

FIVE DECADES OF GREATNESS

For John Petraglia, character is the key

Johnny Petraglia has seen it all as a professional bowler. His career has now spanned five decades. He joined the PBA in 1965. He will be 60 in March, and he's still rolling, and still striving to serve the sport that he loves.

Johnny has made more than a million dollars rolling a bowling ball, but his career is not simply measured by earnings or titles. He owns plenty of championships, including 14 during his touring years, 5 on the senior tour, and 9 regional crowns. He is a Triple Crown winner; but it is his work and life off the lanes that defines him as a man of char-

acter and substance.

After winning his first pro title in 1966, he spent the next two years with the US Army in Viet Nam. It was an experience that made him a man very quickly. It changed his perspective, instilled a greater sense of purpose in him, and caused him to appreciate life, family and friends, and his country more than most.

Today, he is one of the spokesmen for bowling's official charity, Bowlers to Veterans Link, and he never misses the opportunity to help BVL help America's veterans. Recently, one of the new Generations tour events

was named for Petraglia, and a substantial amount was raised for BVL during the pro-am and tournament.

He is also loyal. To his friends, to his family, to the sport and industry, and to the company he has proudly represented for almost four decades. When Brunswick signed Johnny to their pro staff in 1971, they were looking for much more than just a great bowler; and 36 years later, both parties will say they are still very happy with the relationship.

Because of his intense desire to make the sport better for future generations, Petraglia has been very outspoken over the years. And

he always backs up his sometimes critical observations with ideas for improvement. He did it during his three terms as PBA President, and he is still doing it today.

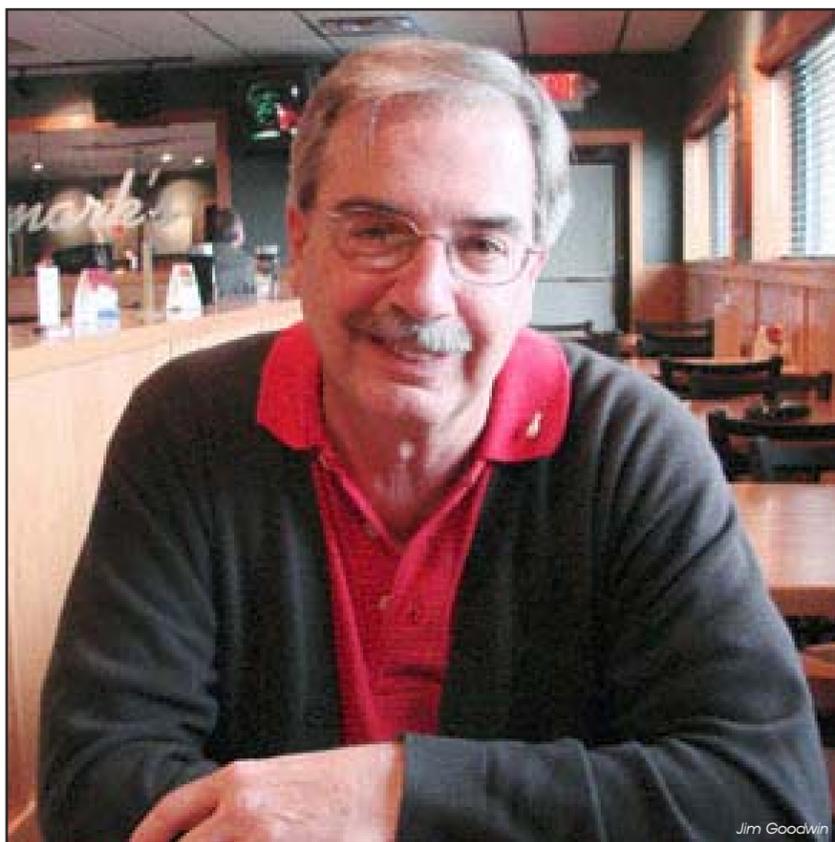
No true bowling fan will ever forget the day in 1994 that he tossed that \$100,000 perfect game in Toledo and said "Thank God, now my son can go to college." Today, John Petraglia Jr. is a member of the bowling team at Moorhead State University, and guess what - he wants to be a pro bowler and follow in his dad's footsteps.

Good luck, JP Jr.! You have some very big footprints to follow.

We've had a few conversations over the years about Halls of Fame. You are in the PBA, the New Jersey Sports, and the Italian-American Halls, but in spite of your illustrious career, you are not in the USBC Hall; nor is Mark Roth, Marshall Holman, and several others. Is the USBC "20 year rule" requiring 20 ABC/USBC national tournaments the only thing keeping you and others out of the USBC Hall? Does this bother you? How many ABC Tournaments did you bowl, and why did you stop before getting 20?

