

LIT bowlers turn game into a science

By Tom Panzenhagen
staff writer

They say Ted Williams made a science of hitting a baseball. He didn't analyze the properties of cork and horsehide. But he knew how to make contact.

Two members of Lawrence Institute of Technology's bowling team, however, literally are making a science of rolling a bowling ball.

And the whole team knows how to make contact — with the pins.

The bowlers — ranked among the top 10 college bowling teams in the nation — recently finished first in Michigan Intercollegiate Bowling Conference play, and they won the Midwest Collegiate Championship in tournament action last month in Milwaukee.

This weekend they will bowl against top teams from Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky in Young American Bowling Alliance sectional rollofs in Richmond, Ind. The winner advances to the National Collegiate Bowling Championship — college bowling's equivalent of the NCAA basketball finals — May 3-4 in Milwaukee.

IF LIT BOWLERS have an advantage going into the rollofs, it's the study team members Bill Wasserberger and Joe Montano are making of the game.

The two are working on a school project involving the properties of a bowling ball. They are, in fact, turning the game into a science.

Wasserberger explained: "The center of mass of the ball is not at the center of the sphere." Most bowlers use 16-pound bowling balls, he noted, but the "internal weight" of the ball may vary by three ounces.

"The relation between the center of mass and the axis of rotation affects the character of the arc as the ball goes down the lane. All this is known by top bowlers, but it's never been studied scientifically."

"We're bringing scientific analysis to the study of bowling ball balance."

"The ideal delivery is one-third slide, one-third roll and one-third hook. You vary the internal weights of the ball in order to achieve the same slide-roll-hook under an infinite variety of lane conditions," Wasserberger said.

To knock down pins with the consistency of champions, however, you have to put theory to practice, and that's what the LIT bowlers have done this year.

Armed with averages near the 200 mark, the bowlers appear confident about the upcoming rollofs.

"WE HAVE TO WIN, so I predict we're going to win," said Montano, a junior from Troy and a mechanical engineering major.

"We want to win," said junior teammate and co-captain Wasserberger, who has two 300 games to his credit. Montano also has bowled two perfect games.

"Indiana State is the only team ranked higher

bowling

than us (in the sectional rollofs)," said senior co-captain George Sokolowsky of Detroit. "But we've beaten them. They were bowling right next to us (in the Association of College Unions International tournament Feb. 15-16 in East Lansing), and they saw our top four bowlers average about 250 in our last game, and they just cracked."

Indiana State beat LIT this year, too, in the Michigan Swiss Invitational. But LIT "got even," as junior Fred Page of Livonia put it, two weeks later in East Lansing.

"Our chances of winning are as good as anybody's," Page said. Montano added, "We have three guys bowling the best they've ever bowled and a couple not having the years they're capable of. We have peaked (recently), but we haven't played over our abilities."

Other team members are Jeff Briggs of Troy, Joe Patti of Birmingham and Rick Tepper of Birmingham. All are juniors and will return next year with Montano, Wasserberger and Page.

The coach is Dan Ottman.

LIT COMPETES in the Michigan Intercollegiate Bowling Conference, made up of teams from the University of Michigan, Saginaw Valley State College and Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State universities.

They practice at Plum Hollow Lanes in Southfield and Astro Lanes in Madison Heights.

"The school has treated us fantastic," Sokolowsky said, explaining that LIT pays for about two-thirds of the bowlers' expenses. "But no one includes gas money or anything (in their expense accounts)."

He added, "Few people really know anything about us, but for us this is everything. I'd stay another year if I could, but my eligibility is up."

Wasserberger linked team spirit with its success this year.

"It's a team sport and we play for nothing but pride — same as an Olympic team," he said.

Sokolowsky, a mechanical engineering major, said he has no intention of turning pro when he graduates.

"I've got a job (lined up) and the pay is solid. I'm not going to go right on the (pro bowlers) tour — that would be nuts," he said.

Maybe about as nuts as making a science out of bowling.

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