

Chris Croak April 13, 1951 - May 31, 2008

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Chris was 'one of top bowlers' in area, dies at 57.

Before the days of \$300 balls and slick lanes that provide all sorts of new advantages for bowlers, Chris Croak was already putting up impressive scores.

"Before the game changed to how it is now, Chris was a bowler," said John Falzone who managed the Cherry Bowl in Cherry Valley and Viking Lanes in South Beloit. "In the good old days when the ball would only do something if the bowler made the ball do it, Chris was averaging in the 200s. It was unheard of then."

Croak, a fixture on the local bowling scene, died Saturday, May 20, 2008, after a battle with cancer. He was 57. In his bowling days, Croak stood out because of his delivery, said Falzone, who knew Croak as a customer and friend for more than 35 years. A leftie, Croak threw from the left side of the lane instead of the middle.

Croak was "consistently good," said Jerry Partch, who writes a weekly bowling column for the Rockford Register Star. "He had a very simple game, and it was very effective," Partch said. "He'll be sorely missed."

Croak's alley accomplishments earned him a spot in the Rockford Bowling Hall of Fame in 1997. He also shared his skills with younger generations by coaching bowling at Guilford and Auburn high schools. Croak also was an avid golfer and fisherman and owned his own painting business.

Though his name was synonymous with bowling, Croak was more than just "one of the top bowlers in northern Illinois," Falzone said. "He was a wonderful, wonderful man," he said. "He was a quiet guy, a funny guy, a friendly guy. He was all three."

Croak is survived by his wife, Janet; sons, Jonathan and Jimmy; his mother; and five brothers.