I'm also in the N.J. Sportswriter's Hall of Fame, the N.Y. Bowling Hall of Fame and the PSAL (Public School Athletic League) Hall of Fame. The qualification for Bowling Hall of Fame has been a sore subject for me on many levels. First of all, you will notice I'm in the N.J. Sports Hall of Fame, but not the N.J. Bowling Hall of Fame. I was inducted into the N.J. Sports Hall of Fame in 2002 with Tom Kelly (Manager of the Twins) Willie Wilson (center fielder for the K.C. Royals) and Lou Lamoriello (owner of the Nets and Devils.) The qualifications are simple; you either have to be born in the state or live in the state or compete on a state team for a certain number of years, and then you're judged on your accomplishments.

But in bowling, you have to have X number of years in league, and X number of State Tournaments just like you do the USBC Hall, and that's so ludicrous because one contradicts the other. I'll explain - for years I didn't bowl in league because it wasn't fair to my teammates. Because I was a touring Pro 1, I had to miss half the season, but that's the small portion of the problem. The big problem is that because I was a touring 1 I wasn't allowed to go to the national tournament with my team. I could bowl in the city, county and state tournaments with them, but when it was time to go to the Nationals they had to get a sub. Incredible!! So, for 30 years, because I wasn't allowed to bowl in the team event, the Masters counts as a national tournament toward my 20. So I pay the same dues as everybody else, but I can only bowl the Masters, and only if



JOHNNY PETRAGLIA

I bowl the pro-am. But if you're going to do things right you don't put in a letter that says - if you don't show up for your Pro-Am squad you can't bowl the Masters. We're not children, all they had to do was ask. What is truly amazing is once you're not a touring pro 1 or the current ranking (exempt player) then you HAVE to bowl in the team event. Bowling in just the Masters doesn't count. Theoretically, a person can bowl in 30 Masters, win it 3 or 4 times and never be eligible for the USBC Hall of Fame. The solution is simple; pay your dues and be a USBC member in good standing for 20 years and you're eligible. Then judge the person on their bowling accomplishments. For me there is a simple way to judge if a Hall of Fame is good or bad. Make believe that you know nothing about a sport, go into a Hall of Fame and when you come out ask yourself "Who are the best to ever play in their sport?" If I come out of the golf Hall of Fame I know Jack Nicklaus and Bobby Jones were two of the best ever. If I come out of the baseball Hall of Fame, I know Babe Ruth and Willie Mays were two of the best. Can you imagine coming out of the Football Hall of Fame and still not know who Jim Brown is? At the bowling Hall of Fame? Well, in

the case of Mark Roth, 34 titles, 4 time bowler of the year, 5 time high average winner, bowled for a PBA title 33 times in 3 years, and if you know nothing about bowling when you come out, you still don't know that Roth is possibly the best ever. And in the State of N.J. Hall of Fame he doesn't even exist. That I was locked out for 30 years. Because I was a touring pro really hurt. I can bowl the team event again now, but after 30 years. I've lost the desire to do it.

Not very many people know that in addition to your 14 PBA Tour titles, 5 PBA Senior Tour titles, and 9 PBA regional titles, you also own 2 ABC Eagles and 4 Eastern Opens. Describe how these other titles stack up compared to your achievements in the PBA.

It's the Newsday Eastern Open. This is one of the best tournaments I've ever bowled in. 516 entries, 85 games (21 in qualifying) 64 in the finals. It was a true test of bowling, the lanes were resurfaced three days before the tournament started. Brand new pins were put in the first day. Finalist were given uniforms to bowl in and they were cleaned each day, and you were treated like royalty. Many great players

bowled in it, Dick Weber won it twice, Mark Roth, Teata Semiz, Mike Limongello and Rudy Revs have won it. Bowlers like Carmen Salvino, Billy Hardwick, Andy Varipapa, Chuck Pezzano, Ernie Schlegel and Lou Campi bowled in it but never won. It is a shame it came to an end. Bowlers don't want to spend two weeks at one tournament anymore. The new formula seems to be a high roller type or a one day marathon. That is fine and they're fun to bowl in, I just wish there was enough room for both. The closest type we still have today is the U.S. Open. I would rank the Newsday right up there with any tournament except the majors. It was one of the most exciting things in my bowling career.

As a PBA member since 1965, you were also very involved in the business side of the tour, serving as PBA President three times during your career. (79-80, 89-90, and 97-98) what did the PBA accomplish during your three terms, and what are you most proud of as an achievement in the area of PBA business that you were directly involved in?

