

GERRY FLEMMING

Gerry Flemming's bowling career began at age 8 when he bowled duckpins for two years. He returned to the lanes a few years later, but this time it was tenpins. He again left the sport during his junior and senior years at Potomac High School, when he participated in basketball, track, and cross country.

Following high school, Flemming again took up tenpins and was content to average 180 bowling just once a week. One weekend, however, he competed in a local tournament club, and bowling was never the same to him.

The competitive spirit had come out in Flemming, and he wanted to win and keep getting better and better, so he played every weekend.

In fact, Flemming, who holds degrees from Prince George's Community College (1983—accounting and business management) and the University of Maryland (1991—agricultural economics), couldn't get enough weekend action, so he joined a second tournament club. Eventually, he won nine club titles—an accomplishment he doubts any local bowler has topped.

He became so successful that one of the clubs informed him that he was no longer welcome. Ironically, that was welcome news to Flemming, who had wanted to get kicked out so that he could move up to scratch competition.

However, zero cashes in four Masters events in 1993 had Flemming wondering if he was ready for top-flight competition. A turning point occurred after local instructor Gary Parsons advised Flemming his physical game was fine but that he needed to focus more attention on his mental game and learn how to bowl on the highest scratch level.

His "above the neck" education has since paid generous dividends for the 30-year-old Temple Hills right-hander.

Last year, Flemming, the 1994 Tournament Concepts Player of the Year, won scratch tournaments on three consecutive weekends, including a 149-pin victory in the Nation's Capital/Baltimore Area Masters event at Falls Church, where he became the first Masters champion to go undefeated in match play. A member of the Professional Bowlers Association for nearly a year, Flemming led the Masters in 1994 in both earnings (\$3,700) and average (224.05), and he was fifth in points (9,066) despite missing the first five tournaments.

Already in 1995, he has won a Masters event at Capital Plaza, made the finals in both of his PBA regional tournaments, and has cashed in several other scratch events. Last month, he averaged 227.5 for nine games to place second in the scratch all events division of the 50th

annual NCABA Championship Tournament.

Recently, Flemming took time out from his job as a career development specialist in Landover, where he helps local disadvantaged youths find jobs or continue their educations, to talk about his bowling career and other topics with BOWL Magazine Editor Bob Cosgrove.

How would you describe yourself?

In or outside of a bowling center? I'm different in a bowling center—I'm pretty anti-social. I'm focused pretty much on winning or what I have to do. Outside, I'm totally relaxed and I have a good sense of humor.

So your competitors don't get to see that part of you?

No. Not unless they're my teammates or people I know really well in the bowling center.

I pretty much can stay on an even keel whether I'm shooting 150 or 300.

Does it concern you that some of your competitors might think that you're a human zero?

Sometimes. I guess they don't know that I'm a practical joker. My friends think I make a lot of snide comments and that I'm a comedian. But not when I'm bowling.

You really are a Jekyll and Hyde. Yes!

Did you watch a lot of bowling on television when you were young?

I didn't watch religiously. I flipped channels and if it was on, I watched. When I started taking the game seriously, I watched every week and I started taping shows.

Did you have any heroes?

Early on, I liked Marshall Holman. I liked his flamboyance and his antics. It's funny because our games are totally opposite. I have no antics or no life; I'm just kind of focused and lifeless.

Describe your bowling style.

I think it's unconventional because of my push-away; it's kind of a push up—push up and away. The first time I saw myself on tape, I looked at it over and over again, and I compared it to [David] Ozio. I realized that it's not like Ozio, but I realized that my timing

was a little late and my arm swing was a little early. I had to do something to delay my arm swing a hair, so I started pushing the ball up to just delay my arm a fraction of a second.

What is the difference between your game and that of a David Ozio?

I wouldn't know unless I'm out on tour. Experience, I'm sure. Slowly, I'm trying to get that experience to become a better bowler. I want the Flemming of '95 to be better than the Flemming of '94. I'm concentrating on regionals to see the difference between me and, say, Guppy Troup and Sam Zurich, two top regional players. That's where I want to be. When I get to that point, then I'll think about David Ozio.

Right now, I think I'm competitive on a regional level.

What is the best part of your game?

