

Windsor Essex Chatham-Kent Bowling Association



WECKBA would like to congratulate 2024 Molson Masters Champions, Darren Alexander (OPEN Division) and Mark Labord (SENIORS Division). This year's tournament was the 68th, and was completed on Saturday, February 17, 2024.

The Molson Masters is a tournament with a very long, rich history. It has been hosted at Palace Recreation, Crescent Lanes, Revs Bowlero, and now at Revs Rose Bowl. Nick Stein (Tournament Director) deserves much credit for this year's tournament success, along with Jeremy Bas (Tournament Coordinator), and Tournament Sponsors (Molson Coors Breweries, Reaume Chevy-Buick-GMC, Revs Rose Bowl). Cogeco Cable is now in its thirty-eighth year hosting the Molson Masters TV telecast.

There was \$16,000 in prize money for the 2024 tournament including \$8,800 for the TV finals with \$2,000 going to first place in the Open division and \$1,200 winning the Senior

Division.

In the Open Division, Darren Alexander, a three-time winner and defending champ, is the #1 seed. He needs one win for his fourth title. He is followed by Jason Heron, who is making his finals debut. The #3 seed is Joe Pettinato, the 2014 Champion. The #4 seed is Dylin Hunter, a two-time champ. The #5 seed is Dan Aqwa who was the 2016 Champion. Aqwa was high qualifier for a tournament record sixth time.

For the Seniors, 2004 champ Mark Labord, is the #1 seed. The other three seeds are first time finalists. The #2 seed is Bruce Cockburn from Chatham. The field is rounded out with the #3 seed Ed Staudt and the #4 seed Les Ross

The **Molson Masters** runs over 4 weekends. It features a **Senior Division** (55+) and an **Open Division**. The tournament starts with two weeks of **Qualifying**, followed by one week of **Match Play**, and the fourth week is the **TV Step Ladder Finals**. To qualify in the Senior Division bowlers bowl 4 games over 4 pairs of lanes while the Open Division participants complete 5 games over 5 pairs of lanes.

The TV format is set up so that the Open Division and the Senior Division alternate the match play bowling in the stepladder finals. The Open Division bowls the first match then the Senior Division bowls a first match. The wait between matches is very challenging in that it makes it harder to stay consistent because lanes can change between the starting and stopping. Sometimes the #1 seeds might see this as an advantage because they do not have to bowl then sit and wait to bowl again.

SENIOR DIVISION for Match Play - the top 15 Senior bowlers, plus last year's Champion, are divided into 4 groups of 4 bowlers each. They face each bowler once in their division. Then they bowl a final position round within their own group. Each time a bowler wins his match he earns a 30-pin bonus added to his score. They move over to a new pair of lanes for each new game bowled. The top Senior bowler from each of the 4 Senior Division groups advances to the TV stepladder finals.

Senior Division – Match Play – Final Results

GROUP A		GROUP B		GROUP C		GROUP D	
1	MARK LABORD 975	1	BRUCE COCKBURN 926	1	LES ROSS 860	1	ED STAUDT 867
2	MIKE VOLIGNY 912	2	DAVE FORFITT 871	2	CHARLIE YOTT 850	2	JOEL LEWSAW 848
3	DARIN DESCHAINE 788	3	MARC POUGET 827	3	CHRIS MOXLEY 805	3	CHRIS WOODMAN 840
4	JOE RAMIREZ 745	4	MARK MORAND 771	4	MARCEL PINARD 769	4	DAVID MASSEY 583

Senior Division – Step Ladder- TV Finals

In the Senior Division Stepladder finals, the results were as follows:

Les Ross (181) vs. Ed Staudt (150)

Les Ross (193) vs. Bruce Cockburn (223)

Bruce Cockburn (179) vs. Mark Labord (224) –Mark Labord is **2024 Senior Molson Masters Champion**

Les Ross (4th seed) bowls in a Wednesday Morning Men's League (average 195). His highest series in league play was 802, with a high single game of 299. Averaging 192 his match play record was 3-1. He qualified fourteenth for match play with a 4-game series of 774. Ross bowled well in the TV finals but his one open frame in the semi-final match left him just short of making it to the finals. This was Ross's first time in the TV finals. Ross reflected that "Molson TV finals was really an enjoyable day, but more stressful than I imagined. I started bowling when I was eight, but this is just my second year back bowling after taking 15 years off to raise and coach my kids in sports and school. I always loved sports in general and Bowlero bowling alley was walking distance from my home growing up. Organizers of this tournament deserve to be noticed and thanked by all bowlers; they all were great. I met some new bowlers and can say that every guy was gracious and congratulatory, not one was disrespectful and that shows volumes within the bowling community."

