

Part II

Has the routine of the tour gotten old for you?

When you're 19 or 20, you're free to roam and do as you will, which, unfortunately, is what I did for a while. If you have to grow up, you're not going to be successful, and if you are, you're not going to be around long because you're going to burn out. You've got to stay on top of the game: It's changing so fast—the technology and the caliber of bowlers out there.

I'm burning out, but I find if I bowl three weeks and then take a week off, no matter what, that helps me get through it. But if you're not bowling well, you can bowl three weeks and take a week off and still be fried when you go back out for the fourth one.

When it's not going well, you really have to try to turn it around. Try to just forget that past experience and go on to the next week because a lot of times you're beating yourself up for not bowling well. You come back and you're still in a bad frame of mind and you get off to a slow start. The next thing you know, there are five lefties on the show. You may sneak into the finals and you may get a check, but those few frames earlier cost you a lot of money.

Is it frustrating when you're at home and you see Mike Aulby, Parker Bohn III, and Jason Couch on TV?

It used to be. Now I understand because I bowled with Aulby at times when he was 500 or 600 over and I was even.

I know I'm going to hear flack about this, but when the left was playing better, the lefties would just dominate the field because the right side of the lane was so poor and the left was that much better. But now the variables change so fast out there, and the left-handers—there's more of 'em and I believe they're better than they were because of sheer numbers—are able to do more things on the lane.

Maybe it used to be where if you threw it hard and you'd play up the gutter, you'd have a good reaction. Now there are guys who can slow-loop it or go up the gutter.

Of course, it makes you wonder if you go out and you bowl the first two or three weeks and there isn't a lefty in existence, and then when you're home you look at the paper and say, "Ah, sheesh—not a good week to take off!" At least there was a possibility that I would have had a chance.

That's the down side of taking a week off—you have to accept it and say that it was

nobody's fault except my own. I should be bowling, and I chose not to because no matter how well the lefties may be doing, if you're not into it and you're not physically and mentally prepared, you're not going to do well anyway.

Do you still love to bowl?

That's an excellent question: *Do I love to bowl?* I get joy when there's nobody in this bowling center except me and my friends and I can bowl—bowl and discuss how the lane breaks down and how bowling on different surfaces has this or that effect. Even the bowling balls—what surfaces of balls and the pin placements. There are so many things involved in bowling well now that you can make it as simple or as complicated as you want.

I love bowling. People limit themselves to what they can and can't do with a bowling ball. Most people have the ability and talent to do a lot of things that they just don't think they can do because they don't understand the game as much as they do the equipment and vice versa.

I love the actual watching of people bowl in slow-mo and figuring out what this does and why they walk left or why is [David] Ozio bowling poorly now and bowled great then and/or vice versa. I like that part.

Have local bowling centers asked you to serve as an instructor?

That's probably a double-edged sword. I believe when I was at Sports Plus, I had discussed with [General Bowl's] John Benko and Annandale about doing some of that stuff.

People are not calling me, to answer your question. It's my responsibility possibly to pursue those things on my own. A lot of times, I have all good intentions—and I'm sure that [former sponsor] Bruce Merriman is laughing at this right now if he's reading it—but a lot of times when I go out and don't do well and I'm not bowling well, it's hard for me to come into a bowling center with the right mental attitude to deal with people about bowling.

I have no problem whatsoever discussing bowling, agreeing or disagreeing with me about bowling, but it's hard for me to deal with people sometimes when I feel like there are a lot of people who will criticize me for my lack of performance on tour and yet want advice from me and/or help—I have trouble letting those things go. But there are a few people I can't let affect my overall thought and what I should be giving back.

I would enjoy doing something like that, and that is one of the things I will do in the future.

What do you see is the most common mistake among league bowlers?

Not understanding the lane changing. In today's environment, the lane changes so fast, and you have to change with it or else you will not do well. A lot of bowlers blame themselves too much and do not move with the lane.

Do people limit themselves in part because of the overall lack of instruction in the game?

Because of the boom of equipment and the so-called easier or softer lane conditions, I think it's easier for them to first pursue drilling a bowling ball or talking to a pro shop expert. That's a fine avenue, but I think it comes to a point where it will be a dead-end street eventually.

And the pro shop people tell you the same thing. It gets to a point where you want to help the customer as much as you can, but there's only so much the bowling balls can do. If they can't read the lane, they can't tell you what they need, so you can be doing the exact *wrong* things for them, and that's the unfortunate side of that.

