

INTERNATIONAL
BOWLING INDUSTRY

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**WHAT
ARE THEY
SAYING
ABOUT YOU?**

HAVING THE WORLD ON A STRING

Is competition on string pins at The 2022 World Games a good step for bowling?

■ By Paul Lane

The World Games has been an international sports event held every four years since 1981. With the postponement of the 2020 Summer Olympics to July 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, The World Games was moved to 2022. Staged over 11 days, The World Games represents the pinnacle of competition for 3,600 of the world's best athletes in thirty-plus unique, multi-disciplinary sports, and it generates worldwide exposure for the participating sports, providing a highly visible stage on which athletes from more than 100 countries compete for gold.

When the International Bowling Federation and QubicaAMF announced that Edge String Machines would be installed for The 11th World Games, it took the bowling world by surprise and triggered a landslide of questions.

The use of string pin machines poses questions about the future for manufacturers; industry organizations such as the BPAA, MUBIG, PBA, and USBC; and competitors from around the world, many of whom will experience bowling on string machines for the first time while participating in The World Games. Jason Overstreet, deputy director of the USBC, has confirmed that Team U.S.A. will represent the U.S.A. in The World Games in 2022, despite the uncertainty of string pin lane certification by the USBC.

A CROSS-SECTION OF OPINIONS

IBI has asked a cross-section of stakeholders in the business and sport of bowling what their take on the string pin machine debate is and how The World Games will impact the evolution of the bowling industry.

BPAA'S PERSPECTIVE



JIM DECKER,
BPAA President

"The use of string pin machines cannot be ignored, and this thought is amplified with the announcement that string pin machines will be used at The World Games. The results will probably fall into two factions: the purists who resist change; and those with a more open mind and accept change. Hopefully, there's a happy medium, and the results will determine what happens in the long term. We cannot ignore the issue. It's a case of, 'Buy them, bowl on them, and like them.' They are here to stay."

"Because it's the way of the future, [certification of the string pin lanes] requires a meeting of the minds between the boards and technical staff of both the BPAA and the USBC. Ultimately, the BPAA will go along with whatever the USBC decides. Certification by the USBC may not necessarily generate new opportunities for growth in BPAA membership. Instead, it will help to stabilize membership, as many existing centers will convert to string as an economical move. An influx of new centers that opt for string could help our membership numbers in the long run."

MUBIG'S PERSPECTIVE



ROGER PHILOPI,
MUBIG President

"MUBIG would hope that USBC, as they have in the past, review advancement in the business. MUBIG feels an open dialogue with USBC on any topic related to the business. Every decision has ramifications, so we respect the review process and continue to offer feedback to USBC as they review the certification of string pin lanes. In every technological advancement, the bowling industry has always attempted to grow the sport and solidify the business."

"The vast majority of proprietors, bowlers, and industry supporters are willing to share their success stories and ideas to advance the business. Growing pains are inevitable, but with string pin technology, this industry will collaborate for success. That's what makes the industry sustainable."

BOWLERO CORPORATION'S PERSPECTIVE



COLIE EDISON,
CEO of the PBA,
Chief Customer
Officer of Bowlero
Corporation

"We have string machines at two locations – Bowlero Dania Beach and Bowlero Arlington. The string machines are very effective from a cost perspective and the customer satisfaction standpoint. We've heard no complaints. String machines also reduce labor costs in our centers and help eliminate a mechanic position that can be challenging to find. String machines allow a more affordable way to have more lanes and have more people go bowling which will help grow the sport."

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PBA'S PERSPECTIVE



TOM CLARK,
CEO and
Commissioner
of the PBA

"It will be interesting to watch. Will the players feel the different [system] influences the scores abnormally, or will they reconcile that the string game — being played by everyone under the same parameters — is ultimately fair? To date, there have not been enough high-level events to influence player strategies one way or the other, or to completely judge the way the game is played on strings versus free-fall so that all eyes will be on The World Games.

"Right now, most competitive bowlers are either in a wait-and-see mode or against the notion of string pins because their first instinct is to believe the game differs too much from standard free fall pin setting. So, a major international competition like The World Games using string pins, and the opinions of the players coming out of the event, will go a long way to creating more familiarity with the string game and perhaps a greater acceptance that events moving forward will utilize this technology."

