

Bowling and the Olympics

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Should bowling be an Olympic sport? While many people believe that bowling should not be an Olympic sport, either because they do not believe that bowling is a sport, or because they think that bowling is stupid; others believe bowling should be an Olympic sport because it is the number two highest participation sport in the world.

The reason bowling is not in the Olympics is because not enough countries have good players if any players. Other popular thinking is: the United States (US) would always win, bowling is boring, and people do not think that bowling is a sport (Yahoo! 1-2).

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) exploits television coverage, which in turn brings in merchandising that causes competition for air time and brings in a large sum of money for the IOC. Are the actual Olympic games becoming less important than commercials, banners, Olympic themed clothing, and all else associated with merchandising? If bowling were to be selected to medal status in the Olympic Games, what time of the day and how much air time would bowling receive? Another problem is boredom. Bowling does not have the intense excitement afforded to sports that have time, distance, and height to beat. Therefore, bowling is too serious for the Olympics which are becoming more about the commercials than the sports (Letourneau 1-3).

People use the argument that bowling is on ESPN to validate that bowling is a sport;

however, bowling typically runs on ESPN2, a less watched station. Some say that bowling is a sport because there is a physical fitness element. Although rolling a 12-pound bowling ball requires a small amount of strength, it does not equal better scores (Hayward 1-2).

While everyone was excited about Michael Phelps and all the wonderful things that happened with our Olympic athletes in Beijing, there was a sport missing. Bowling is one of the few sports that is not included in the Olympics. Bowlers have tried for years to earn a spot in the Olympics and just missed making it into the 2012 Games. Something that most people do not know about the sport of Bowling is that two years ago the US World Tenpin Bowling Association (WTBA) made a move to allow professionals to compete in world events. This way the best athletes can represent their countries at events certified by the WTBA, the governing body for the sport on the world level. Because of this move, America sent their "Dream Team" to the WTBA. However, do not expect this team to dominate at all WTBA events; there are many outstanding bowlers from other countries who will be perfect opponents. This leaves us with the question, why not bowling (Lowe 1-2)?

One would think that the second-highest participation sport in the world would have automatic Olympic medal recognition. According to Olympics officials, for a sport to qualify as an Olympic sport,

the sport must be "widely practiced by men in at least 75 countries and on four continents, and by women in at least 40 countries and on three continents." Although bowling is practiced by over 100 million people in over 100 countries, it has never gained Olympic sanction (Lukas 1).

Bowling on a recreational level is simply fun and is meant to be enjoyed with friends. However, on the competitive levels, which include collegiate bowling events, local amateur tournaments, and the PBA's October-March live telecasts on ESPN; therefore, bowling is a sport in every sense of the definition. Most literalist consider a sport to be a competitive activity, which involves physical exertion with some sort of skill. While "physical exertion and skill" covers all levels, over the course of a professional bowling tournament, participants will bowl around 40 games over a three-day time period. The professional bowlers that participate in these tournaments often throw a 15-or 16-pound ball down a 60-foot lane in attempt to hit a target less than two-inches wide known as the "pocket" (the area between the headpin, the one pin, and either the 3-pin or the 2-pin depending on the bowler's dominate hand). One must be in good physical shape to have the stamina to bowl that many games and still be able to repeat shots perfectly. Many, if not all pro bowlers do weight training or stick to an exercise program in order to build arm and wrist strength.

Another huge aspect to the sport of bowling that puts the

casual bowler worlds apart from the professional bowler is the amount of oil that is put onto a bowling lane along with the pattern that is applied. Bowling center proprietors set up their lane machines to put down a "house condition" for public play. This puts a very heavy concentration of oil in the middle of the lane which gradually tapers to the outside boards of the lane where there is no oil. This will create a "funnel" effect for the hook-ball bowler (most competitive bowlers throw a varying degree of hook, which creates pin action and increases the likeliness of a strike). If the bowler misses his/her mark to the right, the ball will grip the lane surface quicker due to the lack of oil, like tire treads on a road, the ball will then start curving earlier; nevertheless, it will still hit the pocket solidly. Bowling proprietors put down this "house shot" to promote high scores, which in turn will keep customers happy and coming back. However, in the professional ranks, the oil is used to create a challenge. A thick volume of oil is laid out evenly across the entire lane; this way when mistakes are made the ball does not funnel back to the pocket. While recreational bowling will always be associated with grabbing a house ball, renting strange shoes, and conversing with a group of friends, the competitive side of bowling deserves to be called a sport and those who participate in competitive bowling deserve to be called athletes (Watanabe 1-3).

