

Friday September 5, 2025

Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Michael DeGrave Rolls Back-to-Back 300s After Shaky Start

Michael DeGrave's league session at Potter's Alley in Morton began with not even a hint of a historic performance on Thursday night.

The 46-year-old Caterpillar service information developer, who has only been bowling for four years, struggled to a 169 in the opener, salvaging the game with three strikes in the 10th frame.

"I think it took a few frames for the beer to kick in and loosen me up," DeGrave said with a laugh.

Once loosened up, he didn't miss again on lanes 7-8 with his Hammer Black Widow 3.0 ball.

In Game 2, he rattled off 12 straight strikes for his first-ever 300 game. The clincher wasn't perfect — his final ball drifted Brooklyn and barely nicked the pocket — but every pin fell, and DeGrave finally had the milestone he'd been chasing.

"I'm still shaking," he admitted afterward. "I don't think I ever stopped shaking from the first 300."

Remarkably, the story didn't end there. DeGrave kept the string alive into Game 3, piling up strike after strike until the nerves again caught up to him in the 10th frame.

"In the last game, the nerves didn't really kick in until the 11th ball," he said. "But when I threw that last ball, I was hoping the bowling gods were in my favor."

They were. The shot took aim directly at the head pin and plowed straight through the nose, snowplowing the rack (the last three pins to fall were the 4, 7, and 10) and giving him his second consecutive 300. With 27 strikes in a row, DeGrave had gone from an opening 169 to a 769 series, capped by back-to-back perfection.

His previous high game had been a 297 at Mt. Hawley Bowl, and his career-best series is a 780. On his first try at 300 at Mt. Hawley, DeGrave's final ball also went high that night, leaving the 6-7-10 split. This time around, however, both high hits carried, making the back-to-back 300s even more meaningful.

"I always said I would probably bowl 800 before I bowl a 300," DeGrave said.

Last season, Pro Shop Tony Schnack accomplished back-to-back 300s on two separate occasions: once at Potter's Alley during the Peoria River City Association's city tournament and once at Plaza Lanes in Washington during the PRC Association's Mixed Doubles.

But Schnack is a two-time (and current) PRC Association Men's Bowler of the Year and led the association with a 239 average last season. So, while his pair of double treys were impressive, they were not very shocking. DeGrave's, on the other hand, came completely out of nowhere.

After 27 straight strikes, was he tempted to keep bowling? Hardly.

"No, I'm tired and ready for bed," he said with a grin. "I have dogs at home and I've got to go and let them out."

DeGrave's celebration was modest but enthusiastic — everything short of a Lambeau Leap, which felt appropriate for a big Green Bay Packers fan bowling on NFL opening night.

For DeGrave, the game has never been about pressure or chasing records.

"There's no stress. It's just for fun," he said. "And that's the whole reason why I go bowling, just for fun. I'm not a competitive bowler. I like to come here, hang out with the guys, encourage everyone. I give high fives, you know, hype everybody up and have a good time."

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And sometimes, on nights like this one, he also happens to throw back-to-back 300 games.

Another big night for Pro Shop Tony

A couple of pairs over from where DeGrave was bowling, Pro Shop Tony Schnack rolled his second 800 series in the first four weeks of the Businessmen's League.

He had games of 253, 279, and 278 for an 810 set.

Three weeks ago, he opened the league with games of 279, 297, and 227 for an 803 set.

Through the first 12 games of the season, Schnack is averaging a smooth 256.



Pro Shop Tony Schnack



Michael DeGrave