



Our latest interviewee is Dan Gauthier, co-host of [Candlepin for Kids](#). In this interview, "Shoebag" talks about how he got his nickname, some behind the scenes details of the show, and how he started with that distinctive approach of his.

Why not start by telling us a little bit about yourself.

Well, I'm 39 years old, about to turn the big 40 on July 3rd. I grew up in Ware, (Massachusetts), where I was forced into my first real job at age 15 by my grandfather, who got me started in a "customer elevator factory," which was one of only 2 in the country, I'm told. I believe the point of that job was to show me what the alternative to going to college might be like, and it worked pretty well as incentive. My first (and perhaps only) "fun" job that I had was when I was 17, and I went to work for the Rolla's, who at the time owned Rolla-way Lanes in Ware, MA. I had bowled a little bit before then, but only in a few leagues. It was the free bowling, combined with some good instruction from my "uncle" Andy Durand, and also Phil Clough, that got me into bowling seriously. A series of Saturday nights bowling smudge or "dots" and losing your shirt can make you improve really fast. The bowling alley eventually passed from the Rollas to the Josefiaks, and the hyphen in the name of the alley cleverly moved (Rolla-way became Roll-away), and I was off to college seeking new challenges.

I went to Central New England College in Worcester on a full academic scholarship. I was pretty smart back then, especially in math. I think the operative word there is "was." I have probably forgotten more than many people ever learn. But I never stopped bowling, and since in bowling you never have to add more than 30 pins at one time, I'm pretty safe. Since college, I've worked in the high tech field of computer science. I'm currently employed by EMC in Hopkinton, MA, and have been there for 10 years. I've most recently been a project manager, and a manager of a tech support department. As you can imagine, I'm the one whom everyone calls when their PC breaks. Work in the computer industry, and everyone automatically thinks you can fix their PC. I'm not married, nor do I have kids, therefore I usually have extra money to spend on frivolous things, friends, or fun vacations. Sometimes the frivolity involves both friends and vacations. Many vacations involve Las Vegas, enough said.

I'm at the point in my life where I'm very seriously considering changing careers. If I do make a change soon, it will be to become a teacher. I believe that there are 4 professions I would have enjoyed most: Bowling alley owner, lawyer, cop (especially when people cut me off while driving), or teacher. I didn't become a teacher because I knew they didn't make much money, and I opted for a career where I could make the big bucks. But I wanted to say, especially for any kids still reading at this point, that it's very true that money can't buy happiness. Although, as I recently heard a comedian say, money **can** buy a wave-runner, and it's awfully hard not to smile while you're on a wave runner.

I need to conclude this section by saying how I got the nickname "Shoe," since that's the question I most commonly get asked. That happened while bowling in a league in Ware maybe 20 years ago. One night, I believe everyone on my team had a nickname except for me. So Danny Josefiak (infamous father of Kylie) took it upon himself to give me one. Only problem was that they were looking for something ridiculous sounding, and they seemed to pick random objects found around the bowling alley until someone finally picked up a "shoe-bag" and called me Shoebag. Since then, I've been called Shoelace, Shoestring, and Shoe. Shoe is the least silly of them all, so that's what I mostly go by. Hey, it could have been worse. I could have been called "Ashtray," "Brillo-pad," or "Baby Powder."

How did you get started in candlepin bowling? What was your experience as a youth?

Wow, that's a good one. I have been bowling for as long as I can remember, but I would say that I probably started around age 10 or so. My dad would probably laugh today to hear that I think I stuck with bowling to try to impress him. I didn't play any other organized sports in my early teens. I have this very early memory of being in the back seat of my dad's car, and having my father's friend ask me what my bowling average was. I remember telling him it was 104, and I can still remember how good it felt to have an adult tell you that you had a higher average than they had. I think that from that point on, I was hooked.

