

Windsor-Essex Chatham-Kent Bowling Association



We decided to ask **former youth bowlers** what **youth bowling** meant to them. Youth bowlers were requested to formulate their responses based on the following questions:

- 1) What did youth bowling mean to you?
- 2) How are you using your youth bowling experience now?
- 3) Do you have any recommendations for change to the youth bowling program?

Here are some of the responses that we received from some former youth bowlers. Due to their busy schedules, it took a great deal of time to get responses returned but the wait was well worth it. Responses in this article were simply placed in the order they were received. Before you read each of these bowlers' insights, I would like to take this time to thank each of these individuals for taking the time to provide their input.

Paula Taylor: Youth bowling has impacted many individuals in a positive way, and fortunately I have been one of those individuals whom it has touched positively. I started bowling when I was 6 years old, and very quickly it became a passion of mine. Bowling was never a chore, bowling was something I looked forward to every weekend, which allowed me to have a passion and drive to become better. Every week when I went bowling, my parents would come and watch me bowl, they would cheer me on and they were supportive no matter how I bowled, and it was always an amazing weekend. Even better my father was my coach and he taught me so much I can't even begin to write down. How could you never want to experience that joy every weekend and allowed me to be close with my family and now we always try and spend time together. Youth bowling also taught me that no matter what the sport may bring in competitiveness, it was always fun and enjoyable. I was able to make different connections throughout my years in the alley, it allowed me to meet owners, get a job in different bowling alleys, build up a resume and be confident in who I am as a person. Every time I walked up onto that lane, I was confident in how I threw my ball, I was confident in my game, and I was confident no matter who was watching me bowl, it allowed me to love what I was doing no matter what the score was. Youth bowling also allowed me to travel and compete in different tournaments and sometimes I was able to place decently high in those tournaments. Those tournaments allowed me to win scholarship money, and with that scholarship money I was able to pay for driver training education, I was able to pay for my first year of books for University and I am now a graduate from Brock University with a Bachelors of Arts with a Major in Speech and Language Sciences. Youth bowling has taught me many different fundamentals such as confidence, being proud in what you do and knowing no matter what the score is you can always bring it up and succeed. Those different fundamentals have allowed me to succeed in my education. I work with kids with disabilities and sometimes I take them to go bowling and every time they get a strike and the joy and excitement on their face reminds me of when I bowled as a kid. Youth bowling opened many doors for me such as experience, new adventures, it allowed me to be interested in my future, and lastly it brought me nothing but joy and love. Youth bowling made a clear pathway for me and luckily many other individuals can have that same experience.

DJ Rose: Bowling is a sport, activity, hobby or even a job to people and that is because it can be done by anyone from the age of 1-101. Many children growing up have the chance to play and try out multiple sports to help decide what they want to play when they are older. Some children continue to pursue a sport while others find interest in other activities. Myself, I found that bowling was what I wanted to do so I was going to do anything I could to continue to bowl and show up to my Saturday morning league.

Youth bowling started more than half of my friendships I had because I couldn't wait to see my friends from bowling every Saturday after a full week of school. Growing up in the sport of bowling gave me the opportunity to meet a ton of people and to travel places I probably never would've gone if it wasn't for bowling.

Bowling first started with just my Saturday league but as I got older, it turned into Saturday and Sunday league and eventually evolved into Saturday league and travelling the other weekends much like other sports. The

great part was, I could travel with just my family or with a different group of friends every weekend and would still have a great time. This was important because with other sports, it's the same team week in and week out. Having the ability to be exposed to other groups or friends, made it easier to make friends and get more experience bowling with different people and meeting different coaches.

Coaches in the bowling world are a unique brand of people. They can help coach an entire league of youth bowlers but if you want personal lessons, they are more than happy to help you get better. This is a stand out opportunity in the sport of bowling because bowling coaches will be there for you from the time you start bumper bowling, to the time where you are competing in professional events.

As I got older, I realized that my time as a youth bowler is what fuels me every time I go bowling. It reminds me of the fun I had and how I have come this far since I was young. Not every kid gets to say that. Many kids who play sports like Basketball, Hockey, Football, etc. don't get a chance to say they've competed professionally. Bowlers can. I now compete in professional events and amateur events, plus I am now sponsored by 2 different bowling companies. I also work and design jerseys for an apparel company in the bowling industry. I would not have been able to say that I have experienced this much if it wasn't for my family helping me get involved in youth bowling. Bowling as a youth helped me become who I am today, and I highly suggest if you are unsure if you want to start bowling or continue to bowl in a league, keep pushing because you never know where this sport can take you.