People tell me that it's my mental game. That might be it. I pretty much can stay on an even keel whether I'm shooting 150 or 300. I pretty much maintain the same attitude. You need that to keep your emotions under control so that when things are going bad, you don't go to pieces. If I shoot a bad game, I just move on to the next pair, and there's nothing I can do about it. I'll make up for it in the next game.

Do you also keep your emotions in tact to keep your opponent from seeing you flustered?

Probably. In playing head-to-head, I don't worry about what my opponent is doing because I can't control what he's doing. I'm just worried about my game. I just try to post my score. Whatever he does...it's out of my hands.

Is there any particular player you like to watch or sneak a glance at during competition because of his game having some similarity to your game?

Not anybody in particular. If I see a good player, I might peek and see what they're doing just to get an idea. But there's no one who I run to every time.

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

Right now, I'm more so leaning towards getting into shape. I'm not practicing as much this year as I did last year because I almost ran out of things to work on.

Are you satisfied with the basic structure of your game?

I'm satisfied, but I need to work on my spare game. I've missed far too many spares in the last few months, and that's something I'll be working on in the next few weeks.

Is that in part due to unexpected areas of oil on the lanes or simply bad bowling—a

lack of concentration?

Mainly, it's [because I'm] playing at home and playing away. The lanes are much drier locally than when I bowl in a regional. When I play away from home, I don't necessarily have to kill the ball, but at home I most definitely do.

Do you change equipment for spares?

I've done that. I might try a different hand position or different equipment, but I'm going to work on it. Also, I've gotten my hand problems straightened out so that I can practice. I got all my [ball] specs changed, and now I'm bowling without any pain for the first time and that feels good. That's another reason why I'm satisfied.

When you think about the "perfect" bowling game, what players do you consider?

When I first videotaped myself and tried to pattern my game after someone, it was David Ozio. I really liked his fluidity, his arm swing, and his textbook style. Brian Voss also. I wanted to bowl like them.

Anyone locally?

I love to watch Rich Wolfe bowl for the same reason as the other guys: He's textbook smooth and powerful at the same time.

Are you surprised that Wolfe hasn't done as well on tour as most people have expected?

I've expected him to do better, but I still think he will. It took Amleto [Monacelli] a long time to get his first win—now look at him.

When you're away from bowling, what do you like to do?

I like music—rhythm and blues—and going to the movies. I usually don't miss the [PBA] tour and other sports on television, plus movies, documentaries, and wildlife shows. I also go to plays and concerts, such as Luther Vandross.

Do you do much physical conditioning?

I like to work out. In the last two years, I've really gotten out of shape. I was in much better shape before.

At higher levels of competition, it's a must. I wouldn't go out on the pro tour in bad shape. When you're bowling 18 games or more, then conditioning comes into effect. But if you're talking three to five games, as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't take a lot of stamina or conditioning. I definitely feel you should be in shape to bowl well at high levels of competition.

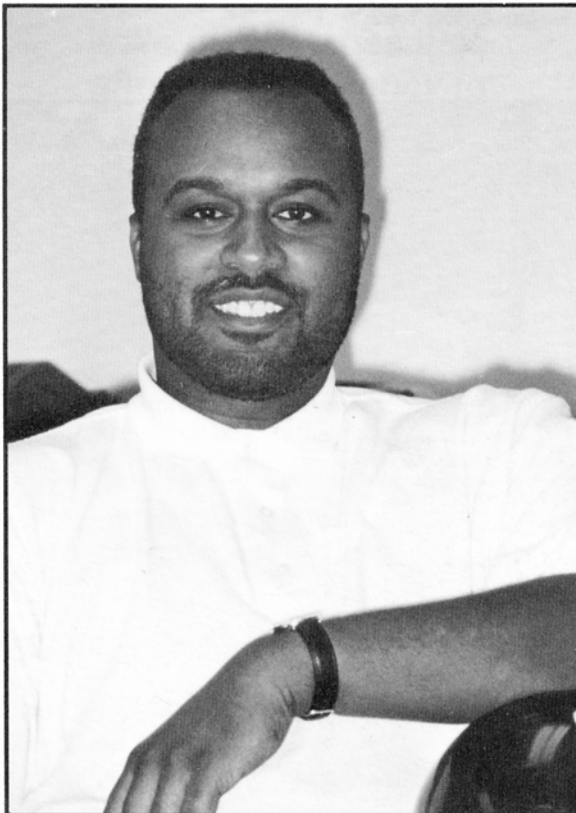
Good shape to me might mean something else to other people. When I was in great

shape, I was running three or four miles every day, and I was bench pressing 300 pounds. I don't think you need to be in that type of shape to bowl, but I don't want anyone to get the idea that bowlers are slobs.

