

## The BPAA Must Step Up To Lead This Industry

*Will USBC be a cooperative partner, or a competitor?*

Bowling center owners, it's time to step up to the plate. The membership organizations have taken a significant leap toward future progress with the creation of USBC. Now it's your turn.

When I look at the incredible job BPAA does with Bowl Expo, I see an organization capable of thinking big; people who seem to see virtually no limit to the future success of the worldwide bowling industry. The challenge, however, is in establishing an unquestionable leadership role, not getting bogged down by "turf battles", and putting the game and the sport ahead of the recreation and the business on the priority list.

A few proprietors just flinched. Put the sport ahead of the business?! What is that? Others, who reverently practice the

'four-walls' theory of running their centers, may only see the sport as something the PBA does, or as something too troublesome and too expensive to incorporate into their business plan, which is why USBC's Sport Bowling Program only accounts for less than 1% of USBC membership today. The trick is to turn those 'terrible toos' into victories by talking, and walking in each other's shoes.

USBC is the new baby on the bowling block, and BPAA must take a proactive role in helping to shape USBC into an organization that is pro-business and a willing and positive partner. We've already seen some signs of it. Roger Dalkin and Jeff Boje "toasting the harmony" on the cover of the *Bowlers Journal* is encouraging. But it will require much more than symbolic gestures.

A new emphasis on youth bowling, rule changes to 'tone down' bowling balls, and a new push for Sport Bowling are signs that it's not business as usual in Greendale or Arlington. USBC President Mike Carroll is also saying all the right things in the first few months of USBC's existence.

Will there be growing pains? Without any shadow of a doubt, there will be many. While the vast majority of

statements being made by bowling's leaders are encouraging, there are a few items that make us think 'what's up with that?'

One thing we've noticed that may impede the pace of progress is the fact that only two bowling center owners sit on the USBC 24 member board of directors. Some might say we're making progress by allowing any, but we don't agree. We think the USBC board should have at least five BPAA members, people who understand the game and the business.

When we look at the people on the USBC board, we see too many 'yes' people and not enough proven strong leaders. All are good people, but many don't have much experience outside the ABC/WIBC structure to understand issues that affect BPAA members, manufacturers, and others. It's nice that some bowling athletes are on the board, but again, do they have the experience necessary to move the industry forward, or will their input reflect a rather narrow focus?

What is USBC's and BPAA's purpose? The way we see it, BPAA must lead, and accept the responsibility that comes with leadership. USBC, for the good of the game, must unselfishly assume the role of a 'support' organization. When we hear USBC people talking about marketing the industry and branding the USBC name, it seems a little off-focus. What needs to be marketed is the game, not the organizations, and we sure don't need USBC and BPAA or Strike Ten competing against each other, or even operating on parallel paths. Bowling needs one and only one marketing department.

Taking a specific example, let's look at the Halls of Fame. In the past, ABC had one, WIBC had one, BPAA, PBA and PWBA all had one. Isn't now the time to consolidate all of these Halls of Fame to create an **All Bowling** Hall of Fame? Obviously, the Hall should have categories, but why maintain all these separate Halls of Fame with unnecessary restrictions like having to bowl in 20 tournaments for example. Create a **Bowling** Hall of Fame, schedule an annual installation in conjunction with the Hall of Fame Salute or in St. Louis at the museum, and make it a significant

event for the game and the entire industry. Stage a major tournament around it. Imagine the publicity for bowling if it's done right.

Back to our primary premise. We believe BPAA's leaders are now willing and determined to step up and lead. Seven million league customers walking out your doors will make you think. It happened for a hundred different reasons, and an unfortunate disconnect between BPAA and the membership groups was one of the most significant among them.

Bowling is changing rapidly. 36-week five member team leagues are not coming back. Late leagues are not returning. New Saturday morning youth leagues, on the other hand, may be on the horizon; but bumper bowling and cosmic bowling will not sustain the business; nor will open play alone.

BPAA's new Contemporary Bowling Association, rumored to be competition for USBC, must join forces with Strike Ten Entertainment to market the game, and USBC, PBA and hopefully PWBA must be included every step of the way. USBC should not look at CBA as a threat, but as a potential partner.

Will USBC membership grow? Eventually it will, but it may decline for a few more years until its purpose is clear. USBC should make and enforce the rules, run their dozen annual tournaments, support BPAA and the pro groups. Major emphasis is already being put on developing stronger youth programs, and professional bowlers must be a big part of that. The sport starts at the youth level, and reaches its pinnacle with the pros. One end of the spectrum will not work without the other.

Bowling can earn respect in the business, recreation, and sports worlds by presenting a genuine unified effort, and by rejecting any hint of the 'turf' battles that proved to be nothing but destructive and divisive in the past. The alternative? If BPAA and USBC butt heads and USBC is unwilling to concede final decision authority, bowling loses again; but we're hoping and praying that bowling's leaders are smart enough to see that it never happens again.