Are you frustrated by all the amateurs in leagues who carry higher averages than the touring pros?

It doesn't bother me because I understand the difference. However, it's unfortunate for those who don't choose to or don't want to understand the difference. It is a hard situation to explain that the among PBA members, the highest average ever is 222, and amateurs in leagues are in the mid-230s.

Unfortunately, it's like you're criticizing their performance when they're averaging in the mid-230s, but that's not the point. There's a different environment on tour to maintain, and it's a no-win situation. What are you going to tell the bowling centers—not to put out a high-scoring environment? They need bowlers in their bowling centers. You can't rag on them for doing that.

Is there frustration when you come home to work on your game and rarely find conditions that even vaguely resemble what's on tour?

Yes, it's very difficult. But locally, I'm able to tell the lanesmen what I want, and they do all they can to try to set something up like the tour is doing. But I've realized that it's so difficult to set up because I would need about 10 or 15 left-handers to come bowl on my pair with me because that is the biggest part of bowling on the tour.

It's not that you have to be a genius to bowl out there, which we all know. It's not the fact that the conditions aren't sometimes easy and/or difficult. Sometimes you have to play the one-two [boards], sometimes you have to cross the ball between the fifth and sixth ar-

rows on the right, and even the fourth and fifth on the left—it occurs this way.

But what you cannot understand or they can't appreciate is that they oil those lanes *once*. Sometimes there's a lot to start, sometimes there's little. But when you get about 50 lines on each lane, that oil is *gone* off the front part of the lane.

And when the right-handers start moving left, and they're already into the left side of the lane, and the left-handers are trying to move right, there's a problem. That's when the carrydown and the breakdown characteristics of the lane will determine whether it will be a left-handed-dominated tournament or the right-handers are going to fare well and keep up.

It becomes difficult, but for the people at home, it is much easier.

What advice do you have for a top local bowler who wants to bowl on the tour?

Hopefully, he has a background to fall back on. As far as bowling advice, hook up with a particular bowling center and go around and try to find a way to set up different types of patterns to get at least an understanding that you're not going to be able to stand between 15 and 25 everywhere you go.

There are going to be weeks—and people will not believe me—and I'll tell them that I am sliding in the right gutter cap, lofting the ball over the gutter because that's where the shot is. It is not necessarily hard to play there—that's where the shot is. It may take a 220 average from there.

This past year in Toledo, [Jason] Couch made the show doing that. All the left-handers were in that deep. And the right-handers for the most part *every* week are in that deep because of the breakdown of the lane. And there are other weeks where you have to hang it off the gutter.

So there are just different variables that you have to become accustomed to and say, *Hey, this isn't that awkward, it's just a different angle.*

It used to be that everybody said that you had to go out and learn to bowl on the tour, and I still believe that's true. However, you can be much, much more trained and prepared to bowl out there if you do the right things at home, meaning that if you get right environment to practice under, if you have a good set of eyes, and if you have knowledge and equipment and surfaces and lane conditions, you'll be a step ahead—big steps ahead. So therefore, it's not going to cost you as much for a learning experience.

Are there any ladies who could have any success on the men's tour?

That discussion comes up over a lot of

meals at night. The general impression is that Tish Johnson obviously can play. The right-handers will tell you that she can play, too, because she's left-handed and she'd have less players to beat on the national tour.

It seems that there's a certain stamina involved with bowling. I think it depends on the condition that is put down on the lane. If they put a condition down where it had broke down a great deal up front and they were forced to throw the ball very hard or generate a certain amount of speed that they are physically unable to do, I don't think they would fare too well.

I don't know whether they would do well



or not. They'd have a hard time beating the best bowlers in the world. Would they cash and make some finals? Yeah. But as far as to go out there and dominate that tour and win titles, I don't see it. But in the next few years, that would be another option: Let 'em bowl. Why not?

What is your view on the arena finals?

If you're having trouble finding positives, that has to be the biggest one in the last couple of years. That has really become very popular, and the bowlers on tour love it. It really is a unique situation. People are rowdy, the pregame warmup, the parties outside—it's really nice.

Many PBA champions on television thank the "knowledgeable" fans. Is that a crock?

I think it is. It's just something to say. A lot of that is filler—just like the condition we bowl on this week is "35 feet of oil" and "dry back-ends." It's the same basic concept each week.

I adamantly and totally disagree with a lot of things that go on the show. As long as you treat the viewers like they're 12 years old, that's the way they're going to view the game. And I still believe that's the way they view it.

