WHY HAS BOWLING INSTRUCTION LAGGED SO SIGNIFICANTLY BEHIND TENNIS AND GOLF, BOTH OF WHICH HAVE ENJOYED GREAT SUCCESS IN VALIDATING THE IMPORTANCE OF COACHING AND INTEGRATING INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMMING INTO VALUE-ADDED SERVICE?

To illustrate, the USGA has 700,000 members, while the United States Golf Teachers Federation reports a membership of more than 13,000 instructors. That's one instructor for each 54 USGA members. And while bowling has been lowering the standards of the playing field, golf has established a premium on coaching as a prerequisite for improvement. Can you imagine contacting your local professional or certified teaching pro? It can happen — but it's far too rare.

According to Bowling Proprietors' Association of America Executive Director John Berglund, coaching is becoming more important to proprietors, given the increasing percentage of casual-bowler open play. As Berglund explains, "It is our belief that if we can offer coaching programs to the casual bowlers, they will improve their games and enjoy bowling more." This belief appears to be consistent with an emerging trend of providing in-house coaching by some chain operations.

Kegel's Vice President of Coaching, Richard Shockley, recently spent six months traveling to Brunswick Recreation Centers to train three staff members at each Kegel certified instructors, who later were granted Bronze certification status from USA Bowling. As a result of Brunswick's commitment to teaching customers how to bowl, 324 new coaches were certified in 12 cities. AMF is likely to follow with a similar initiative following the appointment of former USA Bowling coach Palmer Follgren.

Other proprietors also have invested heavily in coaching. Royal Pin Leisure Centers, which operates five large facilities in Indianapolis, has formal coaching opportunities every night of the week. Ray Muir, the chain's Coaching Manager, works for an entire week in one of the centers, then rotates to another the following week. He spends time with interested bowlers, after league play, working on improving their approach, timing and release skills. Royal Pin currently is examining the impact of these coaching opportunities on league retention. As Muir states, "With the nationwide loss of 47 percent of new league bowlers annually, it is very important to our business strategy [to attempt] to significantly decrease this number [of bowlers we lose] within the Royal Pin Leisure Centers."

How long will it take for the proprietor masses to realize how important access to coaching and instruction is to retaining bowlers? Kelly Head of the three-center Buffalo Lanes chain in Raleigh, North Carolina, sees proprietor buy-in as critical to the success of a coaching program. "Everyone has to buy into the belief that instruction is important to the success of bowling, starting with ownership and management, all the way down to the counter person and lane attendant," states Buffalo's Director of Coaching and Instruction.

The aforementioned programs aside, it appears that most proprietors have yet to embrace the idea of making a substantive investment in a full-time coaching program. This could be about to change, however, thanks to the increasing popularity of high school bowling.

The BPAA sees high school bowling as fundamental to the success of retaining current and future bowlers. Notes E.D. Berglund: "Coaching is a significant element to youth and high school bowling — not to bring new bowlers into the centers, but to retain the new bowler through
TWO FLORIDA FACILITIES OFFER HIGH-TECH COACHING

KEGEL OPENED its new training facility in Lake Wales, Florida, on July 15, 2003. The 12-lane (four lanes are for R&D, and eight lanes are for instruction) 85,000-square-foot facility has 2.5 miles of chains under the lane beds that allow Kegel to make 81 adjustments for crown and depression, and 60 adjustments for crosswise and lengthwise tilt on each lane. A lane mapper can determine bow flat a lane is in 11 to 12 minutes per lane. After mapping, each lane allows micro-adjustments of well under 40-thousandths of an inch, every two feet, to bring it back to near-perfect flat.

The facility also has humidity and temperature controls to maintain consistency in the air and lane conditions. Humidity is maintained at 47 to 52 percent, and the temperature at 68 to 72 degrees. Humidity measurements are taken every 15 minutes with thermometers that can record data for 11 weeks. V.P. of Coaching Richard Shookley refers to the center as "a perfect bowling lab in our unique environment." Kegel averages about eight to 10 individual lessons per week; and more than 50 percent of its customers come from outside Florida. A full-day private session at Kegel costs $400, with group rates reducing this cost. Sessions include video analysis featuring BowlersMap software, CATS (Computer-Aided Tracking System), multiple lane conditions and grip analysis.

