

Former pro shares story

Bowling Digest columnist used to road trip it on PBA tour

BY GRAHAM COUCH
The Journal-Standard

FREEPORT — Bill Spigner knows road trips. And he's not talking about Saturday's two-hour drive from his home in Vernon Hills to 4-Seasons for the Illinois Bowling Association's State Tournament.

Spigner spent 12 years — from 1974 to 1985, back when ABC and later ESPN televised all 35 events each year — traveling the Pro Bowlers Tour, winning three national tournaments and gathering eight other regional titles.

To do so, he had to hit the road, and not seated first class in a jet. Spigner began his touring days as a single man, moving from tournament to tournament in a friends motor home, then staying in hotels with three other bowlers. Later, as a married man with a toddler, he, his wife Barb, and his eldest son Robby drove their own motor home from town to town.

"It's the only way I would have done it," Spigner said Saturday between frames. "It's no life to leave (your family) at home. If it was like golf, you could afford to fly home between events. Bowling's not like that."

After nearly a dozen years, one road trip accelerated Spigner's urge to leave the tour.

The family left their home outside Chicago for an event in Los Angeles. Their motor home

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Bill Spigner gets congratulated after throwing a strike Saturday at the Illinois Bowling Association State Tournament at 4 Seasons in Freeport. Spigner, who is from Vernon Hills, was a PBA bowler from 1974-85 and currently writes a column for Bowling Digest magazine.

didn't make it past O'Hare International Airport before breaking down and having to be flat-bedded into a shop.

Two days later, Spigner and company gave it another shot. This time when they got south of St. Louis the furnace quit. After a day-and-a-half in Springfield, Mo. while the heat was repaired, the Spigner family continued on, taking the southern route through Texas to California.

Their journey to L.A.

coincided with the University of Illinois' trip to the 1984 Rose Bowl. And the Spigner motor home just happened to have an orange Volkswagen in tow.

While in Texas, the motor home's once-frozen water pipes thawed, overflowing its 100 gallon water tank. Passing motorists waved urgently so the Spigners would notice the gallons of water spilling out of the back of the motor home. The Spigners simply waved back,

thinking Illini fans were recognizing their orange car.

By the time the family arrived in Los Angeles, six or seven days had past.

"That was the beginning of the end of my tourney days," Spigner said.

It was hardly the end of Spigner's involvement with bowling.

He owns Hawthorn Lanes in Vernon Hills, which hosted the PBA's Miller High Life

tournament, gives lessons and is most famous for his column in "Bowling Digest," which Spigner has been writing since the magazine's inception some 20 years ago.