



HISTORY OF BOWLING



In 1930, British anthropologist Sir Flinders Petrie, along with a team of archaeologists, discovered various primitive bowling balls, bowling pins, and other materials in the grave of an Egyptian boy dating to 5200 B.C.



The primitive implements discovered included nine pieces of stone at which a stone "ball" was rolled, the ball having first to roll through an archway made of three pieces of marble. Their discovery represents the earliest known historical trace of bowling. Another ancient discovery was the Polynesian game of *ula-maika*, also utilizing pins and balls of stone. The stones were to be rolled at targets 60 feet away, a distance which today still is one of the basic regulations of tenpins.

However, a German historian named William Pehle asserted that bowling began in Germany around 300 AD. Monks would set up pins called Kegels, which represented human temptations. They would then throw stones at the pins, trying to knock them down, and, if successful, prove themselves worthy of redemption. Kegling is another term for bowling, even today. It is also believed that King Henry VIII bowled using cannonballs. Henry VIII also famously banned bowling in 1366 for all but the upper classes, because so many working men and soldiers were neglecting their trades. Eventually the game moved throughout Europe, and the Scandinavian countries, and finally Dutch Colonists brought bowling to America in the 17th century. The earliest known reference to bowling at pins in America was made by author Washington Irving in about 1818 in "Rip Van Winkle."

It wasn't long and bowling was being regularly played in an area of New York City still known as "Bowling Green". Bowling at that time was only nine-pins, unlike today's ten-pin formation. Martin Luther is credited with settling on nine as the ideal number of pins.

Bowling's popularity continued until 1841 when Connecticut law makers made bowling illegal due to the level of gambling that was becoming associated with the game. This law was quickly circumvented by adding an additional pin which paved the way for today's ten-pin game. At the time, bowling was known as a sport frequently played by men.

The game was being played throughout the world but rules were different almost everywhere. Even basic equipment was not the same. In 1875 delegates from nine bowling clubs in New York and Brooklyn met in Germania Hall in the Bowery and organized the National Bowling Association (NBA) was formed and a set of standard playing rules was formed. While they agreed on a uniform distance of 60 feet from foul line to head pin and the size of the bowling ball, there were many other disagreements, including scoring, that caused splinter groups to form.

Disagreements continued until representative leaders agreed to meet and on September 9, 1895 in Beethoven Hall in New York City, the American Bowling Congress (ABC) was founded. Over the years women gradually took interest and began participating. In 1916 a group of 40 women, encouraged by proprietor Dennis J. Sweeney of St. Louis, met and formed the "Women's International Bowling Congress (WIBC)"

After the ABC and the WIBC were organized and undertook widespread efforts to increase public awareness of and interest in bowling, its popularity grew by leaps and bounds. In 2005 the American Bowling Congress (ABC) and the Women's International Bowling Congress (WIBC) joined forces and became the United States Bowling Congress (USBC).

HISTORY OF BOWLING BALLS: Bowling balls have changed a lot since bowling first started. There have been different compositions as well as types of bowling balls throughout those years. Historically,



bowling balls were made from very hard wood "Lignum Vitae". But that was only until the first rubber ball called the "Evertrue" was introduced in 1905. In the 1950's bowling balls were made from Polyester "Plastic". Which was then changed in the early 1980's which was when Polyurethane "Urethane" bowling balls became popular. In the

early 1990's, "Reactiv Resin" material which was still made from urethane but treated with some additives to create pores in the coverstock which allows the bowling ball to absorb the oil on the lane which results in even more friction with the lane. The latest material to date is when the "Particle" was introduced. With the advancements within the manufacturers, they were able to create even more friction by distributing small particles into the reactive polyurethane cover.

HISTORY OF BOWLING PINS: Just like bowling balls, bowling pins have changed over time concerning their overall design. Just like



bowling balls, the first bowling pins were made of wood materials like Maple. Sometimes the pins were made of stone. Pins were shaped through the use of a lathe tool. Wooden pins were coated with an exterior plastic coating, and the pins are given a high gloss finish

with a polyurethane coating. Today, the size and weight of bowling pins are strictly regulated by the USBC. All pins have to be no greater than 4 3/4 inches in width, and they must be exactly 15 inches in height: this allows for uniformity regarding pins design. Every pin is designed so that it weighs exactly four pounds.