Unfortunately, I don't recall any real youth programs for bowling in my area while growing up. I see some of the programs that they have today, such as the traveling leagues, or the ICYBA, and I see first-hand what a huge difference that makes to the younger bowlers. I believe that without solid youth programs, the sports will indeed eventually die out. I don't generally donate to many charities as a rule (unless you count all of my friends who hit me up for \$10 "worlds" raffle tickets every year... you know who you all are!) But I do like to donate to youth programs. For those reading this with some extra money burning a hole in your pockets, some good youth programs are found in , [Pilgrim Lanes](#), and Steve Renaud's [Candlepin for Kids](#) show. Give till it hurts!

I never had anyone "coach" me really. I think that to this day, I could benefit from a few solid coaching suggestions. Early on, my "uncle" Andy Durand taught me how to "spot bowl." That's all well and good, unless the alley has no "Spots." I think what I've figured out for myself over time is that any style can work... even Jason Doucette's patented wrong-footed style. But the key to success with any style is repetition, and muscle memory. And that, my friends, is my own failing. J I vary my

own style so much from day to day... but I'm trying to get better and correct that.

What's your high single/three/five?

My high single is a 189, which I hit 2 summers ago at Putnam Street. I do not consider that my best single, however. In fact, there were elements of that string that were very disappointing. I had a real shot at a 200 that game, or even the alley record, but I had a 3 box (yes, you read that right) in the 4th frame, followed by 5 consecutive strikes, and then a 7 box on the end. To me, I am much more proud of a 185 game I threw maybe 7 or 8 years ago at Baypath lanes, if only because I marked in every frame. One strike, 9 spares. I don't know which is harder... all 10 marks, or a 200 game. I'll let you know if/when I throw a 200. My high triple is a 455, and my high five is a 746, also hit at Baypath lanes, which missed Tommy Olzsta's alley record by 1 pin. It was, however, good enough to win the TV roll-off, which is all that really mattered.

We bowl in the Thursday night summer league in Ware. Do you call Roll-A-Way your home house?

I usually do say that, just because that's where I grew up. But if anyone could be said to not really have a true home house, it would be me. Roll-a-way and Natick feel the most like my home houses.

You have an interesting, 5-step approach to the line. Is there a story behind it? How did you come to adopt that approach?

Now that's funny. I never even thought about how many steps I take until one day in Natick, Richie Hallberg did his impersonation of me, and he took about 30 rapid baby steps in his approach, then after he threw the ball, complained that he was winded from the long run to the line. But once he got me thinking about my approach, it got into my head later that night, and once I started thinking about it, I actually got confused about what foot I was supposed to start with, and I had to stop my approach dead a few times as a result. So to make a long answer short, no, there's no story behind it except that I had no real coaching when I learned to bowl. I imagine that since I had tiny legs, I must simply have needed more steps to make it down the approach and to the line. I'm pretty adaptable though, and most of those steps are really tiny.

How many television appearances have you had? Do you adjust yourself for television bowling? Does it feel different on league night?

I've had 9 TV appearances in total, starting with channel 5 doubles, moving through WNDS, other small shows, and then Comcast. I'm looking to hit the big double digits in appearances next year. The most major thing I do when I know I'm going to be on TV, is to go on a 1 week crash diet to lose a little weight. Nothing is worse than seeing yourself sweat on TV. Well, maybe splitting your pants on TV would be worse... and that's yet another reason to diet before an appearance. But I can honestly say I'm very comfortable on TV now. And unlike the first few times I've been on, I honestly expect to win now. I can't always say that was true. To steal a word that I heard David Godwin use on TV, the key when you're on TV is "focus." Focus is so

hard to maintain over long periods. Focus is the key to taking your game to another level though. And to answer your last question, no, I do not **always** have that focus on league nights. I certainly always try, and I **never** sand-bag. However, I feel like I can reliably step things up on playoff nights and position nights in leagues, and in tournaments. I have one thing that I have always believed... and even with this belief, I am still guilty of breaking this rule myself from time to time... when you are in a zone, on any amazing streak of marks or strikes, etc... the fastest way to end the streak is to turn around and talk or laugh about it. Wait until the streak is over to turn around and say something. Next time you see someone on a nice streak of marks, or strikes in a row, and they turn around and start saying something about it, watch... the streak is now OVER 90% of the time.

I've noticed you participate in many tournaments. Do you have a favorite? How many do you usually hit in a month's time?

