill six or seven balls over a period of like two years before I finally figured out a pattern and how to bowl on it with that particular equipment.

I was very frustrated when the urethane balls came out; it was probably the only year in the past 20 years that I didn't average 200. Then I found a couple of drill patterns and learned how to bowl with them.

So it's had an overall positive effect on your game?

Oh, yes. It's definitely had a positive effect once I learned a little bit more about the equipment.

Do you feel you have less of an advantage over lesser-skilled bowlers today because of the equipment?

From a bowling ball standpoint, yes, probably. They have just as much advantage as I do or some of us like Larry O'Neill and Chuck Gannon and guys like them, and we went through it. I remember Chuck and Larry, and we would always talk about the equipment and how it was passing us by.

But I think from a mental standpoint of bowling, that's where I finally made a little bit of headway against other competitors. I may not have the best game out there or the most power or whatever, but from a mental standpoint and being able to stay focused on what I'm doing, I think that's the advantage I'd say I have now.

How do you stay current on equipment and other issues?

I read the *Bowlers Journal* and *BOWL Magazine* and other magazines, and I watch the guys on TV that are out there on tour now and watch some of the stuff they're using and the drill patterns and the releases that they're doing. I just study what the real good bowlers are doing.

Do you rely on anybody for equipment help?

Actually nobody right now because my son Barry closed up his shop. So I guess I'm looking for somebody to keep me up-to-date with the equipment and stuff like that.

Is there a particular brand of equipment you favor?

I'm actually on a program with Brunswick—you buy this package deal and you get so much equipment each year from them. So Brunswick is by far my favorite ball; it's about the only thing I use right now.

How do you prepare for a big match?

I just go down and when I'm bowling against that particular individual, I just have a mind-set to bowl my game and really not worry about what he's doing. And I've actually got to the point where I know a lot of bowlers will be upset if you throw a Brooklyn on them or get a lucky break or something like this here. But I've always looked at that from the standpoint that I get 'em as well as they do, so if it's my day to get the breaks, fine. If not, then that's the way it goes.

What your biggest challenge bowling on the PBA Senior Tour?

The biggest challenge is obviously the lane conditions. It was about three or four years ago that they came up with these set patterns for lane conditions. I remember when I first went back out there that I really, really struggled on it because it was new to me. I felt like I was being left behind again.

But then I brought that information back and went out on the lanes and I worked on it. Basically what I do is I practice with a plastic ball because it's hard to find a house condition or go into a bowling center where you can actually bowl on the type of conditions that we need to bowl on. So I basically bowl with

plastic because plastic will teach me immediately whether I've got the right release or my timing's right or whatever. And it works!

How does the PBA figure in your future?

I guess this year, probably right at this point and time, has been my best year so far. I've gone out and in all the regionals I've bowled in I've cashed or made match play, except for the [PBA Senior Manassas Open], which is the only tournament I haven't done anything in.

But my goal is to participate maybe in the next couple of years in some more national stops. My biggest issue right now is that I'm starting a new job and building up some vacation time and leave time to be able to go out and bowl. So what's really holding me back is having the vacation or leave time to do that.

Was it especially disappointing not to cash in the Manassas event?

Well, yes, it was a disappointment. But after I was done and came home, I thought about it and said that this was another learning experience. It was the wrong choice of equipment to start the tournament, but I made the change to the right equipment and did all right. I started really bad to a good finish, but it just wasn't enough.

Do you have any interest in the Generations Tour for senior bowlers?

I don't know a lot about it. I know a lot of the bowlers in the area are talking about it, and they think it's a great thing. Personally, I'm not so sure it's that good of a deal. It's good that there's going to be money for the bowlers and stuff like this here, but I wish the PBA and this particular group could get together and make it one organization where it benefits the PBA and the Generations Tour.

What is the best aspect of your game?

Now I would have to say it's the mental approach to the game of bowling because physically, actually being a little older, I've had to adapt my game a little bit. But still, as long as I maintain the mental aspect, I feel like I can be competitive.

What would you say is the weakest aspect of your game?

The weakest part of my game would

be my lack of confidence in making ball changes or playing different angles as the lanes transition. To overcome this, I will use every ball that I bring with me to a practice session to see how many different angles I can play.

I work very hard at concentrating on the *next* shot and not the last, especially if it was a bad shot.

Are you currently bowling in a summer league?

