

Ken Jennings' streak is on the line. It's "Bowling Trivia" for \$1,000 (again). The answer is "Schuhardt's" and the champ asks "What was the name of New Castle, Indiana's first bowling alley?" Wrong! Second bowling alley? Wrong!

According to Jess Adams, Henry County's unofficial Bowling Historian and former pin boy, the second story of the Sears and Roebuck building, then on Fleming Street, was home to our very first bowling alley back in the early '30s. After that, another one came along at Ritter's. "You went upstairs to play pool or cards and downstairs to bowl."

"Schuhardt's didn't open until 1937. It was a big deal because the pins didn't set on spikes," recalls Adams. Until then, the old method involved placing pins on spikes that would come up out of the floor. "Schuhardt's was started by a couple of brothers in the dairy business, so they also had an ice cream parlor and sandwich shop. They had the best 15 cent banana split you ever ate in your life. The problem was, you didn't have the 15 cents!" To Adams, current prices need to be put into prospective. "Back then, prices were low, but nobody had any money. Today, prices are a lot higher, but people have the money to pay them."

In the early days, bowling was 20 cents a game, and pin boys got 4 cents of that. With two shifts of 5-man teams bowling three games each, \$2.40 wasn't bad wages for a night's work. When pin boys weren't setting pins, they were often asked to call fouls. Before the days of electronic foul lights, judges sat in chairs, similar to tennis, and watched for fouls. Guys were known to jump at the chance to call fouls during the ladies leagues. "Before the days of women in pants, the girls wore dresses or skirts, a lot of times with slits up the sides" smiled Adams. "We'd watch those fouls pretty close!"

One oddity of yesteryear was using two sets of pins—one set for league bowling during the week and one set for practice and open bowling on the weekend. "They were made of wood like they are today but they didn't have the plastic coating. When pins got beat up, we'd put them in a lathe and sand out the splinters and use them for practice." When they were beyond using, they were passed on to the high school for various woodworking projects.

Another unusual difference was the ball return system. Today's bowler is used to a single return under and between each pair of lanes. In Schuhardt's day, a side-by-side double ball return was installed every four lanes. "I was setting pins one night next to my brother Everett" recalls Adams. "I reached over to send a ball back and it jumped the rail and hit him in the head. I thought I'd killed him!"

One little-known fact for the history book was the short-lived Duck Pin bowling alley that opened after Schuhardt's. The basement of the Moose Lodge, caddy corner from where Schuffman's furniture store used to be, housed the Duck Pin lanes with short, fat pins and softball-size bowling balls. "They didn't last too long. We used to go over there and show off how hard we could throw the balls," said Adams.

Joe Neirinck, now retired and living in the Colorado Springs area, is another pin boy who remembers with great fondness the years his father and mother, Lee and Goldie, owned and operated Schuhardt's. "When we bought the place, everybody already knew it as Schuhardt's, and it was easier to say than Neirinck's, so we kept the name the same. At that time, it was still a smoke-filled place, mainly for men, and my dad didn't want that sort of establishment. He wanted to open it up to families. We even started the first junior program on Saturdays and it was really something because up till then, kids really didn't bowl much!"

Turnover was a big problem among the younger kids that set pins. “A lot of them just needed a little date money and wouldn’t stick with it. But there was a fraternity of sorts between the regulars.” Time, though, hasn’t erased the memories of the trials of working in the pit. “People sometimes threw balls before you were out of the way, and often there would be some ‘discussion’ about it!” Bowlers throwing the ball too hard also created numerous injuries from flying pins. “Jim Adams could throw that ball 60 MPH” said Neirinck. “He was just a young kid back then, but boy could he throw that thing hard!”

Lee Neirinck died in 1959, and by then, the new and modern Bee Line had been built. More lanes, automatic pinsetters, and more parking brought an end to the Schuhardt era. The one thing that still stands today, though, is the admiration and respect from the bowling community for the Neirinck’s. More on them and “the good old days” next time.

