

Column for Will County Sportsman Just Paying Attention

July 2007
By Mark London

Are you doing as well as expected in your PBA Experience league? If you are, that's great. For those who thought your average would not change much or dropped a bit too far, here are a few things that may clear up some of those frustrating issues.

Welcome to another edition of Pro Shop 401.

If you are used to hooking the ball out to the edge of the lane and bringing it back without penalty, see how far you can project the ball to the breakpoint. There will be a point where it will start to come back, while the area a little bit to the right the ball will appear to skid further and not hit the headpin. Get familiar with how far to the right the ball can travel before it does come back to the pocket. If these two areas are really close to each other, your ball path needs to be a different angle, probably to the left (for a right-hander). You will be able to use this reference point during an entire night of league. You may have to try numerous places on the approach to start as well as different target areas down the lane. And now here's a bonus tip. It works on house patterns, too.

Whether you roll it straight or crank it up, what you need to find is friction further down the lane. Watch your ball down the lane and find a breakpoint you can manage to get the best finish, even if it looks not to hook much. Depending on the length of the pattern and volume of oil, you may not be able to play your comfort zone right away, if at all. You may also need to project the ball down the lane differently. Straighter players may need to roll the ball at a slight angle away from the pocket while starting in the middle of the lane. Bigger hook players may need to move right and play straighter. In any case, what you are looking for is a readable backend reaction. Whatever way you can get the ball to the pocket while still carrying is the true objective here. How well you can repeat the your approach to get the strike ball to your optimum breakpoint while reading

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the changing lane friction helps determine score. Keep in mind, these patterns are much flatter than house league patterns and change rapidly, especially the 15-30 foot area from the foul line, or what is referred to as the midlane. Since these flatter patterns don't have the puddle of oil in the center of that area, it can act as a hurdle rather than a funnel to get a strike ball down the lane to the readable backend reaction.

Another common question is whether a new ball is needed for Sport/PBA Experience leagues. OK, here's my best answer. Maybe. A greater amount of success on these patterns depends on repeatable execution and experimentation as to where your roll fits in best. If you are rolling a plastic ball, absolutely. Your traction is compromised in today's game no matter what oil pattern is applied. If your scores are OK with the plastic, then keep it. Once you find an area to roll and score well, next is up to you to figure where to move once the oil begins to move around making your initial line unplayable.

If your average drops 30 or more pins on these patterns, you may need to make a change in either your approach, release, or initial ball path down the lane. The 150-190 average group will most likely see the biggest change in scoring, mostly due to knowing house patterns only. If you are in that group, one question worth asking yourself is what happens on those days when house patterns seem different than the norm. How different does your ball roll if lanes are drier or oilier? One way to deduct a more accurate answer, take the score out of the equation and watch how the pins fall. If they fall slowly and in a lazy manner, something needs to change. If pins dance around and fall rapidly, you are on to something. Friction is tougher to find on these patterns, so don't get to discouraged, though. Adjustments like these are what professionals have to make during competition. Remember, this is a PBA Experience league. If it is not your cup of tea,

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don't bowl it next time. But if creativity and ingenuity are in your mantra, finding solutions can be a bigger reward than you could have ever imagined.

One interesting point to watch about the PBA Tour Trials is not only who does make it, but who doesn't. Over the past four years, a few bowlers who did have success on tour in previous seasons end up on the other side of the cut number. This year's names who did not make it to exempt tour status this coming season include Chris Collins, Liz Johnson, Rudy (Revs) Kasimakis, Chris Johnson, and Del Ballard, Jr. Collins won the 2006 stop at legendary Riviera Lanes in Akron, OH, home of the Tournament of Champions for a 30-year stretch. Rudy Revs and his devastating strike ball were tour regulars until 2005, Johnson was exempt 2003-06, while Ballard, 43, is in the midst of making a comeback from the urethane era in the late 80s and early 90s. Most if not all these names will bowl the qualifying round prior to each tournament again this year, looking for a not only for points to qualify for following season's tour, but for that all-elusive win.

Next month is August and you know what that means, the annual tune-up column with tips to jump start your game for the upcoming league season.