

## Prodigy™ Writing Contest

Contestant Ryan D. Miller

A prodigy is a remarkably talented, gifted young person who has the potential to rise to superstardom whether it is in sports, movies, or music. A prodigy can be compared to a diamond in the rough, someone who has the potential to be the best of the best. A prodigy's talent leaves spectators with a sense of awe and inspiration. A prodigy is **not** an instant success, rather one who is willing to continue the work that talent only started. Mastery is truly a journey that often begins in childhood.

In the bowling world, some big names come to mind when appreciating raw talent. Pete Weber, Norm Duke, Rhino Page, and the new two-handed Australian sensation Jason Belmonte all demonstrate unbelievable, natural talent. Each has been considered a prodigy and is now a bowling champion because they worked to develop their talent. At just the age of eighteen, not much older than I am now, Norm Duke captured his first pro title defeating the all-time great Earl Anthony. As I enter my senior year of high school, I am more motivated than ever to excel in bowling. I am inspired by the prodigies like Duke. As I approach college, I have my eyes on scholarships and collegiate bowling opportunities that will get me to the next level. With every meet and tournament, I gain valuable experience and learn from my mistakes. I am determined to improve my technique and mental game so I can finish my high school career with a successful and memorable bowling season – perhaps with a State Championship!

So what does it take to be the next bowling prodigy? I believe there are certain personal traits that create the “perfect storm” for a prodigy to emerge. First and foremost is natural talent and the willingness to develop it. A deep, life-long passion for bowling and love for competition is next. A prodigy has a strong will and fierce determination yet the willingness to be ‘coachable.’ Finally, one has to have an open mind that is dedicated to learning every aspect of the game ~ techniques, strength training, mental game, and teamwork. Every aspect has to be mastered and this process often takes a lifetime of hard work and dedication.

I began bowling on the Bumper League when I was just three years old. My love for the game has never wavered. I have continued with YABA leagues, won many USBC awards, and even some local tournaments. My middle school team won first and second place trophies for the Northern Illinois Middle School Bowling Program. In high school, I have averaged 210 and was a conference Honorable Mention. Our Harlem Huskies took second in Conference this past year. I practice a lot and have personal high games of 289 and 290 – still determined to get my first 300 game before my little brother. Am I the next bowling prodigy? I like to think I am! I

have the ingredients for the perfect storm and when the conditions are right and I meet the right opportunities, I too will emerge.

This last July I got a chance to participate in a two-day lane-play bowling camp. This camp was very informative and eye-opening, and what made it even more special was that Pete Weber's brother and coach, Rick Weber, was one of the instructors. One of my biggest goals for the future is to be able to bowl with a college team in the next couple of years and be able to compete at that level. Rick Weber is also the Lindenwood University bowling coach, and I got the chance to ask him what Lindenwood looks for when it comes to recruiting high school bowlers. He said the first thing considered is grades and ACT scores, and then they will look at bowling ability. This was good to hear because I have always been an excellent student with a 4.0+ G.P.A. and no matter how much I love to bowl, I know that school must come first. I also asked Rick what the typical average is in college bowling. I was surprised to hear that most college bowlers only average 170. I am used to averaging over 200 on a house shot, and this just shows how difficult the college bowling lane conditions really are. When I bowl a big game on a house shot, I don't let it go to my head or become overconfident because I know the conditions are 'easy.' Taking this camp has shown me that the key to getting better is stepping outside your comfort zone and challenging yourself to become a better and more versatile bowler. I think that I can achieve this too.

Another topic talked about in this bowling camp was bowling balls and other equipment. One of the other coaches running the camp was Tom Carter who is the owner of my local pro shop, Bowler's Universe. One thing he said that I'll never forget is that you can have every single bowling ball on the pro shop wall, but it won't make a difference if you don't have the proper technique in throwing it. Even if you have the best equipment in your hand, this doesn't guarantee good scores. Once good technique is developed, then a brand new ball is well worth the investment. Tom also talked about the common fascination with throwing a big hook ball, especially for younger bowlers. I have finally realized that a big hook doesn't necessarily mean more success. I need to become a "smart bowler" who listens to what the lane and oil are telling me and adjust accordingly. Walter Ray and Norm Duke throw a straighter ball and they have enjoyed enormous success. To me, one of the biggest keys to becoming the next bowling prodigy is developing consistency and learning how to adjust to the lanes.

A new season of high school bowling is coming up this fall, and my team is excited to have another shot at winning a conference title and earning a trip to State. Last year, my high school bowling team was very talented, but we came up short in Sectionals and missed out on going to State. With the new season brings some big changes. First, the local bowling coaches decided on changing the bowling conditions during meets from a regular house shot to Kegel's

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“Middle of the Road” shot. A lot of my friends are nervous about the new lane condition. Also, my high school is getting a new head bowling coach, but we are still not sure who it will be. I think part of being a bowling prodigy is being an encouraging leader for your teammates, especially during tough changes like these.

I’ve had the chance to meet several of the professional bowlers I have mentioned at the U.S.B.C. Masters in Milwaukee, WI. I have been so impressed with their ability to connect with their fans and to be so at ease off camera. I enjoy watching them focus on their shots yet appreciate the fact that they are so ‘grounded’ and personable. I would love to help motivate my Harlem Huskies for the 2010-2011 high school bowling season with a visit from “Stormin’ Norman,” Pete Weber, or another awesome bowler on the Storm pro staff. I know that we as a team would learn much from them – and not just technique, but what it means to be a true bowling prodigy.

*Ryan Miller*