My goal this year is to get fit. Being in great shape will help my mental game.

What about people who say that bowling's not a real sport?

That comes from people who don't bowl, so it really doesn't bother me. To the people who say that, I'd like to meet them in any sport they name. I'd like to see them on a basketball court, and I'll match my athletic



ability with their athletic ability. I'll say, "What is a real sport? You name it. Let's go!"

Now you're seeing the other side of me!

How do colleagues react when they learn that you are a competitive bowler?

They support me. Most people who work with me don't bowl.

My supervisor, Caldwell Coleman, is a bowler and he's on my team. He's one of my biggest supporters, as are my father, James Flemming; my fiancée, Lorna Rollins; my best friend and sponsor this past year, James Milling, a receiver for the Atlanta Falcons; my brother, Darnel Hunter; and my uncle, Newton Hunter.

How do you line up in practice prior to a tournament?

First, I pick a ball that I'm comfortable with and know how it will react under, say, a normal

house condition. Then I roll it in the 10 [board] area and then 15 just to see when it grabs the lane, how it grabs the lane, and how it rolls. That will give me some idea where I should be playing. From there, it's how the ball carries: I line up to *strike*, not just to hit the pocket.

If you have time, do you watch bowlers on earlier squads?

I used to. I do it once in a while just to get an idea, but I don't like to zero in on someone and try to emulate exactly what he does because everyone's game is different. I got into trouble doing that before. So I just try to go in and take my normal steps to line up on my own. I use my 10 minutes of practice to do what I usually do.

What are your PBA plans?

I'd consider the national tour only if I do very well in regional competition. My goal this year is to bowl as many eastern regionals as I can and hit the southern regionals on the off weeks. I just want to be one of the best regional players—make the top five in points or whatever. However, I'll have to skip a lot of local tournaments to do that.

Do you have any concerns about the PBA itself?

I think the PBA will still exist. It's just going through a rough time right now. The tour was better a few years ago, and there's not a lot of money out there, especially for the guys below the top 10. But there are so many bowlers and interest in bowling that I think sooner or later things will have to get better.

What about arena bowling?

It sparks interest in communities. It makes the telecast a little more exciting, and that's what bowling needs to win more PBA fans.

How important is the prize money when you're bowling?

The money isn't an inspiration at all when I'm bowling. Maybe before bowling, I'm thinking of winning the money or the money that's available. When I'm bowling, I'm thinking about executing, making good shots, keeping a level head, and making good decisions. Anyhow, I'm just thinking about winning. I just want to win.

When a tournament is over, I can still feel good about my performance even if I haven't won if I think I bowled as well as I can. There have been times in the Masters when I finished second at Annandale and third at Alexandria and I left happy because I bowled as well as I could have that day.

There have been times when I didn't make the finals when I just barely held on to get a

check, and I was happy about that. I struggled in the beginning, but I kept my composure and eked out a check, so I left just as happy as if I made the finals.

A few years ago, there were hardly any local scratch tournaments. Now there's something every weekend. Is there enough money around to support all these events?

At times it seems like there's too much, but the bowlers dictate whether there's too much or not. There are enough bowlers to play. A lot of scratch bowlers also are PBA members who bowl regionals—that's competition—and some scratch bowlers don't bowl every week. It's touchy. I predict there will be less tournaments.

What attracts you to a tournament?

The money and format.

Is there a format which causes you not to participate?

Luck-of-the-draw types.

What about tournaments that don't carry over pins?

I don't bowl in those.

Has your success brought you respect from your peers?

I think so, yes. And that's important.

You've been accepted, even though you're not exactly Mr. Friendly out there?

