

## **"THE MOLSON'S" 60th Anniversary**

The Molson Masters Bowling Classic was born in 1953 and quickly became known to the local bowling community as simply, "The Molson's".

Except for a three year absence (1978-1980) this tournament has remained a much anticipated annual event. Few other sporting events in the Windsor area can boast of such a long history. That makes this year, 2015, the 60th edition of "The Molson's".

In 1953, Ken Fathers, Windsor Star bowling reporter, and Bill Miles, local Molson Rep announced plans for two unique singles tournaments for Windsor and district ten-pin and five-pin bowlers. Two local bowling alley owners were approached to host this event. It was decided to have a ten pin tournament at the Palace Recreation and a five pin tournament at the Crescent Lanes. The first Molson's ten-pin tournament offered a first prize of \$300, second prize of \$100 and \$50 for third and fourth prize. There was no entry fee; bowlers just had to pay for the lineage. In 1962 the tournament was expanded to include a women's division. The tournament remained at the Palace, which became Crescent Lanes in 1965. There was no tournament from 1978 to 1980. In 1981, the Rubin family owners of the Bowlero Lanes, Doug McNaughton, manager of the Bowlero, Tom Hannan, local Molson rep and Ted Poniatowski, tournament director revived the tournament. It continues to this day at the Bowlero.

Unfortunately, over the years, participation at the women's level decreased and the women's portion was dropped after the 1999 tournament. In 2005 and 2006 the format was changed to a match play-handicap format in an effort to revive the women's tournament, but ultimately this proved to be unsuccessful. In 2007 a seniors division (55 years and over) was added and it has been very successful and continues to this day.

The Molson's is unique in that it has always been a scratch play-match play event. Most tournaments are of the handicap format but the Molson's is bowler versus bowler with the top score counting. The match play aspect is different in that bowlers compete against one opponent at a time instead of having a tournament where the winner is determined by just a total score.

When the Molson's started, it involved many weekends of match play to determine the eventual champion. There were six-four (64) qualifiers to start. That number was reduced each week from sixty-four (64) to thirty-two (32) to sixteen (16 to eight (8) to four (4) to two (2). Overall there were six (6) consecutive weeks of bowling not counting the qualifying week(s). It was truly a marathon, as bowlers competed in five (5) game matches each week. As well, from 1953 to 1977, each bowler only had "one" opportunity to qualify as one (1) of the sixty-four (64).

When the tournament resumed in 1981 it remained a scratch-match play format but bowlers would have multiple chances to qualify. This was done to increase the prize money and also the lineage for the bowling alley.

However, the tournament was found to be too long and a new format was needed. In 1985 changes were made to improve the Molson's but maintain the original intent of a scratch-match play format. After considering various options, Moe Parent, David Iorio and Gary Langill of the Bowlero came up with a pro-style format. Bowlers would still have to bowl five (5) games to qualify. Then they were divided into groups, five (5) for men and four (4) for women. The group format meant that each bowler in the respective group would bowl the others in that group in a series of one game matches. Every victory added thirty (30) points to the bowler's total pin fall, with the top in each group moving to the step ladder finals. In a step-ladder final the #5 bowler (the combined pin fall and points) would bowl one game against the #4 bowler with the loser being eliminated. This process would continue with that winner, bowling the #3 seed, that winner bowling the #2 seed and finally the championship against the #1 seed.

Also in 1985, Cogeco Cable TV began to televise the Molson finals, and the format change allowed a reasonable time frame for Cogeco to cover the event. The support of Cogeco Cable has been instrumental in the tournament's success and its continued longevity. At one time the Molson's was the most watched program on Cogeco, next to the City Council meetings and the Windsor Spitfires hockey telecasts.

As the Molson's continues in its seventh decade of competition, it remains the premier bowling event, not only in the Windsor area but one could argue, provincially and nationally. Many local bowlers have always stated that in addition to bowling a perfect 300 game, they want to win "The Molson's". the prestige of being called a "Molson Champion" continually draws bowlers to compete for the title of being the best of the best.

It should be noted that there are four former Molson Champions--Tony Chibi, Kay Stanko, Scotty Laughland and Carol Mielczarek who have been inducted into the Windsor Essex County Sports Hall of Fame.

Since its inception sixty years ago, the competition to be a Molson Champion has remained strong. Each year fans continue to come out to watch both the match-play portion and the TV finals and add to the excitement and drama of the tournament.

Nick Stein, Tournament Director (since 1985)