The Right Approach training facility in Orlando offers similar services for bowlers wanting to improve their game, including video analysis with BowlersMap, CATS, and grip and arsenal analysis. The Right Approach staff includes Pat Costello, Kendra Gaines and Ken Webber. A full-day session, including private instruction and the technology tools, currently runs $275. Group instruction is offered at a reduced rate.

Each facility illustrates a commitment to utilizing technology to enhance the game through the analysis of qualified instructors. As Kelly Bednar says, "BowlersMap and the other computerized coaching programs will become as visible and used as widely as the golf analysis programs are used at golf courses today." — J.S.

coupling so that they see improvement in their game and, as a result, enjoy the game more."

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, bowling saw the greatest growth of all high school sports in two recent annals with 235 new programs in 2002 and 267 the year before. Eleven states currently recognize bowling as a varsity sport, and 20 others have developed high school programs that operate at the club level.

Which brings up the question: Will there be sufficient number of qualified coaches to meet the need? As USA Bowling Gold Coach Susie Minshew says, "Although the history teacher who's looking for a few extra bucks may have their heart in the right place, they're not qualified to teach bowling."

Recent attendance at USA Bowling Bronze certification programs indicates a potential growth trend. At Bowl Expo last summer, 54 people attended the Bronze course, while 67 were certified in Chicago and 35 in Dallas a few weeks later. According to USA Bowling Coaching Director Bob Maki, his organization certified 3,417 Level I and 615 Level II coaches in the past year. From last January 1 to July 31, USA Bowling also certified 240 Bronze, 91 Silver and two Gold coaches.

With the emergence of high school bowling, and NCAA status for women's collegiate bowling, has come a need for more qualified coaches at all points on the coaching spectrum. USA Bowling has created a new certification program designed to meet the need for highly qualified coaches. "We want to be the one-stop shop for all proprietors, coaches and bowlers to go for their bowling education needs," says Maki.

On January 1, a new era in coaching was born with the USA Bowling unified coaching program, funded through the ABC, WTBC, YABA, BPAA and USA Bowling. The new certification program is scheduled to go into effect early this year, with the goal of adding new tools to a coach's toolbox. Designed by Cary Poin, Coaching Manager for USA Bowling, and a team of coaches, the new USA Bowling Level I certification program will focus on helping entry-level bowlers of all ages. Coaches will need to pass the Level I program, or have taken previous entry-level coaching programs offered by YABA in the past, in order to move on to the Bronze certification program.

USA Bowling recently reached a three-year agreement with the National Federation of State High School Associations and the American Sport Education Program. The agreement will provide participants in the certified coaching program with training in CPR and first aid, as well as exposure to the NFHS/ASEP Coaching Principles.

In addition to Level I, the intermediate level of certification will require individuals to complete a USA Bronze conference course, as well as ASEP/NFHS Coaching Principles, sport first aid, and CPR training. The Bronze conference then focuses on developing the coach's eye around the physical game, mental game, lane play and equipment. Participants also will be introduced to videotape analysis techniques.

USA Bowling believes that more coaches will be interested in the training due to the relationship forged with NFHS and ASEP. "The industry will do better as bowling touches more kids in high school than ever before," says Maki. Currently, there are 135 Junior Olympic Instructors nationwide to train new coaches at the USA Bowling Level I.

The new Silver program will focus on helping coaches assist bowlers in matching equipment with lane conditions and remaining dialed-in when conditions undergo transition. Implementation is scheduled for this fall. Certification at the Silver level will require attendance at a Silver conference.

Bowling has a long way to go before it even approaches golf in the area of professional instruction. But for perhaps the first time ever, virtually the entire industry seems to be on the same page, and that can only help in the effort to deepen bowling's coaching pool.

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