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Island's bowling dilemma: More bowlers, fewer alleys

Scott Ireland, the 15-year-old Monsignor Farrell whizz, misses a birdie attempt during a recent tourney.

Ned Clark is a picture of concentration as he watches the fate of his putt on the 14th green of last week's Staten Interscholastic Golf Tournament.

Island's 'Young Turks' challenging old guard

By LARRY MIRALDI

Bill Ireland Sr. stood in the lobby of the clubhouse, shaking his head. He couldn't believe what he had just heard. His son, Scott, had just fired a 21 on the front nine at Silver Lake.

"That son of a gun," he exclaimed, proud as a peacock. "He doesn't have me licked yet, though. He's still got to go out and do it on the back nine."

Papa was right. Scotty had trouble on the back and wound up shooting a 76. His father, a two-handicapper, won by a stroke. But everyone knows that Bill Ireland Sr.'s days as the Ireland family's top player are numbered.

Scotty, you see, is only 15 years old. He is just learning how to play.

Young Ireland is just one of a flock of young superstars, 16 years old and under, who have been making headlines on Staten Island all season.

OTHERS

The names are Mark Hill, Kevin Joyce, Ned Clark, Sean Haggerty, Tom Rogan and Sam Melisi. And that's just a few of them. These guys all break 80 about as often as Nicklaus breaks par.

It's getting so that on any given day any of the Young Turks can whip some of the older, more experienced, players.

Hill and Joyce, both 15-year-olds, qualified for the Ike Tournament and would have advanced in the prestigious event were it not for bogey-bogey finishes. That's merely inexperience.

Ireland went on a little family vacation in the spring and shot a 72 at one of the tougher courses in Florida. "I knew when he did that," said Bill Ireland Sr., "that he might have something up his sleeve for the future."

Hill's father, Jack, is a former two-time Staten Island Amateur runner-up. He is a member of the Richmond County Country Club and has had a tremendous influence on his son's game. But even Jack admits that his days of beating Mark are on the wane.

Now young Hill, who is still not long off the tee, goes out to the country club and breaks 80 almost at will.

PRACTICE

Hill's secret is practice. Constant practice. "I really think he'd rather play golf than eat," Mark's mom, Marie, once said. "He's never home."

Hill spends literally hundreds of hours each spring, summer and fall on the practice fairways of RCCC. He plays until it's too late to see. Around the greens, the kid is a wizard.

"He can really chip and putt," says Bob Scialla of the South Shore Men's Club. "But the one time I played with him in the Classic, I was really impressed with his swing. He never hits a bad shot. Everything seems to be on the screw. Someday, he's really gonna be something."

Kevin Joyce
Best Tot golfer ever?

Mark Hill
Breaks 80 at will

Tom Rogan
'Lives' at the Lake

While Hill spends most of his time at Richmond County, the others mostly frequent Silver Lake, the Island's most accessible course.

When you're only 14 or 15, you can't hop in the car to play, so you either hop a bus or walk ... or depend on mom and dad as your own personal taxi.

The top players in the Silver Lake crowd are Scott Ireland, Clark and Haggerty just to name a few. It is not uncommon for them to play 36 holes a day and then fool around on the practice green for awhile.

"They are all very solid players ... for any age," says Silver Lake pro Eddie Sorge, who has counseled and tutored most of the good ones.

The kids all identify with Sorge as the kind of man and golfer they'd like to be. Twenty years ago, a skinny kid named Eddie Sorge felt the same way about the pro of his day. Someday, it's safe to say, several of the Young Turks will be making their living at golf.

At South Shore, Jerry Powder is, perhaps, the man most responsible for the success of the teens that make it big Islandwide.

He is the reason a kid named Sam Melisi has risen to become one of the top players in the borough. Melisi, who'll be entering his junior year at Tottenville, has played two years on the varsity and taken part in two Pirate city championships.

Melisi, however, must play second banana to Tottenville's No. 1 man — Joyce.

"I think Kevin Joyce could become the best player we've ever had at Tottenville," says Powder. "And that includes Jeff Andersen and the Salas and Bruce Fleeland."

CHOSE GOLF

Unlike many of the other young stars, Joyce was not brought up in a golf tradition. His early sports career was dominated by baseball. Joyce was an All Star in the Great Kills Little League and probably could have made a big splash with Tom Tierney's always tough baseball teams.

But Joyce chose golf. Now, he plays every day. "He usually has an early supper and then goes out and plays golf," says Mrs. Joyce. "He gets back when it's dark."

The hard work all pays off during the high school season and when tournaments roll around.

Next year's SIHSL campaign promises to be the best showcase of young talent the borough ever had.

One battle that's worth watching will be Farrell vs. Tottenville. It will be a veritable war between the Island's best young players.

On the Farrell side will be Ireland, Clark, Rogan and Haggerty. For Tottenville, the troops will consist of recumers Joyce and Melisi and newcomer Hill.

