

# PROSHOP OPERATOR

The Official Publication of IBPSIA

ISSUE 2 ■ JUNE 2025

- HONORS: IBPSIA ISSUES 2025 AWARDS
- DAVID'S DOCTRINE: BALL SURFACE IS KEY

## DECADES OF DEDICATION

**HANS KROL, CEO OF BOWLTECH IN  
EUROPE, CAPTURES THE 2025 BILL  
BUNETTA LIGHTHOUSE AWARD**





## Decades of Dedication

HANS KROL HAS NAVIGATED MANY CHANGES TO MAKE BOWLTECH A MAJOR FORCE FOR BOWLING IN EUROPE.

Story by Dennis Bergendorf • Photos by Bettina Lund



Hans Krol is the founder and CEO of Bowltech in Europe, a distribution company in bowling products headquartered in the Netherlands. He has been named winner of the 2025 IBPSIA Bill Bunetta Lighthouse Award.

**H**ans Krol has seen and experienced a lot in his nearly half century in the bowling industry.

He has witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact; the growth of big and varied brands and the concept of partnerships; the synthetic lane revolution; the explosion of reactive balls; the introduction of modern string pinsetters; and of course, the worldwide pandemic that nearly sent the business into oblivion.

Krol is the founder and CEO of

Europe's Bowltech, someone who has helped supply numerous start-up centers and pro shops with the equipment and advice they needed to make their mark in the sport. For years, Krol has been on the board of the International Bowling Museum and Hall of Fame, and Bowltech is a member of the Billiard and Bowling Institute of America.

For that (and more), Hans Krol is this year's recipient of the Bill Bunetta Lighthouse Award. It's IBPSIA's celebration of a "leader [who] exemplifies the

qualities of reliability and safety, offering wisdom and a safe harbor to those finding their way. With unwavering commitment to mentorship and integrity, the recipient of this award is more than just a mentor; they are a symbol of guidance, strength, and enduring support — just like a lighthouse shining through the storm." In short, he's been "a guiding light, a beacon of leadership who has steered newcomers clear of potential pitfalls and provided steadfast support in challenging times."

Bowltech bills itself as "Europe's leading distribution company in bowling products and with a large and growing project portfolio, thus highly active in building and modernizing bowling centers." Headquartered in Made, The Netherlands, the company has worked with centers in nine countries, from Scandinavia to France.

Like so many others, Krol worked in a bowling center as a teenager. When he was 17, a lane resurfacing firm came in to cut and coat the house's wood lanes; Krol was smitten. He knew what he wanted to do for a living, so he became a lane resurfer, eventually owning his own business.

The majority of lanes were wooden, made by Hoge in the United States. "There were hundreds of lanes in the UK alone, so we got started in resurfacing," said Krol, who was a member of the National Association of Independent Resurfacers, which was looking over its shoulder at a growing trend of synthetic lanes.

"We started this big campaign of 'Nothing beats wood. Nothing.' That didn't last very long," said Krol, who



could see that synthetic lanes would be replacing wood.

In any event, Krol had earned the title of “Lane Doctor,” and proprietors asked if his company could supply the materials to maintain the lanes. “So, I started a little distribution business,” Krol said.

Then came 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, followed by the reunification of the two Germanys. Krol saw a golden opportunity. Krol noted that the Pentagon closed a lot of military bases in Europe, especially in Germany. “All these bases had beautiful bowling alleys,” Krol said.

Krol’s distribution company started buying the bowling equipment from the U.S. military. In 1993 he started a factory to refurbish the machines and install them in what had been East Germany and West Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland and other former Soviet satellite countries.

Bowltech was on its way.

Working with the former communist nations was challenging, said Krol, “not only from a mentality point of view... but raising finances for those people in the former Eastern Bloc countries.” Krol said Bowltech tried helping them as much as possible. That is one reason Krol is receiving the Bunetta Award.

Krol points to the Czech Republic. “We built the first bowling center [there] in the early 1990s, and we built 52 centers,” he said. In many cases, Krol noted those establishments were owned by people in the gambling and sporting industries, who Bowltech targeted to help develop those markets and introduce people to the pro shops.

Bowltech has forged strategic alliances with major brands including Kegel, Storm, Brunswick, Turbo, Vise and Jayhawk Bowling Supply, and is QubicaAMF’s exclusive distributor for most of Europe.

