

Part III

How did you become a member of PBA's tournament committee?

Actually, I was appointed by Mr. [Mike] Connor, [who departed his post as PBA commissioner on Dec. 31, 1995]. There are people he can appoint, and I was one of them.

Did you take that as an honor?

Yes, I thought that was very nice. I also think a lot of times they try to represent everybody on the tour, whether that be titlists of a certain age, nontitlists of a certain age, and I think I was one of the younger people who's been out there for a few years and had an idea of what was going on—and hadn't won.

What was it like serving on the tournament committee?

I was on the committee for, I think, three years. At first it was very exciting, and I looked forward to it. I thought I had some good ideas; I thought I could change quite a few things. It's unfortunate that it didn't work out the way I had planned.

The tournament committee basically deals with fines and obligations. After a few weeks, you're very tired, and a lot of players aren't showing up for the meetings. You discuss whether so-and-so should be fined for cursing out loud or kicking the ball return. After you spend an hour or two on this, it gets very aggravating. You feel like you're in there wasting your time.

It was a good experience, and I'm glad I did it. I just think that the form in which it's set up is not going to be productive. Things won't get accomplished by doing it that way.

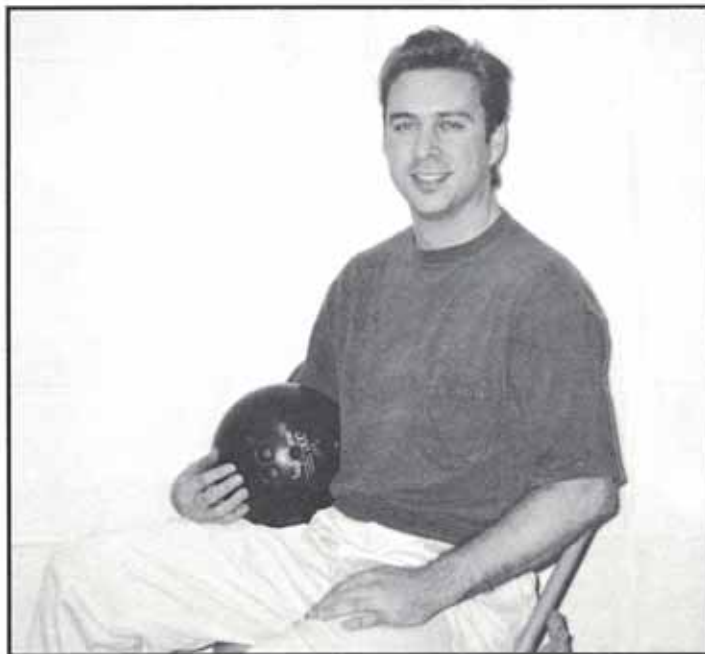
So you had a grander vision of the tournament committee, such as dealing with more significant tasks besides fines and behavioral problems?

We had insights to quite a few different things; unfortunately, with ABC-TV and the PBA office, there were a lot of things we didn't know about on the tournament committee. The way it works is that the tournament committee would bring up suggestions and proposals, and these would go on to the executive board committee.

Nothing seemed to really get done there either, because if there was a proposal for there to be more money on the national tour, the regional tours would want to know where it was going, or the senior tour. The regional tours then would want to have more money put into their tour, and we would reject it. So it became almost a back-and-forth situation, and nobody ended up winning.

Are there things that you wanted to know, but then hit a brick wall trying to find out?

It's not necessarily going up against a wall, but I'm very curious as to what our marketing scheme is and if we really have any marketing people who are real aggressive. But that will be known in the next month, I believe—



there's some reconstruction going on at the office.

Did the tournament committee position ever put you in a spot where you were making judgements on friends who knew you were on the committee?

I never had to make calls on any of my close friends, but there were times when you had to uphold a fine on people where it was an uncomfortable situation because they would know the final vote. They obviously wouldn't necessarily know who voted for or against them, but they had a pretty good idea. And a lot of times, those players would shy away from you or know that you voted against them.

Have you been aware of situations where players who already were locked into a position on a telecast would perhaps not give their best in a position-round match to help their buddy also make the telecast?

I'd be lying if I said it didn't happen. However, you would hope that it doesn't happen. I've told people I've bowled against and vice versa that it won't be that way.

I really believe some people expect it because they're playing somebody who'll basically ditch a match. If that is the intention or that's the way it's going to be, it's very unfair for the person who is behind you.

I would *never* dog a match—under no circumstances. It's not fair for those people who are out there trying to bowl for a living. You have to get past the friendship.

If you're in a situation where if you know friends are bowling each other, for example, who are third and fourth, and you're in fifth or sixth or seventh or eighth, you have to ignore that because there's going to be some times where there could be some doubts in your mind, and you just don't know.

Have you turned people in because of their behavior?

I've never turned anybody in.

What would you turn someone in for?

Generally speaking, there are people who have bothered me, but I wouldn't turn them in. I would prefer to handle it myself. If I found someone bowling next to me who was walking into my lane every other shot or yelling or screaming or throwing stuff around while I'm trying to bowl, I would generally go up to him and say, "Hey look, I know you're a little upset, but calm down a little bit." You try to handle it that way, but if things obviously get out of hand, *then* I'd turn him in.

You formerly were a member of the Ebonite shirt staff. Do you currently have any company connections?

At this point, I don't. I've talked to a few ball companies, and there are some strong possibilities, but right now, I'm a free agent, an independent.

Are there any PBA policies you deeply disagree with?

There's been a controversy over the PBA membership qualifications—the 190 average. I think it's fine to be a PBA member; however, we're riding the fence on this situation.

They're wanting people to join the PBA, but to bowl at a national stop, you have to go to school and cash in a couple of regionals.

