



ANDREA SHARP
*Leads team to
 victory in Women's
 Championship
 Tournament*

BOWL MAGAZINE

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*Best Tip: CRYSTAL SHAW-WESBY
 My Stuff: CINDY JOHNSON*

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STRONG FINISH

*Rodney Eckles wins
 Youth 600 Club
 Tournament of Champions*

"Lucky roll" helps bring Eckles Tournament of Champions victory as junior career winds down

Delayed 2-pin topple leads to 254-248 victory in title match

Needing a strike on his first ball in the tenth frame to keep alive his goal of winning NCAUSBCA's 22nd Annual 600 Club Tournament of Champions March 25 at Bowl America Gaithersburg, Rodney Eckles of Fairfax, Va., got the break of his life. The burly right-hander's toss stayed wide of the pocket 50 feet down the lane. His ball finally turned towards the pocket and caught just a piece of the headpin that went to the wall and returned to the setup, creating a slow egg-beater effect that kept on beating until at last the final pin standing, No. 2, fell forward and then down.

Eckles, now needing seven pins on his first ball to secure the win, nine-spared to emerge a 254-248 victor over two-time Invitational titlist Jason Eman of Springfield, Va., who had applied pressure by closing with eight strikes. Eman's demise, it turned out, was determined by a missed 10-pin in the third frame.

Eckles, who this season has won the 600 Club Winter Doubles with Augie Bransford and a NCAUSBCA team title, answered questions posed by editor Bob Cosgrove after the championship match.

How do you sum up your day?

First of all, I was happy that I made it to the first overall qualifier because my hand just couldn't take it. I've got blisters everywhere; I've got two open wounds in the front and the back parts of my thumb. And that last game, I just wanted to win so I could get first qualifier—and it worked because there was no way I could have been able to bowl any more than just that game.

I saw Michael [Simpson] out there; he was bowling well all day. And then I saw Jason [Eman] getting ready to take the victory, and I wanted to bowl him 100 percent.

There's a big kind of rivalry between me and Jason, so I wanted to bowl Jason for the title. The way it went down, that last shot, I let go of the ball, my fingers just shoot with pain, and then all of a sudden, I get that lucky roll and [the 2-pin] falls down ... and there you have it: I'm champion!

You finished on the right-hand lane. Were there any concerns over your earlier errant shot on that lane?

The one that sailed out and came all the way back? I've been having trouble; I can't hold the ball, so it kinda just depends on how it feels at the bottom of the swing. That time, I felt that pain shoot through it, and I just

let it go. But luckily I hit it enough, and it came back and washed out everything. I'm happy.

Is this your last youth title?

This will be my last Tournament of Champions. I will be an adult bowler next year. However, I think this is the last tournament besides state that's coming up pretty soon, which I might not even participate in. It's sad to go, but....

The Invitational didn't go the way I expected [he placed fourth in A Division], but I decided to come out and do something different, worked hard, and I came out and got more consistent, and this is what happened today.

Who works with you on your game?

I work with several people. I haven't worked with my coach, Shawn Goodwin, in a while, the manager at Bowl America Dranesville. He's the person who basically brought me to the next level. I also work with Michael Ayler and Barry Wallace.

Everybody that helps me has knowledge. I feel comfortable with asking them anything I need to know about my game. They worked with me and brought me to here—they brought me as far as they can get me, and now, it's my turn to work at it and go to the next level.

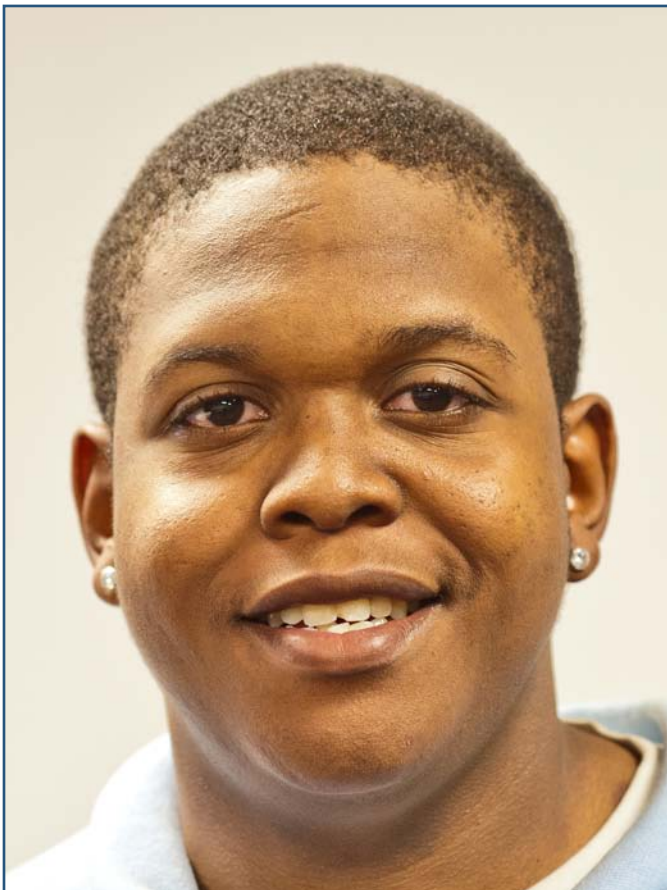
Are you still going to school?

