

Bowling Through the Ages

The sport of bowling can be traced back to articles found in the tomb of an Egyptian child buried in 5200 B.C. The primitive equipment included nine pieces of stone at which a stone “ball” was rolled, the ball having to first roll through an archway made of three pieces of marble.

Bowling at pins is believed to have originated in Germany in the early 17th century. At that time, it was a sport, but a religious ceremony.

The first indoor bowling lanes were used in 1455 and designed by a creative Englishman. In the 1500s, Sir Frances Drake, another English citizen and famous sailor, insisted on finishing his final frame before taking action against the Spanish Armada which was attacking from the English Channel. He is credited with introducing the game of bowling to many cultures as he circumnavigated the globe.

The first record of bowling being played in America was by Dutch settlers in 1626 on Manhattan Island. In 1842, Connecticut outlawed the game of ninepin bowling as a result of heavy gambling on the games. Several bowling supporters changed the number of pins to ten, rearranged them into a triangle shape, and continued to encourage people to participate in the sport. (This allowed them to play legally, since there were ten pins instead of nine.)

The American Bowling Congress standardized the rules of bowling in 1895, and the first tournament for professionals and amateurs was held in 1901. Women’s bowling became official in 1916 with the Women’s International Bowling Congress. The WIBC, as it was known, held its first women’s tournament in 1917. In 1982, the Young American Bowlers Alliance (YABA) was founded to promote bowling to children and teens.

Several important advances were made in the sport of bowling in the early 1900s. For many centuries, bowling balls were made out of hard wood. Then, in 1905, they began manufacturing them out of rubber. Today’s balls are made of urethane and a reactive resin. Finger holes did not gain acceptability until 1889-99 and in the early 1930s, the three-hole ball gained popularity. In 1936, a pin spotter was invented. Before mechanical devices were used to reset the pins, young children sat at the end of the lane and cleared or reset the pins after each bowl. In the 1970s, all scoring was done manually on a score sheet provided by the bowling alley. Today, automatic scoring systems not only keep score, they provide a source of entertainment and instruction for bowlers. Bumper guards and cosmic bowling are two more revelations that make the sport of bowling entertaining for people of all ages and skill levels.