

ERV HOINKE, JR.

a candid conversation with the president of the "world's greatest bowling tournament"

If you really consider yourself a "tournament bowler," the Hoinke Classic in Cincinnati is sure to be on your schedule. Groups of bowlers from every part of the country set aside three or four days every year to visit the fabulous 68-lane Western Bowl and shoot for some of bowling's richest prizes.

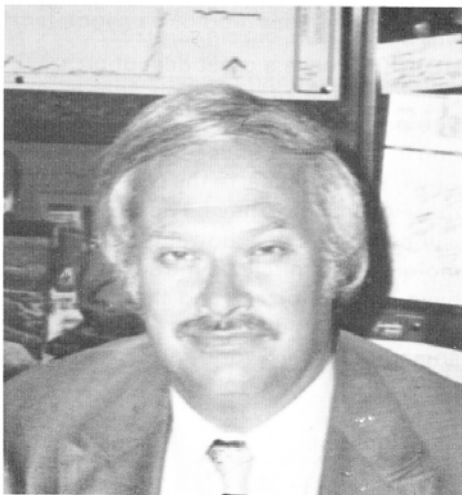
Boasting the "world's longest prize list," the 40th annual event, which began in January and ends this month, will mark the eighth consecutive year with a payoff of more than one million dollars!!!

The man behind this first-class operation is Erv Hoinke, Jr., who succeeded his father as president and tournament director of the classic after "Hoinke Senior's" death in 1980 at the age of 84.

Earlier this year, Hoinke took time out of his hectic schedule to chat with Editor Bob Cosgrove about his "Million Dollar Classic" and other subjects of interest.

BOWL: How many employees does the Hoinke Classic have?

HOINKE: Somewhere in the area of 175. That includes scorekeepers, computer operators, managers, floor people, desk workers, etc.



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BOWL: How many full-time employees are there?

HOINKE: Probably there are 22 to 24 people.

BOWL: And in the main office?

HOINKE: In the main office, Anita Vollmer is my tournament manager. I have two girls who have been with me a long time—Bertie Jansen and Eileen Lally and they are assistant tournament directors, I guess.

BOWL: Is Bertie known as "The Bird-dog"?

HOINKE: No, that's Bert Haefner. She's known as "The Birddog" and she does all the checking on the sandbaggers and questionable averages and completing Rule 27 and any other rules which pertain to a particular bowler.

BOWL: What about the sandbagger problem—is it getting worse?

HOINKE: Oh, I don't think it's any worse; it seems like it's always been there and it's always going to be there—there's a little bit of larceny in everybody when you're rolling for \$53,000! But I don't think the sandbagger problem is any worse than it used to be. I think the rules that we have will tend to make the sand-



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bagger a little bit more careful—the length of our tournament, the amount of time that we can take to check on somebody, etc.

For example, we had some fellows in from Tampa, Florida last month who bowled very well and it looked like they may be "questionable averages." I just happened to be going to Tampa that week and I was down at some of their bowling centers, checking on their averages and talking to people down there while they were still up here!

With Rule 27 and our own rule that if you've won over \$500 in three different tournaments in the past two years, and by enforcing Rule 27 *after* they bowl—which I got through the ABC a couple of years ago—it gives us the necessary tools so that if there are any questionable averages, we can usually define them and reduce their position rather than trying to take it to court and fighting it in court, which is a very long and expensive procedure. So utilizing Rule 27 after they bowl has worked out very well for us.

BOWL: How many disqualifications does your tournament average per year?



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HOINKE: I try to avoid any disqualifications if I possibly can. I have enforcement of Rule 27 which necessitates adjustments and I would say that I might have at least a couple hundred to three hundred adjustments every year.

BOWL: What do you do with the interest from money collected on prepaid entries?

HOINKE: We spend that money for TV and magazine advertising and other materials to help promote the tournament. For instance, we spent over \$35,000 on a mailer to every bowling center in the U.S.

BOWL: The pads?

