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FRONT LINES

A European Bowling Firm Marks 40 Years

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the landmark Civil Rights Act into law, The Beatles made their iconic appearance on “The Ed Sullivan Show,” and Muhammad Ali became the heavyweight boxing champion of the world for the first time.

In 1986, “The Oprah Winfrey Show” — perhaps the most influential program in television history — went national, Queen performed two sold-out concerts at London’s Wembley Stadium, and Mike Tyson became the youngest heavyweight champion in boxing history at age 20.

The years 1964 and 1986 also were significant for the bowling business — specifically, the bowling business on the continent of Europe. Here in the United States, we tend to think of bowling as an all-American game, and while its roots certainly run deep in U.S. soil, the game was brought to America by Europeans. Across the pond in 1964, bowling manufacturer Funk Bowling was founded. In 1986, bowling distributor Bowltech opened its doors for business.

Bowltech is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2026, and through the years has played a key role in the development of the game in Europe by bringing capital equipment to proprietors and consumer goods to players.

While bowling-based businesses with strong food-and-beverage programs have been gaining traction in America for about 20 years, the trend was apparent much earlier in Europe. There, bowling palaces — often with design nods to America, ironically — have been the norm for at least four decades. Long ago, European proprietors recognized that they not only could provide an enjoyable social activity via bowling, but also dig a little deeper in the pockets of guests by offering high-quality food and drinks in upscale restaurants and bars.

Hans Krol and his team at Bowltech have played a significant role in making that happen, ensuring that the products of numerous companies are easily accessible to bowling center owners and bowlers throughout Europe.

Today, in addition to bowling-based entertainment venues, competitive bowling is alive and well in Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and elsewhere. There’s a reason European bowlers have been able to make their mark on the American pro tours, and it can be traced to the availability of the sport on so much of the continent, with the lanes (i.e., the playing fields), bowling balls and other equipment distributed by companies like Bowltech.

Forty years is a long time for any company to be in business. Bowltech has survived political upheaval, economic turmoil, the introduction of the euro and a pandemic. Today, the company remains one of the shining lights of the European bowling industry — an industry that has had a significant influence on American bowling business models and design trends.



BCM Editor Bob Johnson is a member of the Professional Bowlers Association, United States Bowling Congress, International Bowling Media Association, California USBC Association and Orange County USBC Association Halls of Fame. He can be reached at bob@bpaa.com.

