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Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Beef & Bartly make their mark at USBC Open Championships

Call them Beef & Bartly.

That would be a fitting nickname for the doubles team of Stu Williams and David Bartlett, who left the USBC Open Championships in Las Vegas last week with a top-three score of 1,476.

Williams led the team with a 781 set, while Bartlett added a solid 695. That gave them a total that would have won the regular doubles title a few times over the past 20 years.

Williams, of course, is the better known of the two. The native of England owns a pair of Professional Bowlers Association titles and has a regular podcast called “Beef (Stu) & Barnzy” along with PBA and USBC Hall of Famer Chris Barnes.

Bartlett, the general manager at Pheasant Lanes in Bloomington, is well known in Central Illinois and has been a top bowler in the area for many years. He bowled his first Open Championships in Mobile, Alabama with Peoria-area bowlers Pete Argo, Gary Smith, Mark Walker, and Terry Hoesly about 30 years ago.

But how did he end up bowling with a PBA champion in the Open Championships?

“We were looking for a bowler one year, and one of the guys on our team, Jake Bedard, was on the Storm/Roto staff,” Bartlett recalled. “He posted something on the Storm/Roto group for all their staff players saying that we were looking for a bowler. He posted our team, and what it had done in the past, saying they have been a consistent top-100 team. He said they weren’t just looking for two legs to step on the approach. We’d like to have a bowler.”

That bowler turned out to be Williams, who now lives in Pflugerville, Texas.

“Stu reached out and said he would bowl with us if we were interested,” Bartlett said. “That’s kind of how it all started.”

However, Williams and Bartlett were not supposed to bowl together that first year, 2017.

“Jason Peterson and he were going to be partners, because Bedard and I were typically partners in the past,” Bartlett said.

In the team event, Peterson struggled and decided not to partner with the team’s newest bowler.

“Jason didn’t bowl up to his liking – I think he shot a little 500 (actually a 497),” Bartlett said. “He said he couldn’t bowl with Stu. He goes, ‘You bowl with him.’ So I said OK.

“That’s how it happened, and we’ve bowled together ever since. Our captain, Rich Eighme, just kept us together because we get along well on the lanes and Stu is one of the easiest guys to bowl with.”

The duo finished 51st in 2017 with 1,330 and 52nd the following year with 1,335.

But there was no indication they would get close to the 1,500 mark this year.

“This year Stu’s throwing the ball so good, and we talked about the tour stuff and how it’s really catering a lot to the power players, which Stu is not,” Bartlett said. “So, it’s been a struggle out there for him lately.”

Williams has cashed in seven of 13 PBA events, with only two top-20 finishes.

But at the Open Championships, Williams rolled 659 in team, the 781 in doubles and an 805 set in singles, including a 300, to move into second place in both singles and all events (2,245).

“This year it was almost like it was a totally different Stu out there on the lanes,” Bartlett said. “He threw the ball so great all nine games. It was fun to sit there and watch. And to be part of it.”

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Bartlett had not bowled with Williams the past couple of years because of family and work obligations.

"I missed the last two years because of some remodeling going on here at the bowling center, and then some of the travel that we had two years ago," Bartlett said. "It was when Ashley and I got married, and we just had a lot of travel with the wedding stuff, the honeymoon, the boys getting into some of their tournaments and Bowl Expo. I just couldn't be gone that long.

"But at the end of last year's tournament, I reached back out to Rich and said if they still wanted me, I'd like to be back in 2024. He goes, 'It's your spot, Dave. You let me know when you're ready to come back.' So we got hooked back up this year."

Bartlett, however, didn't know if he would be partnered with Williams again.

"Maybe he had started bowling with somebody else," he said. "But Rich put us together again."

To prepare for the tournament, Bartlett had been practicing playing close to the gutter.

"I'm looking at the 3 board, the first dot out there, and I wanted to keep my ball there or right of it," he said. "I had practiced that prior to going out and had our mechanic put some patterns out for me.

"I wanted to get the arm swing out there, in line, and I told the guys when I left if I could play this out there, it would really loosen up an arm swing. Not too many guys can play out there, including the guys that I bowl with, because they all like to go a little bit left to right."

Bartlett played the outside line for all nine games, never getting left of the 10 board, but had somewhat of a slow start (an even 600) in the team event.

"I thought I threw the ball good, and my wife, who was on another team, told me I looked great throwing the ball," he said. "I told her I'd like to knock down a few more pins than what I'm doing. I was shooting more spares than I was throwing strikes.

"She said she thought I was going to be fine."

To start doubles, Williams opened with games of 266 and 268, while Bartlett added 254 and 245 for a 1,033. But Bartlett didn't know they were close to the lead.

"Anybody that knows me, whether it's a local tournament, state or nationals, I had no idea what we needed to shoot to take the lead," he said. "I don't look at that stuff. I just go out there and bowl and see what happens at the end of it. But I knew we were close."

Williams then laid out their exact situation late in Game 3.

"In the eighth frame, Stu looks at me as I'm getting ready to bowl, and he says, 'If we strike out, we take over the lead by 1.'" Bartlett says. "He goes, 'I know it's good to tell you when you're up on your bad lane, right?'"

"I strike in the eighth and the ninth, he strikes in the eighth and then leaves a blower 7-pin in the ninth. We always have a group of people watching us, because we're bowling with Stu and AJ Chapman. So you get used to it after a while. But when Stu left that 7-pin, the entire crowd let out this huge groan, because they knew how close we were getting."

Bartlett finished with a 196 and Williams a 247.

"I should have switched balls a little sooner, but I tried forcing things," Bartlett said. "But when you're sitting at 1,000 after two, it's kind of tough to make that ball change.

"Stu kept saying to stay aggressive. Bowling with him, honestly, I didn't feel any pressure."

Bartlett went on to shoot 689 in singles for a 1,984 all-events total in his 27th USBC Open Championship.

"It would have been nice walking out of there with the lead," he said. "But, hey, we'll take a third place."

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It would not be the first top-10 finish for Bartlett. He was on teams that finished fifth in 2015 and eighth in 2006.

The next day, when Bartlett was making a flight connection in Dallas, he got a text from Williams.

“He said it was great bowling with me again, and maybe we’ll hang on to a top-5 finish,” Bartlett said. “If we do, that would be awesome. Now we just have to wait and see what happens. But at least we gave it a run.”

Nothing less could be expected of Beef & Bartly.



Beef (Stu Williams, left) and Barty (David Bartlett, right) made a big run at doubles lead at USBC Open Championships in Vegas.