

1986 Firestone Press Conference

A Look Inside ABC Sports and the PBA

Again this year on the morning of the nationally televised finals of the \$250,000 Firestone Tournament of Champions in Akron, Ohio, officials from the Professional Bowlers Association and ABC Sports met with writers who were covering professional bowling's most prestigious event.

Representing the PBA were Joe Antenora, Commissioner, and Eddie Elias, Founder and Exclusive Agent. New President Dennis Swanson and Vice President of Program Acquisition Robert Iger represented ABC Sports.

The majority of the questions appropriately dealt with ABC's popular "Professional Bowlers Tour" series, including its handling of current legal disputes within the PBA.

Editor Bob Cosgrove attended the press conference and what follows are edited excerpts.

Mr. Swanson, do you have any experience with bowling?

DENNIS SWANSON: I bowl, but not to any great extent. My wife and I were on a newcomers team once; I think we finished in third place. I'm a lefthander without a hook! I've watched 'em for years—Carmen Salvino and way back in those days. I've just always enjoyed it. I've followed all sports for a long period of time, and bowling is one of them. Bill Lillard and those guys—I go back to those days.

Many bowling fans often ask what ABC Sports can do about bowling through so many frames—especially key frames—during commercials. Has there ever been any thought to cutting back to televising 3-1/2 games (starting in the middle of the first game) and doing some up-close and personal stuff as is done on "Wide World of Sports"?

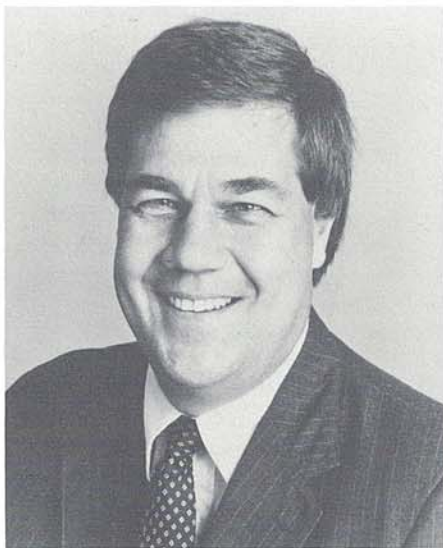
SWANSON: This is one of these things where I'm not sure what is the right way or the wrong way. You get conflicting interests. I've heard people suggest "Why don't you expand the program?" I don't know that that's the answer, either. We do run over into "Wide World of Sports." We had a tournament a few weeks ago that ran eight minutes over so they wouldn't miss the critical elements that were involved in bringing the bowling.

So what did that mean? That meant we had to knock out two rounds of the [taped] Hagler fight. Holy smokes! You think the bowling people are calling you, you should have heard what the boxing people did to me! It's just one of the hazards of live television, and you're

gonna have some runover. We try and deal with it as best we can. We try not to miss the critical action, but there are some compromises. I think it works best in the ninety-minute format.

But I understand the players' point of view, too. They're under the pressure, and they want to perform to the best of their ability because of the prize money that's at stake. So it's a balance of interests here, and hopefully, I think that the fact that the program has been successful in its time period for 25 years means that we're doing something right!

In essence, what my answer is, I'd hate to tinker with the format, to be honest



"I'd hate to tinker with the format . . . because it works."

—Dennis Swanson

with you, because it works. And yes, you can look for this, that, or the other, but basically it's a workable format.

JOE ANTENORA: To add to what Dennis has said, they have done, I think, most that we could reasonably expect from a production standpoint. We know that we have a problem with the pace of bowling, just as bowling does throughout the country. We are doing everything we can within reason to try to come up with rules to regulate the pace of play to the point short of asking our players to rush their shot.

Hopefully over the next few months we're looking at a new twist: we have a rule governing the amount of time they can spend from the time they get up on the approach. We think we need some kind of rules or guidelines on the amount of time they spend *before* they get up on the approach, and we'll be working on that. Hopefully, we can alleviate the problem somewhat.

Fights are special, I guess, but some of the action on "Wide World" is not as crucial as, say, the action in a boxing match...

SWANSON: It is to those people. I'll tell you what: to somebody who likes white water canoeing, don't stand up and tell him that his action isn't crucial!

Are there problems along the network by cutting into "Wide World of Sports," i.e., Are there markets that do not take pro bowling and come in expecting to find Wide World?

SWANSON: Yes. It does help us considerably to keep our programs in their time period because we have an east coast and a west coast, live, delays...It really is a complicated process, and if we can stay within the time frame that helps.