I am friendly. It's just that I'm not very sociable. I treat everybody nice. I guess they see I'm a nice guy; I just don't have a lot to say.

Do bowlers compete against you differently now?

Not necessarily the scratch bowlers, but the league bowlers...I guess they try to beat me more so now than a few years ago.

Do you feel less a part of them?

In a sense, yes, because I take it more seriously than they do. I don't really bowl for fun anymore.

Is it difficult to bowl in leagues now?

It's getting difficult—especially those with five-man teams. My patience goes. I'm used to a faster pace. I might have to cut back next year.

Who's your toughest match-game competitor?

Bill Dontigney—no, no! That's just a joke; I always beat him for some reason. I can't single out one person. They're all tough, and

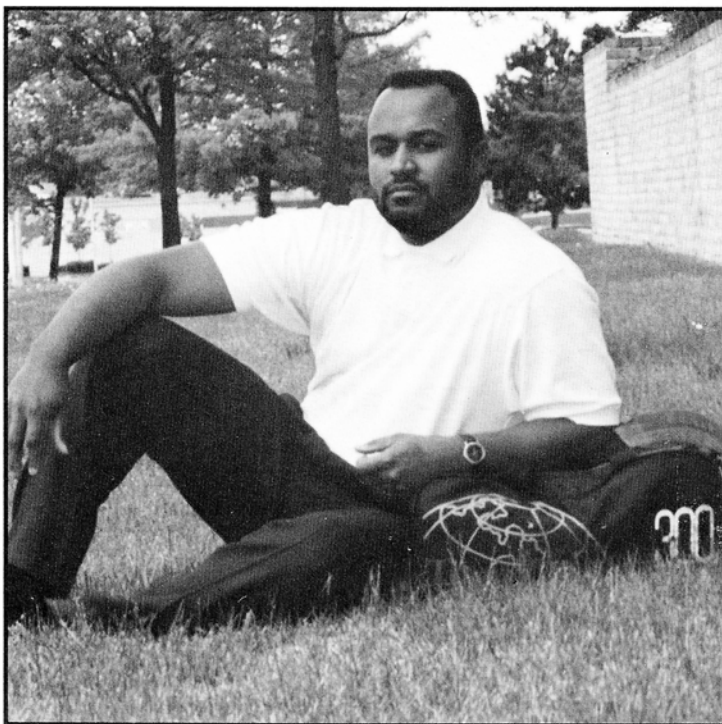
there are a lot of good bowlers in the area.

Would more African-American bowlers be inspired to try the pro tour if there were more successful African-American pros?

I think the pros would inspire more bowlers. My inspiration came from watching local top bowlers at Silver Hill. Since they were right there, I wanted to be like them. Ron Holt, Glenn Callaway—those types. When I was a 180 or 190 bowler, I would watch those guys and want to get to their level.

From your experience, would you say that race relations in the bowling community are better, worse, or an accurate reflection of our society today?

I think bowling is a little better as far as



race relations in our society. The tension exists, not necessarily from the bowlers, but from certain events and things taking place—like the closings of Silver Hill and Kent, maybe, and the openings of Bull Run and Chantilly. With these closings—not to mention Glassmanor in the mid-1980s—we've had over 130 lanes removed from our neighborhoods in recent years, and we haven't heard any dialogue about replacement centers.

This, combined with the openings of centers in predominantly white areas in recent years, has definitely raised concerns among myself and other members of the black community.

I've also heard the last few years about conditions—how Virginia for white bowlers has better conditions, while Maryland bowlers have to bowl on crap and why is that. There's been a lot of discussion about that, but it's

the only dissension I've heard.

If you were the czar of bowling, what changes would you make?

Bowling's becoming too expensive, even for the league bowler. And there's too much equipment.

What could you do to lessen the amount of equipment coming out?

You really can't do anything. The ball manufacturers are making the balls, and they're putting money into bowling.

Doesn't that make it tougher on the scratch bowler?

Yes, you always want to have the edge, and you don't want to be at a disadvantage, so you keep buying equipment. I try to learn as much as I can. I also talk to my ball driller, Scott Bailey.

Would you call yourself a student of the game?