## PART II

Few topics take bowlers back in time quite like the subject of pin boys. The pin boy era ended in Henry County with the introduction of automatic pinsetters when the new Bee Line bowling alley (where Quall’s Trailer Court sits today) opened in the late ‘50s. Some of the most fascinating discussions today center around what our sport was like for our parents and grandparents.

Gene Ziglar, long-time bowler and 2000 inductee into the Henry County Bowling Hall of Fame remembers vividly what it was like back in the day. “I was 12 years old when I first started setting pins at Schuhardt’s. They only had eight lanes. My lanes were 7 and 8. A game of bowling at that time was only 25 cents, and 10 cents of that went to the pin boy. They had two full shifts per night with five man teams. That’s about \$30.00 per week, and back then that was pretty good money.”

Ziglar and former pin boy Tom Dinkins described life in the pit. “You had to watch out for some of the guys or you’d get hurt,” remembers Dinkins. “There were some pretty hard throwers back then. One guy got mad and even threw the ball up through the ceiling tile. It came down through another tile and stopped just in front of the pins.”

First order of business for a pin boy was to send the ball back. While it was on its way, the setter would clear the toppled pins from the deck and the gutters, recalls Ziglar. “You’d pick up four pins at a time—two in each hand—and throw them back up in the rack. My first three years we had to manually shove the racks down to set a full set of pins. Then we went to a semi-automatic where you pulled on a rope and it reset the rack.”

In league play, two lanes couldn’t bowl at the same time because the pin boy was always standing in one pit or the other. While one alley was being reset, the other was being bowled on. “If you were only setting one lane you had time to jump up on a small ledge. Otherwise, you just didn’t have time,” said Ziglar. “If a bowler wanted a re-rack, he’d sit his ball on the approach as a signal to the pin boy.”

When asked about differences in bowling in the fifties, Dinkins remembers the importance of wearing your bowling shirt. “You *had* to wear your shirt back then. Almost all of the teams were sponsored by businesses with their advertisement on the shirt. They even kept extra shirts in the building if you forgot yours or a sub was bowling.”

The lanes were made of wood, and oil was applied with a fly sprayer. “Lee (Neirinck) was the only one who oiled the lanes. The seating was staggered sort of like bleachers. Besides good wages, the only fringe benefit was free bowling for the pin boys on Saturday mornings. Low man had to set pins for the next game.”

Another local man with fond (and not so fond) memories of life in the pit is Larry Thompson. “I was usually on lanes 3 and 4. It was work, but it was also a lot of fun. Your knuckles and fingers got real calloused. You could tell by looking at a man’s fingers and knuckles that he set pins. They’d get so huge!”

“It was hard to keep pin boys. You had to be tough to be a setter, and it helped to be little. It wasn’t uncommon for a new hire to set pins for three or four frames and then quit. You’d hear a bunch of commotion among the bowlers and look over and there’d be pins lying on the deck and the back door would be standing open.”

A game of bowling had just as many frames as it does now, but it didn’t last quite as long back then. “When automatic pinsetters came along, people couldn’t believe how slow they were. A good setter had the pins ready by the time the ball got back to the bowler. We got paid by the game, not by the hour, and we hated it when girls bowled. They’d take their time and file their nails and talk in between frames!”

Lee Neirinck, the owner of Schuhardt’s, was a “slave driver” as Thompson recalls, “but he was a *good* slave driver. He was the best boss in the world, but he was very strict. If you did as he said he’d treat you like a son.”

“Jim Littrell threw the hardest ball I’ve ever set pins for. A lot of guys were afraid of Jim and wouldn’t set for him because he made the pins fly everywhere. One night he hit the seven pin so hard it ricocheted off the side board and went through the ceiling. That pin never did come back down; it stayed in the attic. When they tore the alley down, that hole was still in the ceiling! I didn’t quit bowling until 1992 and I’ve still never seen anybody throw the ball as hard as Jim.”