The odd thing is that I don't see myself the same way. I think I bowl in many fewer tournaments than most of my peers. I'm actually shy about approaching people and asking them to bowl. I rarely turn down an invitation though. My favorite events are anything doubles or teams related. I have a hard time bowling "for myself," but I bowl better when someone else is relying on me. I really enjoy the yearly double's knockout tournament, and my favorite older tournament which I don't see happening any more was something called a "Best ball" tournament, where 2 people team up and the one with the best first ball completes the box. I enjoy adult/youth tournaments the most though. I think aside from getting on TV, I would most like to come in 1st place while bowling with a kid in any tournament. I probably only do from 1 to 4 TV tryouts per year, and maybe 4 or 5 other tournaments. I'm open to bowling in more, but I usually need to be asked. I don't like making up teams myself.

I've also noticed where you've bowled in many different houses and leagues (with you also participating on Monday evenings up in Haverhill at Pilgrim Lanes). Do you have any favorite places to bowl? What are some of the differences between houses that interest you?

In the regular season, I look for a league where the prize structure is very good, and the handicap is no more than 80%. I like Ware and Natick because they're both decent houses with good leagues and decent money to be won. The Natick league is a competitive doubles format, and I get to bowl with Stu Bergman, which makes us a strong team. I'd be open to bowling on a decent Friday night pro league team again at some point, and I'm also considering bowling in Haverhill some night next year if I could find a league and/or team with people on it whom I liked.

I don't like bowling in very fast houses though, because many end of year tournaments are screwed up enough as they are. For example, 100% handicapped state tournaments are inherently unfair. How are you going to win one of those if you come out of, for example, a Park Place, or a Putnam Street, compared to someone who comes out of American Lanes? Your average can be as much as 20 pins different between houses. I don't want to over-inflate my average which would condemn me from most end of year tournaments, and also would probably make me think I'm a better bowler than I am. There's something to be said for bowling in a tough house. It keeps your attitude better when you go to different houses for tournaments.

I do have some favorite places... places where I always *think* I'm going to win when I go there. These places include Ware, Pittsfield, Stoughton, and Bogey.

You work with Steve Renaud on Candlepin for Kids. Could you tell us how that show got its start and how you got involved?

It was completely Steve's dream, and his brain-child. I was merely one of the season 1 guest hosts. But I instantly fell in love with the co-host role, and a few fans and parents thought I did an okay job (Thanks Joe Stella!), so I got the invitation to come back more permanently for each of the subsequent seasons. I think my first insights into the role of co-host came when I talked to Jonathan "J-Bomb" Boudreau the first time. Who would have thought a 10 year old would have so much to say? My favorite thing to do (aside from coming up with an occasional new idea, like the 1-7-10 jackpot), is finding out the contestant's nicknames, then using them on TV.

How does the show work? What happens on taping day?

What most people don't realize is how early we have to get up, especially Steve. The preparation starts the night before, but the real adventure begins around 5:00 AM, with Dunkin Donuts, and the ritual "loading of the van." We've learned that there is just so much that can go wrong. In season 2, everything that *could* go wrong, did go wrong. We blew fuses at just about every bowling alley we stopped at. There's usually so much paperwork and pre-match set-up, that it's are rare but fun experience when I get to actually bowl with the kids, maybe in a pacer role. I really get a lot of enjoyment out of that, and watching the kids try to beat me.

I'm sure it's rewarding to both you and Steve. Tell us what it's like to bowl and interact with these kids.

I've actually always been a little shy around my peers. I think the kids show and the kids events help me come out of my shell. I get to be a lot more outgoing, and engaging. The kids almost all have some sort of a story to tell, and sometimes the fun comes in the searching for that unique story. It's especially fun to be a part of what for some kids occasionally turns out to be their own personal bests. For example, when Billy Bloom rolled a 438 this year, I was proud to be there and witness the whole thing. Or when Robbie Taylor won our high-low-jack Jackpot, or when Sabrina Wilkey hit a 404. I can get just as excited for these kids as I get for myself. I don't usually get the same level of satisfaction watching other adults bowl. There's a certain level of enthusiasm, passion, and sportsmanship that is alive and well in the youth game today.