Yes. I read bowling books, like *Par Bowling*. If I feel like I'm lacking in a certain area or don't have the knowledge I need, I seek it out.

Can you read too much about pin placements and stuff like that?

I really don't try to over-analyze. I just seek out the information I don't know. I worry just about my needs—I don't try to read it all.

Is there a constant concern about whether or not you have the right equipment?

Not much, because I think I have the right equipment.

What are your thoughts on scoring today?

The league bowling scores have gotten out of control compared to 10 years ago. There should be a good mix: The shot should be toughened a little more in leagues; in the long run, I think the bowlers will accept it and realize that you don't have to roll a 270 to bowl a good game.

If you were to spend some time alone on a desert island, what book would you bring?
Probably the *Bible*.

So you're a religious person?

Yes.

Is religion tied in with your bowling? Is it a part of you?

Yes. It was the way I was raised, so I try not to veer too far....

...From the straight and narrow path?

Right. Exactly.

Do you find yourself praying that your opponent doesn't get what he needs in the tenth frame?

No, I don't. I pray that I will bowl well. I never pray to win.

When your opponent has forced you to double or mark in the tenth frame, how do you approach those kinds of pressure situations?

I try to think about practice. When I practice, I work on my mental game and try to envision shooting a big shot or something I need. I try to put pressure on myself in practice so when I need a good shot in competition, I just try to act like I'm in practice and just let it go.

Are you always aware of what you need to win?

Yes. I will say one thing: I'm more nervous in qualifying than in match play. If I make match play, I'm already guaranteed a certain amount of money, and I know I can win. In qualifying, I'm a little on edge because there's the urgency to make good shots right away.

How do you rank yourself among area bowlers?

I had a good year and still think I could do better. I think I'm in the top....

Ten? Five?

I'll say top 10. If someone were to judge the year 1994, I'd be pretty high. But as far as, Am I flat out better than everyone? No. There are about 10 to 20 bowlers locally who can win at any given time.

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Were you surprised at the number of different individuals—ones who perhaps were outside of your "10 to 20 bowlers"—who won Masters titles last year?

There were surprises because I do know Blaine [Korcel] and I know John [Smith], and I was surprised. But as I was saying, there are so many good bowlers that there are no gimmes.

Are there particular individuals that you

look up to?

No. I think I'm looking next to them. There are a lot of good bowlers who I have a lot of respect for.

Any players come to mind immediately?

If I start to mention names, I know I'll leave out someone. That's the problem, and they'll be out to get me! I'll say Rich Wolfe, Tony Chapman, Rich Dodge, Lee Brosius, Tony Walton, Brian DeMatte, Bobby Hall II, Jim Lewis. I think Kendra Cameron is going to be a star. She's someone definitely to look out for. Another young player to keep an eye on is Chris Johnson, the former *BOWL Magazine* columnist.

At the same time, there are bowlers I admired before I became a scratch bowler, like Magic Gray, Ron Holt, Glenn Callaway, and Jim Taylor.

What would you like to accomplish in bowling in the next five years?

I'd like to be a top regional player and hopefully win a major scratch title, like the Super Hoinke, and then maybe go out on the national tour. But I really don't look that far ahead; I'm just concentrating on this year. And that's to win a regional—at least get in the top five in points. I'll set goals for the next year or two once I see how this is going.

I had no intent of accomplishing what I did in the Masters last year. I set out to win, but that wasn't a goal—I didn't have it on my wall.

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Would that be the ideal situation: to become such a good regional player and win a big scratch event for seed money for the tour and then live that life from stop to stop?

I can envision it. I don't know if it's something that I'll want or look forward to until I get to that level—if I get to that level. Then I'll decide: Do I really *want* to do this? But right now, I'm striving to get to that level of bowling. Then I'll worry about the baggage of the lifestyle when it becomes an option.

I have a sponsor. I could go on the national tour today, but I know I'm not ready and I'd waste his money. I've recently been sponsored in some regional tournaments, but I don't have to be sponsored. Hopefully, I'll make money for the sponsor now in case the national tour comes and I struggle.

I sponsor myself in local tournaments.

What advice do you have for local bowlers?

