



RAY BILTON

He's a top young bowler

Ray Bilton only started bowling when the alley was established in town, not so long ago, but it hasn't taken him long to become one of the best young bowlers in the area.

Ray, 18, likes the competitiveness offered by the sport, and he gets plenty of it in the Thursday night men's league in Mount Forest. With some of the top men's bowlers from the region in the league, it's an experience that has helped him maintain an average of over 200.

And with the coaching of Masters Bowlers such as Walter Roth and Harry Snyders, Ray has done well in area youth bowling tournaments.

In fact, he has won most of the tournaments he has entered.

A few years ago, in Molesworth, he took part in his first tournament competing in the senior category for youth bowlers. He was not only the top individual bowler, he also set a record with a four-game total of 1,146. "I had a good day," he says simply of his accomplishment.

His total that day was helped by three games with

scores of over 300, the magic number to five-pin bowlers (450 is a perfect game). Moreover, Ray was on one of his hot streaks at that time.

He has found that when on those streaks, when his concentration is consistent, he can find his mark on the lanes. And concentration, he explains, may be the most important single factor in bowling.

Finding that psyche for strikes and spares is difficult when Ray is not on a streak. He notes that he has not been in the proper groove when competing in the provincial championships in Toronto. He adds that there's also a great deal of pressure since the finest young bowlers in Ontario are vying for top scores, and that, too, can affect concentration.

Winning or losing isn't all that important to Ray, however. It's more the challenge offered by competition, not so much the final result, that Ray enjoys in tournaments.

"I really like going to the tournaments, they're lots of fun," he says. And he is particularly enjoying a rivalry that has developed with another young bowler. At least, Ray believes there may be some sort of rivalry.

He remembers bowling side-by-side with the Port Elgin youth champion at one tournament. After Ray wound up with a higher score, his so-called rival turned to him and hinted godd-naturedly that this was only one match, that there would be others when there would be a showdown between them again.

"He beat me last year," says Ray, referring to the 1983 Four Steps to Stardom Tournament. "But so far, I've defeated him in every tournament this year."

It was a recent Four Steps to Stardom Tournament that Ray and a Mount Forest bowling team were denied a trip to the provincial finals despite winning. Ray was the top individual bowler after another "good day" while Mount Forest also won team honors.

But while things went well on the alleys, something happened with registration that still isn't fully understood. As a result, the bowling team and Ray were ruled ineligible to compete in Toronto, a disappointing turn of events to be sure, notes Ray. "We fought it but it didn't do any good," he adds.

A student at Mount Forest District High School, Ray is involved with other sports in town, including hockey, school volleyball and curling. He's been asked to try to become a Master Bowler, but he feels right now that he is just too young.

Right now, he's looking forward to the upcoming Pepsi challenge tournament in Toronto, where he will compete as part of a Mount Forest team.

Ray will be hoping to ride one of his hot streaks going into that competition. And hopefully there will be no more problems off the alley.