[The announcers] can't call the proper pins,

they mispronounce words. I'm not picking on any particular telecast, but there's one in general where this definitely happens. But then, the other side of that is the business side.

They *love* Nelson Burton Jr., and they *love* Chris Schenkel. They are great for maybe the novice bowler—people who just flip that TV on every week. Unfortunately, we're missing the people who we need—not that we don't need the others. We *need* those younger viewers. We need them to *make* it more interesting.

There are so many variables into a bowling lane and who's bowling well and who isn't and why this person is shooting 270 and he is bowling against this person who's shooting 140. *Why is this happening?* We're told that "He's having a bad day" or "He's not following through." So that's the part that's difficult because from my point of view, I look at it and go, *This is a joke!*

I guess it's always whose eyes you are looking through—ABC-TV's or the players.

On "Pro Bowlers Tour," Nelson Burton Jr. appears to use the phrase "heavier concentration of oil in the center" much more today than in earlier years, when there seemingly was a more "even" condition. Do you find this to be true because of the balls today or because of pressure to have high scores on television?

The situation that occurs now is people want scores. People want to see 300 to 270, and that's what the show, in my opinion, should be—a show. An absolute farce. Wall 'em up, move the corners in, and let 'em go at it.

Unfortunately, the person who has bowled on a certain condition all week and is leading the tournament by a couple of hundred pins, doesn't view that the same way as myself or the average viewer. So it still comes back to, *Whose eyes are we looking through?*

If you're looking for integrity, go bowl down the street, run 'em flat, and bowl pot games or action—whatever you want to do. This is bowling, and this is a show, so therefore, let's do what we need to do. If that what it takes to increase ratings or revenue to come into the tour, that's the way it should be. And that's what they're trying to do; they are trying to make that condition as soft as they can. But a lot of times, the lights and the hour of practice changes them that much. And [due to] the amount of friction and heat bowling balls create, the lane does change rapidly.

That's the other thing that's so great about that arena setting: I don't know why, but it seems like the scores are much, much higher. I think it's because the heat isn't as trapped in the environment. Once it settles down, it

stabilizes like a bowling center would do in a regular situation.

Analyze Bo Burton's role as analyst on ABC-TV's "Pro Bowlers Tour."

As somebody watching the show and not having ever spoken to Nelson Burton, I would not like the show because I don't believe he goes into detail enough. With a lot of things, he's tied down and can't do. He doesn't talk enough about what particular balls the bowlers are using, why or what drilling, the [ball] surface, the surface of the lane, what type of viscosity of oil they are using, where the shot should be all week, what is happening in the environment today.

But in talking to him in a one-on-one situation, he's incredibly knowledgeable, obviously. He's won numerous titles, he's been around bowling his whole life. He is doing what they want him to do, and that's an unfortunate situation because I had never really sat down and spoke with him about these things. All of a sudden, it's like, this guy—he's incredible! He really tremendous!

I've heard in the past that he's really pro-player, meaning that he wants to see the best things for the players. But he is doing a job, and he has to separate those duties from being a player and the player's side.

The first impression was that I didn't like it, I don't like what he's doing. But then on the other side when I look at it, he's doing what he's supposed to do and it's not his fault.

He's got a great deal of knowledge. He's amazing to talk to. I just think it's unfortunate that he can't explain more on the show.

Who on the tour would you not want to travel with?

Quite a few people—it's not to do with them, but rather with me. There's only like four or five people I know I can really trust. I get along with about everyone out there.

There obviously are people who I would not want to hang around with, and one of them would be Bob Vespi—and I've told him that. I like him, we can communicate, and I think he's great for bowling, but we're just completely different types of people. I can tell him this, and I'll show him the interview! That's the way it is. He cracks me up because he's just so intense when he's bowling, and he gets so carried away sometimes that you want to strangle him. But then you realize that it's just him. Just like I had to try to learn to accept the way he is, especially on the lanes.

If I had just watched some people bowl, including myself, I'd say, "What a jerk!" But off the lanes, people tend to relax a bit more and they're actually human beings. It's just that you wouldn't know it if you just watched them bowl.

Is there anything about Vespi off the lanes that bothers you?

No. He's a hard person to understand be-

cause he just gets so intense when you bowl against him. He'll yell and scream and get in your face, and I'm just not the type of person who can take it but for so long, and then I say something back and you have hard feelings against somebody and really nothing's ever meant to be. But no, I don't hate Bob Vespi; it's more of a playful type of thing. Everybody thinks he's such a jerk; I figured I'd add on to the philosophy.

