Bowling Time!

Jess played bowling. It was her favorite sport. Sure, the other ones were fun, but there was something special about bowling. Unlike team sports or most competitive sports, bowling was one person and a ball versus 10 pins at the end of a long stretch of oiled wood. There was something beautiful in that. Much like archery or target practice, it was all about concentration and aim. You had to hit the pins, while avoiding the gutters on the sides of the lane.

Bowling is probably one of the cheaper sports to play. Really, you only need to go to a bowling alley. Once there, you can rent shoes and a ball. It can cost a few dollars per game though. Of course, if you’re serious about bowling, you’ll want to get your own shoes, which can cost more than a nice pair of athletic shoes, and you’ll want a custom ball of your own. There are a lot of advantages to having your own ball to practice with, mostly because of consistency – you know how the ball will react when you throw it. It’s a good idea to have a hand towel to wipe the lane’s oil off the bowling ball and maybe a wrist brace, too, if you’re going to get serious about bowling.

Bowling is 10 frames. Each frame has up to 2 balls to throw, except the last frame, where you might get a chance to throw a third ball. The first ball you always have a chance to knock down 10 pins. If you knock them all down, you get a strike. This is the best you can do. If you knock some of them down and get the rest with the second ball, you get a spare. This is good, also. If you leave some pins standing after your second ball, the machines will sweep them away, and you have an open frame. This is not a great result, and it will hurt your score. The idea of knocking over pins is pretty simple, but in practice is can be very hard to get a ball to hit exactly where you want it to when the pins are so far away.

Scoring in bowling is a little confusing until you get the hang of it. Each pin is worth 1 point, but sometimes you get to count pins more than once, if you get strikes or spares. If you have a spare, you get 10 points, because you knocked down all 10 pins for that frame using both of your shots. You get to count the pins from the next throw in the next frame, too, as a bonus for the spare. So if your next ball knocked down 5 pins, then you will get a score of 15 for the previous frame, because it’s 10 + 5.
Strikes are even better. If you roll a strike by knocking down all of the pins with your first throw in a frame, you get to count your next two shots toward that frame’s score as a bonus for the strike. So, you have the 10 pins from that frame, plus you might roll a 6 and a 3 with your next two balls, giving you 19 total points for the previous frame. The whole point of bowling, you can hopefully see, is to get as many spares and strikes as possible, because it greatly increases your end score. A perfect score is 300 points, and it can only be made by throwing 12 strikes in a row, 1 for each of the first 9 frames, and 3 in the last frame, because of the special rules in the 10th frame, which allow you to get an extra ball if you get a spare or a strike.

Unlike other sports that need umpires and referees, the game of bowling was much simpler: you either hit the pins or you didn’t. Sometimes you might step too far, and you could get a foul, but mostly it was about hitting the pins. There were a few fancy names for different situations, like splits, turkeys, and fences, but a player didn’t really need to know those, so long as they could knock pins down.

Jess was a pretty good bowler. Jess bowled for fun on her own, challenging herself to get better scores each time. It was like the card game of solitaire, where you can play against yourself, trying to beat your own records. She also bowled on a league. She was on a team of four boys and girls, and they took turns throwing balls and knocking down pins. Each team compared scores at the end of the 10 frames to see which team had the best scores. Scores were kept track of for months, and there were trophies and championship tournaments. It was fun stuff!

Jess knew that not everyone knew much about her sport or even played it very often. She saw a lot of young people coming in to the alleys and playing a game or two now and then, but she took it as seriously as other people took golf, hockey, or basketball. Her father, mother, grandfather, and uncle all bowled, too! It was a family sport, and she practiced a lot to get better.

Are you going to try to watch or play bowling?
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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What sport does Jess play?
   A. Archery
   B. Skeet Shooting
   C. Shuffleboard
   D. Bowling

2. How many frames are in a bowling game?
   A. 8
   B. 9
   C. 10
   D. 12

3. What is the score in a perfect game of bowling?
   A. 100
   B. 200
   C. 300
   D. 500

4. TRUE OR FALSE: A perfect game in bowling requires 11 strikes.
   A. True
   B. False

5. TRUE OR FALSE: If you get a spare, you get to count the next ball’s pins toward that frame, too.
   A. True
   B. False
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