

Friday August 1, 2025

Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Phat Kidz Crew brings home USBC Open Championship team title, Eagle to Central Illinois; 3,300 score holds up after 105 days of waiting to earn coveted prize

For the team members of Phat Kidz Crew, the dream of winning an Eagle at the United States Bowling Congress Open Championships came to fruition at the Raising Cane's River Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Central Illinois group of Andy Stone (Bloomington), Travis Anderson (Peoria), Tommy Barnwell (East Peoria), Tony Recsnik (Springfield) and team namesake Steve Taylor (Pekin) posted a score of 3,300 way back on April 13 to take the lead in the regular team division of the event.

A painfully long 105 days later, after the final squad of team competition had ended on July 27, they got the official word that their score had held up to win the title, beating out a field of 11,684 five-person teams – 58,420 bowlers.

They finished 30 pins ahead of the runner-up team (Strike It Rich Pro Shop) from St. Louis and 50 ahead of third in the tournament which lasted for almost five months.

With the title, the team members also earned an Eagle – one of the most coveted prizes in all of bowling, and a symbol that will appear next to their names in all future USBC Open Championships.

An Eagle is forever.

So, the group decided to take “forever” to the next level.

“We’re all getting tattoos,” Barnwell said. “It started out as a joke. When Steve was watching the video of us striking, I half-joking said, ‘Hey, if we win this, are you getting 3,300 tattooed on you?’ And everybody just laughed.

“Then Steve said, ‘You’re damn right!’ So I said, ‘If you do it, I’ll do it,’ because Steve hates needles. So now, all of us are going to do it.”

The final design has not been determined, but it probably will involve an eagle and their 3,300-team score.

That ended up being an unbelievable score on very demanding lane conditions. The team that finished second had bowled two weeks earlier than Phat Kidz, and the team that finished third was on their squad on April 13.

So, no other team challenged the top three spots for the last 17 weeks of the tournament. Only seven teams ended up breaking the 3,200 barrier.

It was the lowest winning score since 2017, when Team NABR had a 3,266-winning total, and the second lowest since 2004.

Barnwell led the team with a 715 set on games of 211, 256 and 248. Stone added 705 (223, 269, 213), Taylor 656 (246, 203, 207), Recsnik 632 (217, 214, 201) and Anderson 592 (221, 198, 173).

“Bowling with these guys and winning the team title, it’s unbelievable,” said Taylor, who has won three Professional Bowlers Association regional titles. “Nothing compares to winning an Eagle. That’s the one thing that I’ve always wanted. It’s something we’ve always talked about. And to actually win it, I can’t even describe it.”

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Over the years, Taylor has bowled with a few different bowlers in the USBC Open. But in 2016, the foursome of Taylor, Anderson, Barnwell and Eddie Flanigan got together for the first time. They added Stone in 2018 and immediately started having some success.

They finished 28th in 2018, 55th the following year and 11th last year.

But Flanigan decided to retire this year, and the team picked up Recsnik.

"It was Tommy's idea, because Tony plays the lanes similar to Travis (hard and straight), so, I knew that would be a good fit for us," Taylor said. "Tony's a great bowler, and as soon as Tommy mentioned his name, I said to bring him on board."

Recsnik had some great credentials to join the group. Four years ago, he set a nine-game USBC scoring record, rolling a 2,483 all-events total at the Missouri state tournament.

Last season, after moving to Springfield from St. Louis, he was the first pick in the traveling Masters League and bowled well enough to earn one of the captain's spots for this year.

The 25-year-old respectfully declined the spot, choosing instead to further his education. However, he almost didn't bowl with the team.

"Last year I bowled with Andrew Orf's crew (out of St. Louis)," Recsnik said. "I was under the impression that they were going to be bowling in June this year. I refuse to go to Baton Rouge in the middle of June, because it would be swamp ass nation down there and just would not be enjoyable."

So, when Barnwell contacted him to join the group from the Peoria area in April, Recsnik gladly accepted.

"Andrew messaged me a couple of weeks later and said they were actually going in April, right around the time Tommy's team was going to go," Recsnik said. "I told him that I had already made the commitment with the other team and apologized for the miscommunication."

Recsnik said his tattoo commemorating the team's accomplishment might be a little different than those of his USBC teammates.

"I want to do something that has that and my USBC record incorporated together," he said.

The USBC title had a little extra significance for Recsnik after he received some bad news the day before the team bowled.

"I found out that my grandma has passed, and I was already in a whirlwind of emotions," he said. "So, I told myself to just go out there, bowl as good as you can and let this tournament end my grandma's life with a bang.

