

## The King Is Gone - But What A Life

In the television entertainment industry, it was Johnny Carson. Golf has Arnold Palmer; and for bowling, Dick Weber was THE KING. Like Carson and Palmer, Weber was the guy everybody loves, and for good reason. No one ever has, or probably ever will, do so much for an entire game and industry than Weber did for bowling. He was our hero, our ultimate role model, and we all loved him.

He also had something else in common with Carson and Palmer. He was a little shy and humble, and enjoyed his private life. He didn't revel in his celebrity, but he understood the power of what his persona could do, and he didn't hesitate to do anything and everything he could for the game he loved, and he did it well until the very last day of his glorious life.

When Carson died only a month ago, there were thousands of stories in newspapers and magazines, and television aired dozens of tributes. When Palmer's day comes, I'm sure the outpouring will be enormous. They were and are icons of American culture. Weber is equally famous, but today, only in his own industry.

When we got THE CALL Monday morning, February 14, I turned on ESPN, and heard nothing about Weber's passing. I bought a newspaper - nothing. We got home from traveling late on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Our local paper had a story they picked up from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in the February 15 Sports.

By now, maybe ESPN has aired something, and maybe there will be more coming, but the point is, Dick Weber was not an icon of American culture like Carson and Palmer because bowling has lost its station in the mainstream media, and that

bothered Dick Weber. I know it did, because he told me on more than one occasion. His mission was to restore bowling's place in sports status.

Dick Weber came from an era when bowling *was* mainstream. In the 1950's and 60's when he was a star on the famous Budweisers Team, and in the fledgling PBA, he was an American icon. Everybody knew his name, and face.

The first time I remember seeing him was at the 1964 All Star Tournament in Dallas. I was 14. To promote the event, and the new airplane, he bowled a match against Sylvia Wene in flight aboard an American Airlines 707 en route from New York to Dallas. Wene won, and Weber always said it was because "the pilot tilted the plane," when he was bowling.

Weber didn't like what was happening to bowling, that it was fading in status, but he didn't give up on it. Just the opposite. He bowled exhibitions around the world, he bowled in and endorsed tournaments, he bowled at fishbowls and wine glasses and other objects on the streets of New York on *The Late Show*. He won pro tournaments in six decades. He did far more than his share to put bowling in the spotlight.

And he was loyal. To the game, to the industry, to his family, to AMF and PBA for a half century. Even in times of trouble, he steadfastly supported even those who may not have deserved his support. He stubbornly maintained hope and an optimistic outlook. Doom and gloom didn't exist for Weber, and he occasionally admonished naysayers, but he always did it with class and dignity.

Most people didn't know that Dick Weber was a member of the Bowling Writers Association of America. He didn't write, but he did a lot of television work during this career, and he attended every BWAA Convention for as long as I can re-

member. He loved and respected the men and women who publicize bowling, and we loved and respected him. He was one of us, and his passing will have a profound affect on next month's BWAA meetings in Baton Rouge.

Weber didn't simply make an appearance at BWAA meetings. He stayed the entire week, attended the meetings and parties, participated in the discussions, and rolled in the annual media bowling tournament. I'll miss our annual dollar bet. I'm sure many others will also. He had so many dollar bets, he couldn't keep up with them. A couple of years ago, on one of the rare occasions when I won, I forgot to make the bet, and after I beat him, I tried to collect anyway, knowing he wouldn't remember. He would have paid me if I'd let him, but I couldn't do it. We both had a good laugh.

I was also privileged to have a ring-side seat to watch Dick bowl the doubles event with Joe Norris at the ABC National Championship tournament a few years ago. It was the equal of golfers watching Palmer and Nicklaus together. Perhaps the saddest part of losing Weber so suddenly is that we all thought he would have Norris' longevity. He was so vibrant and full of life. He often said he wanted to retire when he was "97 or 98, but I haven't decided yet."

On the wall in my office there is a picture of only one bowler - Dick Weber. It is the pencil portrait our friend and artist Stan Clark did in 1995 for the AMF Dick Weber Classic tournament produced by Gary Beck. It is autographed "To Jim - best of luck, Dick Weber". Thousands of people around the world have that famous "best of luck, Dick Weber" autograph. No bowler, probably no athlete in any sport, has signed more in his career.

I'll always cherish mine, and my memory of the greatest man in the history of bowling.

For more about Dick Weber see our special pullout tribute, pages 7-10

