



BOWL • • PINION

by Jim Goodwin

The editorial opinions expressed here are offered to provoke thought on important and sometimes controversial or provocative issues.

Agree or disagree, we'd like to hear from you:

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YOUTH DENIED

Back to the Future?

Denial of honor scores by the sport's sanctioning body is an old worn out subject; a throwback to the terrible 70's and 80's when the American Bowling Congress and the bowling center owners and managers were, how can we put it? – "at odds" – some might even say it was an all-out war, and it was one factor in the declining league bowler base. No doubt it caused some serious indigestion in the stomachs of both sides.

Finally, in the early 90's when BPAA held the proverbial gun to ABC's head, the "system of bowling" was created, and the widespread practice of punishing the bowler for the sins and mistakes of the rules office, or the bowling center owner or manager, virtually ended.

Almost overnight, the awful policy and practice of throwing out scores was replaced with what some see as an 'anything goes' rule. Over 50,000 perfect games approved last season seems to support that view. It seems to have gone from one extreme to the other, and it is the primary reason USBC's Sport Bowling Program was created. Which brings us to the recent news that two honor scores, rolled by obviously very talented youth bowlers, have been denied official recognition by the new United States Bowling Congress.

Another 900 - or Four?!

On November 5, 17-year-old Robert Mushtare of Fort Drum, New York, a bowler who claims to have a total of FOUR 900 series (2 in league play, 2 in practice) had the one he rolled on November 5 denied official recognition because the bowling center or league secretary didn't get the sanctioning paperwork to bowling headquarters in time.

To be brutally honest, another 900 series, even when rolled by a 17-year-old, is not front page news, in my opinion. Because of the dime-a-dozen 300's being rolled today, in non-sport leagues, it just doesn't have much impact or credibility. After the third or fourth 900 was approved, I wrote a little column called "Another 900? Who Cares?", and I haven't paid much attention to them since. However, if this kid really does have FOUR 900's, or if there is a 900 on a legitimate sport condition, that will be a huge story, so we'll reserve more comment on Mr. Mushtare for later.

Sport League 300 Shot Down

The other case, which I want to focus on here, involves 21-year-old Junior Team USA member Jamie Foster, who rolled 299 and 300 games in back-to-back weeks in her Junior Gold Sport League at Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama in Rowlett, Texas. She shot 300-656 on October 6 and 299-676 on October 13, 2005. She also rolled a 300-822 in her non-sport league on September 24. As a result of the two high series, her Sport League average on 10-20 after 18 games was 209. Her non-sport average in the non-sport King Pin League for 12 games was 241. As usually happens in these cases,

Jamie appealed the initial rejection of the scores, and on January 6, 2006, she got a letter from USBC CEO Roger Dalkin telling her the USBC Legal and Legislative Committee denied her appeal.

Dalkin's letter was short – only two sentences, and the key words were "not recognize the 299 and 300 games as Sport Awards", meaning she would receive normal USBC non-sport recognition. The difference? Nothing, or a beautiful crystal trophy (for the 300) worth several hundred dollars, not to mention her name in the record books as one of the few youth bowlers, and even fewer females who have achieved the feat. There is an award for a non-sport 300, but only one per year, and since she already had one in her non-sport league, she received no new award. Apparently, her achievement will only be remembered by a few numbers on paper with asterisks.

When Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama owner Chuck Lande got his copy of Dalkin's letter, he responded with an email to Roger asking for more details of the reasons for denying the scores and the appeal, and Roger deferred to USBC Rules Counselor Michael Spridco. Spridco's reply to Lande was a little terse, and only three sentences. It ends with "Feel free to contact us should you have additional questions regarding this matter."

Duh! Of course Lande has additional questions! That's why he asked for "more detailed information". When you get two sentence letters and emails about such a serious matter, it's easy to understand Lande and Foster's frustration. They want to know EXACTLY why the "lanes were not compliant". It seems a little arrogant for two professional people to send such short letters about this, as if they don't have time to explain the process or details. It's as if they are saying 'How dare you question our authority?'

Special Understanding

Chuck Lande is not only the owner of Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama, which he built in 2003, he is a top level bowler who won five PBA regional titles and spent some time on the PBA tour in his younger days. He currently sponsors Chris Johnson on tour and hosts a PBA regional event in his 26-lane center.

Lande also shares a special connection with Jamie Foster because she employs the same bowling style that he successfully pioneered back in the 1980's – he and Foster roll the ball without inserting their thumb. Unlike Lande, Foster does use her thumb on spare shots.

When Lande bowled on tour, the PBA made a special ruling to reject his thumbless equipment, but later PBA champ Mike Miller employed the style to win a major title. Today, the style is widely accepted, and two international stars, Osku Palermo of Finland and Jason Belmonte of Australia keep it in the spotlight.

