

# Column for Will County Sportsman November 2007

## Just Paying Attention By Mark London

There were tailgaters. More than a few of them. You would expect that walking up to Miller Park, one of this country's legendary sites for pre-game tailgating, but there were not any fans in Brewer blue and gold, although this was late October. Up until four weeks earlier, this may have been the site of the middle three games of this year's World Series. Instead, there was Badger red and white and, of course, Packer green and gold. There were several thousand less than the last time the TV show was here (2,712 vs. 4,300 in '04), but not any less enthusiastic. Thought there would be a few more in attendance since the Pack played the following evening. Even a few hecklers made their presence known this time around, supporting Patrick Allen's spare shooting game while encouraging Steve Jaros to keep striking. The one gripe I have with Miller Park hosting the TV finals is not anything having to do with the building or the environment. It's the images on the TV show itself. Pop the tape back in or replay the TiVo version and look at the thousands of empty seats elsewhere in the park. The casual viewer sees that no one is there. Different camera angles would help, although the crowd was confined to the first two decks between the first base dugout and the right field foul pole. Showing bowlers from the cameras (there were two) down the lanes showed plenty of cheering fans in the background, but shots from other angles made it look like they were bowling in an empty airplane hangar.

One of the story lines surrounding this year's USBC Masters TV finals was whether Jaros would take his eighth career title, second career major, which would be a giant step toward the PBA Hall of Fame. He did have a great start in his first two of three matches, rolling the second highest two-game total in finals history with a 569. With games of 279 and 290, one would think a 245 would be enough to win. What he did do

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was set another record he doesn't want. His 814 set is the second highest three-game series rolled not to win the tournament.

What we did see at Miller Park that sunny Sunday afternoon was this: a picture of the PBA for the next 15 years now has a face. Sean Rash has done something not seen since PDW won the Tournament of Champions two decades ago. He has won his first major at the age of 25. On a tour where youth sits on the outside looking in, Rash may have the moxie to think his way through the various oil patterns. Many of his contemporaries try to overpower them rather than plot a sound game plan for qualifying and match play. Like that certain guy in golf you may have heard of lately, he is developing more creativity and improvisation at an earlier age. Especially now at the USBC Masters, with each TV appearance he is showing us something different. Oh yes, he also has the best TV record of any younger touring player in recent memory at 7 wins and no losses. In a tour dominated by the 30-plus crowd, he's not the typical 20-something player.

His resume isn't too shabby, either. After bowling at perennial collegiate powerhouse Wichita State, there was the two-year stint with Team USA in '02 and '03, but other things happened in '03 as well. Victories included the Intercollegiate Bowling Congress National Championship, Jr. Team USA National Championship, and the USBC Doubles title with Derek Sapp. He narrowly missed an exemption at the 2005-06 PBA Tour Trials and began to bowl the PTQ's that fall, the pre-tournament qualifying round used by newer bowlers as well as players trying to get back a tour exemption. Then came his 13<sup>th</sup> tournament with a PTQ, the 2006 West Virginia Championship and you know the rest, the first of his four titles.

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But what is separating Rash is his rapid acclimation to lane play strategies usually known to only those with 5-plus years of tour experience. His ball company rep, Rick Benoit, has tracked each tour stop for the last five or six seasons at [brunswickinsiders.com](http://brunswickinsiders.com). In the weeks Rash is doing well, Benoit compares Rash to a crafty veteran on his plan of attack each tournament segment from qualifying through the TV show. Benoit knows well what can happen to a player who suddenly bursts on the scene overnight. His brother, Bob, rolled a 300 in his first match as the top seed on national TV to win the 88 Quaker State Open. In subsequent TV appearances, Bob had trouble breaking 200. He eventually added three more titles in the following four seasons, but Rick's coaching experience in that time not only helped Bob in the early 90s, but also allowed Rick to become one of Brunswick's ball representatives shortly thereafter.

With the strong record the last seven years, the jump from top amateur to pro is a challenge. The jump from journeyman pro to marquee pro is a bigger leap indeed. Jaros went through during his three tourney win season back in '03 and with another win this season, Rash will complete his trek.

Rash will undoubtedly earn Bowler of the Month honors (I voted for him and Liz Johnson) and while researching other bigger losing scores, I found a couple of interesting nuggets of local note. Joliet native Jim Stefanich's mark of 815 for three games enroute to a 1006 4-game total at the '75 Denver Open remains at the top of that list, followed by Jaros' 814. The final game of the 1006 set was a 199-191 loss to Larry Laub, who held the record at the time of 1021, set in '72. Stefanich won his final of his 13 tour titles the following year, the '76 Denver Open. I didn't think there was a local tie into something like that, but I guess it still is a small world after all.

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In December's JPA, the PBA returns to Hawthorn Lanes for what might be the final time. Stay tuned.