“I prefer that you have a strategic alliance with the companies and be very open and frank about what’s happening in the market,” Krol said. “How can we approach and deal with the market in the best possible way? How can we

improve visibility and how can we continue to promote the sport of bowling so that we have young people entering the sport, and be enthusiastic for many years to come?”

Krol takes pride in being involved in some of Europe’s most dynamic new centers, several that have won Bowling Center Management magazine’s design competition such as Maxx in The Netherlands. And there are the lanes inside a simulated coal mine.

Krol’s commitment to the bowling industry can be seen in how he helped customers deal with the Covid crisis, when most centers (other than in Sweden) were shut down for up to 15 months.

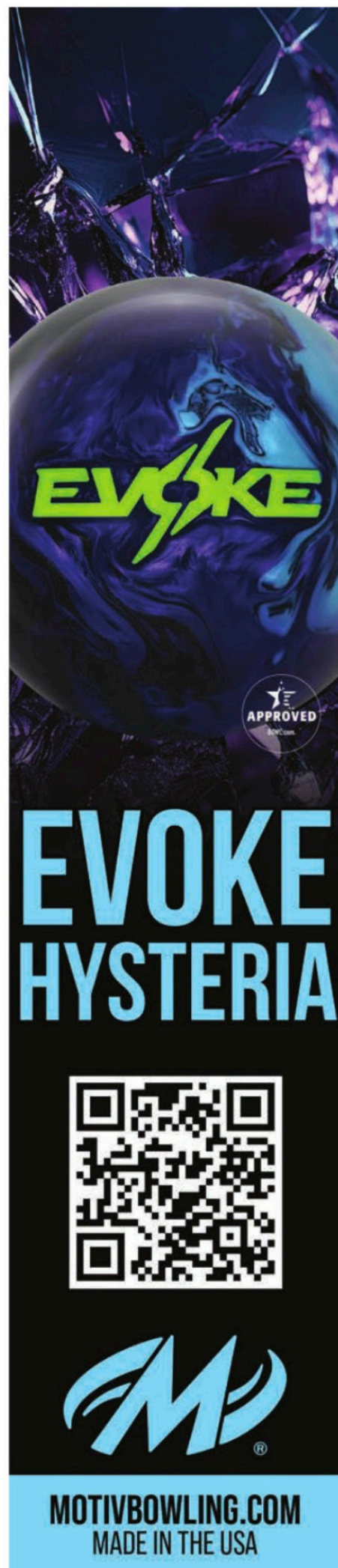
“We tried to stay in contact with the customers,” he said. “Secondly, we helped people who still owed money to us, and gave them (payment plans) that they could meet instead of insisting on the money.”

Also, employees at Bowltech spent time organizing the company’s warehouse. “We used the time as good as we could to be ready when Covid was over so that we could immediately kick off,” Krol said. “It cost a lot of money, but we survived.”

The strategy worked. “The good news was after Covid, the revenue grew so fast it was just unbelievable; 2022 and 2023 were our best years ever,” he said.

The industry’s big challenge now is string pinsetters. But Krol believes the fact that they’ve been approved by the USBC and used by the PBA will spur acceptance by bowlers. “We need to educate,” he said, “because strings are not new to Europe.” They were used in the 1960s and 1970s, when the game of Kegels was still being played.

Krol said the Bill Bunetta Lighthouse Award came as a huge surprise. “It blew my head away when they knocked on my door presenting the lovely letter from Teri Haugh (IBPSIA executive director),” he said. “I’m truly honored to be the recipient of this award. I thank everybody for it.”



The advertisement features a large, detailed image of a bowling ball with a blue and purple marbled pattern. The word "EVOKE" is printed in a bright green, stylized font across the middle of the ball. Below the ball, the words "EVOKE HYSTERIA" are written in large, bold, light blue capital letters. A QR code is positioned in the lower right quadrant. At the bottom, the "AMF" logo is displayed in a light blue, stylized font. Below the logo, the website "MOTIVBOWLING.COM" and the phrase "MADE IN THE USA" are printed in white capital letters on a dark blue background. A small circular logo with the word "APPROVED" and a star is visible on the right side of the ball.