

A Top 10-ranked area bowler in three different decades, Mike Hahn was introduced to the sport at age 14 by his brother in Puerto Rico, where his father was stationed in the military for three years—and also where the teenager set pins by hand. Hahn soon rolled a perfect game in a practice match against a military post, and within three years carried a 196 average to become one of the top bowlers on the island. In 1965, while stationed in the Army, he was the top-ranked bowler in Fort Benning/Columbus, Ga., with a 207 average. After serving in Vietnam for two years, he was assigned to Fort Belvoir in 1968 and soon was recognized by his peers as a top tournament performer and an intense competitor.

Hahn, 47, a PBA member, has numerous scratch tournament titles, including many in local events: the Metropolitan Washington Bowling Proprietors' Association Invitational, Nation's Capital Area Singles (with a record 238.4 average for five games), Mid-Atlantic All-Star, Fair Lanes Mixed Doubles Championship, Tournament of the Month (eight times) at General Bowling Corp. centers, and the Virginia All-Star Tournament (five times). In 1970, he was a member of the Classic Division team champs in the Washington City Tenpin Bowling Association Championship Tournament.

Hahn secured the fifth spot in the 1983-84 NCABA rankings, even though elbow problems curtailed much of his bowling activity in the 1980s. Returning to action in 1991, he cashed in three consecutive PBA regionals despite suffering the first of several knee injuries which have kept him off the lanes in recent years.

In 1992, wanting to do something for the game—as well as revive area scratch bowling—Hahn discussed with several top bowlers the possibility of forming a scratch bowlers club which eventually would be called the Nation's Capital Area Masters. Late last year, Masters members voted to remove several restrictions and add "Baltimore Area" to the club's title.

As expected, Hahn, who serves as night manager of the Sheraton Premiere at Tysons Corner, didn't pull any punches when he recently discussed his tournament club, scratch bowlers of yesterday and today, and other topics with BOWL Magazine Editor Bob Cosgrove.

Every new organization has growing pains. What have been some of the obstacles your club has faced?

The largest obstacle has been trying to get enough bowlers together to make it a quality

tournament with enough prize money. That's why I put so much money back into it last year.

At this year's February event in Fredericksburg, I added over \$500 into the tournament. There, I got 20 new members at \$25 each—all of that went into the tournament.

I just want this thing to grow. It irks me to see people go out of the area to bowl in tournaments that are paying similar to this or less. Maybe it's because people aren't sure of the quality of this tournament or the sincerity of it.

It's the bowlers themselves, I guess. That's the worst part of it because three or four days before the tournament, my phone starts ringing off the hook. They know the rules—your entry must be postmarked the Monday prior to the tournament. Yet I still hear: 'I didn't have a chance to mail it.' or 'I didn't have the money, but I'm definitely going to be there. Would you please put me down?'

I don't know if the women in this area have the quality to win a Masters tournament.

Every time I've offered to bend a little, however, they've taken advantage of it and don't show up, just like at Fredericksburg. We had 13 no-shows, so instead of a field of 130, we had 117. Some of them paid in advance, too. No-shows who don't call will be fined \$5. It should be more. The next time ... there won't be a next time: If they don't send their money, they won't get a spot!

I hate to be that way, but the bowlers have created this situation. It's not fair to me or the center. I have to ask management for more lanes if I get many calls prior to the tournament. We're both counting on the bowlers to show.

So the bowlers have been the biggest headache in this. Perhaps things have been too lax or haphazard in the past. Perhaps they don't want to abide by strict rules. However, for this [club] to go, it's going to take strict rules. I'm just going to get hard-core.

Have you been disappointed with the women's participation in the Masters?

No, I can't say that I have; it's tough for them. However, if they have the talent—with the equipment that's out there today—there's no reason for them not to be able to compete. If they feel they can't compete on this level, it's because they don't have the talent.

I have nothing against the women. I'd love

to see a woman win this tournament, but she'd have to bowl good. And there again, I don't know if the women in this area have the quality to win one of these tournaments. There are certainly a few women with the talent to cash because they've proven it.

