

Wednesday October 2, 2024

Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Some bowlers could stand to practice when they have some spare time, otherwise they could remain "Spareless"

When I worked out on the road staff of the Professional Bowlers Association Tour, one of the many perks of the job was being able to hang out with John Jowdy – one of the original PBA Tour ball reps, representing Columbia 300.

He also was one of the all-time best bowling coaches and instructors. I personally saw "Old Buck" turn a few journeyman players into PBA champions with just a few lessons.

We had met a few years earlier when I was a sportswriter for the San Antonio Light newspaper and he was a sales rep for Columbia 300, which at that time was based in the Alamo City.

So, we were already friends before I joined the PBA road staff in 1983.

Jowdy also was very observant and noticed that a few of the players – even some name bowlers – had a tendency to fail in their efforts to convert their spares.

So, he came up with an annual All-MISS team for players who were **Miserable In Spare Situations**. Jowdy, who was a very talented writer, would publish a column naming names and describing just how terrible these bowlers were at recording marks that were not strikes.

Some of the names are recognizable, but there also were some surprises. Bowlers such as Kelly Coffman, Bob Vespi, Alan Bishop, Bob Spaulding, Scott Alexander and Mark Bowers made the team on several occasions.

The All-MISS team actually got a few of the players to work on their spare games, because they wanted to work their way off the list. So, it served its purpose.

I started thinking about Jowdy's All-MISS team after joining a league this year. I took last year off from full-time league play but accepted an invitation from David McVey to become a member of the Pizza Ranch team in the Peoria Square & Compass League at Mt. Hawley Bowl this season.

I also have been watching my son Andre bowl in a couple of other leagues – the traveling Bill Mastronardi Masters and the Thursday Night Businessmen's League at Potter's Alley in Morton.

So, I've been able to see lots of bowlers roll many games these past few weeks. And the number of missed spares I have witnessed is staggering, to say the least!

It's not unusual to see a four-person team have nine strikes in the first four frames – and three missed single pins. If there are clusters of pins left, odds of converting the spares are not good.

One of the loneliest sounds in a bowling center is when bowlers attempt to convert a single pin, and their ball hits the cushion behind the pins without completing its task.

I'm as guilty as anyone in this process. After bowling in the USBC Open Championships in Las Vegas in April, I didn't touch a bowling ball again until my practice shots for the first night of league in late August.

My spare shooting has been improving every week. I know I flagged five single pins the first week, and only missed one single pin last week.

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But there are some bowlers who have not been improving. When they leave single pins, to say they had a 50-50 chance at a spare would be generous.

While I won't name names, those bowlers know who they are. Their teammates know who they are as well.

I know bowling is supposed to be fun, but wouldn't it be more fun if your scores were higher? More spares can help achieve that!

What I don't understand is why I don't see a lot of people practicing to help themselves or seek help from qualified coaches.

Yet, every time it's nice outside, the driving range at the Golf Learning Center & Academy across from Kellogg Golf Course is usually packed! I'm sure some of the other driving ranges get plenty of use from duffers who are trying to improve their golf games.

I won't post an All-MISS area team, but instead have rewritten the lyrics of the song "Shameless" to fit the topic at hand. I call it "Spareless," as a tribute to some of the area players who might want to put in a little extra time practicing on their spare conversion rate.

If this doesn't work, maybe I will put out an All-MISS team next season. Who knows?

So, with apologies to Billy Joel and Garth Brooks, here is "Spareless." Enjoy.

Spareless

Well, I'm spareless, when I'm bowling certified

Even when I, really, really try, can't spare anything at all

I don't practice, even spares I always miss

Don't think I can take much more of this, can't get anything to fall

You know, now, I'm not a bowler who's ever been

More scared than when I see a group of pins

I don't scare easy, but I'm terrified

'Cause another miss won't spare my pride

I'm spareless, buddy I don't have a prayer

Every time I see pins standin' there, I develop shaky knees

And I'm changin', maybe try another ball

But my teammates know it's just a stall, I don't have the expertise

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You know that I'm not a man who likes to swear

But damn why can't I make a single spare

I can turn away from any spare I ever leave

'Cause a spare I will not achieve

I'm spareless, I don't have a single clue

From a bucket to a single pin, don't know where the ball will go

Oh, I'm spareless, spareless as a man can be

Pins can make a total fool of me, I just wanted to you to know

Oh, I'm spareless

I just left the whole back row

Oh, I'm spareless

Oh, I'm down on my knees... spareless

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8-	7-	53	9/	9/	X	8-	51	3/	9-
8	15	23	42	62	80	88	94	113	122
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8/	9-	44	72	9-	X	X	8-	35	9/7
19	28	36	45	54	82	100	108	116	133