



The National Bowling Stadium: A monument to the game

The September 18, 1995 issue of *Time* magazine devoted two full pages to the National Bowling Stadium.

This glossy portrait of the \$47.5 million structure in downtown Reno more than overshadowed negative accounts and descriptions as depicted by a number of leading magazines and writers in the bowling industry.

The magnificent 80-lane structure, undoubtedly the greatest promotional boost in bowling history, stands as a monument to the game.

Is this an overstatement? If so, where, within, or outside of the bowling industry has anyone invested this staggering amount of money to enhance the sport?

Furthermore, consider that the National Bowling Stadium in 1995 hosted:

- Nearly 100,000 participants in the 1995 ABC Tournament.
- A record entry for the ABC Masters Tournament.
- A maximum field of 608 entries for the ABC Senior Masters Tournament.
- The 13th FIQ World Championships featuring over 80 nations.
- The most exciting World Team Challenge ever.

Unfortunately, as so often occurs within our sport, a number of prominent writers and bowling publications emphasized and accented the negatives of the stadium far more than the positives of the magnificent arena.

The \$1 million-plus computerized scoring system, which shouldered the burden of the criticism, was an abomination. The scoring mechanism fiasco kept National Bowling Stadium executive director Reg Pearson in perpetual turmoil. Although the scoring system posed a time-consuming problem throughout the various tournaments, it hardly diminished the grandeur of the magnificent setting. And *Time* magazine described it best. Following are a few excerpts from the story by Bill Barol:

... the Taj Mahal of tenpins opened in February. Its 80 lanes, under a 42-ft. ceiling, are wider than a football field; it has mauve banquettes, purple and green trim, and permanent seating for 1,100 spectators. Scoring is fully automatic and displayed on the world's longest rigid, backlit video screen. Every aspect of the operation is overseen from a computerized command center on the fifth level. From there, high above the bowling floor, executive director Reg Pearson looks down on an ongoing tour-

nement in full swing. The crash of bowling balls, the staccato of falling pins, the clatter of automatic pin-setting machines: the din is unimaginable. "It sounds like a cash register," Pearson says. "I love it." The sound echoes around Reno, which is being renewed by bowling.

Ummm ... bowling?

Why not? Reno had been lapped by Las Vegas in a race to capture the imagination of visitors to Nevada. ... But four years ago, the city staked much of its future on bowling. And the gamble is paying off. The stadium's inaugural event, the 92nd annual tournament of the American Bowling Congress, pumped \$150 million into the local economy between February and July. ...

... every sport needs a showplace, and now Reno has bowling's.

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... what [Pearson] sees as he looks down on the 18th annual Reno Nisei Invitational is good news enough: 80 clean, well-lit, smoke-free lanes, and several hundred happy, busy, free-spending bowlers. He's a man on a mission. "It's going to take me a lot of years, maybe more than I have," he says. "But I think I can change the image of bowling a hell of a lot." And maybe in the process, as a local priest prayed at the stadium's opening ceremonies, make "this Biggest Little City become the bowling capital of the nation and the world." An auspicious sign: The invocation was delivered by Father Robert Bowling.

Again, these were but a few of the passages from Barol's article, which was far more inspiring and had much greater significance than any of the detrimental reports that flowed from a number of our more prominent bowling publications.

Kudos to Reg Pearson, world-class proprietor, promoter non-pareil, and bowling's outstanding visionary. His quotation, "I think I can change the image of bowling a hell of a lot," says it all.

Doesn't bowling's image pose an obstacle to selling the game to Madison Avenue moguls?

Hasn't bowling's image impeded all efforts to compete with golf, tennis, racing, and other sports for athletic recognition, sponsorships, commercials, and advertising dollars?

Has image relegated bowling to second-class status?

Has our low ranking on the sports totem pole enabled the ABC network to ignore ratings and manipulate "Pro Bowlers Tour" like a chess piece?

Assuming image isn't a deterrent, why haven't other networks raced to compete for a television show that has captivated a loyal and steadfast audience for nearly 35 years and has, with the exception of college football, outlasted any sports program on television and continually posts higher ratings than hockey, tennis, or golf's most prestigious event, The Masters?

Bowling may soon enhance its image through the combined efforts of individuals like Reg Pearson, former Brunswick Corp. president and CEO Jack Reichert, and others whose visions, insights, and imaginations are geared to establishing bowling as a true sport—not merely a recreation.

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.