This is for league bowlers on up, youth bowlers included: *Stop making excuses and make adjustments.* Bowlers in general are the cryingest, whiningest, excuse-making people I've ever seen. It's true: I've never seen people complain so much—even on a scratch level.

Everyone's playing on the same thing—just play with the hand you're dealt, so to speak. That's what I try to do. If I'm having a problem or something, I'll look within and try to change my game or point the blame on me.

People complain about left-handers. I think that the best left-handers are just as good as the best right-handers. Sometimes they have the advantage and vice versa.

For junior bowlers, I say have fun and don't take the game too seriously. Seek out help if you want to improve your game. Ask some of the top area players; they're very approachable—nice guys. They'll be glad to help you out, as will the local instructors.

Parents of junior bowlers can bring their kids to watch the scratch tournaments, and let them have some access to the players. You don't have to wait for the tour come to town to see good bowlers.

Senior bowlers should lower their ball weight if they're having problems.

I use a 15-pound ball. I have more control and I'm able to do more with the ball since I've dropped a pound.

Do you notice any difference in hitting power?

Yes. Mainly the light hit—more 7-pins. The 5-pin doesn't quite make it over to the 7-pin. I don't think I've left more 10-pins because I think I've added some roll to make up for the lack of hit.

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Do you ever use a 16-pound ball?

I had wrist problems—that's why I dropped [the ball weight]. I don't have them anymore. I think I'd have timing problems if I tried go back up [to 16 pounds].

Does it bother you that, unlike the old days, most of today's players who don't make the finals in scratch tournaments don't stay around to watch?

A lot of players don't, but I stick around because I'm a bowling fan. I love to see the competition and the excitement of who are making the shots when they need it. I like to see the outcome.

Name someone you admire in our society and would like to meet.

I would have loved to have met him in his prime, but I still would like to meet Muhammad Ali. He was a great athlete and a fearless man who stood up for what he believed.

What have been your biggest thrills in bowling?

My first win in the Masters tournament last year at Falls Church. Also, my first PBA regional tournament in October 1993 in Franklin, Va., in which I cashed.

I'll share with you that on the ride home from Franklin I shed some tears because I reflected on my mother, who is no longer with us and who started me in duckpins when I was eight or so. She would have been proud of me.

What's been your most embarrassing moment on the lanes?

I fell pretty hard this past season in a league at Alexandria. If I was watching, it would have been pretty funny, but for me it was pretty embarrassing.

It was the fill frame of the last game of the night, and everyone in the center was finished bowling. I wasn't concentrating, and I just got up and stuck a little. The next thing I know, I fell forward, there was a loud *thump*, and I'm on the lane. I glanced back, and everyone was wondering if I was hurt. So I got up and acted like I *was* hurt, and then I took a few steps and told them that I was all right. That's when everyone started laughing. ●

WIBC delegates approve single delivery resolution

At the recent WIBC Annual Meeting in Tucson, Ariz., delegates agreed to test improved services by approving a resolution which will allow WIBC, with ABC and YABA, to establish single processing procedures for purposes of providing membership services for women, men, and youth. This agreement deals with their respective local associations and is for test purposes only.

Any current procedures, bylaws requirements, etc., will apply insofar as applicable and any deviation must be approved through the offices of the executive directors of the national organizations.

Test sites will be determined by the national organizations. The resolution is effective through July 31, 1997 and also was approved by both ABC and YABA.

WIBC President Joyce Deitch reminded delegates: "This is an era where change equals survival. Our industry is not the same as the previous year. The environment, our organization, and the sport require different attitudes and actions."

A proposal passed by ABC delegates which allowed a bowler to finish any one game before his/her teammates or opponents unless league rules do not permit bowling out was amended by WIBC delegates so that "if games one or two are bowled out, the player cannot return to bowl in any subsequent game(s) in the series." The latter applies in WIBC and mixed leagues.

Aulby is April's top bowler

Mike Aulby's victory in the Brunswick World Tournament of Champions and two other top 10 finishes earned him the Bowling Writers Association of America's Bowler of the Month award for April.

A rarity

Bill Lytle of Columbus, Ohio produced a bowling rarity in the Ohio Intercity Tournament. He started with 300, followed with 221 and closed with an all-spares 187, giving him an all-strike and all-spares in the same series.