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THE PRO APPROACH

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The Right Ball for House Shots

QUESTION: What is the best ball for a senior to use on a medium-oil house shot? I'm a left-hander who is looking for strong backend for the ball to snap.

Tough question to answer. There are many choices, and the information needed to pick out a ball and layout involves the oil pattern and personal stats about your ball roll: speed, rotation and rev rate.

The first thing to consider is the pattern. The big things to think about are its length and side-to-side shape. The typical house-shot length is between 40 and 42 feet. The side-to-side pattern often is somewhere around a 12-to-1 ratio, meaning there is about 12 times as much oil in the middle of the lane as there is on the outside part.

Also, on the typical house shot, the heavier oil starts around the eight or nine-board (just outside the second arrow) on both sides of the lane. With the new USBC rule, there is no minimum amount of oil that needs to be on the outside part of the lane — which is not much different than what has been done in the past.

What happens on many house shots is that the dry is so dry and the oil is so wet that an over-reacting pattern is created. If you miss inside your target, the ball over-skids and misses light, and if you miss outside of your target, the ball over-hooks and goes high. In other words, the ball goes in the opposite of the direction of your miss, which can cause a lot of confusion.

The key is to have a ball that blends out the reaction so if you miss outside your target line the ball doesn't go high, and if you miss inside your

target line the ball doesn't come in light on the headpin.

Most league bowling today is played on freshly oiled lanes. You get automatic skid in the front and you have bone-dry backends for the ball to grab the lane and make a hard direction change. For this, too, you need a ball that blends out the lane for effective front-to-back reaction.

Considering this, your first objective is to get a ball that gives you control both side-to-side and front-to-back — not an easy thing to accomplish based on the extreme differences in the oiled

it can have an uncontrollable break point that will make consistency difficult, even as it gives you the snap that you think you want.

So, how do we pick out a ball that will give us control plus enough angle and power to go through the pins the right way in order to strike? Besides the pattern, the key elements to consider are your ball speed, axis rotation, tilt and rev rate — and very few bowlers know those stats.

Thus, the easiest thing to know is ball speed, and most bowling center scoring systems provide that information — a good way to gauge the consistency of your speed and compare it to others. Basically, slow speeds are 12 to 14-mph, medium speeds are 14 to 16-mph, and faster

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and dry parts of the lane. Many bowlers feel they need a ball that has a big back-end snap, but my experience has been that when bowlers say they want that, often they need the opposite.

Remember, you are playing on an overreacting pattern, so a ball that snaps provides an overreacting back-end motion. The key is to get the ball to slow down and start to hook in the midlane of the pattern so that when it gets to the end of the pattern it's already heading toward the pocket. If the ball skids to the end of the pattern,

speeds are 16 to 18-mph.

Knowing your speed and knowing that you need the ball to slow down before the end of the pattern, you can decide on the type of coverstock. These are divided into three categories: slow response, medium response and quick response. These basically describe how quickly and how much directional change the ball experiences when encountering friction.

Quick-response coverstocks provide the greatest reaction, and slow-response balls provide the least. Slower-response

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balls usually have dull, solid covers. Medium-response balls have hybrid covers, while the quick-response balls have highly polished pearl covers. That said, remember that you can change the cover of any ball from shiny to dull or dull to shiny and everywhere in-between.

The second part of ball selection involves the RG (radius of gyration) of the core: high, medium or low. The higher the RG, the longer it takes for the ball to slow down and hook; the lower the RG, the earlier the ball will slow down and hook. So, the combination of the coverstock and the RG are a big part of your decision.

The third thing to consider is the type of core: asymmetrical or

symmetrical. The basic difference is that an asymmetrical core will create a shorter and quicker hook span, while a symmetrical core will create a longer hook span.

Also of importance is the drilling layout of the ball. The first thing to decide is whether to go with the pin above or the pin below the fingers. Pin-up balls flare more with earlier and more hook. Pin-down balls flair less with less overall hook.

Finally, there is the pin-to-PAP (positive axis point) distance. To keep it simple, basically, the closer the pin is to your PAP, the earlier and smoother the hook will be, while the farther away the pin is from the PAP, the longer the ball will go and the later it will hook.

For maximum hook, you want the pin somewhere around 3½ inches from your PAP. This also is true on asymmetrical balls, except that you have to take into account the placement of the mass bias (MB). The closer the MB is to the thumb hole (it could be in it or the opposite side of it), the longer the ball will take to hook. The farther away from the thumb in the direction of the PAP, the earlier the ball will hook.

As you can see, there are lots of considerations when choosing a ball beyond the brand and model names. Learning some of the basics will help you converse with your ball driller from a more informed perspective, and help you better understand what they

are talking about. You don't have to be an expert, but it really helps if you can look at a ball and understand the potential reaction you'll get out of it.

That, together with understanding the pattern, will greatly assist you in making a decision on what ball to get or use, and when to use it.

With house shots, you need to ride the oil line and not have the ball overreact side-to-side and front-to-back. Choose wisely, and rely on your pro shop operator for guidance with your selection. They study this stuff.

And if they don't know you, have them watch you roll a few shots, then clearly explain what you're looking for so they can intelligently advise you.

LESSON PLAN: THE RIGHT BALL FOR THE PATTERN

THIS IS a diagram of a typical house shot. When looking at the lane, you can't see the oil, but you can visualize it from examining a graph of the pattern and understanding the basics of it.

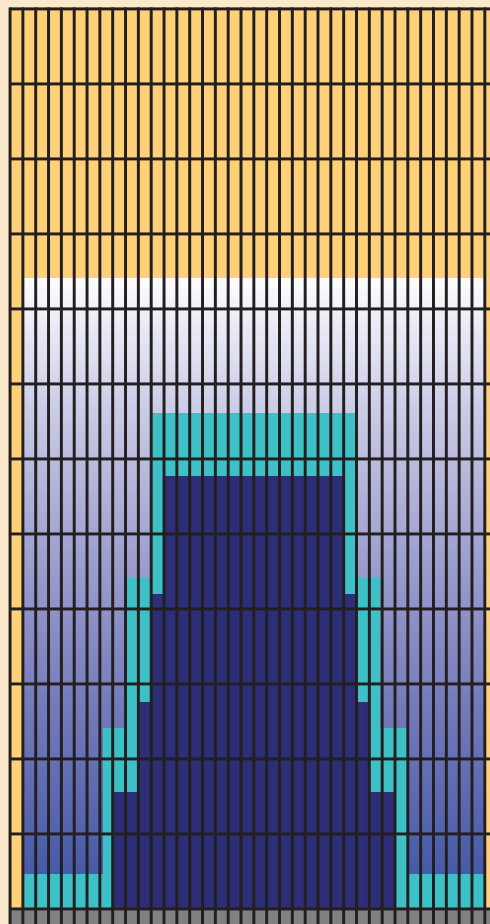
The three things you need to understand when looking at a graph are distance, the volume of the oil, and the shape of the pattern.

The shape is the primary aspect of a house shot because of the vast difference in the amount of oil side-to-side and front-to-back. On this house shot graph, the turquoise is where the heavier oil starts — the eight-board, and then at 10-board it gets very heavy (dark blue).

The object is to play the oil line with a ball that gives you the greatest control and hitting power, not the greatest hook and snap at the backend. To score, you need to ride this oil line correctly, relative to your game.

The pocket is given to you on these types of patterns, but carry is not. Matching up the right ball to the pattern and your game will greatly increase your carry percentage.

— Bill Spigner



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