



I know what's wrong with Walter Ray

What's happened to Walter Ray Williams Jr.? Selected by *Bowling Magazine* as one of the 20 greatest players of the 20th century, he has encountered his most disastrous slump in years during the 1999 and 2000 seasons.

Williams, the PBA Player of the 90s, had his greatest season in 1993. He garnered seven titles and won \$296,370. He was the points leader and also won the coveted George Young High Average Award.

In 1994, he simmered down a bit. He won two titles, again led the points list, and finished second to Norm Duke in earnings with \$195,745. Although he won but one title in 1995, he earned \$153,170, a figure that placed him third behind Mike Aulby and Dave D'Entremont.

The PBA all-time leading money winner with earnings over \$2.4 million completely dominated the PBA Tour during the 1996, 1997 and 1998 seasons, a period in which he won 13 tournaments, piled up a commanding lead as points leader, and won the high average award.

However, during the 1999-2000 season, Williams' achievements have been very disappointing. Most PBA players would be content to settle for Walter Ray's records during the past 20 months. Nevertheless, coming off of three consecutive years as PBA Player and BWAA Bowler of the Year (1996-1997-1998), Williams has not performed to his expectations.

In the 1999 season, Williams won \$101,735, a sum that the majority of tour players would consider a rousing success. *But*, compared to his earnings of \$241,330 in 1996, \$240,544 in 1997, and \$238,225 in 1998, it represents a reduction of 50 percent in income, dropping from first to seventh place—the lowest he has been in this category in the 90s.

During the 1996-1998 years, Williams averaged four-plus titles a year.

In 1999, he won his only title in Tucson in 22 tournaments. He had finishes of second, third twice, fifth, sixth, seventh, 10th twice, 15th, 16th, and 19th. He failed to cash in eight others. This, from a superstar who cashed and made the finals in 90 percent of his tournaments in the previous seven or eight years of competition.

The 1999 season was a forerunner to what has become an even more disastrous year.

In 10 tournaments to date, Williams is winless. He placed fifth in Wichita, ninth at the U.S. Open in Phoenix, 11th in Tucson, 12th in Dallas, 13th in the ABC Masters in Albuquerque, 16th in Akron, 17th in the PBA National in Toledo, and out-of-the-money in the other four tournaments.

How can a bowler of this stature suddenly drop from complete dominance to just another better-than-average player?

This reduction in Williams' performance was probably as disappointing to me as it was to Walter Ray. After winning his 30th title, I made a prediction that Williams would break Earl Anthony's record of 41 titles—provided he remained healthy. At the time, it hardly seemed like a bold prophecy, particularly for a player averaging over four titles a year and completely dominating the tour as no one had since Anthony.

He was certainly in a position to threaten Anthony's record. Provided he remained healthy, why would Walter Ray, still in his prime, suddenly collapse and lose his command and ability to compete at his highest level?

As in all sports, athletes must remain healthy to perform to expectations. Unfortunately, Walter Ray encountered knee problems.

With all due respect to Walter Ray, it is difficult to believe that knee problems hampered his performance to such an extent. From my standpoint as a coach and instructor, I believe I have detected the basis for Walter Ray's decline.

At the risk of seeming bold and impertinent, I've come to one conclusion: Williams, whose end-over-end roll became one of the most effective releases for strike percentage, suddenly became enamored with hooking the ball by exerting excessive wrist action and lofting it out on the lanes. Applying greater wrist motion and lofting the ball is far more strenuous on knees than gently placing the ball on the lanes as was his forte in his dominant years.

This dramatic change in Williams' game became very evident to me. In my coaching clinics, I refer to Williams as a model for laying the ball down early with minimum bounce—that rolling the ball rather than spinning it was the principal factor in Williams' dominance on the tour.

This is no indictment of players who have the uncanny ability to apply thunderous revolutions to the ball. They are successful because they have perfected this type of execution.

Walter Ray Williams Jr. is one of the best conditioned players on the PBA Tour. He is a non-drinker, non-smoker, no-nonsense bowler with tremendous hand-eye coordination. In addition to being a six-time World Horseshoe Champion, his athletic prowess is further evidenced by his becoming a low handicap golfer after a rather short stint at the game.

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Evidently, crankers have had a profound effect on Walter Ray Williams Jr. Judging from the results of the past 18 months, the boys with the big hooks have lured Mr. Williams into their trap.

To their credit, they have benefited from his unsuccessful attempts to execute in their manner!

PBA Hall of Famer John Jowdy is a past president of the Bowling Writers Association of America.