

20 QUESTIONS

Chris Smith

On the evening of April 14, 2023, La Plata, Maryland's Chris Smith, 19, used his 16-pound Roto Grip Idol Cosmos to roll 35 of 36 possible strikes in an 879 series in the Friday Nite Mixed league at Strike Zone, the NAS Patuxent River Bowling Center. His previous highs had been a 289 game and 770 series.

Days after recording his strike-fest, he responded to questions posed by editor Bob Cosgrove.

When did you first bowl in a league?

I first bowled in a league when I was four years old. I bowled at Dyess Lanes on Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas. Most of my youth league time was spent there, but I also bowled youth league at Abilene Bowling Lanes. Then I moved here and bowled at AMF Waldorf, which is where I spent my last years in a youth league.

How many seasons did you bowl as a certified youth bowler?

From 2008-2021 is how long I spent in youth leagues—one of the best experiences of my life. It was 13 years well spent, if you ask me.

When did you join the adult leagues?

I joined adult leagues towards the end of 2021. I was practicing with my friends that I had in my youth league, and my

coach told me somebody was basically scouting me for their team in the fall. I thought it was kind of odd at first cause I hadn't really done much in my last year of youth league. But, my coach had connections to a lot of people in the adult leagues, so I guess it did only make sense for someone to come out and watch me bowl.

What leagues did you bowl this season?

I bowled in three leagues this season—one on Monday, one on Wednesday, and one on Friday. The ones on Monday and Wednesday were at AMF Waldorf and the one on Friday was at Pax River Naval Station at the Drill Hall.

How many bowling balls do you normally bring to a league session?

I usually bring about three-to-four bowling balls. One weak ball (basically urethane), one ball that's kind of in the middle of the spectrum, and then one strong ball. I mostly carry asymmetrical balls, but I'm starting to get more into symmetrical ones.

Did anything during your league warm up indicate to you that a big night was forthcoming?

I don't really go into league with high expectations like, *Oh, I'm gonna bowl a lot of strikes and maybe even a 300.* I

just go and bowl and whatever happens happens.

Was the 300 your first certified perfect game?

That was not my first 300. I did bowl my first at the same place where I shot my 879. Then after that, I bowled one in my Wednesday league at AMF Waldorf. So two in total before I shot my 879.

What were your thoughts after the first game?

My thoughts after the first game was like, *Wow, I bowled a 300 again ... cool.* But it was a lot more hectic than I can explain right now. Usually after I bowl a big game like that, I'm finally able to relax. My mind goes a thousand miles a second whenever stuff like that happens. But I always try to myself to repeat the same shot every time and you'll be alright.

Was the Game 2 300 game more difficult because of what happened during Game 1?

The Game 2 300 wasn't really difficult. It's just all about repeating shots and getting the ball to the right spot, which I had trouble doing in the last frame of both games, believe it or not.

What were your thoughts after the second game and going into the third game?

My thoughts were about the same as Game 1; I'm able to relax and just focus on repeating the same shot. The thought of 900 didn't really come into my mind until halfway into the third game.

In what frame did you not strike, and what was your reaction?

In the seventh frame, got it inside of my target, it looked



good. The line was too direct, and the ball was pushing too hard. Stone 9-pin! Disappointment, mostly.

Like I said, the thought of 900 didn't really come into mind until halfway through the third game. The thought of

even achieving 900 was never in mind until then.

How did other players at your center think of your bowling game prior to the series?

The people in the center would always praise me. They would always say stuff like, "You bet-

ter be going pro," or "I'm always in awe on how you roll the ball." I'm not putting my words into this, those are actual things people would say to me every time. Also, because I'm the youngest in the league, they always want to know how I'm doing.

Has your perception of yourself as a bowler changed due to the series?

My perception of myself didn't change at all afterwards. Did I realize that I am capable of bowling such high scores like that? Before? No. After? Still No.

I always try to keep myself humble in any situation that has me attached to it. I'm not the one to go around and brag about my scores. That's just not me. I bowl and if I did well, cool. If not, there's always next week.

Do you have a coach or someone who helps you with your game?

I am self-taught. Everything that's a part of my game now was all self-taught by me. But, I do owe it to one coach: that's William O'Neal. He's the one that helped me get accustomed to the youth league at Waldorf. He would help me with the things that I try to implement into my game. It would work. He also kept telling me that I have such immense talent, and I'd be making a lot of money when I go into adult leagues. But he would always push me to be great. And I appreciate every single bit of it.

What is the strongest aspect of your bowling game?

The strongest aspect of my game, I would say, my revs. I had always known I had a high

rev rate. But, I had a training session with professional bowler Kyle Troup. The lanes we bowled on had Specto connected to them, so I was able to record stuff like my rev rate, speed, ball lay down point, where the ball hits the break point, etc. And, it said my rev rate was 537. I was shocked, honestly. Usually you would only see that RPM on two-handers.

But I would say that's secondary to what I actually think is my strongest aspect, which is my speed control. Whenever I bowl and the lanes are giving me trouble, I figure what I have to do to start striking.

Let's say the left lane is slick on the outside and the right lane is dry on the outside. I'm able to slow my speed down to play straighter on the left lane. I'm also able to pick my speed and get the ball out more and make sure the ball hits the right spot for it to come off the break point and hit the pocket.

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

I work on my footwork a lot. My feet control my speed and what the ball does when I let it go. If I get my feet too fast, I miss right off my hand.

I also work on my hand position at the bottom of my swing. That really controls what the ball does, so getting that down would be very beneficial to my game.

What has been your most memorable tournament performance?

My last year in youth league I bowled the Pepsi. Before I really started to take my game seriously and actually start practicing, I didn't really care

how I did at Pepsi; I was just there to bowl and have fun. I started taking it seriously when I was told there's scholarship money on the line. And my last Pepsi Tournament was the best I have ever bowled. All six games were above 220.

I fouled for the first time in a long time there, too. And that's what I think cost me first place. An amazing experience nonetheless. Couldn't have asked for a better set of games.

Besides bowling, what else do you do for enjoyment/entertainment?

Besides bowling, I love to watch and play basketball. Whether it's by myself or with friends, I enjoy it nonetheless. I also like to play video games in my free time—games like Call of Duty, NBA2K, Battlefield. Basically my whole childhood was bowling and video games.

What is your current status regarding school?

I plan on going to school in the future to study marine biology and hopefully make a bowling team there, as well. But for now, I work at Target as a general merchandiser. Been working there since October of last year.

What did you do to celebrate your series?

I celebrated the series by going to Sonic and getting some ice cream. What a way to celebrate an 879 series!

Well deserved though, for sure.