

Kegel's Randy Stoughton and his WIU crew made history by winning a national collegiate championship in the team's first season.



# Webber & Kegel Raise The Collegiate Bowling Bar

How a tiny university's tenpin team won a national championship in its first season.

**BY DENNIS BERGENDORF**

**"G**ood morning, Mr. Slowinski. Your mission, Joe, should you choose to accept it, is to create a national powerhouse collegiate bowling program. You have one year."

The mission, impossible as it may have seemed, was accomplished. Joe Slowinski did accept the assignment, and his Webber International

University women's squad won the USBC Intercollegiate Team Championship less than eight months after they first set foot on the central Florida campus. Not only that, but their title came a year after the Webber men finished third in their inaugural season.

How one of the nation's smallest schools came to be a tenpin juggernaut in the blink of an eye is an example of a perfect storm of timing, commitment, a coach with

a 21st century vision, and location, location, location. WIU is in Babson Park, Fla., only seven miles down the road from the Kegel Training Center in Lake Wales.

Webber International is a highly-regarded business college, but it's tiny, with an official enrollment of 663. Still, its athletic program competes in 10 NAIA sports, and it wanted to tap into the growing interest in bowling. So, in April of 2008, officials

approached their neighbor about doing the heavy lifting. Since Kegel founder John Davis had always wanted to develop a collegiate bowling program, it didn't take long to reach an agreement

Slowinski, the former director of coaching for Malaysian bowling, had recently joined the Lake Wales staff and was given the assignment of creating two teams from scratch. He didn't waste any time.

"Within an hour of signing

the agreement, I was sending out a news release to attract bowlers," he says. By August, 12 men and one woman had committed, lured by the promise of a partial scholarship, plus the opportunity to train at Kegel. "People know about the facility and the staff. That's why they come here," Slowinski points out.

Among that daring dozen men were a former Texas youth bowler of the year, a member of Junior Team USA, a former Dutch player of the year, and three Puerto Rican youth stars. Plus there was Ashley Galante, the all-everything who transferred from Pikeville College to be a part of this bold experiment — but who had to sit out a year while the women's program coalesced.

Slowinski knew he had a strong nucleus of men, but he also knew it would take more than talent to be national contenders. Thus began the intense program of molding a crackerjack team, a program some newcomers sometimes compare to boot camp.

With the Kegel facility at their disposal, the kids expected a lot of training on specific skills, and even preparation for the Baker format tournaments, but most were stunned when Slowinski laid out the training regimen. He took a cue from Asia's successful system.

"I wanted a program that was holistic," meaning it would combine bowling training, physical conditioning, mental preparation, nutrition and team-building. "It was critical to build a team culture, to get everybody to buy into what we call the 'Webber Way,'" a

three-fold philosophy of being "patient and present," striving for excellence and constant learning.

The training week includes a seminar (in the classroom and on the lanes), plus drills designed to integrate what was taught, with plenty of self-critiques. One afternoon is a singles league, and another is devoted to the different teams (the travel team is essentially the varsity).

The other two days are devoted to individual practice under the critical eyes of coaches, with players expected to work on specific elements of their games, not just go out and bowl. Most players also would come in on weekends to practice their fundamentals.

Then there's the weight room, where legs and core, as well as flexibility and range of motion, are emphasized. Most players hit the weights every night after bowling, just like their football and

basketball counterparts.

Slowinski knew he was pushing the right buttons when, in its first event, his traveling team finished a respectable fifth at the prestigious Midwest Collegiate Tournament in Wisconsin. The guys had a nice run of top-eight finishes, capped by beating 45 teams to win the Nittany Lion Kegel Classic.

