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NOVEMBER 2019 • \$5 • www.bowlersjournal.com INTERNATIONAL

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PINZ in New Hartford, N.Y.



THE PRO APPROACH

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Secrets of the Senior Stars

WHEN I BECAME a PBA member in 1971, a majority of the tour players were finished by their mid-to-late-30s. Now, there are a lot of players bowling well through their 40s, getting ready to play in senior events when they turn 50.

The PBA Senior Tour really took off around 1990, and since that type of competition was available, many bowlers, whether they had played on the regular tour or not, started to prepare for the day when they could finally take a shot at competing at the highest level, at least for their age bracket.

In 2013, World Bowling introduced the Senior World Championships. This event further advanced the desire among bowlers to work hard in order to be ready to represent their country at international events. There is nothing better than standing on the podium after receiving a gold medal, and hearing your country's national anthem played.

I have been coaching Senior Team USA for three years at international events. The Senior World Championships is held every other year, and this summer was hosted by the South Point Bowling Plaza in Las Vegas. In just the three years that I have been involved, I've seen the talent level of the players improve a lot. I asked a few of our players what they do or did to be ready to compete at this level, and the answers varied a great deal.

Ron Mohr, who has been on Senior Team USA for all four SWCs, has been the individual star of the event since its inception. He has won 14 medals — eight gold, three silver and three bronze — with two of the golds coming in All-Events.

Ron didn't bowl the regular tour, but started bowling the PBA50 Tour after retiring as an air traffic controller. He made a fast rise to the top, becoming a

two-time Senior Player of the Year and earning a spot in the PBA Hall of Fame.

At 63, he still has the drive to play. His workouts are legendary, including doing 600 sit-ups on an incline bench three times a week and 150 push-ups three times a week... among other things.

Ron has medium speed, about 14.5-mph. He has the touch and ability to create the right rotation to carry. He uses

a lot more loft than the "kids," as do other successful seniors such as Walter Ray Williams Jr. and Mika Koivuniemi. They rely on loft to get the ball down the lane, and upswing lift to produce revs.

Ron's physical fitness makes him mentally and physically superior, which greatly adds to his playing ability and longevity. He has intensity and focus like no one else.

Ron's advice for seniors: "You must learn to read the lanes front to back, not just right to left. Figure out what you need to do to create optimum ball motion, and then learn how to do it. Even the best players can't out-bowl a bad ball reaction.



World Beaters: Senior Team USA medaled in every event of the World Bowling Senior Championships, hauling 11 medals overall. (Top Row: Leanne Hulsenberg, Tish Johnson, coach Bill Spigner, Lucy Sandelin, Sharon Powers. Bottom row: Lennie Boresch Jr., Walter Ray Williams Jr., Parker Bohn III, Ron Mohr.)

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“Put a lot of emphasis on physical fitness, which clearly benefits mental acuity,” he adds. “Too many older players do nothing to enhance their physical fitness, so doing just about any stretching and/or exercising will help. For the mental game, keep your focus on the approach side of the foul line. You have complete control over execution and no control over outcome. Why worry about something you can’t influence?”

That’s great advice for anyone.

Leanne Hulsenberg was our star female player this year, winning gold in four of the five events and out-averaging the field by more than 10 pins per game. She was truly in a league of her own.

Leanne was a great tour player, having won 27 pro events, including a U.S. Open and Queens. She still competes on the women’s tour, but only on a limited basis, concentrating on the majors.

Leanne has a soft touch. She is able to out-hook all the senior women and can get the ball to go through the pins like no one else. She has a medium speed, about 15.5-mph, with incredible speed control, which is one of the most important things any player can have. Her PAP is 5 11/16 by ¾ up, which is very close to Mohr’s. Both of these players are able to out-hook virtually all of their peers. They have what senior tour players commonly call “Voodoo Roll,” meaning their ball reacts and carries better than most.

“I don’t have as much time as I once did to dedicate myself to my game, and

it’s not realistic to think I can compete at the same level,” Leanne says. “I think changing perspective helped me this year and allowed me to enjoy it more, thus helping my overall performance and results. I work many youth events

Ron, became a superstar on the PBA50 Tour. He has been refining his skill set for years, bowling as a weekend warrior while operating a pro shop, which has kept him contemporary in understanding equipment.

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— Leanne Hulsenberg

throughout the year, and being around the kids greatly inspires me to continue bowling with a passion.”

What’s her best advice? “Practice with a purpose,” she says. “Many people don’t have a lot of time to practice... so get the most out of the time you have — which basically means to make sure you are practicing something specific. It can be spare shooting, timing, balance, targeting/zone play, equipment comparison or anything that will help your game.

“And don’t worry about score,” she adds. “Don’t waste the time you have on the lanes. Make sure you practice with a purpose.”

Lennie Boesch was our star player on the men’s side this year, winning three gold medals and finishing third in all-events, our best effort. Lennie, like

At this year’s SWC, Lennie was the best player, by far, on the fresh conditions. His low tilt (3-4 degrees), high track and about 45 degrees of axis rotation helped his ball read the midlane and not overreact at the end of the pattern. He basically had control of the lane both side-to-side and especially front-to-back, which is a must on flatter sport patterns.

“I feel the biggest key for me is I have good touch with the ball,” Lennie says. “You can’t teach that; the bowler has to learn it. All the greats have good touch and feel.

“By touch, I mean being able to understand the feeling of the release and the reaction you get from it when it’s correct or not. This greatly helps me make decisions with adjusting, like changing speed and release to get the proper angles to strike. For success, you must learn the feeling of the ball off your hand to know if the shot is good or not — learn to feel it.”

One of the more interesting comments came from Walter Ray Williams Jr. I asked him how he has been able to keep current, still playing the kids’ tour along with the seniors.

“The game is the same to me today as it’s always been,” he says. “I have to figure out a way to strike and learn to do it. I have always said the game is the same to me now as it was when I started learning to play in the mid-1960s. It’s 60 feet from the foul line to the headpin, and it’s our job to hit the headpin at the right angle to strike.”

LESSON PLAN

WHETHER YOU are a hall of famer with dozens of titles or a local league and tournament bowler looking for an edge on the competition back home, a little accountability can go a long way in helping you bring your game to where you want it to go.

Take it from all-time leading PBA Tour titlist Walter Ray Williams Jr., whose perspective is refreshing in a sport in which too many players believe there’s always something else that’s the problem to explain

lack of performance, rather than looking inward. Williams, even after his sensational success over the past 35 years, is so open-minded about getting better that he is learning to bowl two-handed and when to use it at age 60. And he already has had success with that style.

For an aging player particularly, an open mind, willingness to work and a never-quit attitude will prolong your career. You never know when you will become your best and be a world-beater.

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