HOINKE: Yes, we sent them to every bowling center in the U.S. and Canada—over 8,500—and we are currently getting another mailing out of another 4,500 bowling centers in surrounding states, and later this year we will hit another 4,500 which will be another \$10,000 or so. It cost a lot of money to make those pads and send mailers out and use things of that type. But, you know, it takes money to make money and this is one good reason that I can advertise.

BOWL: Many bowlers have wondered why the expense fee in your singles event is \$10.40.

HOINKE: That money covers all the employees that I have working in the tournament, all the scorekeepers, the printing of the entries, pencils, telescore sheets, brochures There's just a multitude of expenses that are incurred. We bought a computer for \$95,000-\$100,000. We've got mailing machines and postage

BOWL: What role will the computer play in your tournament operation?

HOINKE: It will be used to put every score into it so that I will be able to tell you or any other person who would want to know what your average was for the 42 games that you bowled here this year or whatever and I'll be able to identify those bowlers who have bowled 20 pins over their average for the 40 games or 30 pins over their average. It will assist us in trying to find out those bowlers who apparently are bowling a helluva lot better than what their average would indicate.

BOWL: Are there a lot of people who call you about tournament scores?

HOINKE: Oh, yes. I get calls everyday from tournament directors around the country wanting to know what a guy did this year or last year.

It provides us with a management tool where I can determine how many entries I get from Chicago or from Washington, D.C. so that I can determine where, for instance, that I want to concentrate my

advertising.

It also tells us how many bowlers we had who were 210 average and over or how many were from 150-160 so that I can say, "Gee, I'm getting more bowlers here—maybe I ought to do more for the lower-average bowler or maybe I ought to do more for the higher-average bowler because I'm not getting that percentage that I would like to have."

It also gives us a mailing list that we can spit out, like this year we'll hit it only once or twice.

So, I have all the information at my fingertips and I can get it out quickly.

BOWL: Hasn't there been some disagreement in the office concerning the scratch bowler and the handicap system?

HOINKE: I think there's always going to be differences and so I think all you can do is try to get all the input from all the workers you have as to what you think is the right thing to do—try to get input from bowlers. A lot of people object to the minus handicap system for scratch bowlers. We hear it very vehemently from the scratch bowlers! However, there are handicap bowlers who aren't necessarily saying, "Gee, I'm glad you did that!", but they're happy because the scratch bowlers aren't winning all the money!

We try to keep the *blend* between scratch and handicap bowlers as best we can to try to keep everybody happy. Right now, I imagine there's a lot of good 215 and 220 average bowlers—not that there are that many of them, but there are a few of them—who are probably not coming to the Hoinke because they are receiving a minus handicap. But on the other hand, there's probably a lot of handicap bowlers who *are* coming because the scratch bowlers aren't winning everything!

BOWL: Do you think that the minus handicap system bothers some of the scratch bowlers so much that they don't realize that—no matter what—they still have a chance to win the very lucrative scratch prizes (\$14,000 in the singles event, for example)?

HOINKE: We've tried to take care of the handicap bowler—we have a car that we give away (most pins over average in one game) that could only be won by them and *can't* be won by a scratch bowler. So a lot of scratch bowlers say, "Hey, you know, you're not giving me a chance!" On the other hand, the handicap bowler has no shot of winning the high scratch series for five games, so he's out of that. So it's some effort to try and make it fair.

We try to appeal to everybody. We've got a lower entry fee for the doubles

(\$19.00 per bowler). We've got a higher entry fee for the singles, so those bowlers who don't feel that their bowling is worth \$35.00 can put up \$19.00 and bowl in the doubles.

BOWL: How many bowlers roll in both sets of singles?

HOINKE: I think last year it was about 6,000-7,000.

BOWL: Do you still have "agents" around the country who promote the tournament?

HOINKE: I have people in certain areas who work well for me and I have some remuneration for those people who do a good job.

BOWL: They visit bowling centers and pass out materials?

HOINKE: Not so much that, but they're instrumental in organizing tremendous amounts of squads for me. I have eight or ten key people whom I've taken care of down throughout the years.

BOWL: What are your personal interests when you're not involved with the tournament?