It was the tremendous amount of time and effort it took putting together the Pro Tour Qualifier, and making it fair for everybody. It's important for today's players to understand that the players from the past helped create their careers. Carter, Weber, Salvino, etc. took a big chance in starting the PBA and the rules they set up made it possible for people like me to bowl on tour. During my prime the tour got so big there were over 100 bowlers locked out of any tournament. We had to take spots away from players with seniority and give them to the PTQ. It was the only way the new guy could get started. Bowlers like Parker, Pete Weber, Voss, WRW etc. came out of the PTQ. The stars of today should realize two things 1. The powers that be will listen to you when you're on top. Tommy Jones, Chris Barnes, Wes Mallot, and even Sean Rash should be very vocal with the owners of the PBA if they see any injustices. 2. They owe a responsibility to the kids coming up behind them. The college and high school kids that want to become pros.

These kids deserve a fair and equitable chance to get on tour, just like they did. They have to be the Don Carters and Dick Webers of today.

Is the TV 300 game you rolled in Toledo in 1994 to earn the \$100,000 bonus the highlight moment of your career? If I recall, you said at the time "Thank God, now my son can go to college" during that emotional moment. How did it turn out? John Jr. is now in college? How did that day affect your family's life?

The 300 game is without a doubt the most exciting moment in my bowling career. Larry Lichstein and I talked about a 300 the night before, and how it could solve the college problem. That it actually happened is unbelievable. My son is now a junior at Morehead State in college, and bowling for them.

You must be very proud that both your son and your daughter Jamie are both bowlers. Do they have pro aspirations? Did you and your wife Pat encourage them to bowl, or did they simply make their own choice? Is it disappointing that to you that a pro career is more difficult for them than it was when you were their age? Is it more difficult?

My son would like to try the pro tour after college. It's disappointing that the sport hasn't progressed to the level I thought it would be. It was so great in the 70's and getting bigger and better every year, I thought by this time it might even be on par with other sports. The PBA is doing everything it can, but unless the entire industry can come up with a plan to have the media cover us and respect us, I'm not sure we are going to grow. My daughter is on the bowling team and softball team in high school and you really see the difference in importance and press coverage. Softball gets much more attention than bowling.

What is your opinion of the job the new PBA ownership and management has done? In your opinion, have they made any major mistakes? What would be your wish for the PBA in the next five years? You bowled in the new Generations Bowling Tour events in the fall. What's your prediction for the new GBT?

The PBA Tour and Senior Tour seem to be on the right track now. I know the prize funds have gone down this year, but changes in formats, eligibility and flexibility had to change at the top; I think is a formula for success. The Senior Tour will be much better this year, and that relates directly to John Weber becoming the new Senior Tour director. In a very short time John has done a very great job. The GBT went through a lot of growing pains the first 8 weeks. Now the formats and prize funds have changed and the first

stop of the year at Kegel in Florida is full, so maybe Steve Sanders is on the right track. We'll know a lot more in 6 months. I hope he is successful because another tour can only be good for bowling.

How long have you been on the Brunswick staff, and how has your role evolved over those years?

Signing with Brunswick was the best career move I ever made. I was signed by Larry Parker in 1971. Both AMF and Ebonite were interested, but Larry flew into N.Y. and took me and my parents to dinner. We never talked contract. On the way home my dad said "If they offer you a contract that's who you sign with." I asked why? He said "because this dinner was to check you out, to see if you were a good enough person to represent them. Any company doing that is the company you want to be with." My dad was right. For the past 36 years Brunswick has been my second family. Tony Mendiola isn't my immediate boss . . . he's my cousin. Jim Panici isn't my boss ... he's my uncle. It's always been like that,

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whether the guy at the top was Jim Bennett, or Jack Reichert or Warren Hardie it's never changed, because they obviously check out the people very closely before they get hired. Recently, a position opened up in consumer products. Our boss asked for recommendations. He said remember the first priority is character, and the second is will he get along with the group. Then, obviously, he or she must have the talent for the job, but if you don't have the first two ... the third doesn't matter. I've been here 36 years, so I know I'm a little bias, but it's been a great company to work for.