I'm currently in an associate degree program—automotive—over at NOVA [Northern Virginia Community College]. I like cars, so I figure, *Why not?*

Cars are interesting, although with the new technology coming out, cars are not as mechanical as they used to be; they're more electronic. I like working on cars and getting my hands dirty—that's basically it.

How important is bowling in your life?

I'll be 21 here in December. I've been bowling since I was 4—about 16 years now, about to be 17. I grew up in the bowling alley. My mom and dad bowled



on Friday nights, and at first they wouldn't take me because it was one of those leagues that started at 9 [p.m.]. But they knew I liked to bowl, I got into it watching my parents bowl, and ever since then, I lived in the bowling alley.

Working there?

I used to work at Bowl America Fairfax. I think I'm going to switch over to AMF and further my education with working on pinsetters. Other than that, the bowling alley is me.

What are you going to do to celebrate?

Today is actually me and my girlfriend's anniversary—five months—so as soon as I leave here, I'll be headed to Chantilly, and we'll probably sit down and go to dinner and talk about my day. It's been a long day since one o'clock; I've been up since actually 8 [a.m.]. I'm ready to go and relax and probably drink a couple gallons of water.

I felt like I bowled 300 when that pin fell down!

So you're a big water fan?

I love water; there's nothing else. We go out somewhere to eat or whatever, my girlfriend orders a soda; I'll order water, everywhere I go. I usually drink five gallons of water a day, at least. It's part of the reason why ... you see me, I'm a little bit smaller than what you have seen in the past couple of years.

Do you have a goal?

Right now, I'm weighing about 270, and I'm trying to get down to about 210 and get in shape to play some type of football. That's my goal right now—just get healthy.

Football on the weekend?

Honestly, why not give it a shot and get in shape? The NFL is not the only place to go play football, and that's what everybody thinks. They have other [minor] league teams or anything below that. I just want to get in shape and look good, for the future.

Have you played football?

I played football two years. The two



2ND PLACE: Jason Eman's 248 finale included a missed 10-pin in the third frame.

TOURNAMENT REPORT

years that I did play, I was on my way to go to a private school with a full ride but decided to go to high school and play football and probably that was a mistake. I probably should have gone to private school and play football. Now, you watch "Sunday Night Football" and see those big guys out there playing, and I'm like, *That could have been me!* I could be in college right now playing football on TV, but you live and you learn.

What were you thinking as you began the 10th frame of the final match?

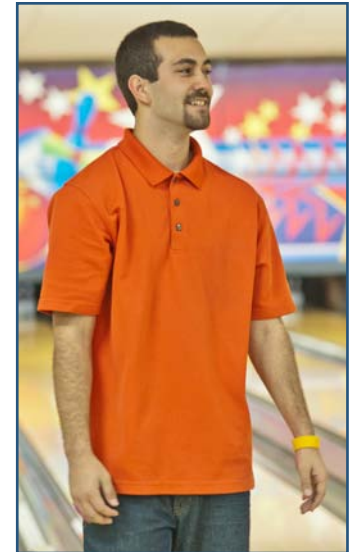
I really didn't know what I scored. I went to look at the screen, but because Jason had already struck, and we all had strikes, I knew I had him by that open [missed 10-pin in frame 3], but I didn't know what would happen if I struck in the beginning or spared in the beginning. I kinda figured I needed that strike.

And in the end, when the 2-pin toppled, you were home safe.

I felt like I bowled 300 when that pin fell down! That's what it felt like. I said, "Ah, man, a bad shot!" It was either gonna go left or just not move at all. It didn't, but it got into that zone, and it knocked everything around.

That was just a sigh of relief when I fell down. I thought I gave it to him—I really did. But they fell, and that's the way it happened.

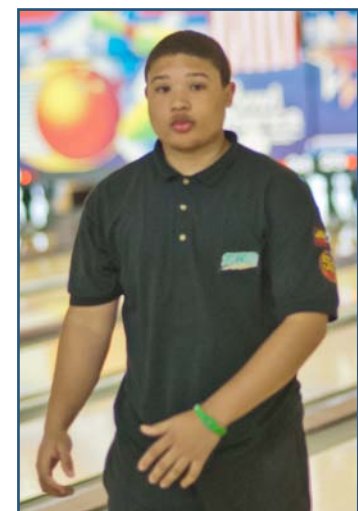
I wanted that Invitational, but this feels good!



3RD PLACE: Michael Simpson rolled 246 and 296 in the stepladder finals before falling to Eman, 255-207.



4TH PLACE: Jarrett DeFalco scored a 184 game against Simpson's 296.



5TH PLACE: Zahir Holmes dropped the opening match to Simpson, 246-183.