There are too many things going on with the women—too many conflicting tournaments. They understand the Masters is here for them if they want to bowl, but they're looking at it as a secondary thing. I will say this: Any female who can compete with these guys in the Masters definitely can be a national champion.

I don't resent the women for not bowling; I sympathize with them. It takes a lot to win a Masters tournament. These are the best bowlers going, and I think the women have to look at it more as a learning stepping stone for them.

If this tournament club would have not gotten off the ground, my next move would have been to do it for the women. In fact, next year I'd like to start a Ladies Masters, as well as one for the juniors and seniors.

These other people who are trying to run scratch tournaments on a regular basis should be after the women. But because I've proven there's a market for scratch bowlers, there are three or four others out there now trying to run scratch tournaments to pick up some money. All they're concerned with is money—I don't care what they say.

How have your dealings been with center management?

Most of the center managers are not benefiting from the Masters like they should because they apparently don't understand. It's not just a tournament that I'm running in their centers; it's a tournament of the best bowlers in the Washington/Baltimore/Richmond areas. It's the cream of the crop coming to their centers. It's a perfect publicity tool for them.

They should be promoting this, not necessarily to get more bowlers into it, but to have those who care about bowling come and watch—especially the junior bowlers. Spectators can learn a lot from these guys.

If it was a PBA regional tournament, the host center wouldn't get any money for lineage. The centers hosting my tournament are making money for us to put on a show for them. The bowling center people need to be more enlightened about what's going on with it and do more for it—not because it's mine but because it's for the betterment of bowling and the best bowlers in the area.

I don't think the marketing value of bowling has even been touched in this area. You have 35,000-plus men sanctioned bowlers and another 25,000 or so women—what a group of people to sit and try to do something with! That's where we can get some sponsors because there are so many people involved.

What's your current feeling about the tournament?

There's a lot of enthusiasm, and I think people are a little more proud to be a part of this tournament. However, many people are still not making it their primary tournament. If there are other tournaments outside the area, they go to those and then, if they don't make the finals, they'll come back and try to bowl in the Masters. That's not the way to make this thing go.

Even so, the membership's growing—I'm up to 285.

I'm still amazed that people will pay three times the amount to bowl in something that pays one-and-one-half times the amount that this one does. I guess it's just gonna take a little more time to become more established.

What do you envision for your tournament club in a year or so?

Next year, I'm going to try to go a tournament every other week. If it gets big enough, maybe a tournament every week. Eventually, the Masters is going to be the dominant event in the Baltimore/Washington area.

I'd like to [run scratch tournaments] for a living. If we had a weekly tournament with sponsors, I might not get wealthy on it, but I could get by.

How does today's scratch bowler compare with those you bowled with in the 1970s?

In the 1960s and 70s, we scratch bowlers took pride in ourselves because we were the best. We looked good. We were proud of our appearance and proud of the game.

Today, the media is down on bowling because of the way the bowlers look. Why should the media come by here and cover somebody who's acting like an idiot, wearing a hat, a tee shirt, jeans with holes in them—that's garbage!

The scratch bowlers of today don't take the pride in themselves that they did in the past; they're not even close to it. I will admit, however, that I have seen some overall improvement during the last several tournaments, so maybe they're getting back to it slowly.

If you want to be a professional bowler, *look like a professional*. If you want to look like a clown, bowl somewhere else. Everybody's having scratch tournaments now; let them go bowl there and look like a clown.

Do you see your club as part of a bowler's learning process?

The quality of my tournament is good for spectators, it's good for junior bowlers, it's good for the upcoming bowler. They can come out and watch and learn. When they can get proficient enough, they can join the club and get their feet wet.

It's a stepping stone to the PBA national



tour and its regional program. We have match-game competition and a lot of PBA members, and although I don't put it on the same level as the PBA tournaments—we have a one-day format with not nearly as many games—the quality of the bowlers is great.