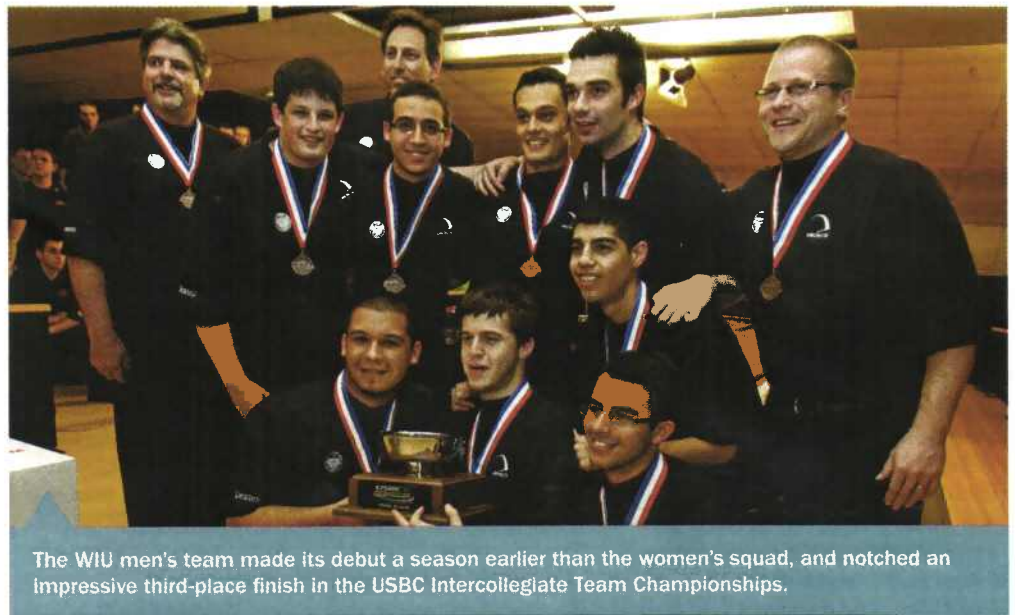
Although the men stumbled a bit that February, finishing a disappointing 21st in the Backhaul Direct Hoosier Classic, Slowinski was sure they were on an upswing. He was right. They easily made it through the Allentown sectional, and in the USBC Intercollegiate Team Championship, they mowed down ultimate champion Wichita State before settling for third place.

"We incorporated ways to get the team to peak at the right time. We wanted them bowling their best in March and April," the coach says, mentioning training loads

that were increased, then cut back "to maximize performance when we needed it."

As the men skyrocketed into national prominence that first season, young women around the country took notice. Slowinski began hearing from high schoolers and their coaches, asking about the women's team. Plans were moving forward, he assured them as he began securing commitments. Which is not to say he was overwhelmed with applications. Only seven enrolled. But with Kegel's brand of bowling enrichment and Slowinski's brand of holistic training, seven was enough.

As with the men, the group was diverse. One was a seasoned Junior Gold player from Virginia, another an 18-year-old homesick Brazilian. There was a medical doctor from the Dominican Republic (who still had four years of eligibility), a former Puerto Rico player of the year, a left-handed Brit



The WIU men's team made its debut a season earlier than the women's squad, and notched an impressive third-place finish in the USBC Intercollegiate Team Championships.

who became the go-to player and, of course, Galante, with her world of experience.

Long-time pro shop guru and instructor Randy Stoughton was appointed head coach of the women, and he threw them into the regimen of team workouts, individual workouts, singles league, classroom sessions, drills, nutrition and physical conditioning. Hayley Beavis, native of a small town near Southampton, Great Britain, says it was first-class culture shock.

"When I got here, I said, 'My goodness, how am I going to keep up?'"

Beavis had spent four years at Martin Methodist College, but felt the Kegel connection would give her a better shot at a national title, so she transferred.

"The fitness program took some getting used to," she says. "But it really helps you be fit for these matches. When you bowl six or eight hours a day, it really wears you out."

The conditioning and the on-lane coaching are tools in the ultimate quest for total team play.

"Collegiate bowling is 100 percent about coming together as a team," says Stoughton. "Thinking as a team. Operating as a team. Relating on the lanes as a team."

The "Webber Way," in Slowinski's words.

Stoughton says getting the kids to "buy into the team concept" was the biggest challenge. "It's job-one, and it takes time."

Chemistry was an early problem, and despite some top finishes during the first semester, "we never bowled to our full potential." The Dominican doctor was not

## ON THE MEN'S SIDE, IT'S ANOTHER TITLE FOR WICHITA

While Webber International was capping an improbable season on the women's side of the Intercollegiate Team Championships, it was just another day at the office for the Wichita State men, who won an incredible 10th national championship.

