

AN INSIDER'S VIEW TO LIVING IN CHICAGO

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Give it up for Chicago's 'Billy O'

By Ben Cook

Known to his friends and fans as "Billy O," this 41-year-old Chicago native is the only African-American Professional Bowling Association player who has earned exemption status (where the PBA picks up his entry and travel fees). Fresh off of winning the 2006-2007 PBA Rookie of the Year award, Billy Oatman is going into this year a little more relaxed, and he's ready to have a little more fun.

Turning pro on June 3, 2006, Billy wasted no time proving his talent, when three days later he rolled his first professional perfect game. Having rolled over 80 perfect games in his life, Oatman says that getting a 300 in the professional leagues is a little different. "You get a gold ring, and with each 300 game you get a diamond to put on the ring. That's pretty cool. I'm pretty stoked about that," Oatman said with a grin.

Oatman credits his strong principles, consistent training, a strong desire to win and his natural competitiveness for his success in his first turn in the PBA. That drive almost beat PBA all-star Jason Couch in last January's Motel 6 Classic in a heart-breaking game, where Oatman matched PBA hotshot Couch pin for pin until the bitter end. Oatman reflects, "It wasn't my turn-if it was my turn I would have won. If I could do it over I wouldn't change anything."

His strong work ethic can find its roots in Oatman's childhood. "When I was a kid I practiced every day. From when I was 13 all through my high school years I practiced. My daily routine would consist of going to school during the day, and afterward I'd usually go practice at the bowling alley for a couple hours., come home, do my homework and then go to bed. If they had league play I had to wait until they were finished, so I would go home, do my homework, take a nap until my mom took me up to the lanes to practice, usually from about 11 o'clock at night until one in the morning," said Oatman.

Since he first started, he has seen a lot of changes in the game. Firstly, he feels that the junior bowling leagues that existed when he was growing up were much more serious than many of



Top: Billy Oatman celebrating one of his strikes while playing Jason Couch during the Motel 6 Classic last January. Bottom: Billy's customized van used for touring in style.

Photos courtesy of Billy Oatman

the leagues of today, and he also feels that a large number of junior bowling league coaches haven't kept up with some of the new concepts and technology of the game. For example: while on tour in his customized van, Billy carries 20-25 custom-made bowling balls, to help him choose what works best on the 5 different lane oil patterns and 7-8 different lane conditions/materials that he faces while bowling on the PBA tour.

Already, he faces different conditions bowling left-handed, as there is less wear on that side of the lane, causing less ball control and friction. Billy compares it to driving a car on ice rather than dry pavement.

For his first televised match on ESPN playing Jason Couch, Billy had his mother in the stands sitting right behind him cheering him on. He calls that day a "dream come true because my mom always wanted me to be the star, to be on the professional bowling tour."

Billy didn't start out his career trying to be a role model, but being the first African-American PBA player on tour this century, it was bound to happen anyway. He doesn't mind. He wants to use his new-found status to become a motivation for young African-Americans to follow in his footsteps, helped in part by his Give'em a Chance foundation, aimed at providing athletic scholarships to young players who wouldn't have the wherewithal to attend otherwise. By giving back, Billy provides the athletes an easier path than he and his parents had. "If it

wasn't for my mom and dad, I would not be where I am today-and I give them all the blessing and all the praises for making Billy Oatman who he is." He also gives thanks for his fiancé, who helps him get "bigger and stronger every single day. I'm pretty blessed."

In preparing for next season, Billy has been working harder than ever-dieting, exercising, strengthening his mental game, and utilizing meditation before each game that he plays. With a Rookie of the Year award fastened securely under his belt, Oatman has a big appetite for success in the upcoming PBA season.

Not only does he want to win his first title, he wants to win his first three. He wants to win the coveted Player of the Year award. Only two other players have won both the Rookie of the Year and Player of the Year award, with no one doing so in back-to-back years. Oatman says, "I would love to have my name in the history books." If these goals weren't enough, Oatman wants to qualify for a tournament in Japan, a goal that requires that he finish in the top 20 for the PBA season.

Driving his customized van from competition to competition, Billy Oatman is savoring the chance to live his life-long dream, while at the same time getting to see areas of the country that he has never seen before, most notably the Rocky Mountains and the redwood forests of the Pacific Coast.

To track his progress this upcoming season visit either www.pba.com or www.billyoatman.com.



Top bowling movies on page 6

Historic bocce ball has new appeal

By Alana Grandau

Philip Ferrari began his road toward becoming "Mr. Bocce" at Locke Grammar School on the northwest side on a sunny Sunday afternoon. "Little Phil, now is your time to play, we are without Uncle Doc." The long-awaited request had come forward from my father, and finally, I had a chance to compete with the most respected players of my family."

Ferrari continues on the WorldBocce Web site (www.world-bocce.org, 1.800.652.6223), "My dad is gone now, but never in his lifetime could he have imagined that I would become the U.S. Nationals Single Champion. What really made the championship meaningful to me was being the first person born in the United States to win the title. The game and that title that was brought to this country by the Italians and controlled by them for decades suddenly fell into 'le mani americane' [American hands]."

Becoming champion made Ferrari, of the northwest suburbs, realize that bocce was more than just the game of a few. Two million Americans play bocce regularly; 25 million Americans have played it at least once. "Bocce is without a doubt the best kept secret in all of sports. The nation, especially the baby boomers, is slowly discovering what my family knew long ago: Bocce can be played competitively no matter the participant's age or size."

He formed the Elmhurst-based World Bocce League (WBL), an upbeat, not-for-profit organization dedicated to "spreading the word," changing the perception that bocce "is only a game played by little old Italian men, getting drunk on red wine." The easiest way to counter the stereotypes is to get young people involved. Through the efforts of the WBL, schools and park districts are now installing regulation courts. In the age of shrinking budgets, officials have found Bocce to be a happy solution: low upkeep costs while providing the students with a great deal of fun.

Moreover, the WBL has formed a World Bocce League Tour, a circuit of competitions combining the very best of players with the country's most desirable venues.

The first Tour stop was Chicago. There was a "Kick-Off classic," teaming Hollywood celebrities with amateur enthusiasts and all proceeds going to the Special Olympics. Then, of course, the actual tournament, with 64 teams competing for at least \$100,000 in prize money.

The history

Throwing balls toward a target is the oldest game known to mankind. As early as 5000 B.C., the Egyptians played a form of bocce with polished rocks. Graphic representations of figures tossing a ball or polished stone have been recorded as early as 5200 B.C. While bocce today looks quite different from its early predecessors, the unbroken thread of bocce's lineage is the consistently common objective of trying to come as close to a fixed

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