How did your Viet Nam experience affect your life and family? How did it affect your bowling career? Would you recommend military service to today's young people? Talk about your involvement in Bowlers to Veterans Link (BVL)

I lost 3 years of my prime to the Army, '67 and '68 when I was in, and '69 trying to get back in bowling shape. Maybe I would have five or six more titles from those years, I'll never know. Being in the Tet Offensive in '68 was very bad and something I'd rather not talk about in print. I did learn, however, through my experience in Viet Nam and the military how great this country is and how important freedom is. I don't want to get into a political debate on whether we should have been in Viet Nam or not, or Iraq or not, but there is one thing that is not open for debate. And that is you can't be free without a military protecting you. If you enjoy your freedom ...

thank a Vet. This is where the BVL comes in. It started with a ladies league in 1942 raising money for care packages for our troops and continues to this day. A little know fact is when you bowl an award score, if you check the BVL box in the lower right corner you won't get the award and the money the award costs goes to the Vets. So the next time you bowl 300, 800, 299 etc. and you've already got a ring help the people in need that have helped protect you. A new addition to the BVL staff is Kim Terrell. This is a great addition when it comes to talent, professionalism, and class; they don't come any better than Kim.

When you became a professional bowler in 1965, bowling and golf were both mainstream sports. How frustrating is it that bowling has not been able to keep up with golf and others as a top American sport? What is the biggest reason bowling slipped? Is there anyone or any organization to blame? What would be your wish for bowling in the next five years and beyond?

Bowling dropped the ball (no pun intended) in the 80's. I think they didn't realize that people were changing. The focus was always on family fun, which is great and still is. But other sports changed in two big areas: their pros started making a lot of money and there was a big focus on the Olympics. The bowling industry didn't go after either one. Both are life-changing experiences. If you win a golf tournament for a million dollars or you sign a million dollar baseball contract it changes your life. If you win a gold medal in the Olympics, like Michael Phelps or Jenny Finch did, it changes your life. Parents want their kids to have a shot at the American dream. When I talk to parents this is what they tell me. "I've got three, and a middle class income. I can afford to have them compete in maybe two sports, so I'm going to encourage them to play the sports that can lead to a college scholarship or a seven figure salary if they happen to be one of the best." Right now bowling does not fit into that equation. Jack Reichert (former CEO of Brunswick) tried very hard but the industry didn't go along with him. First of all, we have to promote our biggest assets. 1. Bowling is the least political sport to participate in college. You don't have to worry about being on a varsity team in high school so that a college can look at you. Most high school teams are not only how good you are (which is the only thing that should matter, and doesn't) but who you know or you could be the second best player on the team, but you don't get to play because the best player is on the team is at the same position, and most top colleges don't have walk-ons. Bowling has none of that, if you are a good bowler

and you want to bowl in college, you're going to. 2. There are no ethnic or gender problems in bowling. Blacks and whites, Hispanics etc. bowl together on the same team because they want to, not because they have to. Men and women, because they want to, not because they are forced to. You're not shut out of a country club because of your race, ethnic background, or income level. Carolier Lanes, where I have been bowling for 35 years is 50% black and 50% white and I have never seen a fight. The question and statement we should be pushing is 'America ... if you want to learn how to get along - ask the bowling community'. The second thing we have to do is raise big money and put it in tournaments so the media and eventually sponsors would have to take an interest in us. Here is a plan on how to do it. This is just an idea to get things started. Juggle it anyway you want, but this is the basic premise. 1. Raise USBC dues 10 dollars. That would raise approximately 20 million dollars. When a person gets their USBC card there would be 5 punch marks on the card for 5 free games of bowling. If where they bowl only costs 2 dollars a game they would be even. Anything above 2 dollars a game they would be getting a bigger value than their ten dollars. The money would be earmarked for TV and tournaments only. 2. Buy 20 shows of TV time 1 and 1/2 to 2 hours (on ESPN or FOX Sports or some other cable). That would cost about 250 thousand dollars per show equals 5 million dollars. 3. Open the year with a one million dollar U.S. Open, a one million dollar ladies U.S. Open, a one million dollar Masters, a one million dollar Queens, a one million dollar handicapped tournament for all averages, a one million dollar scholarship tournament with a winning boy and girl getting a full scholarship, a half million dollar senior U.S. Open, a half million dollar senior ladies U.S. Open (both on the same show), a half million dollar senior Masters, a half million dollar senior Queens (both on the same show). That would encompass everybody in the sport of bowling. That still leaves 8 million dollars and 13 shows BEFORE you have collected an entry fee or a pro-am entry or a sponsor. 4. Put the college bowling championships on TV 5. Negotiate with the PBA for 5 or 6 shows. 6. The remaining TV shows would go to ladies pro tournaments If we open up the year with 7 one million dollar tournaments in a row the NIKE'S of the world will start taking a look at us. I may be wrong on a lot of things, but one thing I am sure of is this: If Tommy Jones is the leading money winner on tour this year with let's say 3.2 million dollars and Kelly Kulick is the leading money winner on the ladies tour with let's 1.8 million dollars, next year bowling centers will have so many juniors they won't know where to put them.