



NJSIAA TRAILBLAZER

When it comes to trailblazing women athletes from New Jersey during the post-Title IX era, Kelly Kulick deserves a spot near the very top of the list.

A 1995 graduate of Union High School, where she played tennis, basketball, softball (where she gained All-County and All-State recognition) and bowled. It's in that final sport where she became a history-making professional.

On Jan. 24, 2010, Kulick became the first woman to win a Professional Bowlers Association tour event when she defeated a field of men at the PBA Tournament of Champions in Las Vegas. Not only was the tournament a regular PBA Tour event, but it was also considered one of its major titles. In the final round, she defeated Chris Barnes, a 12-time PBA winner and 2007-08 Player of the Year, by throwing ten strikes in a 265-195 win.

The victory drew headlines, generated television attention, and even invited the White House a month later for an International Women's Day celebration hosted by President Barack Obama.

Her triumph in Las Vegas also earned a congratulatory message from tennis legend and women's sports pioneer Billie Jean King, who said, "Kelly Kulick's win at the PBA Tour's Tournament of Champions is not only historic, it serves as a motivational and inspirational event for girls and women competing at all levels around the world."

Kulick's bowling story began as a young girl, and she even predicted a future as a pro bowler in her fifth-grade yearbook. She took part in other sports as well and helped Union win multiple county championships and a sectional title as a cleanup hitter in softball. She attended Morehead State in Kentucky, a two-time Collegiate Bowler of the Year and All-American.

After college, she started her pro career and was the Professional Women's Bowling Association Rookie of the Year in 2001. She also won the women's U.S. Open in 2003. The PWBA folded, however, after the 2003 season.

She competed regionally the next few years until becoming the first female pro to earn a PBA Tour exemption in 2006.

She's had a very successful career competing against the men, as a 14-time member of Team USA in international events and on the women's pro tour, which was relaunched in 2015. She has won 12 professional titles, including three women's U.S. Opens, one of only three all-time to do so. Her record also includes five championships and seven-second place finishes competing for the United States at various team and individual tournaments around the globe.

When Union High began an Athletic Hall of Fame in 2013, she was part of its first induction class.

