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## Despite changes, USBC certification provides benefits to its membership

Recent decisions by the United States Bowling Congress, headquartered in Arlington, Texas, have made life more difficult for local associations affiliated with the national governing body of bowling.

The USBC, caught in what seems to be a never-ending spiral of decreasing membership, no longer offers achievement awards to its members, except for once-in-a-lifetime awards for a bowler's first 300 game, 800 series or 900 series.

The USBC's party line for the change is that it has changed its strategy "to focus resources on national governing body services." Translated that means the USBC can no longer afford to give out awards – which have ranged from magnets to bag tags to key chains to rings – for the \$10 per member that it receives.

As a result, local associations (such as the Genesee Region USBC) are now responsible for developing an awards program that meets the needs of its bowlers. To its credit, the GRUSBC has done just that. For this service, the GRUSBC is charging its members an extra \$2 this season.

All told, GRUSBC bowlers in leagues of more than 16 weeks pay a USBC certification fee of \$18 -- with \$10 going to the national governing body, \$7 going to the local association and \$1 going to the New York State USBC (which runs state tournaments for adults and youths, and awards thousands of dollars in scholarships).

Another recent USBC change was to lower the certification fee to \$11 for those leagues of 16 weeks or less, with \$7 going to national, \$3 to local and \$1 to the state. This is quite a bargain for those leagues that bowl every-other-week or bowl for half the season.

A common question among bowlers is "What do we get for our sanction fee?" It's a viable question and one that all officers and directors of USBC-affiliated associations should be able to answer effectively. Unfortunately, the perception among bowlers is that the USBC only is important if someone bowls a 300 game. That is not the reality, however.

Starting at the national level, here's what USBC-certified bowlers get for their \$10:

-- **Membership into a national governing body:** The USBC is recognized by the U.S. Olympic Committee as a membership organization that provides standardized rules, specifications, regulations and benefits to ensure fairness and enjoyment for all. It employs highly-trained people who constantly review the sport's rules and the various specifications that cover bowling lanes, pins, balls and other equipment.

-- **Bonding:** This provision, which provides insurance in cases where league and/or tournament funds are lost, mishandled or simply stolen, comes into play more than people would like to admit. A league with 48 bowlers bowling 30 weeks can generate a healthy sum of prize money. It's a shame when it's time to distribute the cash at the banquet and bowlers do not get their prize money. Full bonding then kicks in (provided the league president is doing his or her job of checking the bank account on a monthly basis), the funds will be reimbursed and legal action will be taken against those responsible.

-- **Rules:** As a former league secretary and current USBC state association manager, I am thankful that the USBC has a Rules Department run by competent, knowledgeable rules

counselors. League officers and tournament coordinators often seek rules interpretations; certification with the USBC provides leagues with the benefit of having such a service.

-- **Certified average:** While the majority of bowlers do not bowl in national or state tournaments, many men, women and children participate in local association tournaments and charity events which ask for the bowler's highest USBC certified average for handicapping purposes. Bowlers with no USBC certified averages would have to bowl "scratch" (with no handicap). This would put them in a pinfall deficit right from the start.

-- **Youth Development and Scholarships:** Realizing that youth bowling is the key to the sport's future, the USBC made the decision to decrease the Youth certification fee to a mere \$4, effective this season. That change shifts a bit of the burden to its adult members but, in my view, it is worth it to help get more kids into the sport. I, like most league bowlers, got my start in youth bowling and look back on those days as great fun. (Please note that the local association can add to that \$4 if it wishes to provide awards, trophies, coaching clinics, tournaments for its youth).

-- **Member rewards:** The USBC has partnered with many businesses to offer discounts to its members. A list of those companies can be found on the USBC website – [www.bowl.com](http://www.bowl.com) – which, in itself, is another benefit to USBC league and tournament bowlers. Additional benefits include supporting charities such as Bowl for the Cure and Bowlers to Veterans Link, subscription to the online Bowlers Journal Interactive, supporting USBC nationally-televised tournaments and helping to provide staff in the field.

Moving to the local association level, here's what USBC-bowlers get for their \$7:

-- **Volunteer officers and directors:** Depending upon the degree of commitment and enthusiasm exhibited by the president and the board, a local bowling association can make a huge impact upon its bowlers. Gladly, I can speak highly of the efforts being put forth by the GRUSBC and its president, Tom Fluker of Batavia.

-- **A paid association manager:** A portion of a bowler's membership dues go toward the salary of the association manager (in the GRUSBC's case, Laurie Cole of Albion), who is responsible for getting supplies to league officers, processing membership applications, coordinating tournaments, making deposits and paying bills, and communicating with the bowlers.

-- **Awards:** Local associations that do not develop an awards program are asking for trouble because bowlers are used to getting something for their noteworthy accomplishments. The GRUSBC has created its own awards program for bowlers of all ages. It includes prizes and/or entries into a grand prize drawing for 300 game, 11 strikes in a row, 700, 800, 900, first 600, 700, 800, all-spares game, various pins over average for both game and series, Big 4 (4-6-7-10 split), 7-10 split and triplicate.

The grand prize drawing will take place at the season-ending association banquet on May 9, 2015. All of the entries compiled from those who earned achievement awards will be put into a hat and the winner will be able to choose from one of 10 prizes, all of them worth at least \$1,500. Prizes include two Buffalo Bills season tickets, a weekend at the Pocono's, Seneca Niagara Casino weekend, Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame weekend, Home Depot or Lowe's gift card, Watkins Glen racing weekend, Peek n' Peak resort weekend, spa package, and golf and bowling packages.

-- **Youth Bowling Opportunities:** Strong local associations embrace youth bowling in the form of weekly leagues and regular scholarship tournaments. Most of the centers in the GRUSBC have youth leagues and all of these children have the chance to compete in local,

regional and state tournaments offering scholarships. Through the USBC's SMART program, kids can earn scholarships when they are 6 years old, for example, and the money is held in their SMART account until needed.

-- **Tournaments:** Many bowlers enjoy stepping out of league mode to try their hand (and hopefully make a few bucks) at weekend tournament bowling. The GRUSBC lists 15 adult and youth tournaments, starting with the Genesee Region Scratch Singles Invitational on Oct. 4-5 at Perry Bowling Center and ending with the BVL benefit tournament on April 18-19 at Raider Lanes in Caledonia.

-- **Local Recognition:** The GRUSBC has an annual awards banquet where top bowlers from the season are recognized, youth scholar-athletes are honored and, if applicable, longtime standout bowlers or league officers are inducted into the Hall of Fame. For additional information about the GRUSBC, you can go to its website – [www.bowlgr.com](http://www.bowlgr.com).

As you can see by now, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to the successful management of organized bowling. When you compare bowling's one-time membership fee to the registration costs for most other sports, it's really a pretty good deal.

*(Mike Pettinella's Pin Points bowling column appears every other Thursday during the bowling season in the print and online editions of The Daily News. If you have an item of interest for his column, contact him at [mikepett2002@yahoo.com](mailto:mikepett2002@yahoo.com), at 343-3736 or by mail at 55 Edgewood Drive, Batavia).*