

## 20 QUESTIONS

# Chris Blackmore

*On November 2, Alexandria's Chris Blackmore captured his first PBA regional title and \$2,500 by defeating John Neral of Haskell, N.J., 220-147 in the championship match of the PBA East Region Danny Wiseman / Fort Meade Open at The Lanes Fort Meade.*

*Ironically, Blackmore has cut back a bit on his bowling this season, competing only in the Jackpot Trios league at Bowl America Shirley and practicing just once or twice weekly. Nevertheless, he believes this current schedule may have helped him win because bowling hasn't been constantly on his mind.*

*Blackmore, 25, a project coordinator for Driven Incorporated, a litigation support business in the District, recently answered 20 questions from editor Bob Cosgrove.*

### **What was the reaction to your victory from your fellow bowlers?**

A lot of 'em said it's been a long time coming and that I should have gotten one earlier. But me personally, I'm just happy to finally get over the hump and get that first regional title.

Over the past couple of years, I've come pretty close. Two years ago, I made the RPI [Regional Players Invitational] team without having a title. I've made the finals quite often; I just never seem to get it done on Sundays.

I'm a little more focused now; I seem to have a better game plan as far as how to play the conditions and what adjustments to make and so forth. Going forward, I feel pretty confident. I feel like I really can compete, and I really do have a shot when I'm out there.

### **Were there any feelings of "Take that!" on your part to anyone who may have doubted your abilities?**

No. I use that as motivation; I know there are people out there who probably feel I'm overrated, so to speak, or something like that. I haven't accomplished as much as people may have expected me to accomplish by this time.

Yeah, I like to use a lot of negative factors for motivation when I'm on the lanes. It actually settles me down when I feel like somebody doesn't expect me to do well. It sort of gives me that motivation, gives me that drive, and it also alleviates the nerves, you know, on the other side. So I actually do use it as motivation.

I actually get along pretty much with everyone in the area; there's no one in particular I want like, "Hey, I want to show you up," or something like that. I know a lot of people have kind of lowered their expectations of me in recent years, which has kind of motivated me to come back out here and prove that I can still do it and I can win at the professional level.

### **You've been known for throwing the big hook. Did your success in having to throw it much straighter during most of this tournament make the victory that much special?**

Yes, it did make it that much more special because that in particular is not really my "A" game, so to speak. Throwing it straighter, I always like it when the lanes are tough because it brings out ...

I believe the best rise to the top when the lanes are tough, and if you're able to adjust and play a variety of shots, then most of the time you'll be the one who's successful.

I've been practicing on playing straight, and I feel pretty comfortable. It's definitely not my "A" game, but I knew, at least for that particular tournament, that straighter was greater, and that pretty much was my game plan on Sunday.

It was funny: On Saturday, I played a variety of shots. I started straight and then I hooked it a bunch in the mid-games and then went back to playing straight. I had good games playing both lines, but I felt like on Sunday that if I was going to make a run at the title, then I would pretty much have to find something that nobody else was capable of playing—or at least didn't want to give it a shot.

On [the PBA] Shark [pattern], going straight is not necessarily the ideal way to attack the pattern. Most of the time, you play the middle of the lane, and you migrate in and you usually end up getting pretty deep. But they were really tight on both days. They were actually tighter on Sunday, so I tried hooking it a little bit during practice and just saw there was no way that I was going to be able to get my most potential out of playing that line, so I decided to play way right.

What's funny is that one of my weaker balls was actually reading the lane better than anything I had, so once I found a ball that was giving me the mid-lane read that I needed, I was able to go outside and play that line. Fortunately, it worked out.

### **How does this win affect your self-evaluation as a bowler?**

I think a win in general for anyone would definitely boost their confidence. It's boosted my confidence; I really feel like when I compete out there that I'm a factor, and I have a legitimate shot at winning.

Me, I've always been optimistic with my game; I've always been pretty confident with the way I throw it. I always know I can get better and more knowledgeable, and I always strive to do that. But I think the win definitely makes me more confident in subsequent tournaments.

Knowing that I've been there and done it alleviates the nerves a little bit, and

I will definitely know that I'm capable. And I know I'm capable of playing different lines and winning with my "B" game, so to speak.

**How do you rate yourself among your fellow PBA East Region players?**

Honestly, I've always looked at myself as one of the better players out there. There are a lot of good players, but I always felt like I had potential, and I felt like I was capable of winning. I think a lot of it was mental and just being able to calm myself down on Sundays and just focus on throwing good shots. I know if I throw good shots, I have a chance to win.

If you go into matches where you're a little hesitant about your own fundamentals or whatnot, it's difficult to win. Now I feel like I can go into these finals on any given day and have a shot at winning.

**How do you rate yourself among your fellow NCAUSBCA members?**

I think I'm one of the better players. Like I said, there are good players all over the place—there are good players on the regional circuit, there are good places locally that don't participate in PBA events. Me personally, I don't like to sound cocky. I really don't talk about my game a whole lot—I'm usually pretty critical of myself. But in my honest opinion, yes, I certainly do think I am one of the better players, and I never shy away from bowling against anybody.

