

International Champion, He Remained Humble

As told by Raymond Rolak
World Traveler and Promoter of Polonia

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DETROIT -- He was World famous. He bragged about Detroit. He was a Champion Bowler and much more. Eddie Lubanski, 81 passed this week.

Lubanski was also a ballplayer, an accomplished pitcher. "We loved it when we got to play on Diamond # 1 at Northwestern Field. That was the pinnacle. The infield was manicured like a pool table," he had said. Lubanski signed as a pitcher with the old St. Louis Browns and bounced around in the minors. "I got my perseverance from my father, Edward. I was playing in the Wisconsin State League, went 23-5 in my second year, but decided that I had a better future in bowling. It wasn't a good life for Betty."

Buck Jerzy put it in perspective. Jerzy got to talk and travel with Lubanski extensively during the Detroit All-Star Classic days in the 60's. Jerzy said, "Eddie was class, he was a gentlemen's-gentleman. Classy and humble, he would focus and help the younger guys. I was a publicist and he helped me; we would talk bowling and college hockey. He always gave me a new angle for a new story."

Bowling success brought Lubanski international notoriety. His television matches on ABC-TV with Johnny King were legendary. King would sport giant Churchill cigars, much bigger than Eddie's. During the pro-ladder matches Lubanski would use body-English to coax his pin roll. It was pure theater. King was known to jump over the ball returns after a double strike. King would trash talk and play to the crowds. Eddie was more reserved and ever so watchful. It was the equivalent of Muhammad Ali versus Joe Frazier. The King-Lubanski matches always got the largest ratings, they were the heavyweight performers. Don Carter and Dick Weber were other notable and popular television foes.

Lubanski's two-finger, five-step delivery began to show great results along his bowling tournament travels. He won the World's Invitational Championship in Chicago in 1958, and then followed that with an amazing four titles in the 1959 at the American Bowling Congress tournament in St. Louis. He was voted Bowler of the Year in 1959 and named to the All-American Bowling Teams in 1958 and 1959. He won numerous BPAA titles.

"I loved the feel and control the two-fingered ball gave me and most especially the revolutions I was able to manufacture," said Lubanski. "Up until the early 1940s, the two fingered grip was common, but by the end of the decade, nearly everyone had switched to the three hole method because it was supposed to be more comfortable and effective," he added. "But my fingers are short and thick and the primitive position gave me better control, slowed my roll and grabbed the lane sooner, giving me greater pin action."

Lubanski related, "Detroit Recreation Center on Lafayette and Shelby. "It had six floors of lanes and billiard tables, and a lot of 'sharpies'. It was a bowler's palace," he said. "Eighty-eight lanes and the best cigar stand in the city. I won a lot of money there. People came there just to see the place, so much action. That was Detroit when it was glowing."

He is noted in the Guinness Book of Records for carrying a 204 average for 25 years. "The fifties and sixties were so alive and exciting in Detroit," he added.

Also, in 1959, Lubanski got to icon status when he bowled a 300 game on television. He had the "Great Double 300" in Florida at Miami's Bowling Palace. "I was in a zone that you only find a few times in a career," he told me about that night in 1959. "It was easily my proudest moment as an athlete. Don't think bowlers aren't athletes. Most times we would bowl six games and that took a toll. I advocated bowling to become a varsity sport in the NCAA."

Lubanski has been inducted to five separate Halls of Fame. Most recently along with writers Kevin Allen and Del Reddy he was promoting his autobiography, "***King of the Pins***". He was forthcoming about a past drinking problem and his new passion was for mentoring in Alcoholics Anonymous. "I owe my life to Betty," he said. "I can afford to give back."

In all, Lubanski posted 11 sanctioned 300 games. He captained the Detroit Thunderbirds in the team pro team National Bowling League in 1961 and 1962. They won the championship.

Bob Strampe remembered how after the National Bowling League failed, they put together a squad from Detroit and won the Bowling Proprietors Association of America five-man Team Title in Birmingham, Alabama. "We had Eddie, Billy Golembieski, Bob Kwolek, Pat Stone and Bob Ulrich. Lake Pointe Chrysler sponsored us," said Strampe.

"Eddie was a fine gentleman and a great family man. He was a tough competitor and an even better teammate," he added. "This was before the Professional Bowlers Association tour was in existence." Strampe had bowled for the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Twin City Skippers. "We were disillusioned after the pro league failed. Eddie really picked us up at the five-man BPAA tournament."

Those were the years of the Beer Team bowling wars, Strohs, Pfeiffer and Goebel's all sponsored powerhouse squads. Everyone wanted Eddie Lubanski on their team.

Son Paul said, "My father was a hero, a true hero and he inspired. He defeated his alcoholism and he anonymously helped save the lives of others. When we were young, dad travelled a lot, but he made time for us."

Memorials are requested to the Our Lady of Fatima - Men's Club, 13500 Oak Park Blvd., Oak Park, Michigan 48237. Lubanski is survived by his wife Betty. Children, Janis, Edward, Paul and Robert also survive their father. A daughter, Denise, predeceased him and he will be cremated and interred with her.

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