

ABC drops all gender restrictions

By Bob Cosgrove

It's not the bowling world turned upside down—yet—but there's definitely been a strong tilt.

More than two-thirds of the 1,257 delegates at the 103rd American Bowling Congress Convention in Mobile, Alabama on March 18 approved an amendment that removed clauses in its constitution and bylaws restricting membership based on gender. The vote officially ended five months of uncertainty and a nearly 100-year policy of excluding women from membership in the Greendale, Wis.-based service organization for tenpin bowlers.

Well aware of recent sex discrimination court rulings involving USA Boxing and the Boy Scouts, ABC's executive committee last October eliminated all references to gender after several women's leagues—most notably, the 33-member, church-affiliated St. Anthony's Ladies League of Temperance, Mich., which had obtained legal representation—applied for ABC membership but were rejected because of the gender clauses. ABC, which did not wish to spend members's money fighting in court a cause it wasn't sure it could win, ordered its 2,700 local associations to process all membership applications filed by women.

ABC's board of directors ratified the committee's decision in November, leaving delegates with the final say.

Those at the convention arguing against the amendment, particularly NCABA spokesman Vince Jozwiak of Springfield, noted that no plan had been established concerning how ABC and its sister organization, the Women's International Bowling Congress, would handle matters if both groups dropped their gender clauses (WIBC will vote on the issue this month in Salt Lake City) and essentially provided similar services.

In addition, Jozwiak wondered why a decision had to be made while an ABC/WIBC-sponsored consolidation study currently was underway.

One delegate, after pointing out that ABC was one of the first sports organizations to drop the "Caucasian-only" clauses from its constitution (in 1950), said there was no room in today's world for discrimination of any kind. Another mentioned that passage of the amendment would be the best way for ABC to celebrate Women's History Month.

The amendment passed after a voice vote by approximately a 70-30 margin.

Two other issues generated considerable debate. One was a proposal to remove scores of 299 and 298 from the "honor score" category and place them in the "11 in-a-row" category. The plan was then, according to the ABC board which recommended its passage, to use the savings to develop more awards for lower-average bowlers.

The delegates instead stayed with tradition and voted to retain the honor award status for 299s and 298s.

The only amendment that required a ballot vote dealt with adding booster division doubles and singles events (and increasing the allowable average from 170 to 180) to the ABC Tournament. Any chance for the plan's passage ended after ABC Executive Director Darold Dobs, in a rare appearance at the microphone during the legislative session, pleaded with the delegates to maintain the tournament's stature as "the best of the best." The vote to reject was 584-486.

In all, 24 amendments were adopted, 14 were rejected, and two were withdrawn.

Other legislation adopted:

- Establish a 20-day time frame for league and tournament secretaries to submit completed honor score award applications.

- Allow scores bowled unopposed before or after a scheduled match to qualify for ABC awards.

- Require a league officer or appointed representative who is not bowling to be present during an unopposed pre-bowl or post-bowl match.

- Require teams bowling unopposed to

complete one frame on one lane before starting the next frame on the adjoining lane.

- Permit the use of a removeable device to change the span, pitch, or size of the gripping hole in a bowling ball as long as the device meets the criteria specified in the rules.

- Expand the Award of Merit to honor the highest average bowler in each association.

- Allow bowlers 50 years and older to join senior leagues if provided by league rule. However, only those bowlers 55 and over will be eligible for senior awards.

- Eliminate the senior certificate to coincide with the elimination of the senior membership card.

- Remove adult-junior leagues from the mixed league classification.

- Provide seasonal awards for sponsors of mixed teams of any combination which bowl one of the three highest scores for a three-game series or a single game in sanctioned competition.

- Provide temporary coverage to all leagues which intend to sanction.

- Establish a one-year term of office beginning May 1 for amateur organizations which have representatives on the ABC board.

- Allow ABC officers and directors to be elected without ballot at the convention, providing a list of nominees is presented to delegates at registration.

- Restructure the ratio to determine delegates from local associations. One delegate will be allowed per 1,000 members or major fraction thereof. Associations with less than 1,500 members are entitled to one delegate and one alternate.

- Require local association secretaries to provide the state association secretary or designee a copy of the alphabetical list of each association member who bowled 21 games or more in the winter or summer season.

- Delete some requirements for inspectors for certification or honor scores while requiring verification of pinspotting accuracy for each inspection.

- Delete the special awards for bowlers who must deliver the ball differently, and provide the same recognition as other ABC members.

- Place the responsibility on individual league and tournaments to comply with applicable gambling laws during sanctioned competition.

- Delete the ABC dues waiver for overseas active military duty personnel.

- Establish an ABC lifetime membership with associated fees.

- Increase the maximum allowable term of office for state/provincial association presidents and vice presidents to three years.

- Revise the objectives of the state/provincial associations to reflect current responsibilities.

- Require state/provincial associations to adopt the mandatory constitution.

Other legislation rejected:

- Recognize all summer league averages of 21 games or more, and require them to be included in the association's yearbook.

- Allow league arrearages to be deducted from a player's prize money, but if not covered there, to be prorated from prize money of all league teams.

- Prohibit a team from using a substitute for a vacancy.

- Allow pacers to bowl in league play unless prohibited by rule.

- Increase participation fee in sanctioned tournaments from \$1 to \$5.

- Allow a bowler who does not have an acceptable entering average under tournament rules to use his ABC Tournament average for 25 years or more.

- Allow a bowler with a previous or current average to use his ABC Tournament average of 21 games or more for entry in the ABC Tournament booster division.

- Permit local associations to conduct either a team event or singles and doubles competition as their annual tournament.

- Require each bowling center to be considered for the local association championships provided it meets the minimum tournament requirements.

- Allow bowlers who have suffered a disability that limits their performance to establish a new average upon return to league play if approved by the league's board of directors.

- Two proposals dealing with mixed competition awards since another similar proposal was approved.

Legislation withdrawn:

- Allow individuals bowling unopposed to qualify for ABC awards, providing a league officer is present.

- Require a bowler resigning from a league to pay fees until the vacancy is filled.