Third seed Ed Staudt bowls in three leagues: Senior Men's Classic (202 average), Windsor Original Seniors (200 average), and Monday Retirees (193 average). His highest series is 797 with a single game of 300. He averaged 194 in match play and posted a 3-1 record. He qualified fifteenth for match play with a 4-game series of 767. This was the second consecutive year that Staudt qualified for the Match-Play and earned a spot in the TV finals for the first time. Sadly, he missed making last year's TV finals by 7 pins. Staudt observed, "This was a huge learning curve for me as I have not been a tournament bowler in the past. It is unlike match-play where there are 15 other guys on the lanes with you. In the TV Finals, you are on the lanes by yourself. I was fine until I got onto the TV pair, lanes 9 & 10 where we were given 4 practice balls, but I was unable to find the shot. At that point nerves got the best of me and I performed well below my expectations. However, it was a great experience, one which I hope to build on in upcoming years now that I have that additional experience. The one thing that I would like to share with you is the friendships that I have made. The camaraderie and the laughter that is shared on the lanes makes me look forward to bowling but don't let that fool you, there are a lot of very good, competitive bowlers in this city, from all age groups. Windsor has always been known as the bowling capital of Canada. As a retiree, I can honestly say that **A bad day at bowling is still better than a good day at work.**"

Staudt returned to bowling about 18 years ago. When he was younger, he bowled for about 15 years. He said after he got married bowling had to take a back seat because he was busy with work and kids sports such as bowling, karate, curling, baseball, and hockey. They then progressed to the travel competition. Staudt even got involved in coaching baseball at the house league level and travel level. He returned to bowling in his early 50's when his wife's cousin needed a bowler. Staudt said after two full knee replacements in 2019 and 2021 he decided to bowl in two additional leagues. His father got him involved in bowling when Eddy was younger, so Staudt was very fortunate to bowl with and against his dad in numerous leagues. He reflected, "I hoped to be able to bowl in a league with him again once I retired, but unfortunately I was not given that opportunity."

Staudt took time to thank Dan Aqwa for helping him with various aspects of his game. "Dan has drilled the majority of my bowling balls and has always taken the time when I have asked him any questions; I would like to thank him for that."

Second seed Bruce Cockburn bowls in the Friday Peterson League at Chatham's Bowlerama where he carried an average of 214 last season. His highest series is 838 and a 300 single. Cockburn averaged 209 in match play and was 3-1. He qualified ninth for match play with a series of 793. Bruce was High Qualifier in 2020 and this was his first time in the TV finals. "As a bowling proprietor," he explained, "I don't get a lot of time off to actually play the game I love nearly as much as I'd like to." The Molson Masters is one of the few tournaments Bruce bowls in on a regular basis. He is competing with and against some of the best senior bowlers in our area. Bruce indicated that "Socially, it's fun to catch up with some folks (young and old) he has not seen in quite some time." As a bowler he appreciates Rose Bowl (Jeremy Bas & staff) hosting the tournament, Nick Stein for running the event, and Cogeco Cable Windsor for allowing the match play to be videoed and shown locally. "I was fortunate enough to make it through match play, defeating three previous champions, and to be the #2 seed for the show. I bowled well against Les Ross in my first match and moved on to the title match against Mark Labord. I struggled this time and Mark took advantage of my struggles to win the title. I'm proud of my second-place finish but look forward to hoisting the trophy one day soon!"



Mark Labord (1stseed) His match play record was 3-1 and averaged 221 in match play. He qualified 4th for match play with a series of 850. Labord claimed the 2004 Open Championship and was also the high qualifier that year. Mark was Runner Up in the Open division in 2000 then Runner Up again in the Seniors division in 2020. Labord just needed one game to **become the Molson Masters Senior Champion**. Mark struggled on occasion to convert his 10-pin spares but that really did not matter because he was dialed in on the lanes stringing strikes.

Mark indicated that since it has been so long since he won his previous title that it meant the world to him. Labord lives in London, but he makes the trip on a yearly basis to come and qualify to bowl in this tournament. He indicated that he is now aged 60 and he has been bowling in this tournament since the age of eighteen. Mark summed up his Molson Masters experience by indicating “In the past forty-two years of bowling the Molson Masters I made the TV show six times in the Open and

Senior division. I was top qualifier in the Open twice, won the Open in 2004 and am just the fourth bowler in Molson’s history to win both divisions.”

