

## Inside Line

News, Notes And Perspective



to then be replaced by 10 scantily-clad women standing with their feet spread apart. A grinning Varipapa rolls a ball smoothly enough to journey down the lane without hitting any of them, and accurately enough to convert an 8-pin spare.

"I rehearsed that shot 20 times and never touched a leg," he told Cherin.

It was the kind of shot he first rehearsed in his dreams.

"I developed those trick shots in my sleep," he said. "I used to dream about them, and then I'd practice them."

The final shot of "Strikes and Spares" was his wildest dream yet.

Smith calls it "the prize package in Andy's basket of tricks." It is, to a T, the "Flying Eagle" shot for which Chris

Barnes is now famous. The 7-pin is set up on the left lane, the 10-pin on the right, and another pin about 50 feet down the right-hand side of the left lane. Varipapa's shot sends that third pin hurtling toward the 10-pin while the ball takes out the 7-pin.

At one point in the film, he even throws a strike left-handed.

"Andy Varipapa is an Italian by birth, and an ambidextrous bowler by training — a unique combination," Smith says.

That, too, came with a well-used Varipapa tale of a time he threw the front eight strikes during an exhibition when someone in the crowd — "a drunken spectator," in *Detroit News* writer Jim Walter's telling of the story — yelled, "Throw one left-handed!"

**A First:** Varipapa became the first to defend an All-Star title in 1947, for which Petersen Classic founder, Louie Petersen, awarded him the trophy. Only Don Carter and Dick Weber replicated that feat.

Varipapa closed out the 300 game with a left-handed four-bagger. Add that one to Grossman's foot-thick pile of clippings.

If more people came to know Varipapa as a clown in the movies than a king on the lanes, he rectified that in 1946. At age 55, he won the coveted title at the All-Star, a tournament now known as the U.S. Open.

"Pretty ancient for a sports cham-

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pion," Byron Schoeman wrote years later.

The following year, he became the first in the tournament's history to win back-to-back titles. Even then, Andy the Great was not done. At the 1948 All-Star, he finished runner-up.

The names of the only other players to defend their All-Star titles are the names of gods: Don Carter, who did it in 1952 and 1953, and again in 1956 and 1957; and Dick Weber, who did it in 1961 and 1962, and again in 1964 and 1965.

But Carter did it in his late 20s and early 30s, and Weber in his 30s. There was a good reason guys in their mid-50s did not win the All-Star: The tournament format called for players to bowl no fewer than 100 games.

Since that event became known as the U.S. Open in 1971, only one bowler, Dave Husted, has won it twice in a row, which he did in 1995 and 1996.

The man Cherin interviewed decades later was a man who had traded in the shoes of a professional bowler for the wiles of a professional storyteller.

But even when he journeyed from Carfizzi to Ellis Island in 1903 with his mother, Concetta, after the death of his father, Francesco, his stories crossed the ocean with him.

"I was a cowboy," he told Cherin of his days as a boy in Italy.