"To shoot 3,300 on one of the toughest team conditions that has been used in the last 10 years, it's really surreal to me that we were even able to get to that number."

Recsnik and Anderson were playing the lanes straighter than the other three bowlers and were filling their frames. Barnwell and Stone, the high-revs players on the team, had the best look on the lanes, a few boards left of their teammates.

Taylor was playing the lanes somewhere in between. He opened with a 246 to help the team post the first 1,100 Game 1 of the tournament up to that point (1,118). They followed that with an 1,140 – the highest Game 2 in the tournament at the time.

"After that it was just all about carry for me," he said. "I changed balls, but they didn't quite carry as well as the first one did. I hit the pocket a lot but just left a lot of nine counts."

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Stone rolled a team-best 269 in Game 2 on his way to a top 50 finish in four different events. He added a series of 695 in doubles and 685 in singles, finishing in 24th place in all-events with 2,085 and 49th in doubles (1,368) with his brother Pete. Phat Kidz Crew also finished third in team all-events.

"We had a game plan that was nothing very different than we do most years," Stone said. "All 10 of us followed the plan and stuck with it. That's a big part, because you have to have a companion team where everybody's all-in on the game plan."

The companion team consisted of his brother Pete along with Tony Wysinger, Paul Lippens, Todd Swadinsky and Brian Davis.

"I wasn't really sure our score was going to hold up," Stone said. "It seemed like the scores were starting to ramp up.

"But I wasn't fully realizing how tough the pattern was playing. So, when nobody was even getting to 3,100, and it took another couple of weeks for anybody to get even to 3,200, I started thinking that maybe we did have a chance to hold on. And now, this is the biggest thing by far that I've ever won."

Barnwell closed out the team event with games of 256 and 248, striking out in the 10th frame of Game 3 to give Taylor the opportunity to reach the 3,300 mark.

"Winning a USBC Eagle, obviously, has to be one of your ultimate goals as a bowler," Barnwell said. "I've never been one to bowl PBA stuff, because it was never anything I wanted to do. But this has always been the one thing that I really wanted.

"It really hasn't hit me yet, but I'm sure when we get there next year and look up at that big scoreboard and can see that thing next to our name, that's when it will really hit me."

Nobody could have been more relieved than Anderson that the score held up after the long wait.

He started to struggle on the right lane in Game 3 and finished with a 173.

"I grabbed the wrong ball, then lost the right lane," Anderson said. "I struck on the left lane a bunch of times but had two splits on the right lane. The ball either hooked right away or I couldn't get it to hook.

"Unfortunately, that's kind of how nationals has been for me the last eight years or so. Either I have a look, or I just need to grind it out and hope for the best."

Anderson said he believed that his last game would cost the team the title.

"I was convinced that I was the reason we were going to lose, especially with me shooting at 170 my last game," he said. "I told (his wife) Paige a bunch of times that somebody was going to jump up and get us – and it was going to be my fault."

But Barnwell, who has bowled with Anderson since they were in junior leagues, said he had confidence that Anderson and Recsnik would continue to fill frames down the stretch.

"Travis and Tony are two of the best spare shooters that I've seen," Barnwell said. "If I needed a frame filled to save my son Eli's life, I would let Travis throw it."

Even though he was worried that a team would beat their score, Anderson did not keep a close watch at the leaderboard.

"I refused to look at the website because I was afraid, I would jinx it," he said. "I just relied on Steve and Andy to tell me stuff."

There was a group chat for the team, so they could keep tabs on the goings on at the tournament.

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“Andy, Steve and Tony were watching it closer than me and Travis,” Barnwell said. “And if you’ve ever had to communicate with Andy, he never texts. You always have to get in touch with Laura (Andy’s wife). So, we knew that whenever Andy would text the group chat, it was something serious.”

In the end, nobody came close to topping their score, but it was still a very stressful time for the entire team.

“It’s a good thing I don’t have any hair, because it definitely would be all gone by now,” Taylor said. “It has definitely been nerve-wracking, knowing that we shot it on April 13 and there were still a ton of really good teams that hadn’t bowled yet.

“And to have our score not even get challenged is very surprising. To me, winning the Eagle is the ultimate trophy – the ultimate prize in bowling – in my opinion.”

Anderson agreed.

“I told somebody weeks ago that I don’t care about the money (the team will split around \$40,000),” he said. “I don’t care about anything besides getting the Eagle. They can’t take that away from you. You’ll have that forever.”

Just like the tattoos.

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Members of Phat Kidz Crew, winners of the USBC Open Championships team title (left to right): Travis Anderson, Andy Stone, Tony Recsni, Tommy Barnwell, and Steve Taylor.