

It's been awhile since I last wrote something, so this blog post will be a little longer than normal.

Things have been changing so rapidly that every time I begin to write, something makes me pause. I have been meaning to write about what organized bowling might look like in the near future, but that scenario is still evolving and rather than speculate, and I've heard some pretty wild speculations from competitive bowling being just done to bowling going back to business as usual once all counties reach Phase 2, that I think I'll just wait a little longer as I believe the answer will be somewhere in between those two speculations.

So, what else is going on that's making me pause?

Besides what is hopefully a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic going on, we have now entered a period of heightened awareness of racial equity. While the government responses to the pandemic directly affect bowling with the restrictions placed on bowling centers, it's not an easy leap to see the direct effects of racial equity on bowling. From unique invitational style cultural bowling events to the simple interactions between league and tournament bowlers, there are certainly impacts in bowling. So far, I've avoided making any kind of political statement in my blogs as I've thought it not the place for such statements. The OSUSBC is a bowling organization and as such, not a political vehicle. However, I feel it remiss, particularly as a person of color and with an educational background in multicultural psychology, to not at least mention something in this regard.

I'm going to digress here for just a little bit to give some historical context that some bowlers may not be aware of regarding the history of our sport. For many years, the American Bowling Congress (ABC) and Women's International Bowling Congress (WIBC), the forerunners to USBC, were white only organizations. People of color were not allowed to hold membership in ABC/WIBC until 1950 when ABC/WIBC removed the non-Caucasian restriction from their constitution. In the time before non-whites were allowed to bowl, organizations with people of color originated as a response to the non-white mandate. The most prominent of those organizations, The National Bowling Association (TNBA), was founded in 1939 to serve and encourage Blacks to bowl. The TNBA continues to this day and is open to all bowlers and not just Blacks in staying true to their early fights for "Equality in Bowling." Another organization that formed during this time to give non-white bowlers an opportunity for tournament competition was the Japanese American Citizens League tournaments which later became the Japanese American National Bowling Association (JANBA). JANBA also continues to this day and includes sites in Oregon as part of its rotation for its annual national tournament.

Anyway, enough history. . .

While most national organizations have come out with a statement supporting a move towards racial equity, bowling has been slow to issue a direct response with a statement concerning the current events and protests. However, USBC has made a statement committing to diversity on bowl.com that reads as follows:

Diversity

USBC is committed to improving existing relationships and to forging new ones to remove any perceived barriers to the sport of bowling. With this dedication comes a concerted effort

to protect and nurture the SPORT with mutual admiration and respect to all people of varied backgrounds.

USBC believes to best serve our diverse membership we must embrace the value of the differences in insight, approach, and experience. USBC understands that all of our members, employees and communities are critical to our success. USBC is steadfast in partnering and growing with our communities of diverse backgrounds, and will conduct our business in an ethical, inclusive and sustainable manner. Our worldwide perspective and touchstone of inclusion guides our mission to promote the sport of bowling across the globe.

USBC will continue to identify opportunities to expand and strengthen the relationships of bowlers and non-bowlers alike. We will be unwavering in our commitment to embrace an inclusive culture of participation and leadership that will enable us to serve the communities that participate in our sport.

Now, for those of you immersed in the racial equity arena, will note the word “Diversity” and understand that this statement was written some time ago. However, it does make a statement of inclusion and that is the real importance of this statement. With that, I look at bowling as committed to upholding the ideals of racial equity and look to do my part in maintaining that standard by furthering awareness.

Something else, that gave me pause was reading some Facebook responses from dedicated bowlers stating that with the economic downturn and government mandates for social distancing, competitive bowling might just go away, or at least be radically reduced. Of course, those thoughts seemed to me to be the inevitable doomsday cries that accompany any kind of societal upheaval, but was there some truth to that concern?

Because my father always taught me to look at any situation from as many sides as possible, I started to look around to see if I could find any evidence to either confirm or deny the doomsday statement. I studied up on the government mandates regarding re-opening procedures, talked with different bowling center proprietors and managers, but I found my strongest evidence for an answer in an unlikely way – passing out gift boxes.

I was out and about with Rebecca Cole, the OSUSBC Youth Committee chairperson, delivering Senior gift boxes to graduating seniors that missed their last opportunity to compete at the youth level in state association events because of cancellations due to concerns with the coronavirus. Rebecca came up with the idea of trying to send a message to these graduating seniors that while their final opportunity as youth bowlers may have been taken away, they were certainly still in the thoughts and hearts of those of us that work youth events. It was our way of saying thank you for their dedication to our sport and to wish them well on whatever path that lies ahead of them. Both Jeff Unger (Oregon State Pepsi Youth Tournament Director) and his wife Sue Unger (OSUSBC Director) were also instrumental in putting together the boxes and helping make deliveries.

We made journeys in our local area to hand deliver the gift boxes and you can see some of the pictures from those visits on our Facebook page. One stop in particular stood out as it was in a bowling center that had moved into Phase 2 of Oregon’s re-opening plan and was open for bowling on a limited basis. We knew we were going to meet two of our graduating senior youth bowlers at the bowling center but

were surprised to find not just one other youth bowler at the center but **five** other youth bowlers, all from outside the local area of the bowling center. These bowlers had traveled a considerable distance just to be able to bowl once again. And, if we had been there a little earlier and stayed a little later, there would've been two other youth bowlers from outside the local area that we would have encountered. This was not a coordinated gathering; this was just different youth bowlers and families making the effort to once again roll a bowling ball down a real live bowling lane.

I know that a brother and sister that made that trek had their family construct a makeshift bowling approach and stub lane in their garage so they could at least work on timing during their time off from the lanes. This is just another example of how dedicated kids and their families are to our sport.

While this pandemic and its effects have certainly given voice to those exclaiming the end of competitive bowling, I just looked at those kids and their families in the bowling center that day, the dedication and ingenuity that they have demonstrated, and knew that one way or the other, competitive bowling will indeed survive this pandemic.

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