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According to Webster's dictionary, one definition of a prodigy is "an unusually gifted or intelligent (young) person; someone whose talents excite wonder and admiration." In that regard, that does not apply to me, as I am a 52-year old man. However, another definition is "Anything so extraordinary as to excite wonder or astonishment; a marvel." I may be able to make a case using this one.

I have been a bowler for a long time. I first started bowling in youth leagues when my dad was stationed in Alaska in the late '60's. My dad was, and still is my hero, and he was a 190-plus average bowler in those days. He told me the best way to become a good bowler is to keep your ball in play and be a good spare shooter. I have never forgotten those words. It is the one tip that I have used throughout my bowling career.

As a kid, I was smaller than most of the others in my league, and not as strong. I made up for my lack of size and strength by trying to use my dad's tip. While others had more big scores and higher averages, I was one of the most consistent bowlers. I didn't have a lot of big games, but I also avoided the real low games better than most. I knew that if I did what my dad taught me, I would become a better bowler.

After high school, I joined the army. As a young man out on my own, I used bowling as a way to keep me busy and out of trouble. Not only was it something that I loved, it was inexpensive. In the days when you were given a sheet to keep track of your games, I would bowl a whole sheet, which usually had room for 12 to 16 games on it. I did this a couple of times a week, whenever I had a day off. I was a good practice player. I didn't just bowl, I practiced. I tried playing different parts of the lane so that I would be prepared for whatever condition was out there.

At one of my duty stations in Germany, there was a German-American Friendship bowling league. I was invited, along with another soldier, to join a local bowling club, because of our abilities. As a small club (less than 80 members), we bowled in one of Germany's lower divisions. However, in 1988 we conquered club teams at all levels, winning the German Club Championship, defeating teams that had hundreds of bowlers to choose from. It was like a junior college basketball team beating teams like Kentucky or North Carolina to win the national championship.

I have lived in Florida since 1992. Since moving here, the game has changed a lot. Equipment has improved and lane conditions are more consistent. Newer centers have synthetic lanes with down lane markers. All of these things have worked to my advantage. My game has been built on consistency and spare making. Given these extra tools to work with, my game has continued to improve, even though I have become a senior bowler. To this day I don't try to overpower a lane. I use the skills I have worked on since I was young to keep me competitive. My concentration and ability to repeat shots has been my greatest weapon. In today's game, where the young guns open up the lanes and have many boards to use to get to the pocket, I remain true to my game. It has worked for me for many years. Keep the ball in play and make spares. I was once analyzed at Lane 81 in Reno during a USBC Open and it was determined that I was accurate to within .76 boards in 95 out of 100 shots. A professional bowler averaged being within 1.01 boards. I still don't have the physical game that some have and I have a low rev rate, but I can get to the pocket and strike enough to have a very good average. And when some bowlers of my age start to suffer from physical issues and burn-out, I still have the same passion for the game I had when I was young. And

believe it or not, I am continuing to get better, as evidenced by my composite 220 average this past season, which was done at three different bowling centers. I continue to work hard every time I step onto a lane. Some people think I can be a jerk when I bowl, but that is because I am working hard on every shot I take and try not to be distracted. I just don't want to lose my edge. I know what my strengths are and I use them to my advantage. I recently made the cut at the Senior Masters and bowled well at Nationals. In the four years that one of the centers in our area has had a PBA Experience League, I have had the High Average each year, even against other bowlers that have better "House Shot" averages.

I have worked very hard at my game. I don't know if that makes me a prodigy, but I will put my game against anybody's, even the big boys. I may not come out on top, but I will put in the best that I have on that day and see what happens.

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