

Three Manitobans to rep the Maple Leaf at seniors bowling worlds

Incredi-bowl trio roll into Reno

BEN LITTLE

DONNING his Team Canada bowling jersey for the very first time this weekend, Winnipeg's Rodell Bautista feels mixed emotions.

Bautista is one of three Manitobans representing Canada at the International Bowling Federation World Seniors Championships in Reno, Nev. — joining Manitoba Bowling Hall of Fame inductee Lynne Gauthier and former national team coach Earl Sobotkiewicz.

Since he could walk, bowling has been a big part of Bautista's life. His father, Rudy Bautista, played a significant role in growing the sport in the province's Filipino community. He coached Bautista and his two siblings to multiple youth provincial championships.

"He was a huge part of my bowling life," said Bautista, now 50. "He's kind of the reason why I'm here."

After high school, Bautista took a step back from competitive bowling. Since then, he's bowled once a week in his father's Millenium League on Sundays at Chateau Lanes.

A couple years ago, Bautista's father asked him if he'd consider returning to high-level bowling.

"He knew that the national championships were in Winnipeg," said Bautista. "He specifically pulled me aside and said, 'Hey, it would be really great if you competed in nationals and tried to make the team.'"

After a strong showing at the nationals in June, for the first time in his life, Bautista is representing his country on the world stage. But he will compete without his lifelong coach in the stands. Rudy Bautista passed away in March at age 77.

"We were just bowling buddies," said Bautista. "The last 20 years of bowling for me has just been good quality time with my parents."

As he transitions back into a more competitive environment, Bautista leans on his father's advice — something that helped give him the edge at nationals.

"The last day of competition, I needed to step up," said Bautista. "I could hear my dad in my ear saying, 'Just suck it up and go bowl'... that's the attitude I took into the last day."

It's been a full-circle moment for Bautista and his family, who have rallied around each other since his father's death. Bautista said his family's support has been instrumental in his journey back to competitive bowling.

"My whole family now bowls Sunday afternoon," said Bautista. "My three daughters, my son, my mom, my sister — who competed with me when she was 14 and hadn't picked up a bowling ball in 40 years — she's bowling again in honour of my dad."

Bautista has been bowling alongside his Manitoba teammates Gauthier and Sobotkiewicz for more than 40 years. He specifically remembers attending the same school as Sobotkiewicz, who played running back for the Sisler Spartans football team.

"(Sobotkiewicz) was kind of that guy," said Bautista. "He's always been kind of someone to look up to — same with (Gauthier)."

Bautista and Sobotkiewicz are both attending their first IBF World



SUPPLIED

Manitoba is well represented on Team Canada at the upcoming International Bowling Federation World Seniors Championships in Reno, Nev. From left: Rodell Bautista, Lynne Gauthier and Earl Sobotkiewicz.

Championship tournament as bowlers, but Sobotkiewicz is no stranger to this tournament.

Sobotkiewicz began coaching Team Canada in 2015 under the mentor program — taking over full-time in 2017. He said that experience is helping him to keep a cool head in Reno.

"I've been in this environment with the team before, so I know what to expect," said Sobotkiewicz. "I know the format, I know how it works, nothing is going to surprise me."

Sobotkiewicz said focusing on his game alone, rather than analyzing each player's shots like he would as a coach, helps take some pressure off.

"Go with the process, it's one good shot at a time," said Sobotkiewicz. "My next shot I'm throwing — whether

it's a strike, or a spare — is my most important shot."

Gauthier was quick to praise her teammate in Sobotkiewicz, who still coaches Gauthier at home.

"Earl has put so much time and effort into his game over the years," said Gauthier. "It is really wonderful to see him compete on the world stage — and to wear the Maple Leaf on his back as a competitor."

Gauthier has yet to win a gold medal at the IBF Worlds, but isn't letting that distract her from her main focus.

"My goal is to represent my country to the best of my ability," she said. "If that translates into a medal, then wonderful."

Gauthier grew up walking to Northgate Lanes with her brothers from

their Garden City home. She wound up a 16-time Manitoba Female Bowler of the Year and has won four gold medals, three silvers and two bronze at the international level.

In 2022, Gauthier had to step away from bowling to take on a new challenge — leukemia.

