



HALL OF FAME

2024

TOM HESS

It is hard to decide where to start in a presentation of the career achievements of Tom Hess. So I decided to start with my first memory of Tom which was approximately 30 years ago during a Greater Iowa Bowling Association tournament at Riverside Lanes in Dubuque, IA. Tom was the number 1 seed for the stepladder finals and ended up with a 2nd place finish in the event. I won't speak of the details that led to him losing the title match. What I will say is that was my initial opportunity to see the talent Tom showed on the lanes. That tournament was held in the mid 1990's. Over the next ten years following that first impression, it was evident that the bowling potential was there, but it was around 2005 or so that Tom's career took a major step forward. In 2006, Tom won his first Iowa State tournament title as part of the winning team. That year also saw him finish in 4th place in singles at the USBC Open Championships in Corpus Christi, Texas. Tom won his second Iowa State tournament title in the 2007 doubles event. He added the Iowa State tournament all events title in 2010. Tom also added a 3rd place finish in doubles at the 2014 USBC Open Championships and another 3rd place finish in All Events at the 2018 Open Championships. Fewer than 40 bowlers have bowled two 300 games in Open Championships

competition. Tom has accomplished that with one in the 2006 singles, and the other in the 2018 team event.

For over 55 years, the Greater Iowa Bowling Association has provided scratch bowling tournaments for the top bowlers in Iowa and surrounding states. For the past 15 years, Tom Hess has been the dominating force in the GIBA. He has amassed a total of 17 titles. Each season, the GIBA schedule includes the Iowa Open which serves as a qualifying event for the U.S. Open with the winner receiving a paid entry into the U.S. Open. Tom has won that event 4 times and finished 2nd two other times, and also has 8 other finishes in the top 10. The tournament is contested on the 40' flat U.S. Open pattern which is the toughest pattern and Tom's ability to repeat shots shows with his wins. The GIBA schedule also includes three major tournaments each season, the 11thFrame.com Open, and the Fusion Realtors/Ebonite Classics. These tournaments are also bowled on very difficult 'sport' patterns and Tom has won 3 titles in those events and also has a couple of 2nd place finishes. The incredible feat he has accomplished is cashing in the major prize list in all 30 of these tournaments he has bowled. The GIBA has a season long point list where bowlers earn points for tournaments bowled, their finishing place, and a bonus for top 5 finishes. Over the period from 2015 thru 2021, Tom won that point title 4 times and finished 2nd, 3rd, and 5th the other three seasons. The winner of the points title receives a paid entry into the USBC Masters each year.

Tom won a significant number of tournaments around the State of Iowa as his bowling career progressed. These wins included more than ten titles in Mid-Iowa Bowling Association tournaments that were conducted in the Greater Des Moines area. Other titles include the Joe Tomsu Memorial 4 Person Team event in Council Bluffs, the Sweet 16 tournament in LeMars, the New Years Day Sweeper in Muscatine, Walt Miranda Sour Apple Classic in Des Moines, Yaw's Over/Under 45 Doubles in Des Moines, and SSBA Over 50/Under 50 4 Person Team event in Waterloo.

Not to downplay his early successes, but very few bowlers can honestly say that their major successes came after they reached the age of 40. Most certainly that is the case for Tom. He had experienced enough success in his 30's to make the decision to join the Professional Bowlers Association in 2005. He bowled a few PBA tournaments over the next 6 seasons with some success in the Midwest regional events. Fast forward to the 2011 USBC Masters tournament held at the National Bowling Stadium in Reno, Nevada. A magical week for Tom ended with him capturing the title in that event. At the age of 42, Tom became a major champion. The ten years following that win found Tom winning a great number of tournaments all around the Midwest including some of the most prestigious events in Iowa and the surrounding states. Tom has amassed a total of approximately 120 tournament wins around the Midwest area along with several other titles on a more national basis. Some of the biggest wins include the Greater Ozarks Open Doubles in Springfield, MO, Bowling This Month 8 game champion in Reno, LaCrosse Open in LaCrosse, WI, Sandhills Open in Omaha, NE, and the Lawn Lanes US Open Qualifier in Chicago, IL which Tom won 3 Times.