WSU unleashed a barrage of strikes in defeating Calumet College, 232-154 and 226-177, in the televised final. They had waltzed through the tournament, winning 18 of 20 matches, something that surprised even Head Coach Gordon Vadakin. "I don't think anyone has ever [been] that dominant," he said.

Wichita alumnus and PBA star Chris Barnes also was impressed.

"They are the greatest college men's team ever assembled," he said.

While that may be open to debate, the Shockers seem to have a lock on the title, having now won it three straight years, tying a mark set back in 1995 by... you guessed it... Wichita State. That means juniors Josh McBride and Jake Peters have a shot at being national champions in each of their four seasons.

Over the years, the program has been an incubator of professional talent, with stars such as Sean Rash, Nathan Bohr, Lonnie Waliczek, Rick Steelsmith, Jim Tomek Jr., Justin Hromek and Clara Guerrero having bowled for WSU.

— Dennis Bergendorf

happy, and when she left, a cloud was lifted. Then a second Puerto Rican youth star enrolled, and the effervescent Brittney Mari transferred from Lindenwood. Things began to click.

Despite the shaky chemistry, the women came charging out of the gate last fall, just missing the championship at the Midwest Collegiate. In the following eight events, they finished no lower than third, winning the Leatherneck Classic and being awarded first-place points at the McKendree Baker Challenge.

Interestingly, despite this record, the Lady Warriors were only a fourth seed at the ITC sectional in Allentown, Pa. But they again showed their mettle, finishing second to Pikeville and breezing into nationals.

Kegel Vice President Del Warren, who coaches the developmental squads,

stepped in for Stoughton in Allentown, and came to a pair of conclusions: that Mari (not eligible for post-season play) had to be elevated to assistant coach so that she could be "on the deck," and that the team needed a lot of work on left-side spares.

That was accomplished. At El Paso, the squad cheered and chanted its way through the contenders bracket, then beat Robert Morris twice to get to the showdown with McKendree in the best-of-three Baker final. They needed only two games to claim the championship, becoming just the second team in history to go all the way in an inaugural season, Wichita State being the first. (For the record, the WIU men, who had won the Allentown sectional, were eliminated early at nationals.)

Is it possible for another school, somewhere, to duplicate Webber's feat? Yes,

says Slowinski, but only if there's a huge commitment.

For one thing, it's not cheap. There are more than 30 bowlers in the system, all earning an average stipend of \$5,000. The teams rack up nearly 20,000 miles of commercial air travel, and there's lodging and meals. Since many tournaments pay prize money, some expenses are recouped, but only if the teams are successful.

Few colleges, though, have Kegel's resources. Asked if this is an unfair advantage, Beavis laughed. "Well, it is an advantage."

While Slowinski talks about holism, Warren thinks about synergy, about how the school and the training center have each benefited.

"It has brought a new energy," he says. "It has raised the bar for Kegel."

Not to mention raising the bar for collegiate bowling.



# THE TRUTH BE BOWLED

BY DIANDRA ASBATY { diandraa@bowlersjournal.com }

## Meet the Bowlers of Wichita State and Webber International University

IT'S THE PINNACLE OF COLLEGE BOWLING. It's what young bowlers work their hearts out for all year long. Bowling in it is an honor, but nothing compared to winning it. It's the USBC Intercollegiate Team Championships.

The stories of the two 2010 national champion teams are quite different. Wichita State, which won the men's title, has been a powerhouse in collegiate bowling since the 1970s. As for the women of Webber International University, this was the very first season their team was assembled.

How did these teams prepare for the biggest tournament of the season? What was instrumental in their victories? How did their schools celebrate them when they returned home?

Ashly Galante is a junior at Webber. She is majoring in Business Administration and resides in Palm Harbor, Fla. Jacob Peters of Decatur, Ill., is a junior at Wichita State, majoring in Entrepreneurship. Katie Thorton is a freshman at WIU and is majoring in Sports Management. Her nickname is "Hurricane," and she's from Chesapeake, Va.