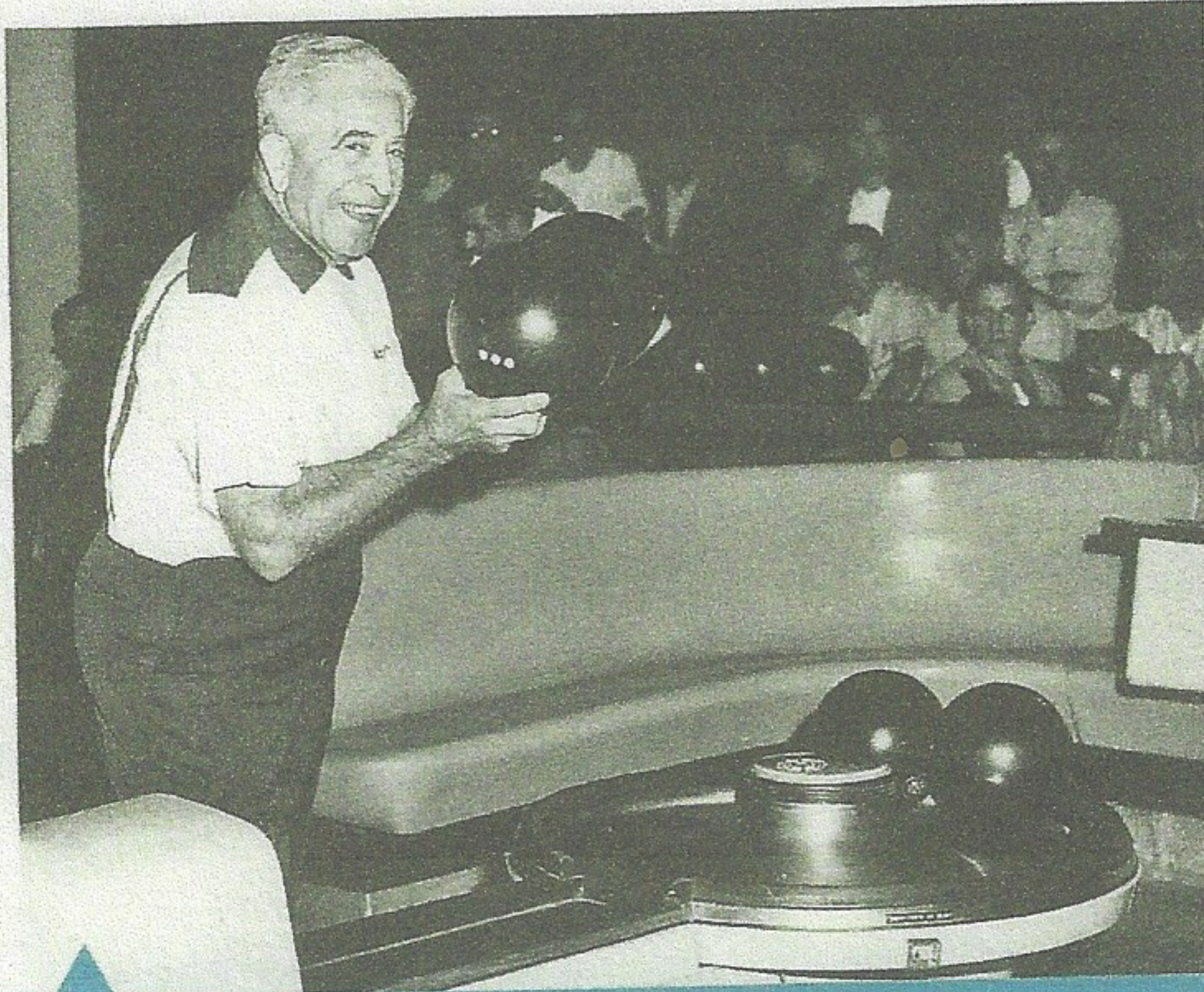
Cherin told him he thought Clint Eastwood was the first spaghetti western hero.

"No," he said. "Varipapa was."

As Cherin noted, the man did enjoy speaking of himself in third-person. By age 90, the thing he enjoyed even more was his most glittering possession — the past, a place he roamed often in the twilight of his life.

He remembered his days on his parents' farm in Italy at age six.

"I was supposed to watch the cows. I had fallen asleep and left the corral gate open. The cows walked over and around me while I slept. I never even stirred," he said with equal dashes of charm and pride.



All in a Name: Varipapa's personality glowed as brightly as his skill, earning him many monikers over the years, such as "Handy Andy," "Andy the Great" and "Varipapa the Magnificent."

The series of Wheaties ads General Mills produced this year after inking a deal to sponsor the PBA League would have evoked a prideful grin from Handy Andy, too. They star Varipapa, who flashes his old tricks while a gruff narrator quips about the bygone world that made such a character possible.

"His breakfast was cereal, not a microwaved, five-dollar, turkey-bacon, egg-wrap frittata," the narrator says in one spot.

"Grandpa didn't have energy drinks. He had black coffee, two hours of sleep, and a big bowl of self-respect," he says in another.

The bowling world served up a big bowl of respect for Grandpa this past March, when the PBA invited fans to vote for the "best trick shot ever." The four finalists included Osku Palermaa's "over the chair strike"; Norm Duke's "spinning ball spare"; Chris Barnes's "Flying Eagle"; and Varipapa's three-ball split conversion.

The voting provided testament to Varipapa's influence when his three-ball split conversion made the final two against a shot he himself performed 80 years ago, albeit one appropriated masterfully by another all-time great, Chris Barnes.

Varipapa edged Barnes and his "Flying Eagle" narrowly, 51 percent to 49 percent. At least four generations removed from any of his three fellow contestants, he prevailed against names eminently more familiar to today's bowling fan than a man who was getting his kicks with tricks more than a decade before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Not bad, for a kid who noticed something special while skidding ice up a Brooklyn street in the dawn of the last century and parlayed it into a career.

We are all noticing something special in him still, 80 years after Pat Moore told readers of this magazine how "the little boy who came here from Calabria" became the man we refuse to forget.