

# BowlersJournal

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# STRING THEORY

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A tournament like no other

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What we learned from  
a hybrid free-fall/  
string-pin event

# A TOURNAMENT LIKE NO OTHER

Illuminating data and hall-of-fame perspectives from a hybrid string-pin/free-fall tournament.

If you are going to tell the likes of 16-time PBA Tour champion Jason Couch, 40-time titlist Norm Duke, 20-time champion Amleto Monacelli, or all-time leading titlist Walter Ray Williams Jr. (47) that they are about to experience something on the lanes they never before have experienced, it had better be something pretty unusual.

While those pro-bowling legends brought a combined 123 PBA Tour titles to Headpinz Entertainment Center in Naples, Fla., the weekend of July 25 to bowl QubicaAMF's "Some Strings Attached" tournament, they brought almost no experience bowling on string-pin machines. That changed as soon as they shoed up to bowl the event, however, as it called upon competitors to alternate between free-fall and string-pin lanes for the length of an eight-game qualifying round. Those among the top 12 who advanced to an additional three-game block to determine the top stepladder finalists then bowled entirely on string-pin lanes, as did those who made the championship round. This was, in the truest sense of the phrase, a one-of-a-kind experience for players who have seen everything on the lanes over their decades-long careers.

While string-pin machines are touted for their cost efficiency — using less power, requiring far less mechanical expertise to maintain, and rarely disrupting play with breakdowns, for instance — string pins also can be

a source of controversy for those who believe they give a bowler an extra lucky bounce here or there and, in doing so, perhaps leave the bowler's fate to luck rather than to skill.

If some of the events that unfolded at Headpinz provided fodder to string-pin

setting as free-fall machines.

First, the fodder...

At one point during qualifying, Matt Gasn left the 2-4-10 split in the string-machine portion of the house. He hammered the 4 back into the pit, then watched to his bewilderment as

it bounced back out to take down the 10-pin and then continue across the deck to topple the 2 as well for a conversion. Call it bowling's "magic bullet."

Asked for his reaction to that miracle shot, Gasn said that, "I almost changed the score [for the frame] to 71 [from 7/]."

Former Webber International star Verity Crawley, now a PWBA Tour standout with five runner-up finishes to her credit thus far, was within reach of the stepladder finals in July 25's "Invitational" when she left the 4-9 following an eight-bagger. Crawley pounded the 4-pin straight back, then saw it shoot back into the deck to mow down the 9 for a split conversion that got her onto "the show."

"A 4-9 is very makeable for me so I just tried to shoot it the way I normally would and obviously the string pins helped me," Crawley said. Crawley finished fifth, losing the opening match of the stepladder finals to two-time

PBA Tour champion Tom Daugherty, 237-214.

Four-time USBC eagle winner Matt McNiell said he "would much rather be shooting splits on string pins" than on



**Couch's Call:** Couch, who bowled masked up as a COVID precaution, said he found string pins and free-fall machines to be "very comparable" as quirky advantages of string-pin action generally were balanced out by taps.

detractors, other aspects of the event, particularly the data it yielded, belied the notion that luck inflates scores on string pins to the point that they cannot be taken as seriously in a competitive

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freefall machines, as he converted a 6-8 split he said he “had no business converting” given the quality of the spare shot he threw. McNiell finished third in the Invitational, defeating Daugherty in the second match, 225-216, then losing to eventual runner-up Couch, 267-226. Couch fell to former Team USA member Kenny Ryan, 247-223, in the title match. For those counting at home, yes, that’s three lefties out of five finalists (McNiell, Couch, Ryan).

The spectacle of such miracle pin action on string machines left the likes of Duke resistant to the idea of using string pins in a professional bowling setting because, in his experience bowling the event, “luck superseded skill” on the string machines.

“I champion the attempt,” Duke added, “but the technology is in its infancy. Once we get it perfected, I’ll change [my opinion]. But until it’s perfected, I want a lot less luck involved.”

To Pat Ciniello, proprietor of Headpinz and Chariman of the Board at QubicaAMF, that was the point of the event.

“I think the beauty of this whole test is that you’re going to be able to see the anomalies, and we’re going to be able to address them,” Ciniello said. “So where we saw some of the pins [doing what they did for Gasn, Crawley, McNiell and others] it could be a curtain or cushion adjustment or modification. We’ll be talking with the engineers on that piece of it.”

Williams, who utilized the two-handed style for portions of the event, had his own take on those “anomalies” Ciniello alludes to, saying that, “You might get a couple 10-pins to go down because the string action knocked the pins over, but then there are a couple taps that normally would strike on regular pins ... In the end, bowling has a lot of luck anyway. The longer you go, the more it

kind of evens out.”

