

The Enigma of Steve Miller

Will his legacy be the start of new PBA success, or will he be remembered for his brash approach?

I believe it's fair to say that *Bowlers Journal* Editor Jim Dressel is a fan of former Professional Bowlers Association President and CEO Steve Miller, who recently resigned from the position to pursue other interests. In the October 2005 BJ, Dressel compared Miller's contributions to the PBA's success to those made by ABC Sports Broadcaster Chris Schenkel, who passed away only a few days after Miller left the PBA's Seattle headquarters.

The title of Dressel's piece, which was primarily a heartfelt tribute to Schenkel, was 'A Tale of Two Departures', and he prefaced the piece with the statement "We lost a giant in Chris Schenkel. How much we lose with

Steve Miller is TBD." At first glance, I thought it was strange to compare the five-year tenure of Miller to the 36-year association the PBA enjoyed with Schenkel. The four-time sports broadcaster of the year was 'everybody's best friend'. Miller didn't exactly endear himself to the industry, and chances are his best friends are not in bowling, but Miller made quite an impact in his short tenure.

As the leader of bowling's number one publication, Dressel was able (and perhaps obligated) to have a unique business relationship with Miller, and was one of the few bowling journalist Miller allowed into his world. I only knew him from afar, but my impression was that he generated enough hot air to keep PBA's balloon afloat; the question now is will it stay aloft without him? Put simply, he just didn't operate on the level of bowling tabloids like *Stars and Strikes* and many others. Miller's definition of media was *ESPN*, *USA Today*, and *Sports Illustrated*. He didn't have the time or desire to associate with the grassroots bowling media. His focus was on one thing and one thing only – promoting the PBA on television and in the mainstream

media. I believe he reluctantly made time for Dressel, only because the BJ is bowling's undisputed #1 publication.

Some might argue that he promoted himself as much as the PBA, but perhaps his method of selling the PBA was to sell himself. In Jim Dressel's article, he captures the personalities of the old and new PBA by saying, "If Schenkel was a star in a more laid back era, Miller had a much more aggressive personality in being one of the leaders of the "new PBA".

Dressel even offered a tongue-in-cheek comparison between Miller and Senator Hillary Clinton; he put it this way – "Loved by some, hated by others, but respected by most, Miller had a personality akin to the way Regan Books President Judith Regan described the former First Lady: "Hillary is one of the rare people who ignites everyone's interest: the good, the bad, and the ugly."

Comparing the "old PBA" to the "new PBA" is difficult, because times have changed and bowling has been declining for decades. The "old PBA" enjoyed years of tremendous success under the guidance of its founder Eddie Elias, who possessed many of the talents now being attributed to Steve Miller; but again, is it fair to compare Elias' 40 years of accomplishment to Miller's five?

Elias, like Miller, was flamboyant and outspoken, and had very little tolerance for any industry that was reluctant to support his organization. He fit Dressel's description of Miller – "loved by some, hated by others, but respected by most." If Elias had a fault, it was not mentoring his successors.

Eddie Elias was well connected in the business and media industries, and he could waltz into the office of almost any corporate executive. What we didn't know until recently, as former PBA assistant Commissioner Kevin Shippy revealed to Dressel, was that Elias often used media superstar Chris Schenkel to close sponsorship deals; but again, it was a different era and a different world. Steve Miller didn't have the luxury of simply 'charming' spon-

sors. Today's environment is much more competitive than the one Elias and his group faced.

I think my friend Jim Dressel likes Miller because more than anyone else who has entered our industry in recent years, Miller wanted to change the status quo, and Dressel believes our industry needs to change. I know this because we've talked about it many times. It's something we both strongly believe. Bowling must change to get better.

In Tulsa recently, we had the opportunity to talk to Miller's replacement, Fred Schreyer (see interview p.7) about some of those changes. Schreyer has been working behind the scenes at PBA for several years, and now steps into Miller's role. Schreyer's personality is pretty much polar opposite of Miller, but he seems just as focused on bringing success to the PBA, which all of us believe will bring success to the entire bowling industry. And since Miller is now living in Chicago, maybe he and Dressel can 'do lunch'.

The Duke-Scroggins title match in the USBC Masters (formerly known as the ABC Masters and the Miller High Life USBC Masters) reminded me of days long past when these two guys battled in numerous tournaments as kids in their native Texas for small stakes, but big bragging rights. Both are now at the top of their chosen profession, and both are good role models for kids and fine ambassadors for our sport.

For Norm, it was another tough runner-up finish. When I spoke with him in Tulsa recently, I asked him how tough it was to finish second or lose a close match. He chuckled and said, "You know, I look at it this way - I've bowled in over 600 tournaments, and I've only won 22 times, so my odds of losing are pretty good, and my odds of winning are pretty slim, so when I win, I'm grateful."

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