

# 12 QUESTIONS

## Tom Baker

*Tom Baker is perhaps the most envied professional bowler today—not only is he one of two players exempt through the 2008-2009 season on the PBA Tour (Patrick Allen is the other), the veteran right-hander from Buffalo, N.Y., also has discovered success on the PBA Senior Tour. In just his fourth outing with older pros, Baker, 50, won the prestigious PBA Senior U.S. Open in Sterling Heights, Mich., a victory that earned him \$20,000 and secured him a spot in the 2006 PBA Dexter Tournament of Champions.*

*Baker, a PBA Hall of Famer who is a member of the Brunswick and Vise staffs, is scheduled to compete in the PBA Senior Manassas Open that will be held at Bowl America Manassas July 30 through August 3. He recently spoke with editor Bob Cosgrove about the Senior Tour and other topics.*

**What was the very first thing you noticed that was different about the Senior Tour versus the National Tour?**

Several of the bowlers were actually watching me! Guys were standing behind me and watching what line I was playing and how I was throwing it. I went from the underdog to the one to beat in the tournament. I'm not supposed to win on the regular tour because I'm older. Out here on the Senior Tour, I'm *supposed* to win. That's the big difference.

**What have you learned about the Senior Tour that you didn't know before or for which you realized you had held an incorrect assumption?**

The guys are a lot friendlier than I thought—way more friendly. It's a more pleasant atmosphere. I didn't think it would be as friendly as it is. We're bowling each other, and there's no cut-throats or in-your-face stuff. We're having fun out here, and we all like to bowl.

**What player on the Senior Tour has impressed you the most thus far?**

Probably Bob Glass. I never really saw him bowl on the regular tour, and I knew he's been [Senior] Bowler of the Year and he's got eight or nine titles, and I see why now. He's impressed me the most. He's been right there every week.

There have been several Hall of Famers from the National Tour—Bo Burton, Roy Buckley, Ernie Schlegel, and even George Pappas, the defending PBA Manassas Senior Open champion—who have not exactly been the dominating players on the Senior Tour that many thought they would be, while the likes of previous relative “unknowns” such as Gene Stus and John Hricsina and now Bob Glass have done exceedingly well. What's your explanation for both instances?

I explain that ... by their bowling styles are kind of one-dimensional. Roy Buckley throws the ball straight; that's all he can do. George Pappas can only throw the ball straight; that's all he can do, where Bob Glass can do both. He can throw it a little bit harder, and when he needed to go straight last week, he did, and when he needed to hook it, he could.

Gene Stus is more of a hooker. He doesn't look like much when he bowls, but he has a really, really good release, and the ball comes off his hand pretty good.

Some of these players have one kind of style, and when they need to hook it, they really can't. Today's conditions ... some of them you *do* have to hook it.

**You recently were quoted as saying that both Don Carter and Earl Anthony were one-dimensional players. True?**

Yes. Don Carter is the same way. It's not his fault. He just grew up in that time when he didn't know how to hook the ball back then, and they didn't have the equipment to hook it back then. To say that he's an all-time great is really ... I can't say that, you know, about Don Carter, but Earl accomplished a lot more than Don. Obviously, Earl could play inside, he could play outside. He really couldn't hook it, but he was repetition, and he had a great mind, and he could play kind of any line on the lane. That's what made him so great.

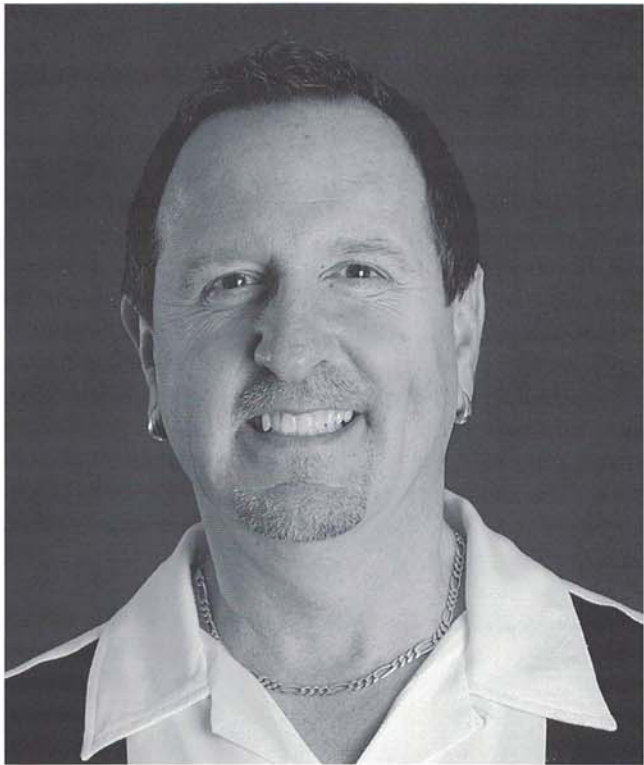
**What lesser-known player on the National Tour impressed you the most this past season?**

That kid who made two shows—Patrick Girard. He's 21 years old, and he made it through the [2004] Tour Trials. He really had a rough start in the beginning part of the year; the first half of the year he didn't win a match. Through some teaching ... he had some teaching behind him in Rick Benoit [of Brunswick], and he ended up making two shows. He showed a lot of talent—that he could handle the nerves, can handle the pressure out there. He impressed me the most. He's got a great release; he's got a ball that you want to have. He's young and he's raw. Not only can he put it all together, he's got the talent.