Whom do you hang around with?

Generally, the only right-hander who gets to hang out with us is Ozio. For the most part, it's Eric Forkel and Ozio. Jason Couch and Parker Bohn quite a bit, too.

Who are the most interesting people to talk to?

By far, Larry Lichstein, Johnny Petraglia, and Joe Hutchinson. They have so many stories, they've been out there for such a long time, and they've seen so many people come and go. The stories they tell go back to the early 1960s. It's just amazing. I love to listen to them speak. It's fantastic, entertaining.

Who are the most knowledgeable pros?

Ozio has to be one of those people. He will tell you his opinions a lot. There are others who don't say much who are absolute geniuses in the game. Not to jump on his bandwagon, but Norm Duke is quite amazing.

Who are the most popular pros?

Vespi, Kelly Coffman, and Bob Benoit. A lot of people enjoy watching Benoit, and he is one of those people who is a absolute delight in the pro-am, from what I can see. But if you bowl him in the tournament, you have to always be aware of what could be going on. It's the same general principle going back to Vespi. I don't know if I want them to bowl well or not—they're just fun to watch bowl. It's a John Daly-type of atmosphere.

Who are the biggest loners on tour?

The first one who pops in my head is Dave Arnold. He's always thinking—he appears to be. Practices more than anybody. People don't even notice he practices because if there's an 80-lane center, he will get the end pair, and he will be there five or six hours at a time. He does not talk, he does not speak to anyone, unless it's [brother-in-law] Jess Stayrook. But other than that, he's very quiet, very nice, and doesn't say much. He works really hard, and he deserves the success he's had in the last couple of years.

Who has a game that's most similar to yours?

I used to think it was Parker [Bohn], but now it's probably Parker and Jason Couch. We all three have a tendency to get quite a bit of speed without realizing it a lot of times.

They throw the ball relatively hard, and that's usually who I'll end up watching.

What's been your most memorable match?

Probably my first TV match against Scott Devers in 1990. It makes me wonder how it would be different had I thrown a better shot on the first hit in the tenth and won my first match. I'll always wonder until I've won what it will be like after I win. So that was a huge shot.

Can you understand now how players can take a week off in the middle of the PBA Winter Tour?

It all comes down to personality. Some people out there can bowl 30 weeks straight—people know themselves and their bodies. It sounds ridiculous, and I admit it, but if you're out there and bowl three weeks in a row—and I would like to know what this feels like—if you make three or four finals in a row, and you have been making the show, it is very stressful because you don't have any time.

It's not so much the physical stamina, it's the mental stress that you're put under. It's from getting up at 7 or 7:30 in the morning—not that that's early—practicing, working on some balls, getting ready for the beginning block. You have to do a lot of equipment work now. You practice a half-hour to an hour beforehand because you have to be there for roll call. You bowl your block.

Whether you bowl well or not, now you have to determine what's going to happen for the next block. *How are they going to break down? What type of equipment should I be looking for? What type of surfaces?* Then you have to go eat, so that gives you about an hour, and then you have to be back for roll call again and the same process keeps going over and over.

There are a lot of guys who still don't believe you should take weeks off, but Norm Duke, if I'm not mistaken, isn't going to bowl the first three weeks of the fall. He does that a lot: When he gets to a point, he may win two weeks in a row, and then he just won't bowl. He'll say, "Yeah, I'm on a roll, but I'm tired. If I go out there and I happen to bowl poorly the first block, my mind won't have the energy to focus on what I'm trying to do, so I just won't waste my time." He figures if he goes home and rests for a week, he'll come back and win the next one.

I know that's how I am: I've got to give myself some time because you practice and practice and practice and you overtrain—you just beat yourself up. You need to relax and enjoy it for a little bit.

How are you keeping up with all the equipment changes?

I would say it's almost impossible, but that's not necessarily true. With the infinite number of balls on the market today, it's very difficult.

Especially on tour, a lot of times you don't always get the information that you would if you were in a pro shop. You don't know the weight block, what it looks like, etc.

My personal view is to try to keep it a little simpler. I think in the past, I've confused myself. Sticking with one or two companies that are pretty strong is probably the best advice I have.

Have you noticed a change in people who have been out for a while and haven't won and then win?