Marcus Berndt is from Malmo, Sweden, and just finished his first year on the WSU team. Hayley Beavis is from Southampton, England, and she bowled in the anchor position at the national finals. **How did your team prepare for nationals, and when did you start preparing?**

**A.G.:** Before nationals,

our team focused a lot on spares. We also practiced on different bowling conditions. Every time I picked up a bowling ball, I was preparing for nationals.

**J.P.:** Hard work — every day for nine months. I think one of the biggest keys to the success of the team is that we believe that there is no off-season, just pre-season. That attitude and work ethic has prepared us for almost

another individual session on our own in the gym, working on either upper or lower body.

**M.B.:** Five days a week for an hour, working legs, arms and core.

**How did your team mentally prepare for the biggest tournament of the season?**

**J.P.:** By treating it just like any other tournament. Every tournament we bowl, we continue to try and learn from it and get better. The

**"WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS NO OFF-SEASON, JUST PRE-SEASON."**

anything we will encounter. We started to prepare right after nationals last year. As a team, we evaluated our performance and found some things we could all individually improve on, and at that point we started working toward this year's goal.

**How often did you practice to prepare for nationals?**

**J.P.:** Four times a week.

**K.T.:** Six days a week.

**Did your team have a workout routine?**

**H.B.:** Yes, Tuesday was conditioning outside, Wednesday was a workout schedule in the gym. Then we had

biggest factor for us was just having fun and really enjoying the moment, and having fun with each other.

**H.B.:** Being able to bowl on challenging lane conditions all year-round at the Kegel Training Center, and at college tournaments. The team simulated national TV experience by having teammates line up along the approaches and make noise.

**What is the most important element to your preparation that led to winning a national title?**

**J.P.:** Teamwork — learning as much about each other's

personalities as our bowling games. So when we're bowling in a tournament, we can be seamless and our communication is at its peak.

**A.G.:** Spares!

**Describe how your school celebrated your victory when you got home.**

**J.P.:** They honored us at the Shocker Pride celebration and gave us commemorative plaques. Wichita State and the city of Wichita are always so supportive of our program.

**H.B.:** We had a police escort! When we arrived, the police cars put their sirens on and we had a band playing with everyone cheering and waving with signs!

**Sum up this year's collegiate season in one sentence.**

**K.T.:** An amazing experience that no words could describe.

**J.P.:** Unbelievable — the best group of guys in the world!

**H.B.:** An intense final year of collegiate bowling that I will never forget as my dream of being a national champion came true.

**M.B.:** Our team was in perfect harmony.

**A.G.:** Something I'll never forget.

If someone you know is wondering whether they should bowl in college, I'd encourage them to find someone who has and ask them.

I can guarantee you that I know the answer.

**3.95** Grade point average of Alexis "Allie" Ijams, recipient of the 2010 John Jowdy Scholarship, presented by Columbia 300. Ijams, a 2009 BJI "Top High School Prospects" honoree, just graduated from Sinagua High School in Flagstaff, Ariz.

**4** Number of awards earned by Bowlers Journal International writers in the 58th annual national writing competition sponsored by USBC. Story: page 14.