HOINKE: Well, I've got four children and they all play sports and I enjoy watching them play. I'm an industrial design major and I play around a lot with my house and try to redesign rooms and things of that type.

The job is pretty demanding, but I do like to play a little golf and I'm an amateur photographer—I'm good with Nikon lenses and a Nikon body and I like to take pictures and play around photography. Also, I go on vacations.

So I guess between photography, bowling, golf and my children, that pretty well consumes my time.

BOWL: How accurate is this statement: Hoinke Sr. was very much a businessman, very cost-conscious, sometimes had to put the reigns on Hoinke Jr., who was and is flash, big signs, pizzazz ?

HOINKE: I have a great deal of pizzazz. I believe in the presentation—I'm heavy into presentation. I'm planning on putting in a \$30,000 service bar (at Western Bowl) that is typical of the type of pizzazz that I would like to have. The sparkle that will be on this new bowling center and motel will definitely be the sparkle that I have and the pizzazz and the presentation that I would like to present to have something that is world-famous and will have great appeal to people coming in that will be a conversation piece. It will have skylights in it. It will be multi-level. There will be a great deal of presentation. We'll have mirrors that reflect outside. It's going to be similar to the Wimbledon at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas—it's sparkle, it's crystal, it's contemporary!

This is the type of thing I intend to

create. If I get this bowling center off the ground, it's going to be a showplace. It's going to have great pizzazz!!!

Being five years in an industrial design school, I've coined a few things about presentation and design and I intend to incorporate them into this venture.

BOWL: Do you find that office workers who may have less pizzazz than you are saying to others, "Oh my God, he's gone off the edge!"

HOINKE: I'm sure they do, but what I've done has worked out very well so far and I've come a long way. I've learned to pick the flies out of the ointment! I think that I will continue and I might fall flat on my face, but I don't think I will. I think I've got a good head on my shoulders. I graduated from industrial design school in five years at the University of Cincinnati and I spent two years in the Army as a First Lieutenant and I've been around—I'm not a country bumpkin!

BOWL: Did you join the Hoinke Classic after getting out of the Army?

HOINKE: Yes. I spent two years in the Army in 1955-57 and bowled my way out of Korea. I went to Fort Meade, Maryland and won the All-Army Championship and won the All Events and beat a couple of guys like Norm Meyers and Johnny Guenther, who were very excellent players at that time. So I bowled a little bit. I can average 200.

BOWL: Other than style, what differences did you and your father have in running the tournament?

HOINKE: Oh, my father and I always had disagreements. He more or less had a tendency to stand behind the handicap bowler and I usually stood by the better bowler to some degree. I guess we mellowed each other and came up with an answer that was somewhere in between that appealed to both the handicap and the scratch bowler.

We really haven't changed our format that much. I don't think it changes for any tournament—especially if you're number one in the country! We've tried to basically stay pretty close to the things that we did twenty years ago, with the exception that we did go to a 210 handicap system just because of the high scores.

Years ago, 200 was scratch. When I was 16 years old, I could average 200 and I bowled in the best league in town and only two bowlers could average 200 in the league. Now, if you average 200 in the best league in town, you're down to about the 35th position or 20th or something like that, where 210 seems to be about the position of scratch now so that's what we've made it. I think it's worked out well.

BOWL: Did you differ with your father on the Steve Fehr case? (*Steve Fehr, a top Cincinnati bowler and a non-PBA member at the time, was barred from the Hoinke Classic because he was deemed to be a "professional." Fehr went to court on the issue and lost, the court ruling that the tournament directors had the right—as stated in the tournament rules—to judge whether a bowler is a "professional."*)

HOINKE: I watched Steve Fehr bowl in the 1982 ABC Masters in Baltimore and I watched him beat everybody but four guys and I am sure that my father is up there someplace looking down and saying, "I told you he was a scratch bowler! I told you he was a professional bowler!"

My father had a good point that Steve did nothing but bowl. This was his only source of income and when you're out there bowling day-in and day-out and you have no other source of income, then I guess you're a professional bowler.

