

Monday July 17, 2023

Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Peoria Hall of Fame announcement, a surprising 300 game highlight big week for Robinson family

The second half of 2023 started out with a big week for the Robinson family.

On Friday, July 7, the Peoria River City Bowling Association announced that Gary Robinson had been selected as a member of the 2023 Hall of Fame class in the Outstanding Bowler category.

That was not a surprise, because Robinson has had hall-of-fame credentials for many years. His getting elected to the Hall always seemed like a foregone conclusion.

The following day, Mike Robinson, Gary's 17-year-old son, rolled his first career 300 game at Potter's Alley in Morton.

"I thought that was kind of interesting that he did it the day after my Hall of Fame announcement," said the proud dad. "I had known about that for a while, but Mike's 300 was a little bit of a surprise."

Not a total surprise. The younger Robinson had won a Wednesday sweeper at Plaza Lanes a few weeks earlier and recently took over the lead in the youth division of the Petersen Classic with a 1,298 total for his eight games.

"The most strikes I had gotten in a game was like nine in a row," he said. "I wasn't expecting to get 12 in a row! The last frame kind of just happened."

Gary Robinson was there to record the final strike.

"You could hear me on the video when he threw the last ball when I say, 'How about it!' I just wanted it to carry," Gary said. "We've talked about this. Sometimes you make perfect shots in an entire game, and you just can't carry. I don't care how good you throw the ball; you're not going to strike on every single shot."

"I thought he threw pretty much every shot perfect in the 10th. That last shot might have gotten a little bit longer, but it still was shaping up nice. I was just glad to be there when it happened."

Mike's mother Amy, however, was not. But she was getting regular reports from her husband.

Monday July 17, 2023

"I was texting her," Gary said. "We live five minutes from Potter's, but I didn't want to jinx it and tell her to get over here. I'm not superstitious, but you know how that goes."

Gary Robinson has rolled a few perfect games of his own. Thirty-four to be exact, to go along with 10 800 series and a high average of 231.

His other accomplishments include two Peoria association team titles, a city doubles title with Terry Wiesenberger, a pair of runner-up finishes in singles (with 790s both times), Central Illinois Tournament team and doubles titles, Peoria city senior singles and all-events titles, Illinois senior state doubles title with Carl Wall, a Century doubles title with Gary Alstott at the USBC Open Championships, and a 30-year lifetime average of 195 in the USBC Open Championships.

But Robinson had not submitted his name for the Hall of Fame until a couple of years ago, even though he has been at the top of his game well into his 50s.

"I've just always felt like I'm too young," he said. "You think of Hall of Fame and it's like you're at the end of your career. Your best days are behind you. That's when you go in the Hall of Fame.

"But Gary Alstott and a few other guys have always pestered me over the years to submit my name. I always wanted to wait until I was older. I'll be 60 at the end of the month."

And he's still adding to his credentials. He was on the winning team of this year's Perfect Angle Pro Shop/Bill Mastronardi Masters league and rolled his most recent 300 game in March during a trios tournament at Potter's Alley.

"In the 10th frame of that game I threw a Brooklyn, and it carried," Robinson said. "Then I just killed the next two shots. That was something new. It's the first time I've had a Brooklyn in a 300 game.

"I do notice a few differences in my game now, but I feel like I'm still throwing the ball pretty good and can still compete with the young guys."

That includes his twin sons, Mike, and Matt, as well as Gary's daughter Morgan. All have put up solid credentials of their own as youth bowlers.

Matt Robinson had been named the Youth Boys Bowler of the Year by the local association for the past two seasons and has a high game of 289.

Morgan Robinson was the Peoria association's Youth Girls Bowler of the Year in 2021 and was on the all-star team last year. She is bowling in this year's Junior Gold tournament in Indiana.

Matt had high book average last season with a 201, five pins higher than Mike.

Monday July 17, 2023

But Mike was the first of the Robinson siblings to roll a perfect game. And he did it shortly after bowling on the challenging lane conditions at the Petersen.

“It was kind of hard readjusting my hand, because my thumb swelled up so I couldn’t really let go of the ball,” he said. “But after we bowled in the Friday night sweeper at Landmark, I kind of got back to throwing the ball normally again. I think it was directly afterwards that I shot the 300.

“I didn’t even know my dad was recording me on the final shot. It would have made me even more nervous. I was nervous enough in the 10th. My legs were feeling pretty weak.”

Mike started Saturday’s league session with 13 straight strikes, using an Idol Helios ball that Alstott had given him.

He finished with a 721 series, and now Mike knows he has bragging rights over his twin brother.

“I would say it will put more pressure on Matt to get one now,” he said.

That leaves Mike just 33 behind his dad, who expects his sons to surpass his accomplishments.

“I appreciate bowling and I like that my kids like to bowl,” Gary said. “I like when good things happen for me, my kids and even any of my teammates.”

Unfortunately, the Robinsons will not be able to attend this year’s Hall of Fame and Awards Banquet, which will be held on Saturday, November 11, at Barrack’s Catering Inn.

“This is the kids’ last year in marching band as seniors (at Morton High School), and the grand nationals are on November 11 in Indianapolis,” Gary Robinson said.” So, I think what I’m going to do is record a little segment for this year and then they’re going to give me my official party night in 2024.

“It’s kind of a bummer, but I can’t miss the last band competition.”

Which makes him a Hall of Fame dad as well.

Monday July 17, 2023



Gary Robinson (left) and his son Mike.