Another Hall of Famer whose roots go back to setting pins is Rose Bowl employee Dick Ward. “I set pins for two years back in the mid-fifties” said Ward, “and I can still remember bowlers rolling tips down the gutter to us, usually a quarter. Between my wages and tips, that’s how I made enough money to buy my first car, a 1930 Model A Ford, and I wish I had it back!”

Anytime a pin boy would lose at something, the standard “punishment” was having to set pins the next game—sort of like pitching batting practice with no fielders and having to chase down all the balls.

In addition to Littrell, Mike Reuter and Wilbur Cross were also notorious fireballers, according to Ward. “We had to carry Bobby Cox out one night. He got hit in the head and the groin by two different pins at the same time. The way it turned out, he was okay, but I don’t think he ever came back after that. Can’t say that I blame him.”

Many names have been recalled in the last few weeks of those who set pins at Schuhardt’s. Thirty-four, to be exact, and still counting. In alphabetical order: Jess Adams, Ted Alcorn, Ron Baldock, Eugene Benson, Bobby Cox, Obie Dick, Tom Dillinger, Tom Dinkins, Goldman Dobbs, Eugene Dobbs, Louis Ferguson, Jim Flynn, Owen Griffin, Ken and Jimmy Key, Everett Lucas, Dick and Gary Marcum, Joe Neirinck, Junior New, David Perry, Herman, Ronnie and Steve Riggs, Ken Rigney, Bill Shelley, Billy Sherwood, Harold Smith, Larry Thompson, Bob Waddel, Dick Ward, Richard Webster, James Winchester, and Gene Ziglar. Even if you were a “Four Frame

Wonder” and escaped out the back door, if you or someone you know set pins and are not on the list, be sure to tell us. We don’t want to leave anyone out.

### PART III

Besides me, has anyone ever started a project only to find it was three times bigger than expected? This is the third of what has turned out to be a three-part look back in time. That doesn’t mean it’s the final chapter. Hopefully we’ll revisit the pin boy era as stories come in, but today’s column will wrap up the current path and mark the beginning of a new one: YOUTH.

According to the Bowling Proprietor’s Association of America, the average age of a *sanctioned league* bowler is 46. The average *bowler* is nearly half as old at 24. We’ll look at some of the reasons why—and what the future may hold—next time.

Now back to yesteryear. Some new names have been added to the ever-growing list of pin boys since we last chatted: James Edwards, Virgil Kelley, George Madden, Jim Pennicuff, Sammy Stockton, Albert Williams, and Robert Young. We’ll continue to add to the roll in future articles.

Rual Vincent, a late bowling bloomer, taking up the sport in 1961 at age 35, was an occasional pin boy. “I didn’t do it a lot—usually when I needed money to go to the show.” Vincent is another one of many who remembers Jim Littrell’s fastball. “I remember him picking up the 7-10 split one night in Babe Ruth fashion by calling it in advance!”

Jess Adams, local Bowling Historian and one of the most interesting guys you’ll ever talk to, remembers shoe rental at 10 cents. “They let us pin boys keep a tab on all we did and the food we ate. Some weeks we’d eat up most of our wages!”

Speaking of food, anyone remember Oran Bassett’s “Chicken Shack”? According to Adams, they served up some of the best fried chicken on the planet at the time.

Known for his unusual walk, the first manager at Schuhardt’s was “Ducky” Adams. Tom Snell was his assistant. At least during league play, a 300 game was never rolled there. (Floyd Collier’s perfect game at the Rose Bowl in 1967 was the first sanctioned 300 in Henry County.) Bob Canady and Norm Springer were the only known close calls with 299. Thanks to a flying pin from one of his “60 MPH fastballs,” Jim Adams is probably the only person to have ever rolled a strike on one lane and *also* get nine pins two lanes over with the same ball!

