



Our latest subject is 2007 WCBC Rookie of the Year Mark Ricci! Candlepin Gallery would like to thank Mark for participating in the latest installment of this feature.

**Why not start by telling us a little bit about yourself?**

My full name is Mark Dominic Ricci and yes, I am a candlepin-a-holic. I was born on July 4, 1981 and raised in Somerville, MA, so as of this interview, I am 26. I started bowling at Lanes & Games in Cambridge, MA when I was 3. My grandfather had taken me bowling and saw that I had a knack for it back then. My father signed me up in their kids league later that week and I have been bowling in leagues ever since.

I bowled in their kids league until I was 15 then went to Pilgrim Lanes and finished my juniors there. My bowling "career", in my mind, began there. I was exposed to real competition for the first time bowling with the likes of Jeff Buggea, Matt Carrington and Joe Casio. We were all good friends off the lanes, but we had no problem bowling each other and trying to beat one another. Even still to this day, some of the best matches and good times I have is when I get to bowl these guys up in the pro ranks where we are now.

Since those days at Pilgrim, and because of what I learned and accomplished there, I feel lucky enough to have advanced my game far enough to be able to join the ranks among the WCBC Pro Tour and pro leagues. I was even asked to bowl in the World Championships last year and was asked again to bowl this year in November. Its a good feeling to know all the years of practice and dedication are finally paying off and I am living my boyhood dream.

**Where are your home lanes? Tell the readers a little bit about the place you bowl out of.**

My home lanes are the Woburn Bowladrome in Woburn, MA. I have been bowling there regularly for the past three years. The bowlers and staff there welcomed me there and have been the best. Although I do bowl at two other houses during the week (Fairway Sports World and Ball Sq. Bowl) I will probably always consider Woburn Bowladrome my home house. I also bowl on the Woburn men's pro league team and wear a Woburn shirt on the WCBC Pro Tour.

Bowling at Woburn kind of helped a little when I made it on TV. Since the show is taped there, it was just one less thing I was worried about. Knowing the lanes and approaches helped by not making me worry about sticking or slipping and falling on my face. Normally, you wouldn't worry about that, but your first time on TV has a way of giving somebody shaky legs for the first few boxes.

**What's your current average, high 3, high 5?**

Currently, I carry a 124 average in Woburn. My personal bests are: 194 - 461 - 765. I had a very good season last year; in fact, these numbers are all reflective of that. Before last year, they were: 186 - 423 - 687.

**You've been on television before, specifically the Comcast Challenge show. What is that experience like? Tell us about a typical rolloff, finals and television taping. Is it a nerve wracking experience? What's it like?**

I always thought that it wouldn't be a big deal. I would get there, and after a few boxes, the nerves would go away. Didn't happen that way. I was fine when I walked in the building and during practice. But as soon as they handed my TV shirt to me, the nerves kicked right in. The realization of what this really meant hit me in one fell swoop and didn't go away till the end of the match.

I don't care who you are, when you are about to have one of your life's dreams come true, nerves and anxiety will kick in. I ended up losing, but it was a moment I won't forget. My family, friends and some other bowlers were there cheering me on. My opponent, Joe Tavernese, had also brought his own large cheering section so it was loud. I wouldn't change any of it.....except I would win instead of lose. But I am a firm believer that you learn more from losing than winning.

I did make it back onto the show again two months later. Some friends said it would be easier as far as nerves and jitters go, and they were somewhat right. It wasn't as bad as the first show, but they were most certainly there. I don't think they will ever go completely away, but the more and more you get there and prove yourself, the more confidence you get and the less you think about nerves and jitters. We'll see what happens next time.

As far as the rolloffs, they are a good time. All the bowlers usually enjoy seeing each other and we usually try to make the best of each situation : good scores, bad scores or average scores. The thing is, no matter how many people are there, everybody's trying to make the finals. That's where things get interesting. The intensity gets turned up and its everybody for themselves for the most part. We still cheer for other bowlers and friends, but we want ourselves to win. Where they only take the top two in each rolloff, its all about whether you can rise and win or whether you are making plans for the next rolloff.

**Recently, you donated pictures of Ball Square Lanes to the gallery. Tell us about that center and what attracted you to it.**

Wow, yeah! ! Well, I grew up in Somerville and bowled, actually, grew up in Sacco's Bowl Haven. I would drive by Ball Square as a kid and really want to go in and check it out. Finally, I grabbed my stuff and headed down there to practice. Unfortunately though, I found that it is only open to leagues and there is no open bowling. Needless to say, I was bummed. So I dropped it thinking that I would join a league there someday.

Then, earlier this year, a friend who bowls there asked me to bowl in this years winter season. I jumped out of my Dexters at the chance. I have always loved the feel and atmosphere of the old school alleys. They just don't make them like they used to. Don't get me wrong, today's modern centers are beautiful in each one's own way. There's just something about the old places that I am drawn to.

**Can you discuss the thrill with bowling in an old school bowling center? Some of our readers might think that "new" is always "better."**

Maybe it has to do with the fact that I grew up in . It is very old school. It has the effect of walking into a bowling alley and being taken back in time about 50 years. In a weird way, it made me appreciate the game and where its been a bit more than I did. Usually, the old alleys are louder, tougher, and smaller. They are like the Fenway Parks of the candlepin world. Personally, I have always felt more comfortable in an old bowling center.

The new centers of recent years and all the upgrades that have been made to other centers are also great for the game. Most of the emphasis has been toward the glow (cosmic) aspect. Who can blame proprietors for making their places brightly colored with the lights and good music? It brings the kids in and the hope of a next generation. But for those who haven't gotten the chance to bowl in these old alleys, it could be the treat you may be looking for.

**How did you get started in candlepin? Can you trace back to where the bug first bit you?**

My earliest candlepin memory was when I was 3. My grandparents took me bowling at Lanes & Games. My grandfather wouldn't let me bowl between my legs, so he made a point that we didn't leave the center that

day until I could bowl one handed. I'm glad he did. It made me one step ahead of the other kids in the juniors for awhile.

At pretty much the same time, I was exposed to tenpin. My grandmother on my mom's side was on the ten-pin pro circuit. So she would take me some weekends to her tournaments and taught me how to bowl ten-pin. From ages 5-10, I bowled two junior leagues on Saturday mornings: candlepin in the morning, and tenpin in the afternoon. Eventually, I chose to stick with candlepin full time...not because I don't like ten-pin, I actually enjoy the game. I use it for practice when I bounce balls down the lanes. I was always taught to roll a completely smooth ball. The more flat revolutions a ball makes, the more force it will hit the pins with and the bigger explosion of pins there will be. I just found tenpin less challenging. Not easier, less challenging.

On the whole though, candlepin has been really good to me. I have met many lifelong friends, I became a professional at something and it gives me a chance to give back a little of what I know to the next generation of kids coming up. I became a certified instructor and have been coaching in the junior league at Woburn Bowladrome every Saturday morning. If I had the chance, I wouldn't change a thing.

**Do you have other hobbies and/or interests that you like to discuss?**

Believe it or not, with the amount of time I am in bowling alleys throughout the week, I do have several other hobbies. I am an avid model maker: cars, boats, ships....anything I can build. If you know me, you may also know I am a "Trekkie" I have loved Star Trek since I was a kid and usually put patches and pins from the show on my different bowling shirts. People say its dorky, but I like it. I also recently took up golf. I must like the hard games. Its a tough game until you learn a few fundamentals. Other than that though, I am pretty much your regular guy.