

Coming to terms with technology

Taking the fear out of ball-change adjustments



Bowlers today face the difficult decision of how to adjust to all of the different lane conditions that they encounter. Whether it's a tough tournament shot, a PBA Experience league, or house shots in different bowling centers, the central question remains: Do I adjust using physical changes in my game (hand position changes, speed changes, etc.) or do I adjust by changing bowling balls?

Many, many bowlers who learned to bowl prior to the advent of reactive resin bowling balls react badly to the thought of having to purchase and carry multiple bowling balls to be competitive. They believe that they can be competitive by carrying only one or two bowling balls everywhere they go and adjust by line changes in combination with physical changes in their approach and delivery.

At the other end of the spectrum are those bowlers who show up on league night on a house shot carrying eight or ten bowling balls. Most bowlers would consider this overkill...to say the least.

Somewhere between these two extremes lies the rational approach to using multiple bowling balls wisely to aid in adjustments. Following are some useful dos and don'ts for using ball changes to overcome multiple lane conditions:

- **Do** know your arsenal. Unless you are a very high-rev player, there's probably a lot less difference between your bowling balls than you might think. Pick the ball that you use the most and consider it your benchmark ball. Learn how each of the other balls in your arsenal differs in reaction from the benchmark ball.
- **Don't** ever make a ball change to see what will happen. First of all, if you know your bowling balls, you should already know what will happen. Secondly, throwing your next shot with a wait and see attitude rather than with the assurance that you already know the result will usually result in a tentative shot that will yield very little information. When you make a ball change, decide on the ball and the line, and commit to your decision.
- **Do** consider using different bowling balls on each lane to allow you to throw shots of equal speed, line, and roll. For many of us this is a much simpler alternative to trying to throw shots of varying speeds or hand positions to bring the lanes closer together, or playing totally different lines. Be aware that to do this effectively, each of your bowling balls have to be fitted exactly the same. The most important people with regard to your bowling are your coach and your ball driller. Take the time to find someone to drill your bowling balls who is knowledgeable about ball technology, knows your game, and can repeatedly drill bowling balls for you that feel exactly alike.
- **Don't** try to switch to a bowling ball that you think will allow you to play a part of the lane that does not want to be played. This is most often tried by house league bowlers who are very wary of leaving the security of the second arrow to move deeper and find more oil. This ball change is the equivalent of the traditionalist who keeps throwing the ball harder and harder to avoid moving.

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- **Don't** be afraid to tailor your arsenal for specific lane conditions. Do this by understanding that the cover of the bowling ball, both material and finish, determines over 70 percent of ball reaction. If you bowl in a weekly league on a house condition, most likely your bowling ball needs will not change much from week to week. If, for instance, you bowl on a medium length, medium volume house shot, the odds are pretty good that you are not going to need a ball for heavy oil. In a case like this, you might consider taking a ball that you have for heavy oil, based on length and strength, and adjust the cover to give you the extra length you need for a house shot. Try different combinations of surface abrasion with or without polish to find a surface that will let you use that aggressive ball on a house condition (See Exercise #2).
- **Do** learn to watch the ball as it goes through the pins to get an insight into needed adjustments a frame or two earlier. Once you learn to do this, you can often change bowling balls with very minor line adjustments and stay on the same area of the lane for an extra half a game or more.
- **Don't** forget to watch where other bowlers on your lanes are playing. Changing balls and moving into an area that another bowler has already burned up won't do you any good at all.
- **Do** learn the basics of bowling balls. Once you understand that a ball with a low RG rating is prone to roll earlier than a ball with a high RG rating, you can start really tailoring your arsenal to specific shots. If, for instance, every time that you shoot a really high series at a particular center's house shot, you notice that you've done it with a ball with a relatively high RG rating, then you can bring two or three balls in the same RG range with different surfaces to maximize your options.

Exercises to increase ball awareness

If you lack confidence in your knowledge of your bowling balls and how to make adjustments by making informed ball changes, the following exercises will help. They are also fun and challenging and will help you to improve your bowling. All are meant for practice sessions, alone or with a partner.

- Bring three bowling balls to a practice session including the ball with which you've been the most successful... your benchmark ball. Put the same surface finish on three balls; the surface that you have on your benchmark ball. Throw a few shots and note the differences. Which of the balls hooks the soonest? Which goes the longest?

If your arsenal is fairly well balanced, your benchmark ball should be the one in the middle. If not, at least you will know where to look to balance it out with your next ball purchase. Use core specifications to fill in the gap that you've found in your arsenal.

You now have the starting point from which you can tailor your arsenal to fit most lane conditions that you usually encounter, just by adjusting the ball surfaces. For the house shot at a center where there's little variation from week to week, you might want to use your new found knowledge to create an arsenal with very little variation...just enough to carry the corner pins when the lanes start to change. If you are planning on bowling in an unfamiliar center, or on an unfamiliar shot, simply adjust the surfaces so that your early-rolling ball rolls earlier by adding more abrasion, and your go-long ball goes longer by reducing the abrasion or adding polish.

- Bowl a few games using three different bowling balls, alternating between balls every other frame. In other words, use ball #1 for frames one and two, ball #2 for frames three and four, and ball #3 for frames five and six. Go back to ball #1 for frames seven and eight, etc. This exercise will help you to really get a handle on the differences between your bowling balls and will give you a firsthand look at how the different balls affect the pin carry.
- Practice Exercise #2 with a friend. Once you have bowled a couple of games, you will each have determined which of your bowling balls matches up best to the lane condition, which is second, and which is one with which you've struggled. If your averages are within 10 pins of each other, then bowl a competitive game with the bowler with the lower average using the ball that was the best match up for him, and the higher average bowler using his ball with the second best reaction. If the average difference is more than 10 pins, then the higher average bowler uses his ball that had the least favorable reaction of the three. Who do you think will win?

Notice that I have given very little reference to core specifications and made no reference to layout. This was done intentionally, as you really only need to refer to core specifications when you are planning on purchasing a new ball, and hopefully you have learned to limit your layouts to the two or three that work the best for you and "tweak" your arsenal by adjusting surfaces. Whether or not you "approve" of the importance of ball technology, learning to use it can only improve your bowling success. Put in the effort, and watch your average rise. 