Joel Sands: I began bowling when I was around six years old. As soon as I started this sport, I was hooked immediately. As I became older, I started to appreciate the sport for what it truly is and the benefits it has and how bowling has contributed to my life. Youth bowling has played a very pertinent role in my life. From waking up every Saturday morning to bowl in my league, Club 240, to travelling for tournaments, I have always been excited to bowl. I have made various friends through youth bowling and have also attracted some family members into joining Club 240 as well. I know that I will continue my bowling career, alongside soccer, for a very long time into the future.

My youth bowling experience has given me great knowledge on respecting my elders and has greatly advanced my social skills. I learned that the coaches' opinions are always a valid option and that you respect anyone's input while you are bowling. The greatest impact that youth bowling has contributed to my life is the scholarship money I have gained through various tournaments and Club 240 going into University, I have accumulated thousands of dollars in scholarships which has helped pay for some of my tuition, as well as some of my textbooks. I have taken all these valuable lessons, that I gained in the youth bowling program and have applied it to my everyday life and will continue to use these tools in the adult bowling leagues.

There are not many changes that I would make for the youth bowling program, except that I would make a change for the distribution of trophies for youth bowling leagues. I believe that as the bowlers get older, they appreciate the scholarship money and plaques more than the actual trophies. The trophies are a great confidence booster for the younger bowlers, but I believe that the more useful tool is the scholarship money, especially bowlers pursuing post-secondary education. Other than this, the youth bowling program has been a huge part of my life and I will remember all the friends and lessons I have gained throughout the years.

Darren Alexander: Youth bowling is where everything got started for me. It's where I learned the game, started to develop the skills and knowledge I have today and where I got my first taste of serious competition, which has helped fuel my competitiveness to this day. My youth career started out slow. I bowled at a small 12 lane center outside of Essex Ontario called Thunderbowl. Since it was a small center there wasn't a lot of opportunity to compete in many tournaments. The biggest events every year were our association tournaments hosted in Windsor. I remember always thinking that there were so many good bowlers at these events and always wanting to be able to bowl as well as them. I practiced as much as I could and was able to do decent in these tournaments as the years went on. When I was 14 that center closed so I had to decide where I was going to bowl at juniors the next year. Friends of ours decided to bowl at Rose Bowl in Windsor so I followed suit and joined the Club 240 junior program on Saturday mornings. A few weeks after I joined the league, I was asked by one of the coaches if I would be interested in bowling in a traveling league on Sundays that rotated between the 3 big centers in Windsor at the time: Rose Bowl, Bowlero and Super Bowl. I of course said yes right away,

but since it was before I could drive it took a bit more time to convince my parents. Lucky for me they did say yes and have driven me or driven with me to countless bowling alleys ever since.

The exposure to coaching and extra competition in Windsor really helped me to bring my game to another level. My first year in Windsor I went from averaging 172 to averaging 200, and I also shot my first 300 in the traveling league at age 15. During my youth career I was fortunate enough to make Youth Team Southern Ontario 4 times winning 8 gold medals, 2 silvers and 6 bronze at the Canadian Youth Championships. I was also the Windsor Essex Chatham Kent Bowling Association (WECKBA) youth bowler of the year from 2011-2013 and held the Ontario youth high average for those years as well. The great thing about youth bowling is as I achieved all these accomplishments, I also gained scholarship money for all of it. Because I competed both in Canada and the United States, I was able to accumulate a good amount of scholarship money. All the scholarships added up and I was able to pay for over half my schooling just because of bowling. The fact that I was able to compete in a sport I love, and it have such a positive impact on my future outside of bowling is something that I think can really draw more involvement in the sport. I think if more parents hear about how much scholarship money there is in bowling, the more they will want to get their kids involved in it. If the parents are encouraged to sign their children up for bowling and we have good coaching that can keep them interested, involved and most of all having fun, that's how we are going to grow the game. It all starts with the youth and keeping them in the game as they get older.