OPEN DIVISION for Match Play - the top thirty-nine Open bowlers, plus last year’s Champion, were divided into five groups of eight bowlers each. They bowled each bowler once in their division. Then they bowled a final position round within their own group. Each time a bowler wins their match they get a 30-pin bonus added to their score. You move over to a new pair of lanes for each new game bowled. The top Open bowler from each of the five Open Division groups advances to the TV step ladder finals.

Open Division – Match Play – Final Results

GROUP "A"		GROUP "B"		GROUP "C"		GROUP "D"		GROUP "E"	
DAN AQWA	1865	JOE PETTINATO	1916	DARREN ALEXANDER	2028	DYLIN HUNTER	1873	JASON HERON	1952
MIKE SNOW	1781	RYAN TRUSSLER	1853	LARRY SALVATI	1922	JAMES GENDREAU	1829	ALEX FORMOSA	1808
MYKAELA MITCHELL	1778	TIM JOHNSTON	1808	SHAWN LEGGE	1841	COREY FORFITT	1710	RANDY CHURCHILL JR	1714
TREVOR MARTIN	1755	RYAN BOISMIER	1738	COURTNEY MARTIN	1684	STEVE WALLS	1700	XAVIER JOHNSTON	1682
STEVE KUBIS	1727	JACOB EMERY	1671	MATT CHICK	1669	PIERRE BELLIVEAU	1574	CHUCK MENARD	1655
DYLAN HALL	1639	ROB GIRIMONTE	1587	DYLAN SCOTT	1594	IAN FORMOSA	1565	CHRIS BEAULIEU	1633
STEVE MORAND	1589	JASON GREENING	1479	STEVE BLAKE	1494	TYLER DUPUIS	1516	DAVID DUFOUR	1606
CODY TERSIGNI	1553	JEFF HENRI	1316	JOHN BATSON JR	1441	DAVE SHANBAUM	1432	RYAN MILLER	1549

Open Division – Step Ladder - TV Finals

In the Open Step Ladder finals, the results were as follows:

Dan Aqwa (177) vs. Dylin Hunter (215)

Dylin Hunter (193) vs. Joe Pettinato (197)

Joe Pettinato (193) vs. Jason Heron (212)

Jason Heron (205) vs. Darren Alexander (245) - Darren Alexander is **2024 Open Molson Masters Champion**

Dan Aqwa (fifth seed) bowls in a Saturday Night League where he carries an average of 218. He has recorded numerous 300 games and 800 series. In match play he averaged 214 and had a 5-3 record. He qualified first for match play with a 5-game total of 1142. Dan, an Open Champion in 2016, has been Runner-up five times. Aqwa started out with a string of strikes but then left splits and had one open frame which was costly. This was his eleventh time to TV finals. Dan indicated that “Since I was able to bowl in the senior division, I have made the TV show Open Division three out of four years. I have not yet bowled in the senior division. I broke Scotty Laughland’s record for most high Qualifiers with six. I was tied with Scotty with five; and I held a thirty-one-year

record for a five-game block with 1319, shot in 1991 which just recently got broken by Darren Alexander in 2022, with 1322.”

Dylin Hunter (fourth seed) bowls in Wednesday Majors at Super Bowl and carries a 226 average. His highest series is 846, and high game 300. His match play record was 5-3 while averaging 215. He qualified fourth for match play with a five-game total of 1086. Hunter was the Open Champion in 2019 and 2022. In the first game of the TV finals Hunter was able to capitalize when his opponent opened in the latter frames of the match and Dylin was stringing strikes. In his second game splits proved to be very costly. This was his third trip to the TV finals. Dylin indicated “I must make - making the TV Final a habit. I know what it takes to win, having won two titles, just got to keep putting my name in the conversation to win.”