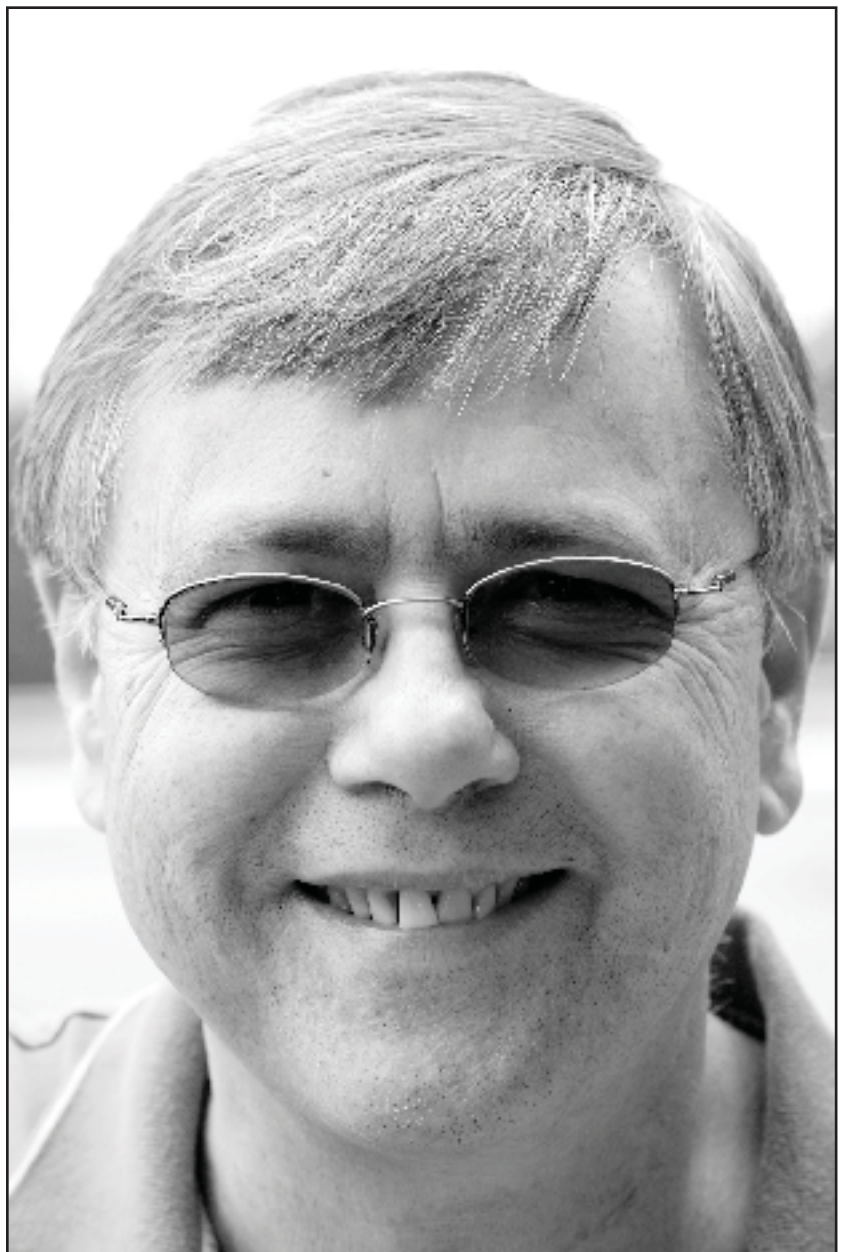
I'm bowling in a Sport [Bowling] league at [Bowl America] Bull Run. To me, it's a very humbling experience. Last year, I averaged 177. I never thought it would be that tough—I *never* thought it would happen! But it was there.

From that point on, I took that as, *Okay, I have a lot to learn about the game*

still. It's been a big plus for me because I'm doing really well now; I've learned a lot through that league last year, and I hope to learn a little bit more this year.

How does the Sport pattern compare to what you find on the PBA Senior Tour?

In one respect, I think the Sport pattern is somewhat tougher—at least in my experience. Having bowled a lot of Tour patterns now, you start to learn the patterns and understand how the ball reaction is going to be. The Sport pattern I think they're just a little bit tougher because I guess the requirement is that whatever they put in the middle of the lane, half that amount has to be on the outside boards. The PBA tweaks that a little bit, I think, so I think the Sport condition is a tougher pattern.



And your Sport Bowling experience helps you on the PBA Senior Tour?

