

Thursday September 28, 2023

Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

Different doubles partner (Darren Dunning), same winning result for "Refty" Tockes

Kevin Tockes seems to have figured out the correct formula for winning doubles tournaments: Keep changing partners.

Tockes, a right-hander who is known as "Refty" for throwing a strong back-up ball down the left side of the lane, won his third doubles title in the past 18 months on Sunday – all with different partners.

He teamed with Darren Dunning, who drove up from Southern Illinois for the event, to claim the September Doubles title at Landmark Lanes, beating a strong field of 68 teams. They knocked off the team of Josh Cantrill and Scott Rains in a tight final match that came down to the 10th frame.

That was not a surprising result for Tockes, who has done well in doubles events for the past couple of years.

In March of 2022, Tockes won the Open Doubles division in the Frank Vincent Memorial Tournament in Champaign with Kevin Audi. He then teamed with Tim Blanch, who uses a two-handed delivery, to win the March Doubles title at Landmark Lanes six months ago.

"I just like to try bowling with new people – somebody that I've never bowled with before," Tockes said. "But I am kind of surprised that my past partners have not asked me to bowl again."

It's also a mystery to Dunning, one of the top bowlers in the St. Louis area.

"If anybody's not trying to bowl with Refty, they're missing out," he said. "He has the best of both worlds. He uses the left side, which is always walled, and he can pick up his 7-pins throwing as a righty. You can't beat that!"

"We had talked about bowling together, but never had a chance to. So when this came up, he messaged me and I said yes."

It was not the first time Dunning had bowled at Landmark, or the first time he had bowled with a back-up bowler.

"It's crazy because the last time I bowled at Landmark, it was a mixed doubles tournament and I bowled with my wife – who also throws a back-up ball," he said. "Truthfully, Refty and I had fun bowling together. We had a lot of small talk, like don't get lazy, take your time, keep working hard, and the biggest thing for us was don't try to strike – just make a quality shot."

They made plenty of those on Sunday, especially in the Baker-format bracket finals, winning all four matches on their way to the \$1,440 first prize.

Tockes and Dunning actually led qualifying for a few games before stumbling in Game 6 with a 375 game. That dropped them into third place, behind qualifying leaders Darin Bloomquist and Joshua Zilk, and the second-place team of Cantrill/Rains.

Thursday September 28, 2023

Bloomquist was easily the high individual in the tournament. He opened with games of 300, 269 and 278 for an 847 set and closed with 194, 262 and 279 for a six-game total of 1,582 – a 263.7 average. Zilk added 1,296 for a team total of 2,878.

Cantrill had a 1,441 total and Rains 1,365.

Even though he was familiar with Landmark, Dunning was counting on Tockes to lead the way in scoring.

“Refty broke our deal,” Dunning said. “I said this is your house. Over the summer he couldn’t miss. I told him I’d bowl with him, but he had to average 250 and I’d do my best to stay close, at 230 or 220. And he broke the deal. We still won, but I was sweating from Game 1!”

Dunning finished with a 1,454 total (242.3 average) and Tockes at 1,348 (224.7).

Cantrill and Rains beat Chad Barnes and Tim Curran, past champions Brandon Hamilton and Byron Miller, and Jacob Jones and Spencer Summer to reach the finals.

On their way to the title match, Dunning and Tockes defeated Brandon Rice and TJ Lewis, Joseph Bevelacqua and Josh Powell, and Tim Blanch and Xavier Davis.

“Out of all the matches, there was maybe two of them we didn’t have the game locked up by the sixth or seventh frame,” Dunning said. “I’m pretty sure we had five or six in a row at some point before the eighth frame of most of the games.”

Against Cantrill and Rains, however, Dunning and Tockes won Game 1, but split in the ninth and 10th frames of Game 2 and lost it to even the match.

In Game 3, Tockes split in the seventh frame and Dunning split in the eighth.

“We looked at each other and I said, ‘Hey, we’re not doing that again. Just make a qualify shot, man,’ ” Dunning said. “This is really our tournament to lose.”

Tockes struck in the ninth and Dunning struck out in the 10th for a 222.

“Rains got the first strike in the 10th, then left a 10-pin for a 212,” Tockes said. “It was a super close match, but we ended up winning it for the title.”

Dunning was expecting nothing less from Tockes.

“As you know, Refty doesn’t talk much,” Dunning said. “But in match play, he was different. He understood when to lock in and make a quality shot. In the final game when it was close, I told him, ‘Give me a good shot and I won’t lose it.’ He strikes, they wrap 10. I strike. We win.”

Other area teams that advanced to the 16-team bracket finals were Eric Lilienthal and Tanner Davis (who qualified fifth), Tim Blanch and Xavier Davis (sixth), Jacob Jones and Spencer Summer (seventh), Tommy Barnwell and Travis Anderson (eighth), Eric Wurmnest and Justin Karnats (11th), Benny Barnwell and Joe Robards (12th), Irvin Johnson and Josh Grove (13th), and Chad Barnes and Tim Curran (15th).

Barnwell/Anderson, Johnson/Grove, Wurmnest/Karnats, Barnes/Curran and Barnwell/Robards all lost their opening matches to finish in the 9-16 grouping.

Lilienthal/Davis lost in the second round, while Jones/Summer and Blanch/Davis lost in the semifinals.

For Tockes, it was just business as usual – another doubles event, different partner, same result.

But he and Dunning do plan on bowling more doubles events in the future.

Thursday September 28, 2023

“We’re looking at some doubles tournaments in the next couple of months,” Tockes said. “We’ll see if it works out, schedule-wise, for both of us.”

If it does, maybe Tockes can win a doubles title without changing partners.



Darren Dunning and Kevin "Refty" Tockes