

# Column for Will County Sportsman      March 2008

## Just Paying Attention      By Mark London

It really makes me laugh. PBA lead announcer Rob Stone's term for four strikes in a row has been celebrated as the greatest thing since sliced bread or the worst travesty in the history of the world. Hambone. One word, that's it. Mention that word to today's PBA tour watchers on ESPN and you get a strong response either way. Log on to the pba.com forum and see for yourself. A line in the sand looks to have been drawn between whether Stone is running the PBA telecasts into the ground and those whom can't wait to draw the next fancy hambone sign. This line in the sand also divides casual fans who bowl a few times a year versus those who bowl a lot more often. What else does this mean? First, this is one of those things that just happens. The last example of this was the emergence of PDW and the crotch chop and we all remember how that took off and pierced itself into mainstream sports for awhile several years ago. Granted, this is not really mainstream sports material, but the stir created based on a one word exclamation is something quite unique. How unique you ask? The next time someone on your or an adjacent league pair rolls a four-bagger, listen how fast someone says hambone. See the reaction and enjoy the moment.

Stone is merely trying to keep the action on the screen entertaining to casual viewers while trying to find his niche in PBA telecasts. I don't know this for certain, but I would guess he watched a few telecasts and listened to what was being said as well as how it was being said. An incoming announcer will then figure what he can make the show sound better.

Stone also knows there are detractors not in love with his penchant for these phrases and has made brief mention of this during the telecasts. How big has this become? Color analyst Randy Pedersen has pointed out something on the attempt for the

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four-bagger. Numerous members in the crowd will shout out, "hambone!" once the bowler's ball hits the lane for that fourth strike. If you are bothered by "hambone" fever, just ride the storm out. By this time next year, it won't be that big if a deal anyway. But knowing Stone's style, he's far from done bringing new words and phrases into Sunday's telecasts. Right now, he is trying out "T-Bone" and "Yahtzee" for a five bagger. Stay tuned for more.

One bowler Rob and Randy have been talking about a lot this season has a nickname-sounding first name. Rhino Page has been having a dream-like rookie season on the PBA Tour. How good a season has he been having, you ask? One win and two seconds in 5 TV finals and 9<sup>th</sup> on the points list, all while competing through the Tour Qualifying Round. That's the 7-game qualifier bowled the day before the tournament itself begins. Only four bowlers had made a TV finals since 1994 and two had won before this season. Page has easily had the best rookie season in history and with a strike or two more in those title losing matches might have been a candidate for Player of the Year. After winning the USBC Masters last fall, I picked Sean Rash as the next new "face" to represent bowling. He certainly is qualified through his Team USA and PBA Tour experiences. I think the USBC should add Page to its roster of young faces of the present. (Something tells me he may have been asked already.)

It has been about four years since the last Top 25 TV bowling Moments. That time span has allowed new items to be considered. Liz Johnson's run for a national PBA title along with Michael Haugen's Tournament of Champions comeback will be definitely included. That means two items will be relegated to honorable mention status. It's not the first time I've had to cut an item, but it's always a tough call. Overall, nothing

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will be new in the top 10, other than order. As time goes by, certain items get new notoriety and embraced by a new generation of fans. Others lose importance due to lack of interest in this point in time. For example, the first list featured Jason Queen's semifinal match 300 game in the 1998 ABC Masters television finals. If Queen had gone on to bigger fortunes after becoming a touring pro, it might still be on the list. That combined with more items getting a bigger bang in the mainstream sports pages and highlight reels was the factor in its removal. On the other hand, an item once rejected might be making its way onto the list. Some of my older regular readers might recall a made-for NBC television event in the late 80s featuring Lisa Wagner, Mark Roth, Marshall Holman, and a nationally unknown Wichita State bowler in a skins format shootout. The unknown was 2007-08 PBA Player of the Year candidate Chris Barnes, who won his way into the show as a amateur. Another factor to consider these days is YouTube. Many of the items on the original and updated lists did not have immediately accessible video to the masses. Now that video feeds and data are traded now like baseball cards were traded 50 years ago, some items on the list have more impact while others have less. Rather than me describing what I saw, you can find it on YouTube, bowl.tv, and Xtra Frame at pba.com and see for yourself. Now that the end of the Don Johnson 299 game has been seen far more often lately, its impact has been never been greater. The internet was in its infancy 10 years ago and there were not all the different sites and video sources it possesses now. Who knows, I may find another item or two.