

RICHARD 'POP' JOHNSTON

Our second inductee into the Tuscaloosa Bowling Hall of Fame is Richard "Pop" Johnston.

Pop is presently 77 years young, is married to the beautiful Mitzi Johnston, and has 4 children, 11 grandchildren, and 17 great-grandchildren. Pop and Mitzi were married in 1951 and have now been happily married for 59 years. Bowling has always been a large part of the family's life, and Pop has been bowling for about 55 years, having started in 1955. He bowled at the old Bama Lanes on University Blvd. when Red Swanson was the manager, and he was one of the first bowlers to bowl at Leland Lanes when it opened. Pop helped to start the Rheichold Chemical Bowling League, where he bowled for many years. Years ago, when they moved to Demopolis, Pop continued his bowling at an establishment in Demopolis until it closed, and also by bringing a team from Demopolis to Tuscaloosa to bowl on Thursday nights. His wife Mitzi also continued and even increased her bowling involvement when she bowled up to six times a week, in Selma, Demopolis, and Tuscaloosa. She told me that Pop even became the official score-keeper for her Selma team, when he would travel there with her every week and keep score. Of course, that was back in the old days when you didn't have machines that could keep score for you. During most of these years, Pop himself bowled at least three times a week, on two different leagues and by subbing another night or so each week. Pop and Mitzi also bowled with their son and daughter-in-law, Ricky and Debbie, on the Friday Night Mixed League many years ago, and this is when the nickname "Pop" started to stick. Evidently the others bowlers kept hearing Ricky and Debbie calling Richard "POP", until finally everyone in the league started calling him by that nick name. And now for many, many years we have all known him by that name.

In addition to bowling with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law, Pop has also been fortunate enough to get to bowl with his grandson "Stoney" Johnston for the past several years on the Thursday night men's league at Bama Lanes, on the same team that Bannie Smithson and I have enjoyed bowling on with them. They have also enjoyed bowling in numerous city and state tournaments together. So, as you can see, bowling and family have always been intertwined in the Johnston household.

Pop's love of bowling has remained constant over these 55 years, and even though he has had a knee replacement, open-heart surgery requiring 6 bypasses, shoulder surgery, back surgery last year, and his recent health scare in the past two years with bladder cancer, he has only interrupted his bowling for one-half a season in 1985 due to the heart surgery. Even for the past two years when he has had 13 bladder tumors removed and has had continuous testing and treatments to monitor the bladder cancer, he has not let these challenges interfere with his bowling. Throughout all of these health scares, Pop has always maintained the most positive of attitudes, and the highest degree of sportsmanship.

Of course, all of these years of bowling have seen Pop win numerous awards and attend countless tournaments. As Pop told me, he used to go to any tournament, anywhere, any time.

He won a doubles mixed City Tournament championship with his wife Mitzi.

He has won numerous league championships.

He has bowled in all of the City Championships all these years, and has won several City Championships.

He has bowled in the State Tournament for over 50 years.

He was one of the first local bowlers to bowl in the NSPTA Traveling Tournaments (That was the National Semi-Pro Tournament Association), which involved tournaments in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. He won 6 of those tournaments in Alabama and one in Mississippi, and was named Bowler of the Year in the National Sem-Pro Tournament Association one of those years.

He was also later a bowler in the ABT (Alabama Bowlers Tour), where he won one of the Tournaments.

We cant find records on all of those past years of bowling, but his highest recent league average was a 195 average in the 2004-2005 season, and his highest game was a 278.

Although he has won numerous awards and championships, one of his fondest memories was his involvement with YABA youth league as a coach for 4 years when he worked with Charles and Carol Naylor on the Youth League.

Please help me in congratulating a great person, a great bowler, and a great ambassador for the sport of bowling, Mr. Richard Pop Johnston.