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## League bowling: Is there a problem?

By Pat Blackmore

Is there a problem with league bowling? You bet there is. League participation is declining in Northern Virginia, if not everywhere. I miss the days when leagues filled the area houses on both shifts. I am writing because I feel very strongly that unless something is done soon, this trend will continue.

In recent years, I have talked with many people, both in and out of leagues, to learn the reasons for this decline. I would like to comment on the three I heard most often and even offer a suggestion or two.

● **Ending time.** Since the late leagues clearly are losing more people than the early leagues, this could be part of the problem. Limiting teams in the late shift to four people would be a way to find out whether this really is an area of concern.

The loss in revenue to the house by going to this format would be offset by more teams joining late leagues.

● **Economy.** I will address the two main cost areas:

*League fees* — In most leagues, teams can still recover part of their investment, if not all of it. (There are not many other recreational/sports activities where this is possible.) Furthermore, one of the area leagues managed to fill the house this year with 40 teams, despite raising individual fees from \$14 to \$16 per night.

*Equipment* — It's no secret that reactive-resin balls are generally improving scores, but at what cost? With new and improved versions of reactive-resin balls coming out almost monthly and approaching \$200, keeping pace with technology can be very costly.

League bowlers who choose not to invest in reactive-resin, or who invest and find out it doesn't work for them, are probably not going to continue to waste their time and money in leagues where they or their teams cannot remain com-

petitive against reactive-resin averages.

Is it possible that these constant technological advances in equipment are having a negative impact on league participation, as well as the integrity of bowling? Maybe it's time for the American Bowling Congress to reexamine existing ball specifications before it's too late.

● **Lane conditions.** The goal should be to please the *majority* of league participants, not just the people or leagues with the most clout. One way to do this would be for each house to survey its league members to see what they like and don't like about the current conditions—I have never seen this done.

Obviously, it's not a cure-all, but it sure would be a start in the right direction. Since the advent of short oil, most of the negative comments I've heard have centered on the general areas of lane consistency and oiling patterns. Maybe it's also time for the American Bowling Congress to reexamine existing lane-dressing specifications.