

The Story of the National Traveling Bowling League (Founded 1945)

"LET'S HAVE FUN!" Within these words are the total substance and the basic principles that have enabled the National Traveling Bowling League to retain its original purposes over the past 80 years. Its membership is an entirely different breed of bowlers, who thrive on close friendship, fellowship, and trust. To them, bowling is a very relaxing form of sport that broadens their circle of friendship and their outlook on life itself.

In the early 1940's, two bowling teams, representing Indiana "Y" of Toledo, Ohio, and Cedar "Y" of Cleveland, Ohio, had been enjoying annual intercity matches to such a degree that they felt this enjoyment should be shared by other "Y" branches in other cities. Spring Street "Y" of Columbus, Ohio and Wabash "Y" of Chicago, Illinois were contacted and at an organizational meeting in Chicago, it was decided that a league be formed with a year's schedule of intercity matches. It was also agreed that it would be strictly for trophies, with no cash prizes. At the end of that initial season, all teams met in Cleveland for a round-robin tournament, also bowled strictly for trophies.

The league continued for several years with this original group until the beginning of the 1951-52 season when one women's team from each city entered. The women themselves voted to make this a permanent arrangement and added another women's team to each city for the next season to make their teams equal in strength with the men's teams. From that time on, the league began to expand, with Buffalo and Pittsburgh replacing Chicago and Columbus, and Youngstown later replacing Toledo. This group, known as the Eastern Division, expanded until each city had two men's and two women's teams.

Next a Midwestern Division was formed, consisting of Fort Wayne, Indiana; Detroit, Michigan; Gary, Indiana; and Saginaw, Michigan. This division lasted only a few years and was replaced by the Northwestern Division (now known as the Western Division) consisting of Beloit, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; Elgin, Illinois; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Rockford, Illinois; and Stateline (made up of bowlers from Beloit and Rockford). These cities are represented by one women's and one men's team.

With the beginning of the 1976-77 season, the former Midwestern Division was reinstated, now called the Central Division, with Akron, Ohio (who had bowled the previous season with the Eastern Division); Detroit, Michigan; Fort Wayne, Indiana; and Van Wert, Ohio, represented by two men's and two women's teams. This division was evened out when Toledo, Ohio reentered the league in 1978-79, and in 1979-80 teams from Inkster, Michigan became a part of the organization.

At the beginning of the 1977-78 season, the Penn-Ohio Travelers, made up of bowlers from Ohio and Pennsylvania, joined the Eastern Division, and the Rochester, New York teams filled out the division in 1979-80.

During the first 20 or more years, the league carried its original title, the National YMCA Traveling Bowling League and worked very closely with local "Y" branches. In spite of this very helpful relationship, the league's expansion was never attained. In 1969, the YMCA identification was dropped, and the title became the National Traveling Bowling League. In 1974, the league was offered an auxiliary sponsorship by the Gulf Oil Company, provided that the Gulf name was added to our title. This sponsorship lasted one year, after which the league returned to its National Traveling Bowling League title. Throughout these various changes, the original league program was always retained.



The original formula for over 80 years of fun and fellowship includes a season schedule of intercity matches within the respective divisions. These matches are played over a weekend period, with the schedule beginning in September. The visiting teams travel to the host city, arriving on Saturday morning or afternoon and checking in at the same hotel or motel. At the scheduled afternoon or early evening time, they meet the host city team on their lanes for a 3-game match. Following bowling, the visitors are wined and dined to perfection, enjoying an excellent evening of socializing and good fellowship. On Sunday, they again meet on the lanes, about noon or 1:00 p.m., to roll the second 3-game set, finishing in time to return to their home cities at a fairly early time. The host city bears the expense for all bowling and entertainment.

During the 1970's, a divisional "BOWL-A-RAMA" was added to the format for the last regular match of the season. This April Bowl-A-Rama enables an entire division to be together at one time and includes a position round where teams engage in hot competition to move up (or down) in the standings.

At the end of the season, a member city hosts the Annual Convention and Tournament (usually around mid-June). This was formerly a two-day affair until 1973 when the convention and tournament schedule was changed to a three-day weekend with the addition of Friday. In the 1981-82 season, an optional event-The Jimmy Robinson Memorial Mixed Doubles-was added to take place on Thursday, and many members voluntarily extend their weekend to participate. The Executive Committee meets on Friday afternoon, followed by the convention where all business is transacted and officers elected. Some form of entertainment is provided for the membership at the Friday "Fun Night." The Annual Tournament (still strictly for trophies) generally opened on Saturday with Doubles and Singles events, and the team events were rolled on Sunday. This schedule has changed somewhat over the years to allow flexibility in accommodating the group. Saturday evening is the time for the Annual Fellowship Dinner Dance. At this time, awards are presented to league champions, honor awards are presented, and all members receive a Participation Trophy. On Sunday, the remaining bowling events are rolled, concluding a long weekend of adhering to our magical motto, Let's Have Fun!"

The major objectives of this league have been to create lasting friendships and to use bowling as means of enjoying much fun and close fellowship. In addition to these objectives, our goals were expanded to include some contribution toward the education of our youth and the league chose to make annual donations to organizations dedicated to this purpose. Expanding our work in this area has become a fundamental goal of the National Traveling Bowling League.

Despite the dire prediction of many people during our early organizational period that a league of this kind would not work, the main principles have been steadfastly upheld and have sustained and strengthened this very unique organization. After many years of existence, the league continues to prove the worth of its objectives; it has shown that bowling can be fun and that an organization so structured can exist and prosper.