The thumbless style probably has nothing to do with these scores being turned down, but it may help explain how Foster could overcome the tough sport oil pattern to roll them. Put simply, this style of

bowler can generate tremendous revs to cut through heavy oil. The downside is sometimes inconsistent spare shooting, which may account for the fact that Foster only rolled series of 656 and 676 to go with her big games.

In researching this story, I spoke to almost all of the parties involved, including Lande, Jamie Foster and her mom, Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama laneman Sam Wall, Youth Director Joyce Claus, manager Adam Wyse, and USBC's Director of Sport Bowling Steve Wunderlich on a couple of occasions. In my first conversation with Steve, after the scores were rejected, but before the appeal was upheld, he told me, "There is no grey area here. This is black and white. The lanes either comply with the rules, or they don't."

Looking at this case and keeping in mind where it could lead in the future, I told Steve that I respectfully disagreed with his assessment that this is "black and white". I think there is a lot of grey, and for the sake of the Sport Program, it needs to be examined objectively.

Who's the customer?

In examining some of that grey area, I think there is a fundamental flaw in USBC's procedures. I think they believe that Jamie Foster is their customer, when they should be looking at Chuck Lande as their customer. Sure, Jamie is a USBC member, but she is Lande's customer, and because Lande agreed to all the special requirements and expenses demanded by USBC to have a Sport League, he is USBC's customer.

The point is, that USBC should stop operating like some non-profit charity, and start operating as a business. What do businesses do? They try to please the customer. Customers are hard to find, and hard to keep, so when you have one, you should do whatever you can within reason to please them.

Another serious flaw I found in my research was USBC's communication procedures. Wunderlich explained to me that in the Sport Program, bowling centers are required to provide a tape or graph of the oil pattern on the lanes in use each week. In Lande's case, graphs were sent, but they were late arriving at USBC. Wunderlich acknowledged that many sport league centers are late sending graphs and tapes.

Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama's Junior Gold Sport League is in its second season, and was certified both for the 2004-05 season and the 2005-06 season by USBC. According to all parties at the bowling center, the same lane machine and the same oil pattern that was first approved over a year ago is still in use, and no one had any indication that there was a problem with the oil pattern until Jamie Foster's scores were rejected. In fact, according to Lande, previous honor scores by others had been approved.

So, what happened? Because lane oiling is not an exact science, it could have been any number of things. Laneman Sam Wall could have inadvertently run the wrong pattern or the wrong distance, or changed the cleaning procedures. A different batch of oil used could

produce a different pattern. The machine could have simply malfunctioned. It's not black and white.

Regardless of what happened, apparently there was a problem with the oil pattern, and according to Wunderlich, when this happens, USBC's procedure is to make a phone call to the bowling center to alert them, and if necessary, instruct them how to correct the problems. Wunderlich says they did call Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama "on several occasions". He says they have notes that calls were made.

I have no way of knowing if these calls were made. I do think Steve Wunderlich is honest and sincere in his desire to make Sport Bowling successful. I have also known Chuck Lande for more than 20 years and have no reason to question his integrity. However, since no one at Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama acknowledges receiving those calls, it seems like in the future, USBC should at least back up these calls with emails. Wunderlich said they use phone calls so they can make immediate changes. Good plan, but an email would provide a written record. Rowlett Bowl-A-Rama manager Adam Wyse did acknowledge he spoke with Sport Bowling's Derek Eoff on a couple of occasions, but "not about any problems with the oil pattern."

Is it over?

Unless Chuck Lande decides to pursue some sort of legal procedure, it is, and I'm not an attorney, but there seems to be plenty of grey area to examine. What would he gain? His reputation as an honest proprietor who cares about the sport? I think he already has that, and this incident won't change that.

As for Jamie Foster, her attitude is terrific. She's obviously very upset and disappointed by all this, but her new goal is to roll a 300 at the next USBC Junior Gold Tournament. "Then they would have to disqualify about 1000 people to reject it," she said.

The good people at USBC should also think long and hard about the lessons learned from this. Are they headed back down the slippery slope of treating proprietors and bowlers like an enemy? I hope not. What bothers me the most about this story is that while a number of professional business people, all mature adults, pointed fingers at each other and claimed that they were right and the other side was wrong, the only one punished is Jamie Foster, and that just doesn't seem right.

If USBC were a business trying to please their customer, this could have been so simple. With that outlook, they could have discovered the problems, handled it professionally with their customer, given their member the award she earned, and corrected the problem. Instead, we have a flashback to 1982 when the most famous rejection in bowling history happened with Glenn Allison's 900.

Will we ever learn?

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