The clearances for bowling [local affiliates carrying "Pro Bowlers Tour"] are actually up this year about 4 percent, which is the good news. That's an adjustment to the new time period [from 3:30 p.m. to 3:00, made in 1985] and a long enough lead time [for such affiliates] to deal with it.

When you look at "Wide World," please, understand that we have contractual commitments to organizations within that as well. And there are interests

that are there. We also have commercials that are sold in that program and we have an obligation to those people. It's not an easy answer, and from Mike's [Aulby, who was present in the room] point of view, as I say, you've got to take the players into consideration, too. These men are under tremendous pressure. This is their life; this is their livelihood. They're trying to make a living.

Also, we want the best scores you can get. I'd love to see somebody throw a 300 game this afternoon! The better the bowling, the better it is for us, too. So you have all those things that compete with one another.

Are you considering some kind of lead-in for "Pro Bowlers Tour" next year?

SWANSON: The rating this year is consistent with the year before. It wins its time period easily. We're at a 5.7 level, and the competitors are at 4.5, so we easily win the time period.

Would we be helped if we had a sports lead-in? Of course we would—just as "Wide World" is helped because bowling is in front of it. It's that block concept, and that's true of anything in television. That's why the program I'd love to produce is the comedy that follows [NBC's] "The Cosby Show"! It's that theory.

In the first quarter of 1987, we will start our sports coverage with bowling at three o'clock on January 10.

You weren't overly concerned with that ratings slippage from 7.2 to 5.7 with the earlier time slot, were you?

SWANSON: Obviously, we'd rather have the 7.2 than the 5.7. I'm not gonna tell you that we wouldn't. We moved "Wide World" and bowling each up a half-hour because there were other interests involved: a network newscast went in there. That's a network decision. Was that in our best interests for "Wide World" and bowling? No, it wasn't. But the people who run the company have to weigh all these things. Again, it's just like the thing we're talking about with the timing of the particular event. It was in the best interests of the company in concert with its affiliate body, which wanted the news because of their local news to do this.

It's happened, it's over with and we've made the adjustments. What we need, what's happened this year and what we're pleased about is that now the clearances are coming back up a little bit. That's what's important. So what we hope is that we can make it come up even further in January and that would definitely help that rating situation as well.

Marshall Holman is leading this tournament. How much does that mean to the

The Firestone Returns in '87

AKRON—The Firestone Tire & Rubber Company again will sponsor the Firestone Tournament of Champions in 1987.

The 23rd edition of the Firestone event will climax the Pro Bowlers Winter Tour in late April.

The Firestone Tournament of Champions has been professional bowling's most prestigious event since it began here in 1965 at Bowlarama Lanes in Copley. The following year, the tournament moved to Riviera Lanes in Fairlawn where it has been staged continuously since.

In announcing the continuation of Firestone's sponsorship, Jay H. Rosenson, company vice chairman, praised the enduring popularity of the tournament.

"We at Firestone look forward each year to the tournament, as well as continuing association with professional bowling and with the many good friends of the Firestone tournament," Rosenson said.

In addition to support of the tournament, Firestone again will be a commercial sponsor of the ABC telecasts of the PBA Winter Tour events.

"Professional bowling is indeed grateful to Firestone for its long-time support of our tournaments," said PBA commissioner Joe Antenora. "For more than 20 years now, Firestone has been a sponsor of our telecasts and of our premier event and we look forward to continuing this mutually rewarding relationship."

ratings if he or a Mark Roth is going to appear on the show?

SWANSON: In essence, our program is helped by more known personalities in the final five. I think that is just a logical, common sense thing, and so your program is enhanced by the appearance of somebody like a Marshall Holman. It would be true of a Mark Roth. The same thing would be true of golf when a [Jack] Nicklaus is on the leader board.

ROBERT IGER: Basically I'm in agreement with Dennis—he's my boss! I think that the ratings difference for an individual event would probably be imperceptible based on the bowlers who were participating. Probably. One of the problems that we have is that the five players aren't determined until Friday night, and it's difficult to get the word out to the entire country. Yes, if you turn it on that day and you discover that a Marshall Holman is in, it might keep your interest. Or, if you're fortunate enough to have a newspaper that's covered the results of Friday night and you could get the information, it would obviously help.