Williams added that string pin behavior, quirky as it may be at times, “is not necessarily an advantage or a disadvantage; it’s just different.”

Though a larger sample size might be more definitive, the near absence of variance in score among tournament participants between string and free-fall would seem to bear out Williams’s theory that

Invitational and won the Open, said, “I did notice that it was a little easier to bounce pins out of the back on the string pins compared to free-fall, so that does allow maybe a little bit better of a chance to make a split.” Couch also observed that the 7-pin had a shorter string on the right lane, where that corner pin is close to the door of the ball return “so it does not go into the ball

return. Occasionally, you would half-7, and if that string fell the right way, it would knock that half-7 out of there. I thought that might be a bit of an advantage too, but, on the flip side, I also saw that if I threw it hard but I kept it on line, it still left a flat-7. I didn’t carry every single off hit. And if you crept a little high, it was pretty easy for a lefty to leave a 6-pin or a righty to leave a 4-pin. So, I thought they were very comparable.”

Couch’s victory in the Open event came at the expense of former Team USA member Sean Wilcox, whom Couch defeated in the title match, 226-196, after dispatching Josh Johnson in the semifinal, 269-238, and exacting some revenge on



**The String Difference:** Walter Ray Williams Jr., who utilized the two-handed style for portions of the event, said quirky string-pin behavior “is not necessarily an advantage or a disadvantage; it’s just different.”

the lucky breaks “even out” over time. With 383 total qualifying games bowled on July 25, the difference in score between string and free-fall came to a mere 1.8 pins per game. The field averaged 201.65 on free-fall and 203.45 on string. In the following day’s “Open” event, that gap narrowed further to .82 pins per game as the field averaged 205.68 on free-fall and 206.5 on string with a more forgiving lane pattern cushioning scores a bit. Across the 671 combined qualifying games bowled over two days, the difference between string and free-fall averages came to 1.33 pins per game. The field averaged 203.43 over two days on free-fall and 204.76 on string.

Couch, the best bowler of the weekend as he finished runner-up in the

Ryan, who shot 251 in a losing effort in match two as Couch fired a 266. Ryan defeated Jerry Brunette Jr. in the opener, 234-227.

“I definitely think there is a need for string technology in today’s world,” Ciniello said. “We need something like this. We can’t find mechanics out there ... Younger people want to be in tech; they want to be in marketing. They really don’t want to be behind pinsetters anymore. That puts [proprietors] in a tough situation.”

Which is where part two of our look at the place of the string-pin machine in today’s bowling industry will pick up in the October issue of BJI, as more proprietors as well as manufacturers will chime in.

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# THE WORLD'S FIRST TOURNAMENT BOWLED ON STRING AND FREE-FALL PINSPOTTERS

The Some Strings Attached Tournament was held at HeadPinz in Naples, Florida on July 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 2020. 65 bowlers, with 20 years competitive bowling experience on average, bowled 670 games. Half of the games were bowled on EDGE String and half on free-fall pinspotting machines.

**EDGE  
STRING** VS **FREE  
FALL**

**THE WINNER IS  
BOWLING!**

65 Bowlers  
222 Participant bowling average  
20 Years competitive experience on average

**97%**

**WOULD BOWL IN ANOTHER TOURNAMENT  
WITH EDGE STRING PINSPOTTERS**

**EDGE  
STRING**





I enjoyed it. It was fun

Kenny Ryan, Winner of the Invitational



I would absolutely bowl another tournament on EDGE String

Jason Couch, Winner of the Open



Great tournament, very fun, very impressed

Nate Garcia



It was my first time, I would do it again

Sean Wilcox



It is still bowling and I love to do it

Verity Crawley



It was a lot of fun

Ashly Galante



**QUBICAAMF**  
**"SOME STRINGS ATTACHED"**  
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**EDGE  
STRING** **VS** **FREE  
FALL**

**THE WINNER IS  
BOWLING!**

**EDGE String**  
335 Games bowled  
204.7 Average Score

**Free-Fall**  
335 Games bowled  
203.4 Average Score

**ONLY 1.3 PINS DIFFERENCE**  
**AMAZINGLY SIMILAR SCORING BETWEEN**  
**EDGE STRING AND FREE-FALL**



# CONGRATULATIONS TO THE TOURNAMENT WINNERS!



**KENNY RYAN**

Winner of the Invitational



**JASON COUCH**

Winner of the Open

“ I was very impressed with EDGE String. I think these machines are a step in the right direction for bowling.

**Jason Couch**

16 Time PBA Tour Champion, PBA Hall of Fame, USBC Hall of Fame

