

# A Perfect Game

Deaf students find bowling lets them compete on equal terms

**THEY HAD** talked for years about bringing *some* kind of sports program to their school. But at the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind, a school in Honolulu with 28 high school students, Eric Dela Pena, a teacher's assistant, and Steven Hanai, a social worker, faced serious challenges. Many of the kids were not athletically inclined since, as



Dela Pena says, "society does not expect much from them in a physical sense." A few deaf students played football and basketball at nearby Kalani High, but they needed an interpreter to get play calls, or to know when a referee blew a whistle. The kids never really felt like they were a part of the team.

Then last year the two men struck upon the idea of bowling as a sport that deaf kids might be able to do as well as anyone else. "Bowling," says Dela Pena, "seemed to have the least hurdles."

In September 2005, the five members of the newly formed HCDB Dolphins boys' team, competed in a varsity match—the first varsity event in their school's 82-year history. Although apprehensive at first about how they would communicate with their opponents, the deaf students wound up teaching the bowlers from Kailua High a few basic signs—

**KINGPINS** In their second season, the bowlers at the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind have become symbols of school pride.

and then beat them 2-1. "Bowling has been a great source of school pride," says senior captain Vuong Ho, 17, who bowled a team-high 145 on that afternoon.

Truthfully, the Dolphins are not especially good at bowling—the boys' team is 7-20 and the girls' team is 4-23 this year—but they are not especially bad either, and that's the point. Although no sports are yet offered to the blind students at HCDB, Dela Pena and Hanai are thinking of adding wrestling, volleyball and diving to their athletic program for deaf students next year. "Everyone who sees these kids compete learns," Hanai said. "They're just like everybody else. They just can't hear."  
—Kevin Armstrong