

Column for Will County Sportsman September 2007

Just Paying Attention By Mark London

The great summer of PBA Experience leagues is in the books and reviews are mixed. Why would they be mixed? A lot of assumptions of what patterns are bowled on how pros do what they do were shattered. For the first time, you finally got to catch a pass thrown full speed by Peyton Manning. You got to bat against Roger Clemens to see what real major league pitching. The biggest difference between house oil patterns and these patterns is the ball path transition at the back end of the pattern. All five PBA Experience patterns have more oil in the last five feet than most. Depending on your centers lane surface, your ball may have either skidded another couple of feet or made a very abrupt change of direction. In either case, it was very different compared to what you are used to with house patterns.

Bowling is one of the activities/sports which most of the participants believe there is not that much of a gap between a higher league average bowler and a top professional. This program helps illustrate this fact.

Speaking of those oil patterns, a not -so-subtle change in procedure was announced this summer by the USBC. The procedure for certifying league oil patterns has been changed. For years, patterns were only certified after an honor score was rolled (298, 299, 300 games, and 800 series). Once the current tape device became commonplace over the last 20 years, patterns were checked 30 days either side of an honor score. In that time, lanes were checked on a freshly stripped and oiled pair of lanes. But starting this season, each center gets checked once a year. Yep, that's it, once. The thing to keep in mind is this: it is a surprise visit. Recent technology has made lane maintenance easier, but one has to wonder with the layoffs announced at USBC Headquarters if that is also a factor.

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Now that the fall leagues are on the floor, its time again for another edition of our Pro Shop 101 series. Instead of a basics class, this will be between a 201 and a 301 level class. If you haven't noticed, there are an extraordinary amount of bowlers discovering the high tech end of the game for the first time who are used to asking solid questions about this game as well. The following are actual questions customers have asked in my pro shop as we begin a new feature called Pro Shop FAQ's (frequently asked questions). Read forth, my friend.

FAQ 1) Why should I clean my ball before putting it back in the bag?

Today's balls soak up and literally erase the lane oil faster than ever before. Over time, a high or mid priced ball loses traction due to that oil from the lane and dirt from everywhere else it rolls. In the very least, a micro fiber towel picks up dirt and oil in the surface pores more than a terry cloth towel, or in some cases a shirt sleeve. You wouldn't think of cleaning a tile floor with a sponge mop without ringing it out to change the water? Would you wash your car with the same dirty sponge? And those of you who still use alcohol, stop. Although it evaporates instantly, there is NO detergent to get rid of the more-imbedded oil or dirt. That's why you have to use it a lot. Yes, I know the bottle costs almost nothing and is conveniently small, but a specially formulated ball cleaner takes oil and dirt from the pores, prolonging ball life. After regular cleaning, a dull ball gets shiny while a shiny ball gets dull. Take the ball back to your pro shop for proper long term care procedure and tips.

FAQ 2) What does a proper fit really do for my game?

This is a common question by those purchasing a ball for the first time and/or by those using a fingers-only grip. One can trace this point back to a basic in sports using a

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whip action (golf, for example) to generate power while maintaining accuracy. Muscle tension for any period of time hurts in just about any activity, but especially sports where power can be a benefit. Tightly squeezing a ball forces muscles up the arm and into the shoulder to do the same. Any motion with excess tension can make you thing you are doing that while walking on a tightrope or the feeling of bowling in a phone booth. The result is ball with more speed than rotational power. Fingers only grip bowlers experience the opposite, with more rotation than ball speed, resulting in excessive hook without much speed. Unfortunately, this grip requires muscle tension just make sure the ball stays on the hand. It also requires more bend at the elbow, knee, and waist to consistently execute this style.

A proper three fingered grip places the base of the index and middle fingers against the ball, allowing the thumb to clear the lip of the hole with a minimum of grip pressure.

FAQ 3) What weight ball is best for me?

There have been a couple of good guidelines, but here's one that covers all age groups. Find and use good fitting house ball for two games. If there is discomfort in the hand at the end of those two games, you have found the right weight. A properly fit ball with the best weight should allow you to bowl 3 to 5 games before any noticeable soreness. Why 3-5 games? This is for bowlers with their first well fit ball. Once good habits like less squeezing are overcome, then the 3-5 game limit is raised.

These should answer some common questions asked by many of our brand new bowlers. More questions will be answered here in JPA from time to time, so look for them. Class is dismissed.

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In the October column, the Women's U.S. Open quarterfinals begin Sundays on ESPN. The PBA starts back up with the USBC Masters live from Miller Park Sunday October 28th.