# insideLine

NEWS, NOTES AND PERSPECTIVE

## Tidbits

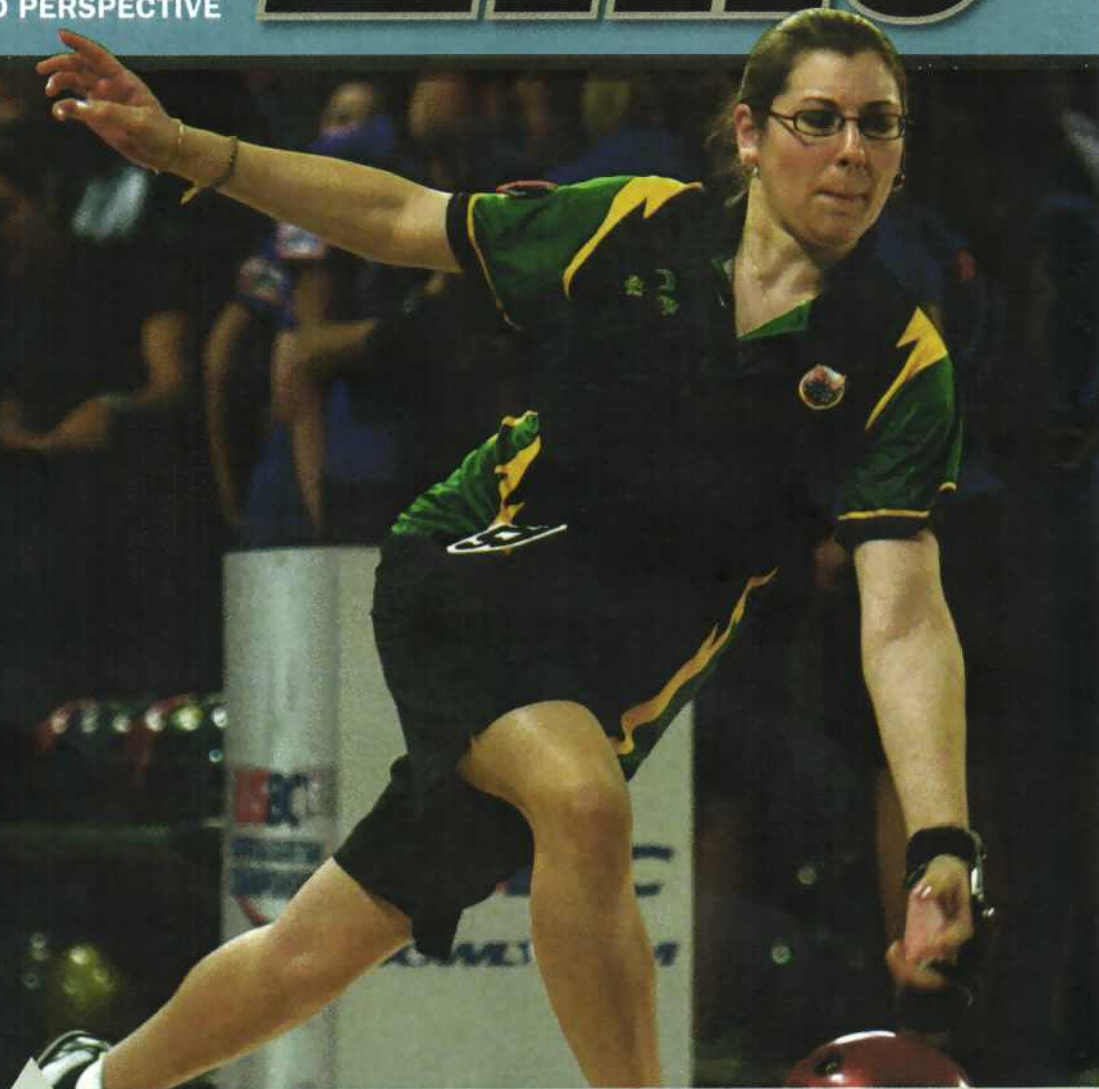
### NEW HALL CATEGORY

In what may come to be known as the "Richgels Rule," the United States Bowling Congress Hall of Fame Committee has added a new category for election to the USBC Hall: "Outstanding USBC Performance."

In years past, bowlers such as Wisconsin's Jeff Richgels, who had good records in the ABC/USBC Championships and PBA Regional competition, were caught in a no man's land; their resumes weren't solid enough to compete with the likes of Mark Roth or Marshall Holman on the national ballot, and at the same time, their "pro" stats could not be included when the committee considered amateur players. In the new category, those who have exemplary records in USBC-conducted tournaments will have a much better chance for election to the Hall by the committee.

### A FITTING TRIBUTE

The Press Radio TV league in St. Louis has been renamed for John Archibald, one of the top bowling writers of all-time.



## NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF COACHING

Hayley Beavis was a key contributor to Webber International University's victory in the women's division of the 2010 USBC Intercollegiate Team Championships. Amazingly, this was the first season that WIU fielded a women's squad. Or, perhaps not so amazing, considering the team benefited from world-class coaching provided by the staff of the Kegel Training Center in Lake Wales, Fla. The story of how a college team became a national powerhouse so quickly is chronicled in a feature that begins on page 22.