

# DAVID HOWARD WAITS 26 YEARS TO MEET BOYHOOD IDOL ROTH

## 1981 fan letter answered in personal way

by Jim Goodwin

The first week of April, bowling legend Mark Roth and his wife Denise traveled to Northrock Lanes in Wichita, Kansas. Roth is seeking his 38<sup>th</sup> career pro title in the 2007 K R Strikeforce Wichita Open, but the week will be memorable for another reason. A special fan was in the audience cheering for one of the greatest players in the history of the sport.

In 1981, 11-year-old David Howard was a young bowler in his hometown of St. Joseph, Missouri. He remembers bowling in his Saturday morning league, then rushing home to watch his favorite TV show – the Pro Bowlers Tour on ABC television.

Howard's favorite pro bowler was the great Mark Roth, who in 1981 was at the pinnacle of an incredible career on the

lanes that still continues today on the senior tours. Howard especially admired Roth's aggressive style and his powerful game.

When Roth converted the 7-10 split on one of the telecasts, Howard became so excited he wrote a letter to him, along with a drawing depicting his vision of Roth's powerful ball showing those 7 and 10 pins who was the boss. They [the pins] didn't know it was the great and powerful Roth rolling that ball," he said, as if Roth were the wizard of bowling and nothing could stop his mighty stroke.

David Howard's letter was a classic example of youthful innocence, and it even included his address, an invitation to "stop by any time," and his phone number, with a plea to "call me anytime." In June of 2006, the call finally came.

Like all top athletes, Mark Roth got a lot of fan mail when he was the number one player in the world. He answered most of them, but with his hectic schedule of 35 events a year and personal appearances when the tour was idle, he stored the letters he couldn't answer in boxes. He intended

to answer them, but just never could find the time; and the years and letters slipped away.

Last year, Mark and his wife Denise were going through the boxes he kept

"This is unbelievable," said Howard over and over. He then temporarily reverted back to the age of 11 and told Roth how excited he was to talk to him, and how much he admired him,

This really makes me want to get back to bowling as soon as I can." Telling his dad about the call was also a thrill for Howard. "He was almost as excited as I was," he said.



David Howard, Mark Roth, Denise Roth, Brenda Howard

over the years trying to put the paper records on electronic discs that could be used on Roth's website and to have available for other purposes. In one of the boxes, Denise found David Howard's letter with its uniquely illustrated cover page. She read it, and finding the phone number, looked at her husband with a hopeful smile and said "Let's call him."

Mark, being the realist that he is, thought she was a little unrealistic, but said okay, not expecting it to go anywhere after all the years. So, Denise dialed the number. As luck and fate would have it, she reached David Howard's mother on the same telephone number in the same house where David lived in 1981.

It turned out that David lived nearby with his wife and kids, a couple of them near the age David was when he wrote the letter. With David's new number, Mark called and said "Are you the David Howard who wrote Mark Roth a letter in 1981?" Thinking it was some sort of a prank, Howard answered "Yes, who is this?" The Brooklyn accent on the other end said "This is Mark Roth."

and how much it meant to get the call. At one point, Denise Roth got on the phone and reminded David that he told Mark "to call anytime", even if it was 25 years later. "I couldn't get two words in," said Mark, who has always preferred letting his bowling ball do the talking.

Over the next few weeks and months, that first phone call led to more calls and emails, and knowing how fortunate they were to find the Howards, the Roths started planning a face-to-face meeting. Finally, they were able to invite them to meet at the Generations Pro Bowling Tour event in Wichita. David and Brenda Howard were special guests of the Roths at the event.

"This is absolutely the neatest thing that's ever happened to me," said Howard, who is now 37 and working as a delivery truck driver at home in St. Jo. He hasn't bowled in a while, but plans to return to the game when he recovers from a finger injury he suffered on the job. "I started bowling when I was three," he said. "My dad was a big influence, and Mark was my hero. I patterned my game after his

That means so much to

have Dick Weber's son say that." Mark's extremely competitive spirit and 'take no prisoners' attitude is what caused David Howard and thousands of others to become his followers. Denise can testify to the drive that propelled her husband to the top of the sport.

"We were practicing together one day, and I was very close to beating him one game," she said, "but he struck out to beat me. I asked him, couldn't you just let me win one game?" He said, "I wouldn't even let my mother win a game."

That's what I like," said Howard, "The aggressive style, the passion. No one else has it as much as Mark."

After the GBT event, The Howard's will go home to Missouri, and the Roth's head for Texas to finish the swing, but the great feelings from this first meeting will linger. GBT also means Getting Bowlers Together, and this was one story that, when recalled, will make people smile and be proud to be a part of bowling, and to live in a time and place where dreams really can come true. "Mine sure did," said David Howard.