

Bowling has been struggling to remain viable throughout the pandemic but had been making incremental moves to sustainability. However, recent government mandates in both Oregon and Washington has turned the bowling world upside down again.

Keeping the faith is getting harder and harder. With that, questions pop up as the inevitable emotional reactions have set in for me. When will this end? Will bowling survive?

Can I take a step back from my emotions and really dig into those questions?

The first question seems the easiest to answer even though the answer may not be the answer I want to see or hear. This will really end when an effective vaccine and social protocols tame the spread of the virus. Is that soon? Not as soon as we all would like, but it will happen.

Reflection on the next question, “Will bowling survive?” is where I really had to take a step back from my emotions. Once I did, my unabashed answer is, Yes! Bowlers and bowling are resilient. However, the bowling landscape will certainly look different with the unfortunate loss of some centers. The loss of each center is a damaging blow to our bowling community, simply because we are a community.

It cannot be stated enough how tragic the loss of a bowling center is, not only to the bowling community, but the local community that the bowling center resides. Bowling centers are not just recreational facilities; they are also community centers, places where people can find others to help fulfill the need of community and a place of belonging. If the mandated restriction of movements because of the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of feeling connected and of being part of a community – bowling centers help fulfill that need. And, this does not even mention the economic impact that a bowling center offers a local community by providing jobs and services.

Bowlers are resilient though. To the outside world, bowling is often seen as a lower-tier sport (with some even considering it not a sport) and even with that perception, bowling has survived and was actually thriving pre-pandemic. Paid league membership had been on the decline in Oregon ever since the early 1980s but recent years showed that decline had flattened and was actually returning to an upward trend – until the pandemic. Also, the business side of bowling has adapted to meet the demands of today’s consumers and evolved a business model that is a force in the recreational entertainment arena. With this track record of adaptability, I know bowling will survive.

So, as I take a step back and look at my questions arising from my emotions, I believe that yes, this nightmare will end, and yes, bowling will survive. Will things ever be the same, probably not, but that

doesn't mean it can't be good. Bowlers need to do what bowlers always do, hang in there and keep up the faith, we will get through this.