Oh yes, absolutely. I would tell every bowler to bowl it and learn from it. When I started out, I was very discouraged. I went in with the wrong attitude. I thought, *Well, I could average 190 or 195*, and I found out that, *You know, this is not as easy as I thought it was going to be*. And it proved out to be so.

What area bowlers do you most admire?

Lee Brosius gets a lot of print time because I've read some of the things that people talk about, but Lee Brosius—and I've known Lee off and on since we were back in Europe in the 1980s—he's one of those bowlers who is very, very competitive all the time.

I love to watch Christopher Blackmore bowl. He has such an aggressive nature, I think, toward the game of bowling, and he challenges himself all the time. He

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obviously challenges himself because he does go out and bowl regionals, and he does go out and bowl on these tougher patterns, and I think he'll be very successful in the very near future. He's one of the guys that we're going to look at to be doing very well in the next couple of years.

Which senior pros do you admire the most?

Guppy Troup, probably. I say that because when I watch him bowl, the first time I saw him bowl, I said, "How does this guy compete? How does he do it?" But for the last four or five years and bowling a lot with him, he's got a very good ... it's just a sound game. It's a style, and he's been very successful with it.

There's a guy by the name of Phil Barnes that I love to watch bowl. He's a left-hander.

And of course, George Pappas. I get to see these guys all the time, and these are guys I grew up watching on TV, so it's fun bowling with these guys.

As the 2006 NCABA Championship Tournament scratch all events champion, you've earned the right to compete in the next USBC Masters for perhaps a top prize in the vicinity of \$100,000. Have you thought much about that?

I'm not one to really think about tournaments a whole lot before I go to them because I've learned that if I think about it a whole lot, I get too hyped up. And then, when I get to the tournament, I'm a little bit out of focus, you might say. So I try not to think about it too much.

But this time, I need to be a little better prepared because the last time I won the all events, I went to Albuquerque, and although I didn't do terrible, I know I could have done a lot better. I was not totally prepared for what I was bowling on. It was a very, very tough pattern, and I had that in the back of my mind that if I run into that condition again, I'll know how to handle it next time.

What's been your most outstanding performance on the lanes?

I would have to say it was a year event because I was bowling with a team down in Fredricksburg—Jim Wolfe, my son Barry, Skip Merryman, and Russell Rose—and that was the year we set the state record for series [3,757 on Sept. 26, 2000 with Dana Gore in place of Merryman]. It was just a great team to bowl with, so as far as accomplishments go, bowling with a team like that was phenomenal. It was great.

That would be a local thing, but winning a PBA event obviously is a great experience.

What do you still hope to accomplish in bowling?

[My girlfriend] Kathy's son, Christopher, enjoys the game of bowling, and I think if I had a goal in mind [it would be] to teach him the game. I've taught my kids, Barry and Ricky and Jennifer to some degree, to see them take a little step further.

Rick and Barry, they really haven't

taken it that extra step, I think, to go out and bowl. I don't know if it's because they're afraid to or it's financial or whatever.

But I'd like to see me working with the youth program more and developing some of these younger kids so they can go out and make a big showing for the area here.

We have bowlers like Christopher Blackmore—"Buddy"—and Keni Lowe and guys like this here. I see their names all the time, and that's great to see because years ago we didn't see a lot of our local bowlers going out and competing, and now I see a lot of them. I think that's great, and I'd like to see it get stronger.

Outside of your family, have you taught much bowling?

When I worked at [Bowl America] Woodbridge, I did a lot of instruction, and I was able to help a lot of bowlers, but nobody who ever had the desire to go out and do anything on a PBA level.

What was the one flaw you constantly dealt with?

Mental. A style—everybody has their own style—so you work with the style, but I've learned that preparing somebody to go out and bowl mentally is probably, well, as they've said, I think it's 95 percent of the game of bowling. Five percent is just throwing the bowling ball.

Any final thoughts?

I hope that the PBA continues to grow the way it's growing. I think that what they've done in the last three or four years with the new formats and stuff like this here and we've got 64 exempt players, and I think that's great for bowling. It falls in line with what the PGA has done and even baseball, where you have a minor league system with regionals. So I think the PBA is on the right track.

For all the youth and regular league bowlers out there, just never stop learning. At 58, every time I turn around, there's something new that I'm finding.

Last year, I watched Wes Malott—he's a good example. I watched him on TV, and I was really studying the way he was releasing the ball—*How was he doing it?*

I worked on some of that a little bit, and it actually helped my game. So I'm always finding something. •