I'd have to agree with Dennis that the overall star quality of the sport over the long haul does help the television ratings, and using golf or tennis as analogies are good ones. Big names in sport that are recognizable personalities clearly have an impact over the long course on the ratings. I would doubt that you'd be able to tell in one event that they made a real ratings difference.

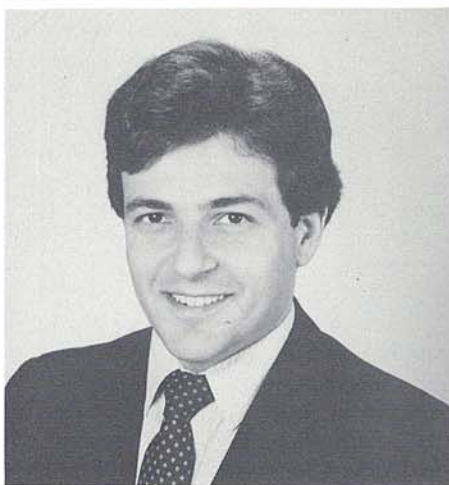
EDDIE ELIAS: I'd like to add something to that. Over 25 years, the two most significant factors—and I think star quality al-

ways pays in anything, nighttime, daytime, anytime—are if you get enough clearances and get enough bad weather. That's true, I'm serious: the best friend you have is bad weather. People will then stay inside and watch. Star quality will enhance that, but if you don't have stars and have bad weather, you're much better off than if you have good weather and have a superstar. The ratings are going to be much better.

How much is the "Pro Bowlers Tour" hurt because it is a television series and not a group of many separate tournaments as in golf and tennis that are on different networks at varying times and thus need—and receive—more on-air promotion? And what can you do to convince the ABC News Division to announce the PBT winner on their "Sports Update" [Saturday evenings at 8:58 p.m.] rather than the leaders of the golf tournament that's on NBC and the two players who'll meet the next day in the tennis finals that's being carried by CBS?

SWANSON: That darn Roone [Arledge, president of ABC News]! I think that bowling in its ratings and its promotion is enhanced by the fact that it is a series because everybody knows that it runs for sixteen consecutive Saturdays at the same time, rather than trying to have to hunt for it every week.

We'll take all the news coverage we can get from wherever. National newscasts don't focus themselves on reporting results, per se. We are better off with the sports at the local stations where they



"Big names in sport that are recognizable personalities clearly have an impact over the long course on the ratings."

—Robert Iger

have the five- or six-minute sports segments. What would do us good is if on Friday night in the late news these local stations would say who the five qualifiers were for tomorrow's championship. That would help us tremendously, particularly if it were an ABC affiliate and the local sportscaster were to say, 'Why don't you tune in at 3 o'clock and watch on this channel?' And that's something that we're talking to the affiliates about.

If I had my druthers, it would be that every ABC affiliate sportscaster on Friday night on the late news would plug the "Pro Bowlers Tour" and the coverage the next afternoon.

What cities do you have your highest ratings in?

SWANSON: The highest ratings are in Detroit, and Chicago is right there, too. Those markets tend to parallel each other.

ELIAS: Detroit is absolutely unbelievable: the ratings go through the roof! It's almost like NFL figures.

When Chris Schenkel mentioned [during the "Greater Hartford Open" telecast] the lawsuit brought forth by the players against the PBA, did you contact the PBA and why wasn't it reported that the PBA is in turn suing the players?

SWANSON: I don't know that it's appropriate for me to comment on the suits where it involves the PBA and the players. The feeling within the production element at ABC Sports was that we should not ignore that there was some sort of controversy that was going on and that we should comment on it.

There was a statement that was put together and worked on and Chris Schenkel read, which acknowledged that we were aware of this circumstance and we reported it to the bowling audience. I think that speaks for itself.

But you didn't report the PBA's stance: that they are counter-suing the players.

IGER: I'll just try to answer part of your question, and that is we did have contact with the PBA. I talked to Joe about it personally, and we put our lawyer, who was actually responsible for preparing the statement, in touch with lawyers from the PBA. The contents of the statement really wasn't discussed beforehand. We wrote it, as was just said, with our lawyer, but quite frankly, I was unaware of the controversial countersuit.

ESPN to Again Telecast PBA Summer Tour

For the second consecutive year, ESPN will exclusively televise all twelve events from the Professional Bowlers Association's Summer Tour, it was announced recently by Joseph Antenora, PBA commissioner.

ESPN will televise the finals of each tournament on Wednesday evenings. With the exception of the Showboat Seniors Invitational, all will be televised live from 9–11 p.m.