At the state that we're in, they should open up the field, whether you're a regional member or whether you want to join and increase the prize fund so that Rudy K[asimakis] and the Chris Barneses, and the Pat Healeys will want to bowl on the tour. That hurts the tour, them not being there. These guys are fantastic amateur bowlers. John Gaines—you name it.

There are quite a few excellent bowlers who choose not to bowl on the tour because it costs quite a bit to stay a member. A lot of times they're better off bowling amateur tournaments—they can make more money.

In the situation we're at, [PBA] needs to loosen that up to get the absolute best bowlers out there. When we're bowling for a great deal of money, then people will want to become members, and they will want to pay that initiation and annual dues.

Now, I think [the current policy] decreases the talent on tour. It would be beneficial for a lot of guys to be on [the national] tour, but they choose not to do so.

Haven't your fellow pros expressed disagreement with your position about allowing top amateurs to compete on the PBA Tour on a regular basis? Wouldn't the amateurs receive financial and other benefits without having to support the organization?

That's true. It's one of the bigger problems, but I think they would all admit to you that it's unfortunate that those kinds of players are unable or unwilling and that they ought to come bowl on tour. The biggest response from the players is, "We're out here trying to do this as a living; they're doing it on a part-time basis."

They're bowling for more money or less money as we do in amateur events, so we have to give them a reason to want to come bowl.

Obviously, a lot of people don't agree with my point of view.

Isn't the 190-average qualification for PBA membership a joke in today's world?

You have to look at the number of members who join to have that card and what the dues are. It's hard for [PBA] to give up those annual dues.

But, yes, to answer your question, I think it is [a joke].

Walter Ray Williams Jr. is PBA's president. Can he or any president truly make a difference the way PBA currently is set up?

It's so difficult. Not even Mike Connor, I don't think, can change things the way they are. Sometimes it comes down to the television rights. At this point, everybody keeps relying on that TV money to make us successful. It's just not there.

People are not buying our commercial air time for the price it's quoted. They're calling at the last minute and undercutting ABC.

Richard Wolfe: Up close & personal

Most marked characteristic:

Ability to deal with different types of people. I can talk to all types of people, and I have no prejudices to speak of. I communicate well with people. I don't think I'm quick to judge.

Trait you deplore about yourself:

Procrastinator.

Quality you like most in a person:

Honesty.

Pet peeve:

Inconsiderate people.

Favorite TV shows:

"Frasier," "Seinfeld," many Discovery Channel programs.

Favorite movie:

It used to be the original *CaddyShack*, but now *Dumb and Dumber* has taken over.

Favorite actor:

Jim Carey.
Favorite actress: Meg Ryan—she's beautiful.

Last book read:

The Client by John Gresham.

Favorite tour city:

Grand Prairie, Texas.

Favorite cereal:

Rice Krispies.
Favorite dinner: All types of chicken.

Most overused word:

"fantastic."

Greatest regret:

I didn't apply myself in high school.

Idea of perfect happiness:

Live a simple life, be successful on tour, be married with a few children, a dog, and a white picket fence.

And ABC gets aggravated, and they're going to take it out on us. They moved [the start of "Pro Bowlers Tour"] back to March. To them, it's a financial situation: They say they're losing money.

We even contemplated telling them that we didn't want that \$50,000 and that we're going to search elsewhere. But we're in a situation where, for most of the guys, what are they going to do? They feel as if they have to bowl. They can't afford to give up, whether it's \$50,000 a show—or \$20,000. They still want to bowl, and they need to bowl out there to make that income.

What five players would you want to see on a telecast?

That is a tough question. Duke, D'Entremont, Vespi, Weber, and Ozio.

Dave [Ozio], because of his passion of always searching for the perfect physical game, and at times confusing himself into confusion. And because I generally like Ozio.

Weber, for the way he is able to attack bowling. He's a very aggressive bowler, and he's real exciting to watch.

Vespi, because he could shoot 300 or 130. He's exciting to watch bowl. When he's in a close match, he'll yell and scream and get in somebody's face, and that's enjoyable and good for bowling.

D'Entremont, because he's got the most leverage and balance that I've ever seen somebody bowl with. He gets such an incredible amount of rotation on the ball with so little effort.

They say this about a lot of people, and it's been an old cliché, that when he or she starts striking, they may strike forever. It is the truth with him. His ball hits like it weighs 30 pounds. The pins, the way they lumber on each other, and the roll is so tremendous.

And Norm Duke, because he's the best bowler in the world.

How do you compare Walter Ray Williams Jr. with Norm Duke, whom you've just called the best bowler in the world?

I've seen Walter Ray bowl well from all angles on the lane, but recently, for whatever reason, Norm is bowling well up the lane, and he's going a little straighter. Norm has, in my opinion, a bigger chance of winning a tournament throwing that big loop shot, which makes him more versatile as far as winning.

Walter Ray can do all those things, but when you talk about the best in the world, you've got Walter Ray just missing in second [place]—it's that close. You're talking about such a small difference.

What's your current outlook for PBA?

There are a lot of decisions coming up. The Senior Tour, the last I heard, is talking about being its own entity and moving on their own way. I not so sure that wouldn't be a bad idea for them because their membership is booming: They're filling fields at 420, and we're not filling fields at 160. It seems that it's really starting to grow for them.

It's hard to say what's going to happen. It seems like overseas, we're starting to get some tournaments. Unfortunately, most of them are invitationals at this point, but I've heard rumors of there being some regular tour stops in Europe.

It's so up-in-the-air what's going on with the tour itself. [New PBA Executive Director Mark] Gerberich is good, but the players have got to get involved. If they don't, we'll have this same conversation next year. ●