But I like Steve and we're good friends, but my father was the commander-in-chief and he said that he was a professional bowler and we took Steve to court

BOWL MAGAZINE INTERVIEW:

and in essence we won the case.

BOWL: You took him to court?

HOINKE: Well, he took us to court. We went to court because he took us there!

BOWL: How many times have you gone to court?

HOINKE: I've been to court with Steve Fehr, with Martin Novak out of Cleveland, with a fellow by the name of Miller out of Cleveland. . . .

BOWL: Wasn't one of those in 1971 when a woman was declared the champion two years later?

HOINKE: Susan Diaz was her name. We paid her off after two years with interest for the money that she had coming, and it worked out very well. Here was a black woman from New York coming down to Cincinnati, in a strange town and after two years later she get the first prize money—an additional \$17,500 plus interest. It helped us establish credibility, I guess.

Whatever I've been doing, apparently it's worked out well. I have had good credibility down throughout the years and we've had a good association with the American Bowling Congress. The amount of entries that we have is a good

indication of how well it's worked out.

BOWL: Are there things in the bowling game that you don't like?

HOINKE: I was disappointed that they didn't have a larger crowd in Baltimore at this year's ABC Masters Tournament—very disappointed. I couldn't understand that. In Cincinnati, I guarantee you that the convention center on Thursday and Friday nights would have been packed—because bowling is alive and well in Cincinnati!

I understand that they have a couple professional tournaments in the Baltimore area and that maybe the people have seen the professionals before and are not particularly excited about seeing them again. In Cincinnati, we haven't seen them in a long time. We would support a tournament of that type—a PBA stop.

I think the PBA is causing excitement in the game; I think it's good for the game. Good competition and good scoring are what causes interest in the game.

I think the ABC is doing a reasonably good job. They've got a problem with the high-scoring conditions all over the country and over the long range, I'm not sure whether it's good or bad for the game any more. I know that young people bowling the game want to score good, and if they're scoring bad, they don't like it! I know! I've got two boys—one 19, the other 22—they like to bowl good. If the conditions are bad—if they run into a rockpile or heavy pins or they can't score, they say, "Let's get out of here!"

I don't know about the high scoring. I think that one thing should happen: I think that the bowling proprietors will have to take over the giving of awards. I don't think you can leave it up to the ABC any more. The proprietors are going to have to govern it and they're going to have to say, "Hey, we're going to give some nice awards. We're going to give a \$600 ring or \$800 ring and they will have their scoring produced as to what they can afford." The ABC has cut back on price of their rings because there are so many of them. Golly, in Cincinnati we probably had 80-100 perfect-games this season! As a result, the awards have become cheapened. Bowlers have really caused the problem because they want to score better; they enjoy good scores. When they do, the proprietor says, "If they want good scores, we'll give them good scores!" So here's the proprietor trying to create a condition out there that gets good scores. So I think that what's going to happen eventually is that the bowling proprietors are going to have to take over the ring situation and

the presentation and the financing of the high score awards.

BOWL: Do you subscribe to any of Bill Taylor's theories on balls, pins and the "weakened scoring environment" that he feels is prevalent in bowling today?

HOINKE: I'm not exactly sure what Bill Taylor really wants. Going back to pins that weigh three pounds-six or -eight ounces or pins that have a lower center of gravity and don't score as easy—I don't think that's the answer. I think we've given them the high scores and we can't take them away. I think if you take away the high scores, there will be a lot of disgruntled bowlers and they're going to quit the game. They're going to say, "Hey, it's getting too tough for me!"

BOWL: How would that relate to the Hoinke Classic and some of the really big scores that are being rolled this year?

HOINKE: I guess we're going to find out whether high scores are good or bad for the tournament. I've got a situation here where we put Brunswick Armor Plate onto our bowling lanes. There's tremendously high scoring. I'm not really doing anything different to the lanes now than I have for the last four years and yet my scores are up probably five, six, eight pins a game—at this point I'm not really sure how high they are, but they are extremely high.

I see people coming in. They're looking at the high scores. They go out, they bowl good, they see that strikes can be had and they bowl multiple entry—they bowl another doubles and another doubles and another doubles! So if they're discouraged with the high scores, it's not really indicative of what they're doing.