It's a stepping stone; the next step from this is the pro tour. Anyone even contemplating going on the pro tour should take a shot at this. If you can't make at least the match games here, I don't think you should be out there trying to beat your head against the best bowlers in the world.

Describe the caliber and characteristics of

the Masters' top players.

There's probably 50 guys who could win this tournament on any day. That's the caliber of player that we have.

The thing that I've noticed about all of them is that I really don't see that aggressiveness on the lanes. I don't mean jumping or slamming or stomping or screaming or all that stuff.

When I was bowling competitively, I had *fire in my eyes* in the tenth frame or the last game or whenever I needed to bowl good to win. I just don't see that. Maybe it's there and they're holding it inside a little better. I haven't really seen anyone who has that explosiveness where he can take the lead and run away with it. I'm sure there are some guys like that out here, but I haven't noticed it.

When I was in the service in Puerto Rico, we used to travel and look for people to bowl match games. That's the kind of aggressiveness that you really need—to walk into a bowling center and say, 'Who's your best bowler? I want to bowl for some money.'

That takes a lot of guts for someone to do that. I don't recall being beaten in a situation like that.

Right now, we have no dominant players. We have some people who cash nearly all the time, like Brian Poole. He just quietly walks in, bowls, and picks up his check. He's got the potential to be a real winner. But there again, I don't see that aggressiveness. Same thing with Tom Middleton.

Brian DeMatte strokes the ball as good as anybody out there. After three games in Fredericksburg, he was *185 pins over*, and I don't know if he got too sure of himself or a little relaxed, comfortable, or

whatever, but he should have been slamming the door and running away with the field. Instead, he started backing up and eventually finished eighth. There again, I don't know where the aggressiveness is.

In that aspect, I don't think there's anybody like myself. When I was winning, I *never* got comfortable. When I got done bowling, I was so tensed inside that I ached when I sat down and my adrenaline stopped. It's hard to explain.

I don't see anyone with that type of aggressiveness out there. It may be there, but I haven't seen it. But there *is* a lot of talent.

What comes to your mind when you hear the name “Jim Robinette”?

Jim Robinette.... He's the godfather of my son, for one. I've known him for a long time and respect him, as a person and a bowler. He's a class bowler. What also comes to mind is 1969-1970 when he beat me out of being No. 1 in the Washington area after I had won every tournament going. I didn't like that, and I thought it was wrong.

I was ranked No. 2, most of the time to him. But the one year I was really dominant, he still was No. 1 because he was a better league bowler than me.

When I see Jim Robinette, I see a challenge. When I hear his name, I hear a challenge. There's a guy who's never looked bad when he walked out to bowl. He looks like a bowler—what I perceive a bowler to be. He's always clean-shaven, dressed well in nice, casual clothes, and he conducts himself well. I don't recall him having moments in the past, such as I did, when he lost his cool and blew up—there again, that was part of my game.

Did you ever resent that, perhaps due to the rankings, the late-1960s and early-1970s period was thought of by many as the “Robinette Era”? Did you resent playing second fiddle to him?

I never resented *him*. I resented the manner in which the rankings were done—to this day. I think stopping the NCABA rankings was the best thing that ever happened.

Mark Glover. He's a great bowler, winning some regionals and stuff like that, but he's never been dominant in the Washington area. He was No. 1 in the area several years in a row only because he was a good league bowler in two houses. That to me does not make a person No. 1.

The rankings should be: *Are you the best when you walk on the lanes in any situation in any tournament?*

Everything should be based on tournaments and a point system. I've set up a point system for this tournament, and I'd be glad to carry it over for other tournaments of quality in this area. The NCABA and Masters tournaments should be involved in the rankings, based on a point system and not on average.

You can't judge somebody by their average. Some people are concerned about who has the best average in my club. That's immaterial because some bowlers will skip tournaments at centers that might hurt their average. If you're going to make average a factor, then it should be *every* tournament and if you miss one tournament, then you're out. And that's not right either—not everyone can bowl every tournament.

It's like the women's rankings. If for some reason you can't bowl in the women's City Tournament, you're out of the rankings—even if you are the best bowler. That's totally wrong.

