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BOWLING: Father coaches son to victory

By Chuck Klönke
Special to The Macomb Daily

A year ago, it would have been hard to find two more disappointed bowlers than Utica's Anthony Mazza and Dakota's Brad Berak after state regional qualifying.

Saturday, Mazza and Berak were two of the happiest as they left 5 Star Lanes in Sterling Heights after finishing 1-2 in the individual portion of the Division 1 regional.

That joy filtered down to their fathers -- who are also their coaches.

"It's extremely difficult as a parent because you can't throw the ball for him," said Utica coach John Mazza. "Now it's up to him -- the hours of practice, games, highs and lows. He had a tough experience here last year. He just missed the finals and it was really hard on him. It affected his confidence.

"We talked about it quite a bit over the last week. I just wanted him to throw the ball good and not worry about the results. Just stay aggressive with his shots. If he didn't strike, it was OK if he hit the pocket. I told him to just pace himself. He did a good job of that today. He worked hard, made a lot of really good shots under very difficult conditions."

All six of Anthony Mazza's games were over 200 for a total pinfall of 1,282. Getting off to a 207 start was a big confidence builder.

"I kept telling myself to keep it in the pocket, keep knocking down pins," he said. "I just carried that through the whole day. My goal was to not shoot below 200 and keep making spares."

Anthony Mazza has been working with his father since he was young. It's not every youthful bowler who has a father with eight PBA Tour championships on his resume.

"I always watched him going to different Tour stops," Anthony said. "I'd see him win tournaments and I'd think, 'wow. My dad's pretty good at what he does.' As a kid I worked hard to be like him. I still do.

"He has worked really hard with me. As a kid we'd practice every other day. Since high school, we've practiced every day. We work on spares one day. We work on shot angles the next day. Another day we work on ball reaction -- always something different. I'm really glad to have a father who's always there for me and will do anything to help me succeed."

John Mazza's pride in his son is obvious.

"I've tried to instill in him the lessons I've learned," he said. "I live for his hard work. I've transferred my energy into his life and (brother) Joseph's life. The rewards are phenomenal, greater than any personal accomplishment I've had.

"I feel humbled because I realize how difficult it is to reach a level where you can win tournaments. Winning today is just another step in his ability and hard work."

Anthony Mazza was just as happy that Utica's team qualified for the state finals on Friday as he was with his own accomplishment.

"Our main focus was to get the team there," he said. "That's been our focus all year and that'll be our focus to the end. Today my mindset was to bowl as well as I can and just see what happens."

A freak incident kept Berak from qualifying a year ago.

"He stepped in some pop that somebody spilled and had to finish his round wearing a pair of house shoes," said Brad's father and coach, Joe Berak. "He had a bad break last year. That's why I'm so happy to see him do well as a senior this year."



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To say Brad was happy would be an understatement.

"This was my dream," he said. "I was thinking about it all night. I really wanted to make states. Last year was horrible. I stepped in that pop and missed the cut by 12 pins."

Berak got off to a decent start with a 186 game, but really caught fire in his next three games with scores of 241, 237 and 255.

"I started out trying to figure out the shot," he said. "Then I made a move to my virtual gravity and just hit it. I shot a bunch of good games. I was on a high at that point. Then we twisted to the other side of the house and I had a really bad game, but I tried not to let it get to me."

Berak slipped to a 149 but came back with a 183 in his final game.

"I'm excited about next week," he said. "It's a new experience for me. It's going to be something special and I'm going to try to cherish it and do as well as I can."

Port Huron's Dylan Jacobs was third with a 1,225 total and Stevenson's Brian Busch came in fourth at 1,217.

Busch came on strong after a slow start. Three of his last four games were 219 or better.

"You could see his confidence grow with every game," said Titans coach Tom Stockton.

Rounding out the top 10 individual qualifiers for next weekend's Division 1 state meet at M-66 Lanes in Battle Creek are Shawn Bibee, Anchor Bay, 1,195; Damien Idziak, Utica, 1,186; Ryan Driscoll, L'Anse Creuse North, 1,182; Anthony Logarta, Ford, and Tyler Culver, Romeo, each with 1,174; and John Short, Chippewa Valley, 1,169.


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