Gauthier withdrew from the 2023 IBF Worlds in Columbia to fight leukemia, which she has since beaten. She said the fight back to health detracted her from developing her bowling game.

"My health has been a bit up and down since then," she said. "To be perfectly honest, I haven't bowled as much as I had wanted to."

Gauthier, who met her husband, Paul, at a bowling alley, she said without him or their son, Evan, she

wouldn't have been able to pursue the sport she's loved since she was young.

"Having that kind of support made it way easier to do," she said. "Had we not had that support system, I probably couldn't have done what I did."

No matter what she decides, Gauthier is grateful for everything bowling has provided her over the years. Her talents have allowed her to see the world and build lasting relationships — something that resonates with all three Manitoban bowlers.

"I think it gives me the perspective of what's truly important in life. It's the experiences, and the memories, and the moments," said Gauthier.

The tournament begins today with singles competition and concludes on Oct. 22.

DREAM ● FROM D1

Last season, he earned US\$97,550 and finished 99th overall, which meant only retaining conditional status. This year, he truly broke through — winning his first event at the Bahamas Great Abaco Classic, adding a tie for third and a fourth-place finish, and earning US\$366,201 overall. That performance secured his promotion to the PGA Tour.

"There have been so many Canadians go up there (to the PGA) and have success, especially in the last few years. It feels cool to be able to join them," said Yellamaraju, who quite literally shows his pride by using a toonie as a ball marker.

It nearly didn't happen. His season came down to the wire last Sunday at the final Korn Ferry Tour event of the year in Indiana.

Yellamaraju entered the tournament ranked 20th on the points list, with the top 20 earning PGA Tour cards. An opening-round 73 put him on the wrong side of the line. Over the next four days, he bounced in and out of the top 20, right down to the final few holes.

He ultimately finished the tournament at two-under, good for 19th overall.

"Ideally, I would have had my card wrapped up with maybe two or three events left. But that's not how it goes sometimes. It went pretty much all the way down to the final shot," he said.

"But that's kind of how it's gone for my career so far. Grind it out, and when the back is kind of against the wall, try to get things done. But, yeah, a couple bad shots, a couple mistakes and nerves were kicking in. I still figure out a way. Obviously very, very happy."

Getting that first win back in January provided a huge confidence boost that set the tone for the rest of the season.

"I always knew I could play well and win. But



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Eleven-year-old Sudarshan Yellamaraju at the Tuxedo Golf Club after he won the Junior Bantam Championship 12 & under division in 2012.

once you actually do it, it's huge," said Yellamaraju.

"The job's kind of only started now. I have to go out there and play well so that I can stay out there and hopefully compete on the Tour for as long as possible."

Among his biggest supporters is Winnipegger

Derek Ingram, who works with Yellamaraju as head coach of Golf Canada's National Men's Amateur and Young Pro Teams.

"Sudarshan has had a unique journey as it relates to getting to the PGA Tour," said Ingram. "The most important thing is that he and his family never wavered from that plan and it's

turned out."

Yellamaraju joins Corey Connors, Taylor Pendrith, Mackenzie Hughes and Nick Taylor — who was born in Winnipeg but moved to B.C. at age three — as full-time Canadian PGA Tour members. He'll be the youngest of the group.

More Canadian content could be on the way. Adam Hadwin, Adam Svensson and Ben Silverman had their cards for 2025 but are still battling to retain them during the final fall stretch.

"(Yellamaraju) has got a very bright future in the game. He's got a very high golf IQ and a game that's more suited for success on the PGA Tour than the Korn Ferry tour," said Ingram, who is a personal coach to Connors and Pendrith.

"He hits it long and straight and is very consistent. And he's easy to coach because he's open to learning."

Yellamaraju is expected to make his first start as a full-time PGA Tour member in January at the Sony Open in Hawaii. Until then, he hopes to play a few late fall or early winter events through qualifying or sponsor exemptions to stay sharp.

There will also be a bit of time for reflection on just how far he's come — though his focus remains on what's still ahead.

"Even just playing the Manitoba Open back in 2022 feels like a long time ago," said Yellamaraju, who tied for fifth that year. He was back again in 2023, finished tied for 25th.

"My game has changed a lot since then and I've learned a lot, on and off the course. I've grown a lot, and I still have a lot to learn. I'm still so focused on where I want to go. But the journey so far has been pretty cool, for sure."

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