



THE PERFECT GAME

STRUGGLING SCREENWRITER:

Hey, Mr. Hollywood! Have I got a pitch for you...it's about a "regular joe" who bowls a perfect game...that's a big 300, 12 strikes in a row, and —

Mr. Hollywood: *Is it a comedy?*

Struggling Screenwriter: *No...it's a true story! A drama! It's about overcoming obstacles! Getting lucky! Underdogs having their one shining moment —*

Mr. Hollywood: *No.*

Struggling Screenwriter: *Why "No"?*

Mr. Hollywood: *It's got to be funny, like "The Big Lebowski" or "Kingpin," or mainstream audiences won't get it.*

Struggling Screenwriter: *But —*

Mr. Hollywood: *What's so special about a perfect game, anyway?*

Enter Richard Dewhurst of Columbia, and Barbara Freezer of Kitty Hawk.

Their stories are their own, in every way. They don't know each other. And yet, they have much in common: Both are "Yankees." (Dewhurst, 51, was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Freezer, 66, in Washington, New Jersey, yet both have called eastern North Carolina home for decades.) Both were brought into bowling by their mothers at a young age. Both have bowled perfect games. And both have, for the most part, quit bowling.

Scene: A regular Wednesday night, October 2016. Richard Dewhurst stands at a lane at OBX Bowling Center, bowling ball in hand, his long, graying hair tucked back underneath his ball cap. He wears a camouflage T-shirt and shorts; his left knee and right arm are wrapped and braced. The building is thick with anticipation, squeezing out even ambient noise.

Stepping up, Dewhurst throws his oldest bowling ball, his trusty "Jigsaw Trap." It skirts the right-hand gutter.

Then, the ball curves in, contacts right of center with a crack and 10 pins fly.

Someone shouts, "Yeah!" A 300 appears on the scoreboard.

"I'd bowled four strikes in a row in practice, and my teammate made a joke that I'd better knock it off or I'd wear myself out," says Dewhurst. "But then [in the game] I threw the first strike — cool — second strike — cool — then eight, nine, ten...and then everybody piles up behind your lane, and you cross your fingers and hope for the best.

"It's like the old saying goes," he continues. "Bowling's 50 percent skill, 50 percent luck."

As for Barbara "Barb" Freezer, the perfect game came in 1995, as she bowled against her then-husband in scratch leagues. She'd chased 300 for so long; first in youth leagues, then in her company league at Mobil Chemical, and finally with — or rather against — her husband in competitive leagues.

I had a bunch of 279 games and 289 games," Freezer says, "but it took a long time to finally get it. When I

threw that last ball, everybody stopped bowling...everyone watched. There hadn't been any women to bowl 300 in that bowling center. I threw that last ball, it went down the lane and...and left a solid seven pin standing on the left corner. I was like [long sigh]. Then another pin rolled across the lane and tapped it just hard enough before the rack came down."

"The best part was I did it against my husband," Freezer says, laughing. "He never wanted me on his team."

Freezer went on to bowl two more perfect games, and on Oct. 5, 1997, the Morris County Women's Bowling Association inducted her into their Hall of Fame.

How hard is it to bowl a perfect game? A bit of math might help. If you regularly bowled 70 percent strikes, the odds would be roughly 0.7^{12} (just go with it), or 1 percent. So, 1 in 100 — not too bad.

Of course, if you're like me, and you bowl maybe 20 percent strikes (in my dreams), you'd have a 0.00000004



Don't mess with these ringers.
Photo: Chris Bickford

You couldn't
script a better
bowling tale.
(Much less two.)

percent chance. We'd only have to bowl 250 million times to get our perfect game. No big deal.

According to Katy Heroux, shift manager at OBX Bowling Center, "Since we reopened in 2013, only four people have bowled a perfect game here. It's mathematics and luck and skill. Conditions change, like the oil on the lanes. People bowl all their lives and never get one."

Since his perfect night, Dewhurst has fought a personal battle against joint issues. Now, instead of perfect games, he looks forward to retiring from a 25-year career as a ferry mechanic in Mann's Harbor. To fishing and watching baseball games. To enjoying heavy metal concerts and taking cross-country trips in his jeep with his wife, Donna, and his two stepsons, Joshua, 13, and Jacob, 10. To rooting on Joshua and Jacob in Elizabeth City's youth bowling leagues.

"They also go to the Pepsi Challenge and to state championships," he says, "Joshua placed seventh in the state."

As for Freezer, she doesn't have the same love for the game since she divorced and moved to the Outer Banks in 2003. Her marriage might have had a storybook beginning — "I was bowling with a ball that had a huge gouge in it, and he told me he'd fix it" — but never quite reached happily ever after. Now, instead, she enjoys writing and visiting friends in Chiapas, Mexico.

But both still have their rings, awarded by the United States Bowling Congress and imprinted with the phrase "Perfect Game." And both still have their memories.

For Richard Dewhurst and Barb Freezer, bowling the perfect game is a movie worth watching, even if only as reminiscence. Because the moment the last pins fell marks the climax of a journey that is theirs alone. For Richard and Barb — and perhaps every bowler who has achieved that vaunted 300 — that moment will forever define at least some part of their lives as, well, perfect. — DAVE HOLTON



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