As amazing as all the competing and accomplishments have been, the most important thing to me about youth bowling is the lifelong friendships I have made because of it. All my closest friends, most whom I consider family, I met at bowling or through someone at bowling. I also met my girlfriend of 6 years when I started bowling in Windsor when I was 15. I can honestly say that if it wasn't for bowling my life would be nothing like it is. I had a hard time with high school and Saturday and Sunday mornings were always an escape for me. When I had a bad day or week, I always knew that on the weekend I would be able to go be with all the people who I truly fit in with. We would all spend the entire weekend together. Bowling Saturday morning then go to someone's house that night, stay up way too late, and then get up and bowl again Sunday morning. It may not sound that exciting to some people, but those are the times I really remember about youth bowling. Not the scores or the bad days but always being able to be with my best friends doing something we love. I don't think I have ever really said it to them, but I appreciate them, and they mean more to me then they can ever know. They have all been a light for me at some of my darkest times. So, for me bowling is more than just a game I love. It really is my life. In some way it has impacted every part of who I am, and for that I am eternally grateful. I hope that the game I love has had this kind of impact on others as well or will in the future. I hope I am able to continue to meet people, compete, and see the world through this amazing game. I want to inspire people, especially young people, to continue to bowl and enjoy the game. Whether at a competitive level or just for fun, the relationships, joy and excitement you can experience are simply extraordinary.

Ryan Hill: Youth bowling to me was just a fun place to hang out with friends and family. I had a cousin who bowled with me and we both competed together in different tournaments each year, so it was cool to spend time with him and also travel around the province seeing different cities and experiencing new things. These tournaments were memories that we still talk about today, some laughs, some great wins, some long car rides home saying just one more strike would have made the difference. Without these competitions, I definitely wouldn't be the person I am today, these experiences taught me how to handle pressure, not only that taught me sportsmanship, taught me leadership and taught me how to represent myself.

I have been a successful leader in retail for many years, but did bowling make me everything that I am? The truthful answer is no, but I definitely had great parenting for that part, but bowling was a way to test those skills early in my life and continue to help refine me. Nobody thinks about the pressure when you are the bowling anchor and your team needs you to get the first two strikes for the championship, or when you are lead-off and your team is struggling to get anything going and you need to put a three bagger on the board to get your team moving. These are life lessons that may not seem like much, but they help build who you are.

Youth bowling needs continued support. My son is eight years old, and I started at seven; we just need to keep supporting them. Of course it's a different generation, and we need to teach them good sportsmanship and good leadership skills the same as we were taught.

Ryan Ford: Youth Bowling provided me with the basic skills that allowed me to bowl to my best potential. As a Youth bowler, I developed camaraderie, social skills while experiencing healthy competition. Because of my positive experience as a youth bowler, and the friendships and connections I developed, I continue to enjoy bowling in a league to this day. My suggestion is that there should be an attempt to keep youth bowlers interested so that they stay connected to the sport into adulthood. Ryan is currently a Quality Control Manager at P.S.I. Concrete in Windsor.

Joe Cartier: Youth bowling meant to me that I was part of a Sport that I was good at and proud of even though bowling tends to be known as a Non-Sport. We, as bowlers, know it is very much a sport and hitting 200 consistently is not easy. Youth bowling also meant it gave me a place to make new friends with kids I otherwise wouldn't have met. I am still friends with some of these people today.

As a Youth Bowler I was taught basic bowling rules, skills and at the same time how to have fun in this sport. Currently I am using my experience as a coach for the Youth program in our Town. By coaching, I am able to instill the knowledge I learned as a Youth bowler. Each week, I make an effort to provide the kids with information from my bowling past so that they can use it to improve their bowling skills and to be proud of their accomplishments.

A change I would like to see is how Youth bowling is promoted. It seems there is a lack of advocacy to this great sport. I feel the more Youth bowling is promoted the more youths may get interested. As well, I would like to see making it more affordable for all youths to join. I think the CTF could reduce the Sanctioning fees for the Youth as well as provide them with a CTF T-shirt or Hat supporting the Federation. The more the organization is in the public eye the better.

Joe Cartier is employed by the City of Windsor in the Graphics Dept. He is President of the Monday and Wednesday Men's Leagues at J&D Lanes in Tilbury. He is also a WECKBA Director.

Submitted by Catherine Wilbur