I don't necessarily see them looking down on [the non-winners]; I do see a change in their attitude. A lot of it could be seen as negative until you understand that they're that way now because that's the winning attitude for them. I've noticed quite a few people who have had quite a bit of change.

On the other side, maybe people didn't pay attention to them before. But now that they've been successful, they're under the microscope. We're going to look for something.

I do know this: The more successful it seems that you are out there, the less friends you're going to have. If you're clowning around and obviously not a threat to take money out of peoples' pockets, they're going to be your friend. I'm not saying that they're doing that just for that reason, I'm just saying that as you become more successful, people have a tendency to dislike you—or like you—more or less.

What do you like to do when you're not bowling?

I enjoy fishing quite a bit, even though it's really aggravating at times. I enjoy playing volleyball, and I really like to play softball. Unfortunately, I haven't got to play much softball due to the time factor, but I enjoy going to the batting cages and getting outside. As long as I'm not bowling on tour, if I can come in and be by myself, I still love to practice; I do love to bowl.

What's the one thing that most people don't know about you?

That's a good question because I don't think a lot of people know me at all. I think they judge me by my bowling antics—whether I'm having a bad day or mouthing off at the pins or somebody or I walk a certain way. They may not care for me with my attitude, but I think most people who have talked to me as a general rule find that I'm very honest, and I'm going to tell you what I think. That's not to say that I will get on somebody's back and tell him I dislike him. But if somebody comes up and talks to me, I will talk back to them. I'm just not sometimes the type of person who will walk up in general and just make conversation.

Sometimes I enjoy being by myself, and I've been that way a lot of times. Since my

brother and sister were much older than myself, I did spend a lot of time [alone], and I kind of enjoy it sometimes.

Your 32-year-old brother and five of his friends died in a plane crash in 1990. How did this incident affect you?

It changed me because I realized I guess for the first time that you can go at any time—there are absolutely no guarantees. I know that sounds ridiculous and we should all know that, but I guess you don't think about it until the death of the first person I had been really close to. Other than my grandparents whom I saw occasionally, he was the first person I was really associated with who is no longer going to be in my life.

At first, I was very aggravated and really upset—very short-tempered. I started reading positive-type books—you know, how to see the world in a different light. It was not necessarily bad, but my bowling suffered.

I was away a month, and it should have been a lot longer. I shouldn't have been out [on tour]; I was ticked off at the world, and everybody else who got in my path at that point in time. It was unfortunate: I really didn't deal with the situation during that time. I had to learn to deal with it and go on.

What adjectives would you use to describe yourself?

That's a hard question because I guess I don't know myself. I think I'm ... I see myself as ... aggressive, but yet somber. I think that ... I'm very, ah—that's not the adjective. I can't describe myself as how I am because I think I'm so much different from when I'm bowling, and the bowling has been so poor over the past few years. Outside of that, I think I'm aggressive. An attacker. I don't know.

How much are you involved in the pro shop business today?

I'm involved slightly with The Strike Zone and Scott Bailey—the Baileys own the shop there. Scott and I have been very good friends since I was a sophomore in high school. I'm working there on a part-time basis—if they

need somebody to fill in or if he needs to take a day off or vice versa.

Do you ever think about getting into the NCABA Hall of Fame?

Not particularly. I don't think it's crossed anybody else's mind, either! I don't know—it's really not me. I'm really not that interested overall in halls of fame. While it's interesting, it's not why I do this or why I'm searching. It's not a primary goal.

What are your goals?

Are you supposed to discuss your goals? Is that something they tell you to do? Right now, my short-term goal is to go out and try to rekindle my bowling in a way, not physically but with a different mental approach. I'm going to go out and enjoy it, first of all, and be successful. If I'm not, I will keep pursuing and doing the things to make it successful on a short term.

On the longer term, I'm looking forward to the beginning of next year. I'll get off to a good start—that's going to be essential. I'm not going to look at the winning side of this right now. I'm going to look to go out and perform the way I know I can. And when that happens, good things will happen.

That's where it will depend on me to not overlook the cashing and making the finals and looking strictly at the win. It will always be attacking to win that tournament but accepting each individual shot and each individual week for what it's worth and not let one week carry into the next and go on and on and on.

My goals are to basically enjoy bowling like I used to and not try to figure some of the things out and just let those things happen. And for things that are not happening, figure out why they're not happening and change them and make them work.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Due to space limitations, this interview will conclude next issue, when Richard Wolfe talks about the PBA, amateurs and the PBA, the five players he'd like to watch compete on a bowling telecast, and much more!