Third seed **Joe Pettinato** has rolled twelve 300 games and four 800 series with 822 the highest. His match play record was 7-1 with a 217 average. He qualified thirty-seventh for match play with a 5-game total of 984. Pettinato had previously won the Open Title in 2014. In his first game of the TV finals, he and his opponent struggled with splits, but Joe was able to win the first match with a double in the tenth frame while his opponent left a split that he was unable to convert. In the second match of the TV finals, Joe could not string the strikes to match his opponent. This was his third time in the TV finals. Joe mentioned that he became involved in bowling when his mother enrolled him and his sister into a junior program at Super Bowl lanes when he was 10. Pettinato revealed that he has been bowling for 38 years and is still bowling at a competitive level. His favourite bowling memory was when he ran the stepladder TV finals in the Molson Masters in 2014 and his mother was there to witness his win. “I won that title for her.” Joe indicated that his overall Molson Masters experience was good. “I’ve been here before and all the guys are great to bowl with and the format is a great format and for the TV finals. I prepared for the tournament with what I thought would be a good arsenal of equipment for the first week of qualifying, but I didn’t have a look at all. The second week I drilled out some new rocks and had a much better look only to get me to 37th seed out of 40. I was still not where I wanted to be with my look so the following week for match play, I changed a few balls and surface adjustments and bowled 8 games and what a grind it was just to get to the TV finals, but I knew I just needed to stay ahead of the other 7 and keep grinding it out. I love this sport and want to thank all my sponsors: 900 Global, Turbo 2N1 Grip, and Aleta Sill’s Bowling World for all their support in my career of bowling.”

Jason Heron, the second seed, bowls in Wednesday Majors at Super Bowl (198 average). His highest series bowled is 878 and has bowled twenty-nine 300 games. He averaged 221 and had a 6-2 match-play record. He qualified thirty-fifth for match play total of 990. He had just one open frame in his TV finals match, but he could not figure out the left lane to make the strikes to match his opponent. This was his first time in the TV finals. Jason indicated “Due to family commitments I only have time to bowl in one league. I have been bowling 42 years and was introduced to bowling by my parents who bowled at Crescent Lanes. My most memorable bowling experience was shooting my first 300 game and 800 series in a tournament in Detroit. For the Molson’s I did nothing out of the ordinary to prepare for this event. The Molson’s experience was wonderful; felt that I bowled well for the first time in the finals.”



First seed **Darren Alexander** bowls in Wednesday Majors at Super Bowl. His highest series bowled is 857 and highest game is 300. Averaging 227 his match play record was a tidy 7-1. He qualified third for match play with a 5-game series of 1112. Alexander has won the Open Championship 3 times (2015 & 2020 & 2023), was Runner-up twice (2016 & 2022), and was High Qualifier on four occasions. As defending champion, Darren only needed to bowl one game in the TV finals, and he made the most of it largely because he was able to consistently put strikes together to win the match. Alexander has become **Molson Masters Open Champion** for a fourth time. This was his eighth time making it to the TV finals. Alexander said he is now aged 33 and started bowling at the age of 4 and has been bowling competitively since the age of 15. His mother and grandparents were bowlers, so he enjoyed watching them and always wanted to bowl after. As a result, bowling became an obsession for him from a very young age. “Experience overall in the Molson’s was very good,” Alexander surmised. “It is always hard to be the top seed and have to wait

around for the final match. It is a lot of time to be there and keep your head in the game. Sometimes sitting that long you can over think and differ from your game plan, and I think I’m fortunate that I have been in the position

before and was able to draw on that experience and stick with the plan I wanted to which ultimately ended up being very successful. For me I am bowling tournaments almost every weekend somewhere so there was no extra preparation for this. It is just sticking with my normal routine and then executing the game plan I want to once I start bowling.” Darren said his favourite bowling memory was winning the World Championship Team Gold for Canada in 2023 in Kuwait. He indicated that there have been many influential people in his bowling career, but the ones that come to mind right away are Brian Neels, Dan MacLelland and Sean Foster.

This year’s tournament did not disappoint as we had a mix of some previous champions, individuals with previous experience bowling in finals and some bowlers relatively new to the stepladder process. In most of the matches the momentum kept going back and forth between competitors right until the final ball. Setbacks like trouble reading a lane, a few missed spares, an untimely split in a late portion of the game or a run of strikes were the deciding factors in many of the matches.

It is important that we congratulate each of the finalists. Each of them considers it an honour to make it to the finals. All experienced nervousness and most had trouble reading that troublesome ninth lane all day. The lane conditions were much more difficult than in previous years so ball selection and choosing a line and then reestablishing that line between the Open and Senior matches were critical. Each of these competitors reached a major milestone. It was exciting to watch the TV finals as each of these competitors made the matches nerve racking right down to the final ball.

Catherine Wilbur