After completing the show's 4th season, I've gotten to know some amazingly talented youth bowlers. Some of them have gone on to start very promising adult careers in the sport. More importantly though, I've felt very lucky to get to know a few of them in particular, and their friendships are very rewarding. I've made some of my closest friends in life through bowling in general. And I think I can safely say that I have a couple of new friendships among these kids as well. I came into this with a naïve idea that I wouldn't have favorites. That hasn't been as easy as I thought, however. It's what you learn about some of these kids outside of the sport however, that makes the biggest impression. I'm hopeful that when one of them becomes president

some day, I can ride his or her coattails.

Any new wrinkles for Candlepin for Kids next year?

Oh yes, as always. I doubt you'll ever see the show stay completely the same from year to year. We're always looking to improve. We already have new sound equipment which I've personally tried out several times, and it makes a big difference. We have 2 wireless microphones and 2 wireless lapel pin microphones for next year. This allows us better sound, and more flexibility. It's also going to make it easy to try something I really wanted to try, which is a "guest announcer" concept. I've yet to clear this 100% with Steve, but I think it would be a good idea if we occasionally brought a past champion into the booth with us to comment on a match of his or her peers. We could talk to them a little about what it's like to be out there competing, and get some new first hand comments from some aspiring sports commentators. Judging by the dancing that some of these kids put on for us, I think we have at least one or two hams out there who might want to give this a shot.

Also Steve wants to try out a new rule where once you have *won* on a given Show, you get to come back to a championship match at the end of the year. The championship match would be an "up the ladder" format, which would be something new but very fun for these kids to try. Also, once you have made the final show, you can not try out again during the same year. This is designed to give some of the kids who have not yet won a roll-off the chance to make it on next year. And we hope that the amount of kids we lose will be more than made up for by the new interest that may get drummed up by the new kids who will try out because now they know they can make it. We definitely know next year is going to be very interesting, if nothing else.

What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment in candlepin?

That's hard to say. I really wanted to answer, "the friends I've made." But that's not what you're looking for. I would have to say it probably comes down to either the 746 I hit at Bogey on a day where I had everything going right, or maybe the Western NE Pro Tour stop I won a few years back at French King, also with another 700+, and a ladder victory. The great thing about this sport is that if you keep at it, it seems that every year you manage to do something that you haven't done before. And I think that's what keeps us all coming back.

What advice would you give our youth bowlers out there?

If you're a youth bowler and you really want to be the best you can be, then here are the best tips I can give you, which are based on the things I see people do wrong the most often:

Practice. Practice as often as possible. Very few great bowlers were "born" with the talent you see.

Repetition and Consistency. This is my own personal area of weakness. But your best bowlers rarely change anything. They're very consistent in whatever style they use. If you stick to one style and do it over and over again, you develop something called "muscle memory," which helps

you be more consistent and avoid the jitters. Consistency increases your confidence, and this sport is all about confidence.

Focus. Don't let down your concentration. When you are on a roll, don't break your concentration. Stay focused. And especially don't let up on your 3rd ball just because you didn't make your spare. This is the easiest way for most kids to pick up 5 or more pins on their averages, is just to put more effort into your "10's."

Don't overthrow your fills. When you have a spare or strike, throw the next ball exactly the same as your previous box. If you try to throw your fill too hard, that's when you always see foot fouls, gutter balls, or otherwise low fills like 1's, 2's, or 3's.

Don't get angry. There's nothing that boosts my confidence more than when I see my opponent start kicking ball returns or screaming. Once that happens, he's done. Keep your cool. It's only a game. The really good bowlers don't get too down when they have a bad break. They go out, get their 10's, and start again. Make your own luck. And if you ever can't stop yourself from punching a wall or a floor, then for Goodness Sake, don't use your bowling hand. Trust me.

Big curves are hard to control and you should probably not try to throw a curve ball in candlepin.

Make your tens!

Have fun, bowl with friends, be a good sport. Always remember, the game is supposed to be fun.

And lastly, but most importantly, when you get really good, don't forget to ask me to bowl with you. I have no shame! :)