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FOR

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The untold story
behind Pete McCordic's
dramatic televised
300 game 30 years ago.

THE PRO APPROACH

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Keys to Pete Weber's Longevity

WHEN I STARTED writing these “Pro Approach” columns for *Bowlers Journal*, my first article was on the great Pete Weber, a bowler I’ve had the privilege to watch from the beginning of his professional career in 1980.

From that Rookie-of-the-Year season through his record-breaking PBA50 Tour season in 2016, you can’t help but marvel not only at his success, but also his longevity. Thirty-seven years is a long time to be one of the elite players in one’s sport.

Along the way, like all athletes, he has had some ups and downs. But it seems as if he emerges from each downturn better than ever. There are those who think he’s a better player today than ever before, evidenced by his record-setting four wins in a row on the 2016 PBA50 Tour.

How does someone stay so good for so long?

In Pete’s youth, he tried to emulate Mark Roth, the bowler often credited as the father of the modern power game. He developed a style that enabled him to hook the ball a lot — and more than Mark ever did — but his game is and always has been very different than Mark’s.

Given his high swing and open shoulders, I would consider Pete to be the father of the big-swing bowlers. Contemporary players like Chris Barnes, Michael Fagan, Tommy Jones, Francois Lavoie and a host of others have more Pete Weber than Mark Roth in their games.



This is the classic Pete Weber finish position, with finger tips extended down the lane to his break point and his arm approximately 90 degrees from his shoulders — a great position to finish in for extension through the ball and for accuracy. Copy his timeless finish position and your game will be on its way.

For instance, Mark didn't open his shoulders, was very physical, had later timing entering his slide, and really used his legs. Pete, on the other hand, is a stroker, not physical, limits the role of his legs, and has earlier timing.

Looking at the key components of his game that have allowed Pete to have such a long and successful career, you have to start with his swing. His very long, free swing uses a lot of upper-body rotation, along with forward and side tilt, to get it high with virtually no effort. The height of the swing enables the arm to descend with gravity, allowing him to load up his wrist and elbow without expending energy or placing wear and tear on his body.

Also contributing to his effortless style is his timing. His ball placement allows his swing to reach its top before his next-to-last step is finished. The swing actually has started down before this

LESSON PLAN

PETE WEBER says his main thought when it comes to releasing the ball is to not grab it.

Not grabbing the ball — and having the fingers chase the ball down the lane in the direction of the intended target line — are things every bowler can work at doing. This technique helps create a long, flat spot for releasing the ball, which provides a greater margin of error in the timing of the release to keep the ball on line.

— *Bill Spigner*

step is done. By contrast, Mark's swing was still going slightly up after his next-to-last step was done, which required him to pull the swing down.

When Pete is starting his last step,

because the swing is already coming down, everything is traveling forward to the release, allowing for a very effortless release.

Then there's the final reason for his longevity — the fact that he doesn't use his legs a lot. Entering his slide, Mark had a lot more knee bend, which was great for his later swing; he was able to push with his legs to generate power at the release, and he used a lot of loft on the upswing to complete his shot. Pete uses less knee bend and more forward spine tilt, which enables him to have great extension through the ball.

Pete has gone through all the generational changes in our sport. He grew up bowling on wood lanes with rubber balls, advanced to the plastic ball era, then on to urethane and resin balls as well as synthetic lanes. Amazingly, he has been successful in all the eras.

I remember watching him early in

his career, when he had a lot of area to “miss” downlane and still strike. That was something we were not accustomed to seeing, and many couldn’t get their heads around him having so much area. As it turned out, he was playing a game that none of us was familiar with.

Asking Pete about his targeting system made me understand my early observations better. Pete doesn’t look at just one board, and never did. He picks out an area about four to five boards wide at 45 to 50 feet down the lane. He then draws his eyes back to the arrows. As he starts his approach, he gradually draws his eyes to the foul line. At release, he watches his hand and follows it to his break point. It’s very unusual for a bowler to watch the hand from the release to the finish. This also explains the open hand and extended fingers in his finish position, which is something commentator Randy Pederson always talks about when Pete is on TV.

I asked Pete about his method of playing lanes. His answer involved two parts, one dealing with bowling on the PBA Tour, and the other with bowling in league play.

On tour, he picks out his break point area based on the pattern, which is a great way for anyone to start out. Then he will roll practice shots to see how long the ball slides before it starts to hook, and how it comes off the spot (break point). From what he sees, he changes balls to get the ball to start rolling and hooking at the right time. He still uses the phrase “skid, roll and hook” to evaluate his ball motion, even though modern terminology is more commonly “skid, hook and roll.”

When making adjustments on tour, his order is to change balls first, change lines second, move up or back, and then change his release.

For his league bowling, Pete has a different view, and thinks too many bowlers get too wrapped up in changing balls. He says that when you have the same condition in the same house each week, you should basically use two balls plus your spare ball, and keep it as simple as that.

In league play, you’re typically bowling only three games and at a slower



This is the perfect position to be in for a high-swing player entering the slide. His swing in on its way down and going forward with the slide and body, enabling his effortless, powerful release. If the swing were higher here it would take a lot more physical effort to complete the shot. Look at your videos to see if you are in this position.

pace than in tournament bowling, and you’re familiar with the characteristics of the center and the lane pattern. Plus, you’re bowling on only one pair of lanes.

He says he sees bowlers come in with eight to 10 balls for a three-game league match, and that’s about the number of balls he carries around on tour to handle a wide variety of conditions. Follow Pete’s tip: In league play, limit the number of balls you use and work more on making good shots and the right adjustments.

Pete also keeps his drillings simple, using three types of layouts: 1. pin up with a hole on his axis; 2. pin down with a hole a little off-set from his axis; and 3. a pin in his palm with a balance hole near his thumb hole. With the three drillings and different cores and surfaces, he can get lots of ball-motion combinations. He also relies heavily on his Storm ball reps to help with layouts

and to recommend balls to use on tour and for adjustments.

When I was writing this column, Pete had been having a hip problem that he learned was coming from a pinched nerve in his back. It had caused him to withdraw from some major events. But given the simplicity of his form and the fact he has never had any other injuries such as knee or wrist problems, I’m sure he will be back and better than ever once the issue is resolved — a scary thought for the other players on the PBA and PBA50 Tours.

He’s far from done, and keep in mind that his father, Dick, won his last PBA title at age 71. Bowling longevity runs in the Weber family’s genes.

Bill Spigner is a three-time PBA Tour champion and a USBC-certified Gold level coach. View archived “Pro Approach” columns at billspigner.com.