The 1986 schedule follows:

Air Date	Event	City
June 4	\$100,000 Showboat PBA Seniors Invitational	Las Vegas, Nev.
June 11	\$130,000 Showboat PBA Doubles Classic	Las Vegas, Nev.
June 18	\$125,000 Kessler Open	Dublin, Calif.
June 25	\$120,000 Ebonite-Firebolt Open	Seattle, Wash.
July 2	\$115,000 Southern California Open	Riverside, Calif.
July 9	\$115,000 Tucson Open	Tucson, Ariz.
July 16	\$115,000 Austin Open	Austin, Texas
July 23	\$125,000 Hammer Open	Edmond, Okla.
July 30	\$125,000 Molson Golden Bowling Challenge	Windsor, Ontario Canada
Aug. 6	\$110,000 Greater Buffalo Open	Cheektowaga, N.Y.
Aug. 13	\$130,000 Columbia Senior/Touring Pro Doubles	Erlanger, Ky.
Aug. 20	\$115,000 Kessler PBA Seniors Championship	Canton, Ohio



"Over 25 years, the two most significant factors . . . are if you get enough clearances and get enough bad weather."

—Eddie Elias

Are you even acknowledging the fact publically that you are counter-suing?

ANTENORA: We haven't made a public issue of it yet. Frankly, to be more concise and more accurate, this is not a situation of players suing the PBA, it's a matter of players suing players. The PBA is a membership organization. It's a family dispute that unfortunately has gone a little further than a lot of us would liked to have seen it go. I personally feel that it is a family dispute that will be resolved within the family and resolved equitably.

We feel in the PBA that our Executive Board, which is made up of members, is well-grounded legally in our constitution, our by-laws, our rules and regulations, and the way they are implemented. We feel legally that we have the right to make these rules, and that our position—if it went to court—would be upheld. We hope it doesn't go to court, and I as commissioner will do everything I can to resolve it within the family, and that's about all we want to say about it.

Is there a counter-suit?

ANTENORA: Yes.

Where was it filed?

ANTENORA: The original complaint was filed in the Federal District Court in the



"We know that we have a problem with the pace of bowling, just as bowling does throughout the country."

—Joe Antenora

state of Washington, so our answer was filed in the same court.

Has there been any thought of giving ESPN rebroadcast rights of ABC's "Pro Bowlers Tour?"

IGER: There was a request made by the PBA to ABC to explore the possibility of additional exposure through cable or additional exposure on the network in the form of late-night programming.

We did pose that question to ESPN at the time as to whether they were interested in getting involved either in an earlier round or on a delayed basis showing the rerun, and in both cases they were not interested.

ELIAS: We'd have liked to have maybe showed Thursday and Friday, but we ended up with twelve tournaments and we got a whole [summer] schedule there, so maybe it's better that it happened this way.

ANTENORA: I'd like to thank all of you in the media for your interest and your hard work reporting our activities.



Don Genalo, Mark Baker, Marshall Holman, Del Warren, and Mike Aulby

\$250,000 FIRESTONE TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS Riviera Lanes, Akron, Ohio

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND

POS.	NAME & CITY	TOTAL	AMOUNT
1.	Marshall Holman, Medford, Ore.	233 (1 game)	\$50,000
2.	Mark Baker, Garden Grove, Calif.	653 (3 games)	28,000
3.	Del Warren, Lake Worth, Fla.	202 (1 game)	20,000
4.	Don Genalo, Perrysburg, Ohio	414 (2 games)	15,000
5.	Mike Aulby, Indianapolis	210 (1 game)	10,000

PLAYOFF RESULTS— Genalo defeated Aulby, 224–210; Baker defeated Genalo, 227–190; Baker defeated Warren, 215–202; and, in the title game, Holman defeated Baker, 233–211.

ESPN, PBA Sign Two-Year Deal

ESPN and the Professional Bowlers Association have announced a new two-year agreement for exclusive live coverage of the PBA Summer Tour. The announcement was made by Steven M. Bornstein, ESPN Senior vice president, programming and production, and Joe Antenora, commissioner of the PBA.

"Last summer's series on ESPN was a success," said Bornstein. "We are sure bowling fans will be excited to learn that the PBA will be a regular summer series on ESPN."

PBA Commissioner Joe Antenora added: "We are extremely gratified by this new two-year agreement because it provides meaningful evidence of the PBA Tour's success as a high-interest sport for television viewers."