HISTORY OF BOWLING SHOES: The exact date when bowling shoes were first used and manufactured is unclear. In certain cultures it may have been that footwear while bowling was optional, however, since the game of lawn bowling occurred outdoors, it is relatively safe to assume that shoes were worn by participants in the game. Of what little traceable history there is related to bowling shoes, historical records indicate that a Dermative shoe was introduced in America in the year 1888. The shoe was crafted out of leather and had water resistant properties. These early shoes were so versatile that they proved beneficial for those who enjoyed boating, cricket, tennis, or bowling. Over time, bowling shoes were crafted with stronger stitching, and since lanes were oiled down so that the ball could move down the lane with greater ease, bowling shoes had to offer superior grip.



HISTORY OF BOWLING ALLEYS: In the early 1900s bowling continued to experience a significant increase in and widespread use of



technology. Pins had previously been set by human pinsetters or “pin boys”, but with the invention of the semi-automatic pin-spotter in 1936, the process became much easier. In 1946 AMF Bowling launched the first commercial fully automatic pin-spotter, the AMF Model 82-10, followed closely by the more developed 82-30 model to replace the earlier Brunswick semi-

automatic and fully manual bowling establishments. The very first bowling games were played on outdoor lawns. Bowling alleys as they are now appreciated were not developed until the late 1950s and the 1960s. The first alleys were erected in the western region of the United States and cost a lot of money to build. A bowling alley was erected in Santa Monica in 1959 that cost nearly \$200,000.00 to complete. Another bowling alley was created in California in Indio in the 1960s at the cost of \$750,000.00. By 1962, a total of nine alleys had been created in the western United States. The largest was situated in El Cajon and was named the Parkway Lanes, which sported sixty alleys for bowling and cost one million dollars to develop. This bowling alley also maintained five acres of space for parking. Many of the early bowling alleys had an array of entertaining features. Developers added snack bars, billiard rooms, cocktail bars, and areas where children could play. This helped to make bowling appealing to every member of the family and also helped in driving customers to spend more family time at local bowling alleys. In the early 1960s, bowling alleys were built in places like New Zealand and Australia. Later, in the 70s, bowling centers were being built across the U.S. with as many as 80 lanes or in some cases more. New technologies have improved the bowling ball, electronic scoring, monitors that show the path and speed of your ball, and many other aspects of the game. Today bowling centers are becoming multidimensional entertainment centers, incorporating laser-tag, trampoline, night clubs, restaurants, miniature golf, cinemas, casinos, bocce ball courts, batting cages, bumper cars, arcades, big-screen TVs, and LED lighting, to name a few. Bowling centers have become popular venues for corporate events, birthday parties, and fund raising events. Today bowling alleys are called “entertainment centers”, “fun centers” or “bowling centers”.

A CHRONOLOGY OF BOWLING



The Golden Age of Bowling: The period from 1940 to 1960 is known as the “*golden age of bowling*” due to the sport’s massive popularity increase and advances in its play. By 1945, Bowling was a billion-dollar industry in the United States. From 1940 to 1958, the number of dues-paying American Bowling

Congress members grew from about 700,000 to 2.3 million. The Women’s International Bowling Congress increased from 82,000 to 866,000 members, and the American Junior Bowling Congress expanded from 8,000 to 175,000. In 1958 the Professional Bowlers Association (PBA) was founded.

1960 to 1980: Ten-pin bowling was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1960. Ten-pin bowling took the UK by storm, and bowling alleys were opening up one after the other. At its peak, there were over 160 bowling alleys in the UK, but a lack of re-investment and waning interest left the fad in a sorry state. This led to a general deterioration of bowling alleys, with a commensurate decline in their image. The United States, meanwhile, saw league bowling soar in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The number of sanctioned bowling alleys in the U.S. peaked at about 12,000 in the mid-1960s, while membership in the American Bowling Congress (ABC) also peaked to about 4.6 million male bowlers plus a million women bowlers who were members of the then WIBC. The ShowBoat Casino In LasVegas at the time had 106 lanes.

