

The Plainville Citizen

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Duckpin bowling champion is on a roll

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Byline:

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Her exploits as a high school athlete in the mid-1990s are well-known by local sports fans, but what Amy Bisson has been up to in recent years will come as a pleasant surprise to most: The Plainville High School alumna is arguably the best female duckpin bowler in the world. Yes, the world.

Recently, Bisson became the winningest player in the 25-year history of the Women's National Duckpin Association, collecting her 12th championship. Since turning professional in 2000, the 29-year-old has been named WNDA Bowler of the Year four times. In 2003, she was inducted into the WNDA Hall of Fame.

It's not a stretch to say Bisson is the Tiger Woods of women's duckpin bowling. And she embraces her celebrity status within the sport. "It feels pretty cool. It's nice to have everyone know you," she said. "But at the same time, you have a bullseye on your back. You have to be on your game at all times."

Bisson's standing in the duckpin bowling universe earned her a featured part in the recent documentary "Duckpin." The film, narrated by ESPN's Kenny Mayne, is available at Plainville Public Library. Several of Bisson's trophies are on display there, as well.

Bisson, a special education teacher, said watching herself in the documentary was an "absolutely surreal" experience.

"I first watched it with my nephew at a small bowling alley in West Haven and I think my stomach was in knots the entire time," she said. "When I watched it again at the premiere in Hartford, with 200 people seeing it for the first time, it was amazing. It felt incredible to watch my mom's face as she saw me on the big screen, squeezing my hand every time I appeared. It was a feeling I will never forget."

The 42-minute documentary portrays duckpin bowling as a history-rich, yet dying, sport. Bisson agrees with that premise. "When I was little, there were many more bowling alleys; especially in Maryland (the birthplace of duckpin bowling). Now, it feels like one closes every year. I think this is happening because there are so many more options that people can choose from.

"Adults that once bowled duckpins as kids grow up, go off to college, and don't return to the sport. Or, because duckpin is such a family 'handed-down' sport, kids aren't following in their parents' footsteps," she said.

Duckpin bowling is a unique and frustrating version of the sport. The balls used are significantly smaller than those used in tenpin bowling, and weigh two to four pounds. The duckpins, like the balls, are smaller than their tenpin equivalents, and it is therefore more difficult to knock them all down with a

single throw.

Duckpin has rules similar to, but slightly different from, tenpin bowling. Duckpin bowlers roll three balls per frame, instead of two as in tenpin bowling.

In both versions of the sport, a total of 300 points is possible in a 10-frame game, but that score has yet to be achieved in duckpin bowling.

Professional duckpin bowlers typically score in the 140 to 150 range. Bisson's all-time high is a 262. She rolled that at the age of 15. "It just goes to show you how difficult the sport is. I have been successful in other aspects of the sport, but attaining that high of a score again is almost impossible," Bisson said.

"A bowler can throw 10 consecutive pocket hits and leave splits every time. You can have the skill to throw the ball well, but luck has a lot to do with it too. It's frustrating, but that's what keeps regular duckpinners coming back. Personally, I don't think bowling a 300 is possible, but if it happens, I hope I'm there."

Bisson said the unpredictability of the game is "why I fell in love with it."

Bowling has been a part of Bisson's life nearly from the get-go. Her father bought a duckpin bowling alley in Newington when she was just 3 years old. Four years later, Bisson set a duckpin world record for 7-to 9-year-olds with a game of 172.

But bowling was just one of Bisson's athletic pursuits growing up. She was a soccer, basketball and softball standout in high school and continued her softball career on scholarship at American International College.

After graduating from AIC, Bisson joined the Women's National Duckpin Association and was victorious in her first two appearances on tour.

The WNDA holds a total of six tournaments a year in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Maryland.

Between 50 and 75 players take part in each event.

Bisson competes outside the confines of the WNDA as well and has been ranked the No. 1 player in the country seven times. The top player is determined by averaging games bowled in leagues and tournaments throughout the year.

Bisson, who taught at the Middle School of Plainville the past two years, recently accepted a position in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, her new home is some two hours from the nearest duckpin bowling alley. Although that kind of travel time will keep her from bowling in a league, Bisson has no plans to stop competing in tournaments.

"I can't ever see myself not bowling on tour," she said.

Sorry, WNDA members, the Bisson Express is rolling on.



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