Fast forward to 2019 and Tom was excited to join the PBA50 where he believed he could be highly competitive. Then COVID hit and the PBA50 season was canceled. The following season, he found some early success although the elusive title was still missing. The Fall of 2021, the PBA50 season was finishing up out West. Tom made the stepladder in the PBA50 Senior U.S. Open and won his first senior PBA major title, beating Chris Barnes in the title match. The following week, Tom once again topped Chris Barnes and won his 2nd PBA50 major title winning the USBC Senior Masters. Amazing that Tom had a PBA major title and two PBA50 major titles for his only three PBA national titles at the time. The two major wins earned Tom the PBA50 Rookie of the Year award along with the PBA50 Player of the Year award for his first season on the PBA50 tour. Since that time, Tom has added five additional PBA50 national titles including two this season. Earning these titles resulted in Tom being inducted into the PBA Hall of Fame this past April. Tom and his family provided my wife Rosie and I with the awesome opportunity to attend his PBA Hall of Fame induction ceremony and share that incredible evening with them.

Certainly, this is a career on the lanes with lots of successes, but there are more highlights. His rookie year performances on the PBA50 tour earned Tom a spot on Senior Team USA. He was selected along with Chris Barnes, Parker Bohn III, and Bob Learn Jr. for the team that would compete at the IBF World Senior Championships in Dubai. Tom made the most of his opportunity by winning the gold medal in singles and a bronze medal in doubles with Chris Barnes. The image of Tom standing on that podium with his hand over his heart and tears streaming down his face while they played our national anthem is one I will never forget. That would not be Tom's last opportunity to represent his country on Senior Team USA. He was chosen again last year to bowl along with Chris Barnes, Parker Bohn III, and John Janawicz at the IBF World Championships in Cali, Columbia. This time, Tom joined his three teammates to take home the gold medal in the team event. He also paired with Parker Bohn III to win the bronze medal in doubles, and he won a bronze medal in singles as well. These opportunities to represent his country in bowling competitions are truly special to Tom.

Suffice it to say that throughout his career, Tom has been more than willing to travel in pursuit of tournaments to bowl. He drives thousands of miles every year to compete. In spite of his travels across the U.S. as well as overseas, Tom remains a steadfast family man. His wife Sue and his now adult children, Megan and Andrew are his biggest supporters and he knows how important they have been to his success on the lanes.

I would be remiss if I didn't provide you with some statistics, and these numbers are amazing:

800 series – approximately 75 with a high of 867

700 series – well over 1000 total

300 games – approximately 180 as of 2022

Highest league average of 238 in the 2014-15 season

I have known Tom Hess for about 30 years. As GIBA administrator, at times his intensity, emotions, and fierceness made it difficult for me to find bowlers willing to pair with him on the lanes. I started pairing myself and my son with Tom whenever possible. These pairings have

given me a close-up opportunity to witness the amazing transformation Tom has made as a bowler and as a human being. The opportunities I now have to cross with Tom are something I always look forward to. His support of our GIBA events is amazing and I appreciate his loyalty to the GIBA as well as to me and my family. Tom still has that intensity, but now it has become a huge positive for him on the lanes. This version of Tom Hess makes him one of the most respected bowlers on the PBA50 tour where he has become known as Major Tom among his peers. He also now serves as a commentator on BowlTV webcasts when he isn't bowling, and the fans love his insight. Tom is a fan favorite when bowling PBA50 Pro-Am events and the youngsters in particular love bowling with him.

In closing, I have served as the administrator for the GIBA for the past 25 years, and helped with administration for over 20 years prior to that. I have been blessed with the opportunity to witness the bowling careers of many of the all time great bowlers from around the State of Iowa. Amazing bowlers like Mike Berlin, Fran Eighme, Shannon Buchan, Don Breeden, Jon McKeever, Mike Peters, Doug Anderson, Mike Erickson, and too many others to list have bowled GIBA events and found success. Tom Hess not only belongs on this list of all time greats in Iowa, but most certainly will end his career as one of the absolute best to ever step on the approach from the State of Iowa. At this time it is my great pleasure to present to you my friend, Tom Hess, as the newest member of the Iowa State Bowling Association Hall of Fame.

Presented June 22, 2024

Chris Birnbaum, Iowa State USBC President