1980 to 2000: Till the mid-1980’s, there was little, if any, new investments in bowling. Due to the complex scoring system and also because it was all done manually, there was a slight decline in the interest. However, this all changed with the introduction of automated electronic scoring systems. Bowlers only had to enter their names into the computers and everything else was done automatically.

2000 to Present: Bowling has experienced another decline since the late 1990's and into the 2000's, especially in the United States. From 1998 to 2013, the number of bowling alleys in the U.S. dropped by 26%. Unfortunately, this trend has continued through the 2020 season and has been compounded by Covid-19. Millions of bowlers continue to love the sport as bowlers are strong and dedicated and bowling will persist and prevail. The truth is, even though it has declined in participation over the last 20 years, bowling is still a very popular sport. In fact, more than 67 million people in the United States go bowling each year and more than 1.3 million people compete regularly in league play certified by the United States Bowling Congress. Today, the two largest bowling centers in the U.S. are in Las Vegas, one with 282 and the other with 242 lanes. Outside of Vegas, the largest is in Ohio with 96 lanes. Staff at USBC Headquarters in Arlington works closely with its more than 1,600 local and state associations to serve league bowlers and to help develop, advance, and grow the sport of bowling into the next century.

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN BOWLING CONGRESS (ABC)

ABC's roots can be traced to many people. One was Thomas Curtis, who became ABC's first president and chaired several historic meetings that produced an organization that succeeded where others had failed.

The adoption of rules at the Sept. 9, 1895 meeting in New York's Beethoven Hall, and most important, the distribution of nearly 1,000 copies by mail to bowling groups in many parts of the United States, was the move which created interest and trust in the fledgling group. Within a few months, there were members in Buffalo, N.Y., Cincinnati, Lowell, Mass., Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Wheeling, W. Va., Kansas City and Quebec. After that, representatives of local, state and provincial associations like these have annually met in convention to review rules and consider proposed changes. Also elected were officers and directors, all of whom serve voluntarily and without pay. The only exceptions were the executive director and assistant director, who oversaw the home office staff.

Service was ABC's and WIBCs aim since its early days. Service began when a league formed and applied for sanction.

The sanction, with membership cards distributed to each bowler, gave both ABC and WIBC bowlers a record of its membership and entitled the league and its members to the following services:

- Automatic bonding to protect bowler funds from theft, burglary and misuse.
- Awards for the achievement of 300 games and 800 series.
- Essential tools for league officers including rulebooks, schedules, handicap charts, average calculators and other aids
- Rules advice and counseling
- Free tournament sanctioning
- Equally important in maintaining standard bowling conditions are the programs of lane certification and equipment testing and research. Every lane is checked and measured each season to assure it meets ABC/Women's International Bowling Congress specifications. Pins, automatic pin-setting machines, scoring devices and other allied equipment undergo thorough and lengthy testing before receiving approval for use in ABC sanctioned league or tournament competition
- Publicizing the inner workings of the Congress, as well as the feats of bowlers coast to coast, is the role of the Public Relations department. Bowlers were as well informed as any sports group in the world through news releases, pamphlets, brochures and other publications.

Although the service programs have been thorough, new groups created special attention. In 1963, ABC added a Seniors program and designed a complete set of services for the nation's senior citizens. The ABC National Seniors Tournament for men 55 and older was initiated in 1964 and expanded to reach every state in 1982.

In 1966, a Collegiate Division was initiated by the Congress to provide a program for the nation's college men while at the same time bridging the service gap between junior and adult competition.

With the formation of the Young American Bowling Alliance in 1982, the Collegiate Division became a part of that organization. It was returned to the ABC/WIBC in 1998 and renamed College Bowling USA.

The most spectacular of ABC's many services was the national championship tournament, the oldest bowling event in the nation. A fixture on the sports scene since 1901, it is unrivaled as a participant spectacle. Held in America's major cities, the ABC Tournament runs 12 to 16 hours daily for more than 100 consecutive days. On lanes specially-installed in public arenas, as many as 17,000 teams and 92,000 individuals participate each year. The prize fund exceeds \$4 million.

HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL BOWLING CONGRESS (WIBC)

There are many colorful stories about when women began bowling in the United States. Seniors reminisce about the turn of the century, when their mothers or grandmothers sneaked in with (or without) their husbands to try out the bowling game. Often they did so at the risk of their reputations.

Tales are told about women bowlers being screened off from view behind partitions or drapes or being allowed to bowl only when men were not using the alleys. Those were the days of high button shoes, skirts to the ankles, cumbersome apparel and tenpin accommodations that were hardly appealing. Old photos document scenes of women bowling as early as the 1880s. The first recorded formalized bowling for women began in 1907 in St. Louis, when Dennis J. Sweeney, a bowling proprietor and sportswriter, organized a women's league.

Inklings of national interest also were being shown. That same year, many women accompanied their husbands to the American Bowling Congress Tournament in St. Louis, as they had been doing for several years. In St. Louis, the women laid plans to hold their own tournament, the following year, on ABC Tournament lanes in Cincinnati after the annual men's event had concluded. A second women's tournament in 1909 followed the ABC event in Pittsburgh.

Records show little activity until 1915, when Ellen Kelly, an avid bowler, formed the St. Louis Women's Bowling Association. Buoyed by her success, she wrote to proprietors across the country asking for names of women who might be interested in a national organization of their own. She followed with letters to those women, urging the organization of local associations and offering advice on rules and establishing an organization.

By the fall of 1916 in St. Louis, Sweeney was there to help Mrs. Kelly stage the first "national tournament." There were eight teams entered and champions were decided in team, doubles, singles and all events. The prize fund was \$225. Following the tournament, those 40 women from 11 cities met at Sweeney's Washington Recreation Parlor and created the national organization that became, after several name changes, the Women's International Bowling Congress.

Fifty years later, a charter member described the initial tournament as "frankly plain, there were eight alleys and four rows of benches for visitors a small counter square in back of the benches was used to sell soda pop, popcorn, peanuts, etc." She also recalled that the "meeting was more of a social gathering, and we gave little thought that it would develop into such a big organization."

The 40 pioneers elected their first national officers and adopted a constitution and bylaws that included the following purposes: To provide, adopt and enforce uniform rules and regulations governing the play of American tenpins; to provide and enforce uniform qualifications for tournaments and their participants; to hold a national tournament, and to encourage good feeling and create interest in the bowling game.

Those original precepts became the foundation of WIBC, which developed into the largest sports organization in the world for women. The 40 pioneers set the pattern for 1.2 million WIBC members, who bowled in more than 60,000 sanctioned leagues in approximately 2,700 local associations in every state and several foreign countries.

That humble national tournament – with its eight-team entry – was the forerunner of what is now the largest women's sports event in the world. In fact, the 1997 WIBC Championship tournament held in Reno, Nev. attracted 14,872 five-woman teams, the largest entry for any team tournament in history. There were 88,279 individuals, a women's world record. The tournament celebrated its 100th tournament in 2019.

That first tentative gathering on the benches in Washington Recreation Parlor evolved into a model of bowling democracy, the WIBC annual meeting. More than 3,000 delegates representing local and state associations attended the WIBC annual meeting to adopt rules and select national leaders. Similar annual meetings at local, state and provincial levels assured the self-government concept. Nationally, WIBC was governed by a board of directors elected by the delegates. Administrative policies and procedures were implemented by a staff at WIBC headquarters in suburban Milwaukee.

Along with growth and development came a multiplicity of services. Leagues received a wealth of rulebooks, record-keeping materials and prepackaged kits to keep them functioning smoothly. Local, state and provincial associations benefited from a variety of materials to help them conduct their affairs more efficiently, ranging from handbooks, information sheets and forms to educational seminars, workshops and counseling from staff members and field representatives. A bonding and insurance program provided by WIBC covered association and league funds. A tournament sanctioning program was another important service.

A description of WIBC's awards for members would fill a chapter in itself. They recognized achievements within the realm of every bowler, from the beginner to the world champion.

From its humble beginnings, WIBC stood for tradition, friendship, fun, competition, leadership and success. It has meant this and more to the millions of women who proudly called WIBC their organization.