

I'm Still Thinking About Women

It's not what you think – I just miss them, and attending the WIBC opening ceremony, the convention, and the Queens was a painful reminder that we don't get to see the greatest women bowlers in the world as often as we did for more than 20 years.

No tour, no regional program, no U. S. Open – very few top-notch events for these talented women to display their talent. And perhaps even worse, there isn't much hope for more in the future – at least the near future.

USBC, the new bowling organization that inherited the PWBA from WIBC, is not stepping up to the plate the start a new tour. Their leaders have told us that it's just not a priority right now, and unless some sponsorship appears from some unknown source, the ladies will be on the sidelines indefinitely.

Sad. Especially when you look at the dozens of extremely talented collegiate women and those who were just getting started in their pro careers when it all stopped two years ago.

I wonder if whoever was responsible for killing the Steve Sanders purchase of the PWBA is now regretting it. I also wonder why some of our leaders think the PBA is the answer. Very few women have joined the PBA, and my sources tell me the last thing the PBA wants is a competing product on television – not while they are still losing

money. Why do so many in this industry go ga-ga over people with money?

Can women be competitive in the PBA? Let me put it this way – No. What Liz Johnson did was terrific, but don't hold your breath waiting for it to happen again. I talked with Liz at the Queens. She's competing in the PBA Tour Trials and hopes to win a spot on their tour next year. I also asked her if she would leave the men's tour to go back to the women's if it starts again. She said she would not.

If she or any other woman makes the men's tour, at least they will have a guaranteed \$1500 a week income for 20 weeks next year. Apparently they think that's more than a new women's tour will offer.

What will it take to lure the women back on the road again? The consensus of the women I talked to in Tulsa said it would take a tour of at least 16 events with a minimum of \$20,000 top prize, a minimum of \$5000 for the top five, and a minimum of \$2000 last cash to get their support.

For those of you not well versed in the business of building a tour, those numbers translate to a minimum of three to four million dollars to get started, and perhaps \$10-15 million for a long term plan. Another thing the players want, and based on recent past history, their desires are justified – is a long term commitment from anyone who starts a new tour – at last three years, preferably five.

Currently, the marketing arm of

bowling Strike Ten Entertainment, is contributing close to a million dollars annually to the PBA tour. Sounds like a lot, but it's only about 1/20th of the PBA's annual budget.

Why are they giving money to billionaires? One reason is because it's the only pro game in town right now, the other is that the PBA has done a good job of raising awareness of the sport in recent years.

When Eddie Elias was in charge and running the PBA, he begged the industry for support, and got very little. John Sommer did the same for the PWBA. Of course, there was no Strike Ten then, and a merger of the ABC and WIBC was a pipe dream. Maybe bowling's groups had to fix their own houses before they could think about helping the pros.

By now, most of the top players in the world are into new careers or jobs that pay them \$30,000 annually or more. Sure, they have to work 40 hours a week or more to earn that income like most working people, but why should they leave their new jobs and new homes for a new tour?

Would they? Some would do it in a heartbeat, some after serious thought, and some never again, content to rest on their laurels. Try to put yourself in their shoes. You know you have talent. You know you can win. All you want is a chance to prove yourself, just like those who had that opportunity since 1960. Is that asking too much?

Maybe it is.

