

Article: Pro Bowler Profile for Carmel Magazine

“King Pin” is not his favorite movie – in fact, former professional bowler Mike Aulby had the opportunity to appear in the movie but declined. “I’d just shot a perfect game on television and was set to start a brand new tournament the following week,” he says. “I would’ve had to cram it in, so I thought I’d better pass.”

The 46-year-old Carmel resident retired from professional bowling in 2003 after 26 years on the pro circuit. He started his extraordinary bowling career by tagging along after an older sister who bowled in a high school league. He soon got into a league of his own and procured an after-school job at a local alley. “I couldn’t wait to practice every day,” says Aulby. “It never got old.”

Practice indeed makes perfect and Aulby bowled his first 300 game at age 15 – and a second one five days later. By the time he was 19, he beat Earl Anthony to win the 1979 PBA national championship – and that was only the 11th tournament he’d ever done. “It was truly a golden moment,” he says. “Winning something like that basically sends a message to yourself and others that you are capable and you belong on tour.”

He recalls this defining tournament was broadcast nationally on CBS, but preempted in the Indianapolis area for a college basketball game. “My mom had to drive 60 miles to Bloomington to watch me play that day,” he says. “My dad was with me – it turned out to be his Father’s Day gift.”

Aulby describes that first championship as his most gratifying win. The most thrilling, however, was the Witchita Open in 1993 when he shot a perfect game on TV to win a title. He also won a \$100,000 bonus for shooting a perfect game.

Eventually Aulby went on to be one of just four players to hold professional bowling’s “Triple Crown” – and the only one to add the Masters and TPC titles for the “Super Slam.” He’s also the only player in PBA history to win Rookie of the Year (in 1979) and then Player of the Year (1985 and 1995). On top of all this, he’s known as a pretty nice guy and was awarded two Steve Nagy Sportsmanship Awards.

Although now retired, this southpaw bowler isn’t ready to hang up his bowling shoes just yet. While he enjoys participating more in family activities and running his business interests (a bowling alley and two ice rinks), he’s not opposed to hitting the lanes every now and again. “I’ll do charity events – I enjoy that,” he says. “And after age 50, who knows – maybe the Seniors Tour!”

10 Things You Didn’t Know about Pro Bowling:

1. The Professional Bowlers Association was organized in 1958, although the American Bowling Congress was formed in 1895 and the National Bowling Association was around as early as 1875.
2. A 16-pound bowling ball is the heaviest allowed, and it will impact the lane with 1,800 pounds of pressure per square inch.

3. Many different materials make up the surface of bowling balls. Some provide less friction for more of a slide, and others provide varying degrees of friction to control the hook. "I always correlate it to racing," says Aulby. "Selecting your bowling ball is like a pit crew selecting tires based on what lane or track they're using."
4. Bowling balls have different shaped interiors which make the ball row in different ways. Some shapes cause the ball to hook a lot and cover a large number of boards, others make the ball go straight. Some make the ball roll earlier, some later.
5. Pro bowlers used to carry one or two balls with them, now they have anywhere from 30 to 50. "One year I drilled upwards of 100 of them," says Aulby.
6. Bowling lanes have 40 boards across, but lanes are rarely made of wood these days. They're usually constructed of hard, durable formica.
7. Lanes used to be covered with oil in order to protect the wood boards but now with synthetic materials, the oil is used to set up different scoring paces, marketed as cheetah, viper, shark etc. Different patterns require different levels of accuracy and speed control.
8. Bowling balls have up to 15 degrees of a wax finish, and which one you use depends on how much oil is on the lane.
9. The 7-10 split is the most difficult to make – even more than the 4-9 or 4-6. Even PBA Hall of Famer like Aulby has only picked up a 7-10 one time in his career as a pro bowler.
10. Before it became illegal, some professional bowlers used to soak their bowling balls in pails of a flammable solvent over night. This would soften the ball and allow the bowler to create a huge hook and hit the pins real hard. "It was innovative thinking," says Aulby. "But think of it – a flammable substance on an oil-covered floor!"