

Cerebration

He stood there, on the smooth wooden platform. His back was turned to the audience. Next to his name on the screen above his head, eleven “X”s stood silently, patiently waiting for their twelfth, unknown companion. The crowd was silent. Tall and thin, he stood unwavering, sweat forming on his forehead. He shifted his stance slightly, his blond hair ruffling, and started his final move.

Two hours earlier, Lenny Lee had walked into the Nutmeg Bowl of Fairfield, Connecticut for the final week of the CIBL high school bowling league. His friend and doubles partner for the day, Dennis, greeted him on his way in and yelled at him to hurry up because practice had already started.

“Don’t worry, I’m coming!” There was still plenty of time before the first games began, and Lenny showed no urgency in his movements. In a little while, the matches were underway. Besides being the final week in the league and a doubles tournament, the ambiance did not suggest anything new. Pins flew; parents cheered. Shots missed; smiles disappeared. The air became saturated with the mixture of emotions. It lent ones at random to the players, causing both the misfortune and luck abundant throughout the bowling alley.

Meanwhile, Lenny easily kept up a 200 average, trailing closely behind Dennis. No other team had them in sight as each of the first four games led them farther and farther ahead.

* * * SOME FACTS TO CONSIDER * * *

Lenny and Dennis were seniors.

They both were well-behaved, determined learners, especially in bowling.

They were fourth and first highest averaging bowlers, respectively.

The second highest averaging bowler was absent.

They were going to win, guaranteed.

These were the last games in their high school league and bowling career.

This would be the best, and perhaps final, time to set a new record.

Before long, the last game, the fifth game, approached. There were strikes, one after another. Nobody noticed until the first five frames were filled with little crosses, “X”s. A sixth one followed, and people clapped. The seventh, eighth, and ninth flew by in the same manner. Before long, the tenth frame loomed in Lenny’s way to his first perfect game.

By now, all of the surrounding bowlers had stopped bowling, watching in awe. The breaths of the best bowlers stopped in their chests as the final shots flew. Throughout the season, there had been a few games above a 290, and they wondered as a group: could Lenny keep up?

“Are you nervous?” Dennis asked him, with the most innocent face. Having bowled multiple 300 games, he was well aware, of course, of the anxiety dominating Lenny’s face.

Lenny replied yes. “Well, don’t be. Just relax,” was his only advice. Lenny was left struggling to figure out how to do so. Anxiety is not an easy foe to conquer.

Despite his angst, the tenth and eleventh throws were also a success. With the fall of every last pin came a massive reaction in the still-gathering audience, quickly swallowed each time by the silent throat of anticipation for the next shot.

Eleven “X”s on the screen. One “X” more. Ten pins in a triangle. Ten pins to knock down. A lane sixty feet by forty boards. A single board off target to a ruined game. All these Lenny knew, but his mind taunted him. Would these numbers fail him? Would his years of hard work and practice lead to a successful shot or a failure?

There was no choice but to start. The swing began, and the crowd stared. Moods flew, replacing each other in fractions of a second. Uncertainty. Jubilation. Dread.

The swing went left, only slightly, but enough. The ball followed. The hook came early. The ball hit high. The pins flew. The ten pin shivered but refused to fall.

There was the strongest uncertainty in the air. To get a perfect game or to miss a few frames and get a decent game would have certain, simpler reactions. But to score a 299, to be just away from perfect, was not something to prepare for. Nonetheless, the crowd reacted.

“Congratulations, Lenny!” Dennis shouted, and people rushed in to shake his hand. Some bowlers seemed disappointed and reluctant to make a remark, but the parents were relentless in their admiration. However, he quietly held in his own dismay.

Only returning to his house later that day did Lenny dampen his disappointment, with some logic and cerebration. There was no reason to be angry with himself, he realized— no harm had come out of the experience. Then, he smiled and continued his journey home.

*** * * A REALIZATION * * ***

People are not meant to be perfect.

A single perfect game does not indicate perfection.

(Consistent 300 games would be perfect, but it has not been achieved.)

Perfection does not exist, and improvement matters.

There’s always time to bowl a 300 when bowling for fun in the future.

A 299 game is still a success.