In 2004 during the Summer Olympic Games in Athens, there were many sports, which were not represented. However, 28 sports from around the world and another 30 non-recognized sports (not full-fledged medal sports) were in the Games. Mark Miller, communications director for USA Bowling said, "We've been trying for more than two decades to get in." Bowling was an exhibition sport in the 1988 summer games in Seoul. Miller said that bowling is played by more than 100 million people in more than 100 countries and, therefore, should be an Olympic game (Unkovic 1).

"I think it would be possible for bowling to have a high profile if we can get into the Olympics," said Adrienne Bride, who completed two terms as the president of Canadian Tenpin Federation. Bride also said, "Like any sport, once you're in the Olympics it attracts so many more people who would like to try it." Jerry Koenig, president of bowling's international governing body, the Federation Internationale des Quilleurs, met with Jacques Rogge, the International Olympic Committee president, before the 2008 Summer Games to talk with him at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. Rogge informed Koenig that he formed a commission to review all sports in the Summer Games to consider the 14 sports not in the Games. "Here's the catch," Koenig said, "Dr. Rogge told me no sport will be added

unless one or more is removed." Koenig continued say that it takes a two-thirds vote of approximately the 128 IOC members to remove a sport (Denny 1-2).

There is no doubt that these muscled, agile women who competed in Beijing are athletic; however, should synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics remain Olympics sports? Both of these sports came of age in an era when women were not allowed in sports such as weights, pole vault, or triathlons. In fact, in the first modern Olympics in 1896 women were excluded from the Olympics altogether. However, today Title IX, the education amendment, allocates funds equally between genders. Still, does it make sense to keep a pair of women-only sports in the Olympics? Synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics involve huge amounts of cosmetics, so much so that it takes away from the actual athletic parts of the sports. Blowing water from one's mouth or wearing swimsuits with too many sequins does not make something worth being an Olympic sport (Beech 1).

When asked why bowling was not going to be in the 2008 Olympic Games, Kevin Dornberger, chief operating officer of the United States Bowling Congress (USBC) and the president of the WTBA said, "It's a political process." "We have some failings as a sport," said Dornberger, "Our events are not very spectator friendly. They aren't media friendly. As a result, they aren't sponsor friendly." However, gymnastics

is also an Olympic sport and takes much talent; though, when a gymnastics athlete is done with his/her routine, his/her score is determined by judges. On the other hand, if a bowling athlete knocks down nine pins, he/she has knocked down nine pins; there is no debating whether or not it was good enough or not (Campbell 1).

In the 2002 Winter Olympics curling was well received; extensive TV coverage gave people their first look at the sport of curling. This sport has been described as a combination of shuffleboard, pool, chess, and bowling on ice. It has also been considered to be in the same sporting family as bowling for a long time because the approach to the line and the goal of the game are similar. If the Olympics let curling into the Games, why not let bowling compete? Curling has only a fraction of the participating countries and competitors than bowling (Pezzano 1).

A legend in the sport of bowling, Paeng Nepomuceno from Manila, Philippines, is still crusading for bowling to become a full-pledged Olympic sport. "Bowling deserves to be an Olympic sport," said Nepomuceno, a Filipino bowling icon, during Amway-Nutrilite's media briefing on this year's World Bowling Cup local eliminations. As ambassador, I train coaches every month in different countries. This is in line with our goal for bowling to be included in the Olympics," Nepomuceno said. Nepomuceno, a 52-year old, has won almost every major tournament and is a three-time

Guinness record holder (Morales 1).

Steve Oldenburger's football buddies tease him for bowling. "They think that bowling is not a sport," said Oldenburger. The wide receiver says, "They say bowling requires no skill." Tyler Wakely, also a football player for the Bucs says, "You actually have to think and react to what's going on." Wakely also said, "It's the same thing as football, but you've got so much more going on in your head." Competitive bowlers know that bowling is a demanding sport and not just a hobby. "To be good, you can't just go out for a month and say I am doing well. It takes a while, maybe a couple of years," said Guilford's Sam Lenz, who also plays baseball. "I've been taught you have to have a mindset that you care. If you want to do well, you have to concentrate," said volleyball player Amanda Drye. Bowlers know this to be true; however, many of the people they come in contact with do not. Belvidere's Kyra Tschumper who also plays softball said, "I get comments like, 'why are you in bowling,' and then others say, 'bowling is stupid.'" It is true that bowling may not seem physical, but bowlers say that they are not lazy. "You still have to be in shape for bowling," Oldenburger said (Young 1).

Although bowling is the number two participation sport in the nation, it is not an Olympic sport. Bowling deserves to be recognized as an Olympic sport, which in turn, would open the minds

and eyes of the average person who believes bowling is not a sport. It would bring respect to the sport of bowling as well as admiration. T. J. Freeman a USBC Silver Level Certified Coach says, "The main reason bowling has not been included in the Olympics yet is largely due to lack of funding and political pull" (Freeman 1). The IOC can play their political game by banning bowling as an Olympic sport only for so long.

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