I don't resent Robinette being No. 1 because he was: He bowled in a lot of leagues in that era, and he always did well in tournaments. But like I said, in the 1969-70 season, I know I won five times more tournaments than anybody that year. To this day, I don't know if anyone has won more tournaments than me. I have no qualms about Robinette being ranked the best of that era.

I know how good I was. I know the quality of person I was as far as when I stepped out on the lanes. So as long as I'm satisfied with myself, that's what matters to me.

What about another of your top competitors, Larry O'Neill?

I think Larry O'Neill is a good bowler. I don't think he's as great as everybody thinks he is; he's overrated in that regard. He had his day, I had my day.

I don't think there are any Masters players like myself. When I was winning, I never got comfortable. When I got done bowling, I was so tensed inside that I ached when I sat down and my adrenaline stopped.

Today, he bowls well in tournaments. He qualified for the match games in Frederick-sburg, but he didn't do anything after that. I've seen him do well in other tournaments, but I think he's lost that aggressiveness, too. I'm sure down in his heart he has the desire, but when he gets out there to maintain that concentration and drive in every shot, I don't think it's there. But he still gets a lot of mention because he still bowls well.

As for being in the Top 10 all-time bowlers in the Washington area, he rates in there. Over the last 30 years, I'd put him in the Top 10, but I don't know where. I'd probably put him in the Top 5.

Like I said, I don't think he has the drive that he used to have. Most of us don't.

What are your feelings about the equipment revolution and the increased level of scoring?

I think that with the equipment and the scoring conditions today, they're taking the skill level away from bowling. When I won my tournaments, I was bowling with hard-shelled rubber balls on oil, and my game was hit the pocket, hit the pocket. If I missed the pocket, I wouldn't feel too bad if I did it once or twice a game, but more than that and I was upset—I

bowled bad as far as I was concerned.

Today, with this reactive-resin equipment, there are four- and five-board sprays, and these guys are fanning the ball all over the place. The ball is giving them all kinds of strikes in some cases; in other cases, it's leaving all kinds of stuff.

Some suggest that should you increase pin weight. You can't do that because it would kill the game for those who use 12- or 14-pound balls. I think the manufacturers were stupid for allowing bowling balls that would just crush the pins.

Some say higher scores are better for bowling. To a degree, I agree. But it's taken the skill level away. With bowling the way it is today, it may never reach the Olympics because of the luck factor involved.

On a golf course or a tennis court or in any other sport, you can't change the conditions to eliminate left-handers or right-handers. But you can do that in bowling.

At my local center this season alone, there have been numerous 300s and 299s. Heck, when I shot my 300, I think mine was only the second one out there. Today, if you're a good bowler and don't throw a 300 in your league, you're nothing, nobody—you've had a bad year.

I bowled 300 games when I was 15 and then 30 years later and they meant something to me—and that last one was only three years ago. Now, with reactive-resin equipment, it's a different story.

The incident at the 1982 ABC Tournament in Baltimore where you had your record low series: What exactly happened and why?

I bowled it as a protest. In previous ABCs, I've finished 35th in singles with a 700 series, finished 17th in all events, etc. I'd go out there and have a decent shot, and I could move into 15 if the lanes were hooking—which I did when I shot 700—and play the oil line. In Baltimore, there was no oil line, except outside of 5, where it was soaked.

When I played inside—even to where I would normally shoot my 10-pin, it hooked through the nose. If I moved outside, the ball banked into the ditch and came back soaked with oil.

That happened when they were really reprimanding folks for blocked lane conditions. ABC gave us a reverse block, which is just as bad, if not worse, because unless you throw a rocket shot or a certain type of ball that goes fairly straight, you've taken away my game and given everyone else an opportunity to beat my brains in.

There's where you can control the game! There was no fairness for everybody.

I told ABC officials that if the lanes were similar tomorrow for doubles and singles, I don't know what I'm going to do, but that I'd do something to protest.