It seems to me that situation is better than having a rockpile out there with heavy pins where you can't knock the pins down and everybody being very discouraged and putting their ball in their bag and getting mad and walking out the door!

BOWL: What do you think of tournaments like the Petersen Classic?

HOINKE: I think that Petersen has had his own thing and it's a different concept, but it's an excellent tournament and I have enjoyed bowling in it.

When tournament director Mark Collier gets up on the microphone after you've bowled four or five games and you're rolling 40 or 50 pins over 200 and he starts telling you how good you are bowling. . . . I'm sure there are a lot of bowlers who get agitated by him doing that, but as long as he doesn't get punched in the nose, I guess it will work

out for him! But it's a fun thing and it has a lot of history and nostalgia and I always enjoyed it!

BOWL: What winners of the Hoinke Classic stick out in your mind?

HOINKE: Well, the fellow with the 157 average (1976 winner Warren Smith) certainly sticks out in my mind; if you watched him bowl, he was certainly a 157 average bowler!

Of course, Pat Dickey sticks out in my mind since he bowled so fantastically. (Dickey won the 1978 Classic scratch when he rolled a whopping 1303 for five games—a 260.6 average!)

Catherine Schroeder, a girl who averaged 160, threw the ball right down the middle of the lane—hit left, hit right with a 12½ pound ball. I thought that was pretty amazing; it doesn't figure for a 12½ pound ball to win the Hoinke Classic!



"I think I've got a good head on my shoulders . . . I've been around—I'm not a country bumpkin!"

But she did it! The ball seemed like it was magic. It was just a regular old Columbia ball, but it was 12½ pounds because I weighed it out! (Schroeder rolled 1102 scratch—1302 with handicap—to win the 1980 Classic and more than \$55,000!)

BOWL: Have you ever felt that you've been greatly taken advantage of?

HOINKE: I guess always in the back of your mind you think that, well, this winner wasn't really genuine, but when we check him out, we check out everything we can.

We ask him to submit Rule 27 and, of course, in a period of 43 weeks, if there is somebody there who is questionable, there's going to be squealers because people do not want somebody to steal something from them in which they participated.

When I'm finished checking Rule 27

and I have my own ruling and I have tournament directors' names from all over the country. If I think there is a problem area, I will call these tournament directors or send out a letter to a group of them, saying, "Has this man bowled in your tournament? What information can you give to me on him?"

BOWL: Sad to say, though, the fact is that an individual could bowl in your tournament for the first time ever and you'd have your hands tied. Is that your biggest fear?

HOINKE: It could happen that there's always going to be that young player—that super athlete—who is going to come in and just bowl fantastically high and set me up from an average that he had. Of course, we say that you've got to have two years, so he's got to go into hiding for two years and practice—hold his average down. It could happen, but I don't really think that I've paid anybody off who was that flagrant of a violator. I've never really seen that really "great" sandbagger come through yet! We usually have some track record on them and I contact ABC associations all over to find out what they think of different people. But the biggest help that I have are squealers—people who say, "That guy's a thief! Check him out!" And we do!

BOWL: What do you see for the Hoinke Classic ten years down the road?

HOINKE: I envision this new bowling center and its 72 lanes. I think on down the road I'll probably have one lane that will have the doubles event and one lane that will have the singles event and I'll probably have another facility to house the team event. So I'll probably have three different facilities and hopefully at that time I can get somewhere over 100,000 participants. I've got 45,000-50,000 now, but I think we can double it.

I think that the bowlers are out there. I think tournament bowling is here to stay—it's big, it's a salvation to the game. I think people want this type of action; they like the action. They like to put a few dollars down to try to win some more. It creates interest!

I think that league bowling is only interesting for a couple-three years and then it becomes pretty much boring unless you can put some life into it, unless you can have some added money put into a prize list and put some of the money into first, second and third prizes and have different prizes of \$1000 or \$800 or \$500 more between first and second and third. I think there are those people who like the action. This is what makes the game alive; it salivates the taste!