**What was your evaluation of your 2004-2005 season?**

I thought I bowled very well. I had matches where I bowled very well. I was tenth in average on the regular tour—that alone says I was bowling well. I think I was averaging 225, and my opponents were averaging 230.

What it came down to was that I was in a lot of games that came down towards the end. It seemed that I would bowl a



240 or 250 and get beat. I could name one with Tommy Jones, I could name one with Torge Torgerson, I can name another one with Chris Barnes. A lot of tough matches came down to the end, and I was in every match. It was a matter of a hit here or there to turn it around, so I thought I was very competitive.

I didn't even get into the "Round of 8," and I was still exempt for the year. That's how steady I was. I made 11 out of 12 of those cuts—I only missed one. So I would say that's pretty solid. I was tenth in spare shooting, so that was pretty solid, too. I was tenth in average and tenth in spare shooting. That's why the Senior Tour has expectations for me because they knew I am still competitive on the regular tour and out here on the Senior Tour I should be one of the better players. I think the reputation was, He's bowling good out there, he should bowl good here.

**If allowed to be PBA commissioner for a week, what's the first thing you'd do to improve each tour?**

I could get in trouble!

Well, the format stinks, obviously. There's a lot of luck involved and not necessarily the best bowlers get there. But there's weeks where they do get there. The fans want that old style back, you know? That's probably the first thing I'd do.

As far as everything else that they've done with the tour, I think they've done a great job. The TV show looks really good on TV. The people are responding to us. We go to these proams, and they're waiting for us there. We're treated more like we should be, and I think they've done a great job in that respect.

For the Senior Tour, I'd get more money, and I'd like to get TV for the guys. I'm sure that want to hear a few more tournaments, more TV, more money.

**How have you adapted to the changes in the game in recent years?**

Well, the game *has* changed—resin bowling balls and the oil patterns that we're bowling on. I, too, have had some good coaching from Rick Benoit, and my old thinking is really out the window. It's a totally new game.

It took me a while to adjust because it's hard to break old habits where I would make a move, and it would be an "old school" type of move, and it was the wrong move. My thinking not only has to think totally different and think in towards the new conditions and the new balls and you have to change your release a little bit more often than you used to. Your angles have got to be a little bit different than in the past.

You gotta do whatever the lanes are telling you to do, where in the past you did your thing, and the lane would come to you a little bit. Not anymore! If you're bowling good, and you've got the wrong ball or if you're playing the wrong line, you're *not* going to score.

**In the documentary, "A League of Ordinary Gentlemen," PBA Hall of Famer Wayne Webb is shown as a guy who dedicated himself exclusively to bowling since his teenage years and today sadly realizes he has few if any skills to rely on for any type of meaningful career outside of the sport. How would your life be different today—what would you be doing—if you were not now an exempt player?**

Had I not finished in the top 13 [positions] at the World Championship in 2004 or not make the top 40 [in points] this past season, I was still gonna bowl, I was still gonna go to the Tour Trials, and I would have still bowled some regionals and stuff. But if that didn't work out, we have a casino in Buffalo, and I'd probably try to get a job at the casino being a dealer or a slot manager, whatever. That's where I was probably going!

**What do you primarily do during the tour breaks?**

I don't have much time now; I'm 30 weeks a year on the road. I just work out at the gym and relax. I don't practice. I haven't touched a ball since I won last week, and I won't touch it until I get to Tucson next week—I took two weeks totally off. I've gotten to the point where I review a thing instead of do it. I keep loose by going to the gym or go jogging a little bit. I just relax, and I just don't do much more than that.

**How do you envision your professional bowling career over the next 10 years?**

I think it's going to be pretty good. I can still throw a ball better than I have been—that's what's scary to me. After the next month of the Senior Tour, I'm making a few changes—just some minor things to get a better release on the ball. I think that's what I need to work on right now.

I feel good things are going to happen. I feel like my head's together. I'm throwing the ball well, I'm with a great company, Brunswick, and I have confidence that I can win here. I won the biggest tournament we have, the Senior U.S. Open, so the confidence is there, and I kind of know what I am doing. It's just a matter of doing it—I'm not lost!

So I feel like the next few years are going to be very, very good.