I always strive to get better, I always feel like I can get better. I just try to keep improving my game.

**What is something that you've learned about bowling or yourself that may have contributed to your success?**

Be aggressive all the time. Do not let off the pedal.

The late [coach] Bob Pendergraft once told me when I first started bowling regionals that none of the guys that win ever let up—*ever*. He said even when it doesn't mean anything, they *never* let up.

I still remember what he told me before because that really is 100 percent true. You can't go in there and expect to win or just feel like you can just cruise through a tournament without giving it your best and your 100 percent effort.

Regardless of the results, as long as you stay aggressive, stay in the moment,



focus, and you have to want it from start to finish. And as long as you strive towards that goal of winning and pushing yourself to the max, that certainly gives you great chances.

**Which area players do you admire the most?**

I would say Keni Lowe Jr. number one. He's won a couple of times, both in the south and the east. I've always respected his game. He's a great person; he's always willing to share his knowledge, too.

I also admire [NCAUSBCA Hall of Famer] Larry O'Neill. I never really watched him in his prime, but we talk a lot about the state of the game and how it used to be

back then. He certainly motivates me, and I hope I motivate him, too, because he still watches me quite often.

**What's the strongest part of your game?**

Being willing to play any angle at any time.

**What part of your game do you need to work on the most?**

I would say balance—certainly balance—and not grabbing the ball (squeezing it at the bottom of the release and sort of trying to force it to hook instead of just letting it go), which is very important

these days because if you grab the ball, it's almost certainly a bad shot.

**Who has been most responsible for the development of your game?**

My father. He was the one who introduced me, he was the one who brought me to leagues growing up and having me compete in all the youth tournaments. So certainly him—and my Mom. You can put that in there, too!

**How do you handle pressure situations?**

I try to go through my pre-shot routine, take my time, and just focus on throwing a good shot and live with the results. As long as I can throw the shot that I want to throw, whatever the result may be is what it's going to be. The main thing is just trying to throw my best shot possible in clutch situations.

**Can you see yourself bowling well enough to earn a living in bowling?**

Honestly no, I don't think so. Obviously the money is just not there right now. There isn't a whole lot out there for the risk. With gas, food, lodging—all of that stuff—and to be traveling around for that many months is just hard. [Outside of] maybe the top five or so in the country, I don't really see it. It's just not a lucrative profession.

**So the PBA Tour is not a goal for you now?**

Well, it's sort of a goal, but it's not my number one priority. Right now, my number one priority is work, paying my bills, have a place to sleep, have food to eat—those are my main concerns.

Bowling at one point was my number one priority. I wanted to pursue it, but I never did get to the point where I could

pursue it 100 percent. It's really hard to get out there and pursue it 100 percent.

If there's someone who would back me or something like that, then maybe it would have been different, but it never worked out like that. I pretty much worked full-time and pick and choose the tournaments that are relatively close and occasionally travel somewhere far maybe once or twice a year. That's about it.

I have cut back on bowling, and I'm certainly not as avid as I used to be, but I still enjoy it, and I'm not ready to pack it up completely and move on. I've been doing it since I was three years old, so it's part of my life.

As far as future goals, it would be great to one day maybe be exempt, but obviously I've got to put myself in a position to earn that status. I have to *compete* to earn that exemption.

**How do you keep up with the continuing equipment changes in the game?**

I do a lot of research online in my downtime about layouts. Sometimes I see videos on Youtube—a lot of different things. I read *Bowlers Journal* and stuff like that. I talk to guys out there when I bowl regionals discussing equipment and what they use, how it's laid out, and why it does what it does. I just try to incorporate that and try to figure out what may be best for me.

