

What has happened to the *sport* of bowling? Bowling was invented in ancient Egypt as a recreation and has continued to be just that until recently. Gary Parsons's November column, "The Area's Best Bowlers," just adds credence to the question.

Until a few years ago, our sport in this country had an unsavory reputation as something the "pot-bellied, beer-guzzling" men did every week to get away from the wife and kids for a while and to bet a little (or a lot of) money, while "bonding" with their counterparts.

Those "dark bowling alleys" of the past have been replaced mostly by modern, colorful, and brightly lit "family recreation centers," places where whole families can go for a night of recreation and fun. Many include arcade areas, billiards, and kids' playrooms; some even have full-service, sit-down restaurants.

So why is it, then, that the area's "outstanding bowlers" are only those individuals who bowl in scratch tournaments and make the most cash?

Why are those who contribute the most to our sport not recognized? These individuals, dedicated to the sport of bowling itself, are the "truly outstanding bowlers"—*not* the moneymakers out for their own profit.

Granted, many of these individuals do make a profit from their association with the sport: some by being center managers, some by working in the pro shop field, some by being league secretaries, and some who had the insight or the perseverance due to their love of the sport.

Their initial quests for the knowledge and understanding of the sport—and their willingness to share that knowledge—are what set these people apart. Their profit gained at the cash register is far outweighed by the profit gained by our sport having yet another participant who enjoys bowling more because of his new knowledge and who, mindful of his own experience, likely will pass that knowledge on to others so they, too, may enjoy the sport.

What follows is a list of "outstanding bowlers" I have had the privilege and pleasure of meeting during my last eight or nine years in the area. This nonrestrictive list is not meant to be in any particular order of importance because each man in his own right is No. 1 in contributions to the sport.

I am sure there are other such individuals of whom readers know. If so, please let's hear about them, and let their dedication to the sport be recognized.

- Jerry Francomano: Simply the best! His quest for knowledge and understanding of today's technologically-advanced equipment is unparalleled. What sets Jerry apart is that he will share this knowledge with all who ask—including his competitors! Jerry will also let his own game and concentration go by the wayside to try and help someone if asked, even if he is competing against that person.

- Jim Robinette: Jim's local bowling experience undoubtedly has been documented. His willingness to share that experience is a plus to all who come in contact with him.

- Other notable standouts in the pro shop field who have many of the same qualities as Jerry and Jim include Larry O'Neill, Russell Sawyers, Steve Harter, Scott Sekely, and Greg Wilson.

- Though he doesn't carry the high average or the big wallet of a tournament bowler, another of the area's "top bowlers" is Irv Clark, director of operations for Bowl America, Inc. His insights to help promote our sport facilitated the idea of "Rolling Bowling."

- Rolling Bowling (for those of you who haven't seen or heard of it)

is a tractor-trailer rig which houses an approximately 25-foot lane equipped with a Brunswick A-2 machine, a full 15-foot approach, and a ball return system.

Clark's idea was to take Rolling Bowling to schools, fairs, and social functions where it could give a taste of the sport to many who don't normally visit bowling centers. In other words, "If Mohammed won't go to the mountain...bring the mountain to Mohammed."

Bringing Rolling Bowling to schools for a week of tours by students during their physical education period is the type of insight needed by others to promote the sport to others both young and old alike.

- Another individual with insight is Eddie Vest, manager of Bowl America Burke. Vest has constantly tried to keep the interest of bowlers and non-bowlers alike.

His ingenuity in coming up with fresh ideas, I believe, culminated with his "I Can't Believe It's A Tournament." Yes, a tournament, but not for big money or the highest scores. Vest's tournament tried to combine not only skill, but a lot of fun, too.

The format consisted of "power bowling" (those striking out in the tenth frame keep going until they don't strike), blind man (installing a curtain 30 feet down the lane which allows no view of the pins), low ball (lowest pinfall is the best score, with gutter balls counting as marks), and bumper bowling.

The feedback from this tournament was overwhelming. I wish inventive thinking such as Vest's could be found in other centers.

- One of the most important people in the sport of bowling undoubtedly is the league secretary. Without his guidance and dedication, a league cannot survive, and bowlers will surely lose interest in the sport.

One individual who best exemplifies an excellent league secretary is Gray Ransom. Gray's knowledge of the inner workings of a league and the regulations governing it is an asset to anyone who bowls in his leagues. He constantly strives to keep the league running smoothly, while at the same time trying to show the recognition to bowlers who have done well by making prompt presentations of their awards.

Gray has also tried to spread the comradeship of bowlers to other centers with his "Who's the best league in the area?" tournament—an event not for big bucks but instead for bragging rights and a trophy to be kept in the winner's center.

At season's end, Gray provides one of the most detailed breakdowns of individual and team scores by each lane and each week during the season—certainly not a necessary task, but a most helpful tool to bowlers just the same.

And every year Gray declines a raise in secretarial fees. It is dedication like this that makes his leagues not only successful but enjoyable to all.

- And finally, to a man whose name I don't know. A few years back, he would come into the bowling center where I worked at least twice weekly during the day. His wife would help set up his equipment, which consisted of a railing made of PVC pipe. After telling him where his ball hit and what pins remained, she would move this equipment, per his instructions, before every shot.

This man carried a 175 average in his weekly league and yet was totally blind!

I watched this man one day and overheard a group of youths say, "If he can do it, then we can, too!" The example this man set will stick in my mind forever. It is his love of the sport that makes him one of the area's "top bowlers." (My apologies for not knowing this man's name, but I am sure his wife will see this and let him know that his dedication is recognized.)

Again, this list is not all-inclusive, and I, for one, would like to hear from readers about other locals whose accomplishments shouldn't go unnoticed.

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