"The PBA is open to conducting events on string pins. It's possible (or probable) that if the PBA conducts events on string pins, records and statistics, such as scoring averages, may be separated into two categories, free fall and string pin, as competitive bowling eases into acceptance. The differences crystalize between free fall and string."

MANUFACTURERS' PERSPECTIVE



BRUNSWICK BOWLING

COREY DYKSTRA,
CEO of Brunswick Bowling

"Brunswick's mission is to grow the bowling industry by providing products that meet the needs of bowling center owners, their employees, and athletes. Centers that primarily offer entertainment bowling experiences rather than competitive play have largely accepted string pin machines to take advantage of their low maintenance requirements. String pin has made it easier for nontraditional venues to offer bowling, which helps expand bowling's exposure. With more people enjoying bowling as a casual experience, there is an opportunity for some people to develop an interest in competitive play."

"The World Games will likely be the first string pin machine experience for many of the tournament participants. We will be closely monitoring bowler feedback."

"Existing bowling centers that offer leagues and tournaments will be influenced by bowler feedback from The World Games as well as research studies that are currently in progress. We also expect that many existing centers in the United States will wait for USBC approval before seriously contemplating an investment in string pin machines."

"We believe competitive bowler acceptance of string pin machines will take time and largely be driven by experience using the machines as well as association certifications. For example, the University of Nebraska Women's team recently trained exclusively on Brunswick string pin machines and won the NCAA Women's Bowling National Championship in 2021."



US BOWLING

DAVID FREWING,
President of US Bowling

"It is super exciting to see The World Games join the revolution of what is going on in the world of string pin machine installations in today's market. That exposure has the potential to further promote the already rapidly-growing string pin machines market, which today represents 100% of US Bowling's new center sales."

"The bottom line is, string pin machines are allowing proprietors to provide a better experience to their customers, be more profitable, and make their bowling business operations more enjoyable. All of these reasons together result in a better business model, less stress, and more time with their families."



QUBICAAMF

PAT CINIELLO,
Chairman of QubicaAMF

"I am excited and looking forward to being at The World Games in 2022. For the first time in the history of our sport, string pin bowling technology will be featured in one of the most important bowling competitions in the world. This is a huge honor and something we are very proud of."

"The EDGE String machine has been designed to play as close to free-fall as possible. The bowlers will all be on the same playing field. It will be interesting to see how the players adapt and adjust as they do for varying lane conditions. And I don't expect there will be any meaningful difference in their averages on string versus free-fall."

"This exposure will bring more awareness of string machines in general and to the benefits and overall savings, they offer for proprietors versus free-fall machines. I think proprietors will see the new string pin technology that is available today and get excited about the savings they can realize if they invest."

"As far as bowlers go, at first, I think there will be a little hesitancy. Change is not always easy. But I think once they bowl on strings, they will find that they get accustomed to them quickly and even forget the pins are on strings."

"All of the new centers being built today are FECs or hybrids, and the majority of these centers are going with string machines because they offer substantial savings peace of mind, sustainability, and are built with safety in mind. For proprietors, this technology will mean bowlers — both league and open play — will have a more enjoyable experience on the lanes. I think this will continue to be the trend for the foreseeable future, especially coming out of the pandemic, and presents a great opportunity for both proprietors and USBC. We grow the sport by getting more people to play!"

BOWLERS' PERSPECTIVE



JASON BELMONTE,
World-Class Bowler

"Play your own game, and the pins will fall. Ignore and forget you are playing on strings – that is just a distraction. Avoid going [into a tournament] with preconceived anticipation of what to expect."



KELLY KULICK,
World-Class Bowler

"Regardless of the style of machines, competition will be fierce and extreme. The World Games is nothing to be sneezed at. It feels like an Olympic event, and there's no feeling like seeing your national flag flying and having your national anthem played on the international stage."



JOHN JANAWICZ,
Former Team U.S.A. Bowler

John Janawicz, a former Team U.S.A. bowler, agrees that string pins fall differently to free-fall, but no one style has an advantage. Some flush hits seemed to carry better on strings, while other hits (such as light) carried better on free-fall.

The bowling industry has ridden the waves of change before. With the newest iteration of bowling at the top of the next wave crest, the industry is poised to take on the thrills and challenges of string pin machines. ❖



Paul Lane is former Director of Marketing and Marketing Services for AMF Bowling, Inc. He has been the director of 18 AMF World Cups, an officer in national and international trade associations, and a pro bowler during a career that spans more than 60 countries and 50 years.