The next day I shot 540 or 550 in doubles

on the same condition, a total reverse block—bone dry in the middle and soaked outside. So I said, 'I'll shoot a record low score, and maybe that'll get somebody's attention!'

I got up, didn't bother anybody, and then stroked the ball straight down 20 and it hooked into the ditch. I tried to go straight down the lane! And I didn't even accomplish what I wanted to do: roll a triplicate of 1. I shot 1 in the first game, and then hit the 7-pin so thin that it knocked down the 8- and 5-pins and I scored a 3. I then knocked off two 7-pins to finish with a 2 and a 6 series.

It was a protest; it wasn't anything else. I wanted to give them the type of scores that were conducive to that condition.

When a tournament official came by and asked me about my bowling, I told him that the reverse-block condition was not conducive to me and that why should I try to go out and hurt myself? I told him to suspend me if he felt I was acting wrong or throwing the ball wrong, but all I was doing was stroking the ball down the middle. If there was oil in the middle, the ball wouldn't hook like that. I threw one outside for him, and the ball banked into the ditch.

I remember to this day telling him that he should be glad that I'm not one of the guys who flew all the way from California to bowl on this kind of condition because I probably would have walked down the lane, ripped a masking unit off, and hit him with it.

After I said that, the guy didn't bother me anymore!

Many have said that you're the best area bowler not in the NCABA Hall of Fame. Are you bitter about that?

Yeah, to a degree. I'm not bitter about it in the aspect of bowling; I'm bitter because of the popularity thing. I am by no means running these Masters tournaments to try to improve my popularity; I'm just as hard out here as I was when I bowled. I'm not trying to win a popularity contest, and I think that's what it takes to be in the Hall of Fame.

As far as I'm concerned, I should have been in the Hall of Fame 10 years ago. If I'm gonna be in, I don't know what they're waiting on. I'm not going to get any better than I was 10 or 20 years ago because that's when I did most of my bowling. I can't even bowl right now. I hold a PBA card which costs me \$250 a year, and I can't even throw a bowling ball!

I'm resentful because I think it should be based more on what you've accomplished. I've had times on the approaches where it was a bad scene when I lofted the ball and stuff like that. But there again, it was not because I was trying to tear up anything or be destructive; it was a protest, and that's what you had to do to get people's attention.

There again, I've never asked anyone to block lanes for me; I've always had the talent to sit there and find a shot. All I asked for was

a decent and fair condition.

Back when I was raising hell and giving bowling center people problems, it's because they didn't care. They'd say, 'If you don't like the conditions, don't bowl here!' Now, from that attitude, they've gone to the complete opposite: 'Let's block 'em up!'

I complained so much in the late 1960s and the 1970s because of my concern for bowling—not because I was trying to be a jerk or anything like that.

I think stopping the NCABA rankings was the best thing that ever happened.

A lot of people hold that against me because I was so outspoken. My attitude hasn't changed at all. If I walk into a garbage center and the conditions are bad and the place is a pit, I raise hell about it. That's the way I'm always going to be.

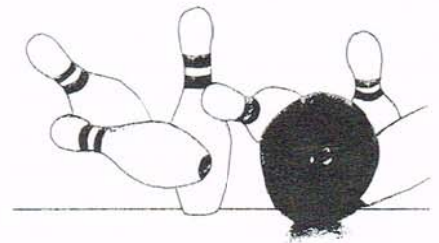
I'm concerned about this game. Anytime I walk into a bowling center and it doesn't look the way it should, I don't like it because it gives

bowling a bad name. I'm *never* going to change in that aspect.

If they can't put me in the Hall of Fame on my accomplishments, which as far as tournament wins, I think, are as good as anybody's—and better than a lot of guys who are in the Hall of Fame—I don't want to be in.

What would it mean to you if elected to the Hall of Fame?

It would be something that I would appreciate and treasure—if it happened because of my accomplishments and not because Mike Hahn has *proven* himself because he's doing something for bowling by running a tournament club. If anyone is changing their mind about me because of this, I still don't want to be in. I want to be in because of my accomplishments. That would mean something to me. ●



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