When asked about Schuhardt memories, Bill Shelley was another pin boy who thought first of his boss. “Lee Neirinck was just a fine fellow. Three or four of us guys were real close. We played a lot of golf together during the day and then bowled at night. He’d let several of us pin boys bowl free after closing.”

“Lee was an awfully good bowler, and he was very particular about his alleys,” remembers Shelley. “We’d offer to help, but he did all the oiling and buffing himself, saying ‘that way he *knew* it would be done right!’”

David Perry, pastor at South Side Nazarene, is another who remembers his teen years in the bowling business. “I was 15 or 16 at the time, and between setting pins and having an ice cream route, that’s how I bought my first car, a 1953 Chevrolet.” (Anyone remember seeing David pedaling an ice cream bicycle, ringing his bell?) “When they built the new

bowling alley out on Brown Road, we challenged them to see whose league would get done quicker. We beat the machines by at least an hour!”

“After working three nights a week plus open bowling on Saturdays, you can still tell from my first two knuckles that I used to set pins,” said Perry. A common thread from all who’ve shared their stories has been the admiration for Schuhardt’s owners. “Lee and Goldie always treated us fair. And I really appreciated the way they would work around our schedules at school.”

After 45 years of wedded bliss, probably the fondest memory of all was date nights with his sweetheart. “When I first met Shirley, she lived across from my grandmother. I went to visit Grandma a lot!” Bowling was a common date for the couple, beginning at Schuhardt’s, then at Bee Line, and eventually the Rose Bowl.

With each passing year, stories from the 1930s, 40s and 50s get a little sketchier, as well as harder to come by. Most people reading this article didn’t take up bowling until the “modern” era, and most didn’t know many of the Founding Fathers of our sport. But the one person just about everyone *does* remember is “Goldie.”

According to son Joe, “Mom always stayed home with us kids. She didn’t go to work until a couple of years before Dad died. She helped out in the pro shop some and always took care of the shirt orders, which was a real big thing back then. One year she ran the snack bar.”

“When Dad died, Mom took over the bowling alley and I dropped out of college to help. But with the new Bee Line just opening, it got to be too much.”

Aside from family, no one knew Goldie as well as Rose Bowl co-founder John Rutherford. When asked about his recollections, he was quick to respond. “She was the most dedicated employee we ever had. She ran the place as if it were her own. We’ve never had an employee as efficient as she was, either, and she always knew right where everything was.”

“At one time, bowling was a man’s sport. Ladies just didn’t bowl. Goldie was instrumental in getting women to start bowling.”

“Goldie could be very to-the-point at times” remembers her old boss. On occasion, if someone brought rental shoes back to the counter that didn’t quite fit, they might hear her famous line: “Just take ‘em. You’re not gonna wear ‘em home!” The soft side of Goldie usually came out on slow days. “If there wasn’t anyone around, she’d like to sit and talk, mainly about her kids.”

An article about going back in time wouldn’t be complete without a record that dates back just as far. It has been brought to my attention that Phyllis Kirkpatrick, 1979 Women’s Hall of Fame inductee (along with Thelma Davis, Babe Tinkle, Goldie Neirinck, Dolores Selke, and Edna Mae Snodgrass) began bowling in leagues at Schuhardt’s in 1941. That alone isn’t such a big deal. Many of our seasoned veterans got started there. What makes Phyllis’ case different is that she’s never stopped. Not even for a season. For the mathematically challenged, that’s 60 consecutive years! Husband and Hall of Famer Forrest hasn’t missed, either, since 1951. The women’s national tournament next year in Reno will mark her 30<sup>th</sup>. “I’ve enjoyed every minute of it and I’ve made lots of friends,” said Kirkpatrick. “I cherish all the memories—and there’s a million of them!”

Stay tuned next time as we go to the opposite end of the age spectrum and focus on the youth.