When these two teams tangle, it may take better than par golf to win!

7 lanes shut down over last 10 years

"The growth of the sport of bowling on Staten Island continues at a fantastic pace. It is, and will continue to be in the future, the most popular participant sport on the Island." — S.I. Advance, Sept. 30, 1965.

By BOB MORRETTA

Those words were written nearly 10 years ago by then Advance bowling writer Bill McDonald during an era when bowling on the Island was prospering.

And today, although the game is still extremely popular, a strange phenomenon is taking place. The Island's population is increasing, therefore there are more and more people who want to bowl . . . but there are fewer and fewer places for them to pursue their hobby.

Why?

That's an interesting question . . . and not easily answered.

The first undeniable fact is that seven Island bowling establishments have closed in the past 10 years.

They are, in alphabetical order: Big Ten Lanes, Stapleton; Central Lanes, Bulls Head; Coliseum Lanes, Port Richmond; Coral Lanes, Graniteville; Madalone's Bowling Center, Tompkinsville; Park Lanes, Stapleton; and Plaza Casino, West Brighton.

The second undeniable fact is that while these seven bowling houses have closed, none have been built to replace them.

One, Paradise Lanes, was in the works for last season but plans to open that lanes in the old Ritz Theater have fallen through.

And, what has hoppened to John Q. Bowler in the interim? Nothing! He is still there . . . waiting and hoping to find a place to bowl.

"My business is flourishing. There are plenty of people who want to bowl," offers Bowling on the Green manager Angelo Albanese.

SIMILIAR COMMENTS

Mike Marotte, owner of the Victory Lanes, Castleton Corners, said virtually the same thing.

"The number of bowlers on the Island has picked up over the last few years, he said. "We have actually reached the point where we must turn people away."

Bill Ciaffoletti, a steady bowler at Victory Lanes, attested to the existence of the large crowds:

"There is usually a wait. Sometimes I have had to go from alley to alley to find an open lane or a shorter waiting time," he said.

Ciaffoletti went on to say that there is a need for another alley on Staten Island to ease the crunch.

Mrs. Evelyn Hartley also feels there is room for expansion of local bowling facilites.

"There are long waits for alleys and it is impossible to get an alley when the leagues are bowling."

An Oakwood resident, Mrs. Hartley went on to offer, "There should be an alley which caters to the non-league bowler."

The obvious question then is, if there is such a demand for places to bowl, why doesn't some enterprising businessman get with it and open a lanes, then sit back and reap the profits.

"I can't the whole point," says Stan Golden, owner of Sunset Lanes, New Springville, "The bowling business is not as profitable as everyone thinks.

"If bowling were that profitable, why did Coral Lanes close? Why didn't someone come along and continue to run that lanes for the bowlers?"

The biggest expense the owners must contend with is the astronomical rise in electrical rates.

According to Ed Nocerino, owner of Knotty Pine Lanes, Mariners Harbor, electricity bills have almost doubled. "Over the last two years," he says, "my electric bill has gone from $950 to $1,008."

The situation is much the same across the Island.

"The problem is not with the number of people who want to bowl," explains Alabanese, "but with our rising expense. The electric bill for Bowling on the Green has risen close to $900 over the last few years."

What it all means, of course, is an inevitable rise in prices and some of the owners predict that the price of bowling a game in their house come September may jump as much as 10 to 15 cents.

The real crime of last season, however, was the demise of the ill-fated Paradise Lanes.

The projected conversion of the old Ritz into an ulta-modern bowling lanes was much-heralded and long awaited. In fact, it was too long awaited . . . by those who signed up for the '73-'74 season and were put off twice by the prospective owners.

STILL WAITING

Paradise was supposed to absorb the overflow caused by the closing of Coral Lanes and many leagues made plans to bowl at the Port Richmond facility.

But when construction delays pushed back its opening for "a month or two," the bowlers understood. And waited . . . and waited . . . and waited. They are still waiting.

The now-gutted Richmond Ave. structure was abandoned by its new owners because of rising expenses and all that remains now is a listing in the Yellow Pages and a dangerous playground.

Where will the bowlers go for the 1974-75 season?

That's a good question. Obviously, there is a need for more bowling facilities on the Island. Whether the Staten Island bowler will get them is another thing.

Until then, he can only hope.

Paradise lost? This is the front of the old Ritz Theater, which was to have been remodeled into an ultra-modern bowling center called Paradise Lanes. Obviously, Paradise Lanes is a forgotten dream.

On radio and TV

BASEBALL

Yanks vs. Baltimore, 2 p.m. (TV—Ch. 11; radio—WMCA). Mets vs. St. Louis, 2 p.m. (TV—Ch. 9; radio—WHN).

GOLF

Western Open, 4 p.m. (TV—Ch. 5).

BOWLING

Japan vs. U.S. in challenge match, 5:30 p.m. (TV—Ch. 9).

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