



The difficulty of winning on the PBA Tour

The greatest bowlers in the world perform on the PBA Tour. With all due respect to outstanding foreign players, as well as the most talented amateurs in the United States, the PBA Tour is the standard of measurement for supremacy in the world of tenpins.

It is extremely doubtful that foreign bowlers who dominated and soundly thrashed the Americans in the FIQ would challenge or dispute the relative talents of PBA stars and those they faced in Reno.

And how difficult is it to win on the professional level? While the likes of Earl Anthony, Mark Roth, Marshall Holman, Pete Weber, Mike Aulby, Wayne Webb, Brian Voss, Amleto Monacelli, Dave Husted, Walter Ray Williams Jr., Del Ballard Jr., Dave Ferraro, David Ozio, and Norm Duke have reached the million-dollar mark in earnings with multiple titles, many of the PBA's most talented players are still in search of their first crown.

For example, Mike Edwards wore the crown as the highest earner on the tour with a victory until he broke through in Markham, Ontario, Canada in 1994. The talented Oklahoman waited 12 years for his first title.

Edwards, at long last, achieved his goal.

However, Phil Ringener, the quiet, affable Texan, has yet to enjoy the sweet smell of victory—a goal he has pursued for 16 years. The 1995 season may have been Ringener's greatest disappointment. In a title match, Phil started strong, built a seemingly insurmountable lead, and with victory practically assured, he lost his concentration, missed two single-pin spares, and again blew an opportunity to join the winners circle.

Rick Steelsmith joined the tour in 1988 as one of the most heralded rookies in the PBA history. He lived up to all advance notices until he was struck by a near career-ending injury. Although Steelsmith holds an ABC Masters title and a PBA Tour/Senior doubles title, he still seeks his first individual PBA championship.

Joe Firpo displays one of the most solid games on tour. He captured a doubles crown with Del Warren at Las Vegas in 1987 but continues to search for a personal victory on the PBA Tour.

Doug Kent, one of the most competent performers in the game, can lay claim to an ABC Masters title. But as far as the PBA Tour, no trophy.

Kelly Coffman, the King of Revolutions,

can splatter pins with the most awesome strike ball on tour. Coffman can be likened to John Daly, the longest driver on the PGA trail. Both are imposing and impressive, and both draw rave notices for their powerful performances. However, both have failed to harness their potency to a great degree of success, while Daly has managed to come away with two major titles. Unfortunately, after trying for nine years, Coffman continues to seek his first title.

Don Moser, one of the steadiest finalists and cashers on tour, manages to qualify for the Japan Cup, the Merit Doubles, and the AMF Dick Weber Classic. He has given his best for nine years but still has no victory on the PBA Tour.

Bill Oakes, the hard-throwing Oklahoman, has been firing his missile on the PBA Tour since 1985. Although Oakes has been very close on several counts, victory has eluded the 39-year-old veteran.

Ryan Shafer, the 145-pound bomber from Horseheads, N.Y., was PBA Rookie of the Year in 1987. He possesses one of the most potent strike balls on tour, but to date, remains winless.

Eugene McCune, one of the hardest throwers on tour, is blessed with one of the best hands in the game. However, the Indiana native lacks the mental attitude required for taking advantage of God-given skills. Perhaps "Gene the Strike Machine" eventually will realize his potential and crack the winners circle.

Curtis Odom, the North Carolina sharpshooter, has been on tour since 1981 but is still winless. The popular southerner had outstanding years in 1989, 1990, and 1991, but he has been hampered by wrist problems, slumping somewhat in recent years.

All of the aforementioned are talented and fully capable of joining the winners circle on any given day. Their inability to claim an individual title is testimony to the difficulty of winning on the PBA Tour.

John Jowdy, first vice president of the Bowling Writers Association of America and tour consultant for Columbia 300, has coached many of the nation's best professional bowlers. He was elected to the PBA Hall of Fame in 1988.