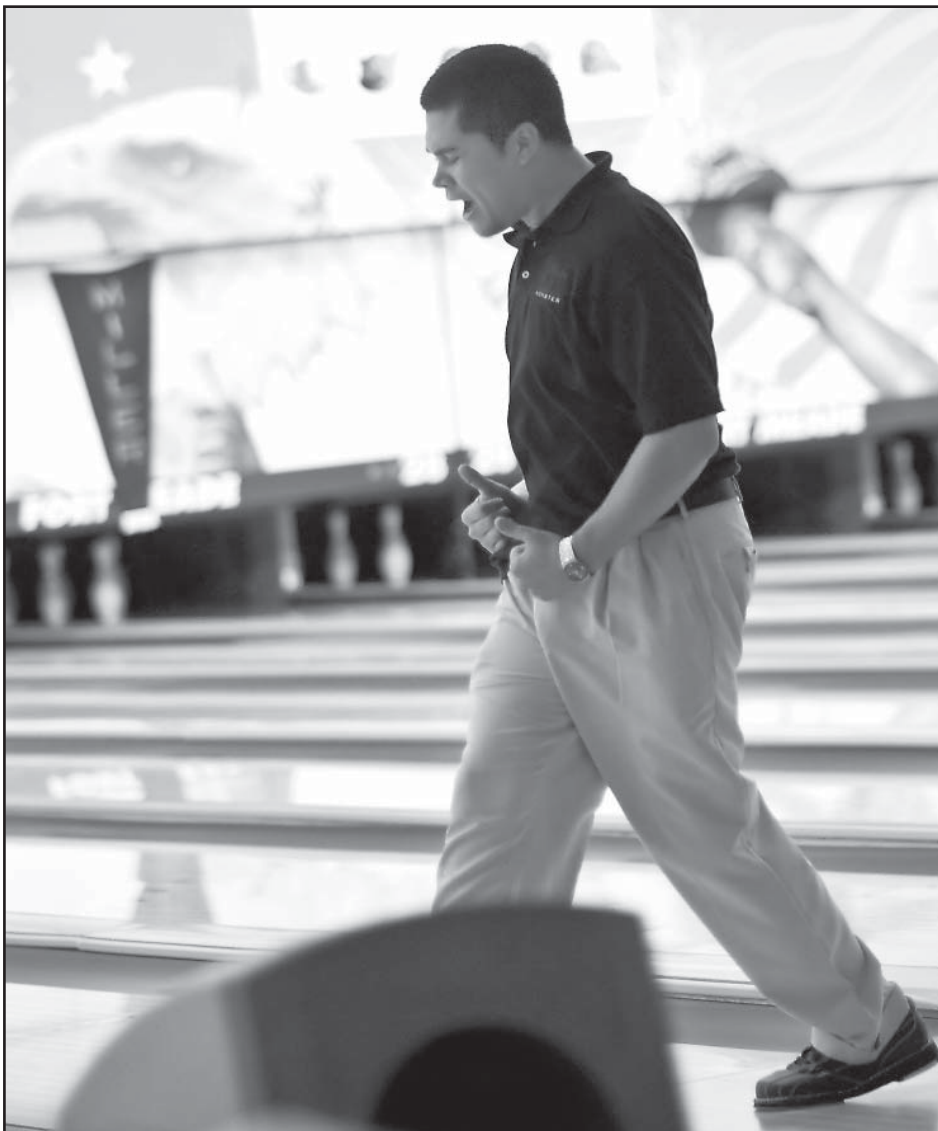
The guys at Sports Plus [Carmen Don Pro Shop] also help me out a lot—Jim Lewis, Mark Spires, Gee Lopez. All the guys there certainly have helped me out a bunch, and I appreciate all the stuff they've done for me. I always ask for their advice and suggestions as far as equipment and how I should lay it out and what they think is best.

**What pleasure outside of winning do you derive from bowling today?**

A league in general is competitive, but I enjoy the people I bowl with, and I enjoy the people that are in the league.

As far as scoring, obviously you don't get a big thrill out of shooting big games anymore. I just want to throw good shots. I understand that the scores are high. I still enjoy the game, basically.

I still get a little thrill out of throwing big games, but I generally just try to focus on throwing from Point A to Point B. If I can repeat those shots, then I can



Chris Blackmore rejoices moments after securing his first PBA regional title.

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pretty much bowl on anything as long as I'm throwing it well—and I can still tell if I'm throwing it well. I know when I'm throwing bad shots yet still may get rewarded for it.

### **How do you prepare for PBA lane conditions on less challenging house shots?**

Spare balls are spares, and lane conditions are totally irrelevant with it comes to spares, so I like to practice shooting spares a lot. If I'm making spares regularly, that generally means my swing is straight and my lines are straight. So spares are certainly really important to be on top of the scoring when you go to any tougher shots on PBA-type conditions.

As far as strike balls or whatnot, I focus a lot on release on easy patterns and whether or not I'm hitting my target. Those things are key. Regardless of the lane conditions, you have to still recognize whether or not you're throwing good shots.

Obviously, you get rewarded sometimes when you throw it way right and it hooks back, but you've got to be truthful to yourself: *Did I throw a good shot or did I just get rewarded for throwing a bad shot?* As long as you can focus on whether you're hitting your target, that's key. Me personally, I understand when I throw a good shot and when I throw a bad shot. That's pretty much how I approach easier conditions.

### **If you were named the bowling czar, what one thing would you change about today's game?**

I would certainly scale back on the equipment—the power of the equipment. I think that certainly has minimized the gap

between the good players and the great players or more so, the bad players and the good players.

People have gotten a significant advantage because of today's equipment, which I don't think is really fair, especially for those who have put in a lot of work and effort into getting better. I don't think it's fair that somebody can buy a “200 [average]” ball and have free hook—you know what I mean?

I grew up pretty much in the resin era, but prior to that I hear a lot of stories from my Dad and Larry O'Neill and guys like that about how they threw rubber and plastic and all that stuff and how today's game has changed so much where it seems as though *lesser is better*. All I can do pretty much is try to adapt to what's out there because that's my environment.

### **What do you like to do in your spare time?**

I play a lot of poker online in the comfort of my own home. I like to go out and hang out with friends. I like to golf. I generally like all sports, but I have put a lot of time into poker actually and have done a lot of study of poker—and been rather successful at it.

### **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Hopefully in a mansion in Beverly Hills! Honestly, if I become a full-time professional bowler, that would be fun, but realistically, I don't think it's gonna happen. So I'm looking at just having a stable job and a nice place.