

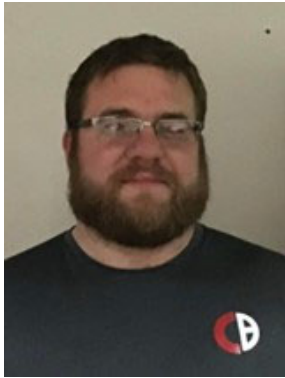
Monday, August 15, 2022

Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Summer celebration continues for Irvin Johnson

The summer just keeps getting better and better for Irvin Johnson.



Irvin Johnson

The Pekin bowler closed out the weekly summer sweepers at Landmark Lanes by claiming the championship round of the series on Friday night.

After leading qualifying with a 1,005-handicap total for his four games, Johnson defeated 15th-seeded Tony DeVita, 220-194, in the title match to claim the \$700 top prize.

The win came less than a week after Johnson was selected in the draft of The Perfect Angle Pro Shop/Bill Mastronardi Masters League for the first time after eight years of trying.

It was the third time this summer that Johnson led the qualifying at Landmark. The first two, however, did not end well for him.

“The second time I led, Tracy Sollenberger fired an amazing 258 at me in the first round – and she was getting 23 pins of handicap,” Johnson said. “I shot 240. Nothing against that, because it is just the luck of the draw.

“The other time I led, I lost to Travis Anderson, who shot a 300 at me in the second round.”

Johnson was able to get a little payback on Anderson on his way to his first win of the summer.

After getting past Eric Kendall and Brad Moore in the first two rounds, Johnson had a rematch against Anderson in a semifinal match.

“Back in college (Robert Morris-Peoria), Travis was my coach,” Johnson said. “So, it has been one of my lifelong goals to beat Travis scratch. Not with handicap, but straight up.”

Johnson was getting six pins of handicap a game but didn’t need it against his former coach.

“I had the front six strikes, and I was like, OK, this might be that time,” he said.

Johnson went on to a 225-205 win – without using his handicap.

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DeVita made it to the title match after barely sneaking in to the top 16 for the bracket finals. He was getting two pins of handicap a game and qualified 15th with a handicap total of 864 – three pins better than Luke Morris and six ahead of Mike Boogren, who were both bowling scratch and missed the cut.

DeVita defeated Tommy Barnwell, Eric Wurmnest and Garrett Lawson (who rolled a 300 to open bracket play) to reach the title match.

Johnson jumped out to a quick lead in the finale, but DeVita stayed close by avoiding any open frames (including converting the 1-2-8-10 washout).

Johnson chopped the 6-10 late in the game, giving DeVita an opportunity to put some pressure on the top-seeded player.

DeVita could have struck out in the 10th frame to force Johnson to throw the first strike in the 10th to win. But DeVita left a 4-pin on his first shot, and all Johnson needed was good count for the win.

Now he has to prepare for the Masters League after being taken by Barnwell in the third round.

“I told Tommy that he was the last person that I would ever expect to take me,” Johnson said. “There’s a couple of guys in the area that everybody knows – Tommy, Travis, and Steve (Taylor). You always say, ‘Man, I would love to bowl on a team with them.’”

Ironically, it was a tip from Barnwell that helped Johnson get drafted.

“I used to throw at spares with one hand with whatever strike ball I was using,” Johnson said. “I would just flatten my hand and throw it as hard as I could.

“Tommy said to buy a spare ball and that I would pick up 50 percent more of my spares. So, I got one, and it showed. I hardly miss 10-pins anymore. I used to miss 10-pins to the left a lot because I was not accurate. Now I just slow everything down and throw it the way I need to.”

Now that Johnson is in the Masters, he said he has some lofty goals.

“The last eight years I’ve thrown my name in the draft, and I’ve always thought that I was that caliber to be out there,” he said. “My first year of getting in, I want to make at least the top 11 averages to be a captain next year.

“So, come next year’s draft, I can draft people instead of being worried about being drafted. It’s a high goal and the Masters field is still stacked. Hopefully with my improvements with the way I have been bowling, I can keep it going so I can make that goal this year.”

If Johnson does reach his goal, Barnwell and his teammates will be the beneficiaries.

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“Tommy said I’ve improved, and that he thinks it’s my year to finally show what I can do,” Johnson said.

So far, so good.