

# FAMILY TIES

These legends' kids are making names for themselves on the lanes.

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## Breakdown

# IN PRAISE OF THE OLD SCHOOL

Bryanna Coté's game is not as flashy as other players, but her success proves that simple still can be best.

by **BILL SPIGNER**

All of a sudden, here's Bryanna Cote, PWBA player of the year. No one heard those footsteps coming, and she was as surprised by the award as anyone.

In an era dominated by fascination with rev rate, ball speed and messengers that tear across pin decks to tomahawk corner pins, Coté has emerged out of the shadows of more celebrated names like Kulick, Johnson and O'Keefe with a decidedly less flashy game founded on hard work and a stick-with-it attitude. It gets the job done just as well as any power player and, for the 2021 PWBA Tour season at least, better than any of them.

Growing up, Coté's grandfather Ray taught her the fundamentals of the game to get her started. Ever since, Coté pretty much has been a self-made competitor. While no one can do it totally on their own, as knowledge has to be gained from somewhere, Coté has proven to be a scrupulous learner. She always keeps her ears and eyes open to ideas, but she filters out things that are not pertinent to her game while applying things that are.

That discernment is serving her well, as she now finds herself at the pinnacle of a tour loaded with talent.

## Hard Knocks, in Phoenix and Beyond

Growing up in the Phoenix area, Coté bowled in the Junior Bowlers Tour throughout the southwest. These events accelerated her growth exponentially as she would bowl mostly against the boys on the scratch side of things. That meant she had to get better in a hurry to keep up, because the boys with higher rev rates and ball speed would destroy the pattern and force her to either learn to adjust or be a non-factor. Learning to survive on the lanes at a young age and refusing to take a back seat to anyone helped prepare her for her next developing journey — college bowling.

She attended the University of Central Missouri, where she bowled under the program's longtime head coach Ron Holms. Coté quickly struck him as a special talent who set very high expectations for herself and had the same expectations for her teammates. Better yet, she always was honest and candid about those expectations, which is to say she exhibited the qualities of a leader.

Her sustained level of focus and work ethic spurred the rest of the team to work harder, and they soon developed into a powerhouse during her years there.



**Girl Power**  
Coté's growth accelerated rapidly when she battled boys with high rev rates as a youth bowler.



#### **A True Athlete**

*Coté's incredible athleticism is on display here. Her very firm grip includes a cupped wrist and an arched index finger pushing down hard. Such grip pressure normally would make it difficult to execute a free swing, but Coté routinely does just that.*

To top it off, she was the first bowler in NCAA history, in any division, to be named NTCA player of the year in each of her four years as a college player. If that weren't enough, she also made Junior Team USA twice while in college, in 2006 and 2007.

#### **Staying Patient**

One of the big things Coté learned in college was to control the pocket and make spares — the genesis of the ultra-successful game she now features on tour. That brand of play was as essential in college as it has proven to be in Coté's pro career, as the Baker format often utilized in five-player collegiate team play puts a premium on filling frames and having the patience that strikes will come.

Unlike Coté's individual performances before college, when she had to get striking to keep up as an individual bowling against those pattern-destroying boys with their aggressive games, this focus on keeping the ball in play and converting spares has instilled in Coté the kind of patience she needed to persevere through the end of a very tight 2021 PWBA Player of the Year race.

#### **Team USA, an Injury, and Major Changes**

Coté added six more years on the adult Team USA squad following those prior stints with the junior program, and it is there that she benefitted greatly from former head coach Rod Ross's Elite Training Assessment evaluation.

That assessment yielded data-driven, top-to-bottom appraisals of each player's game in granular detail, covering everything from physical performance and abilities to fitness and beyond. Coté readily admits she is no numbers girl, but Ross's program cast into high relief the strengths and weaknesses of her game and provided a road map for further refinement. After all, a coach can guide a player, but ultimately it is up to the player to do the work. Make no mistake: Coté is a player who puts in the work.

While she did that work, though, physical injuries interfered with her progress. Bouts with tendinitis required three cortisone shots over time. Coté got her grips reevaluated and discovered a possible culprit: Her span was too long, which caused her wrist to undergo a great deal of stress and made it harder for her to impart rotation on the ball. The solution was a dramatic one, as she shortened her span by a full inch. In an added precautionary

measure, she continues to bowl with kinesiology tape on both her wrist and hand to help reduce swelling and pain, but also to accelerate recovery time.

Further, Coté uses a Turbo Rev on her index finger, which is basically a finger insert, to help alleviate pain at the tip of that finger. She presses the tip of her index finger on the surface of the ball, which is one way to enable a firmer wrist position, tighten up the thumb side of the hand and create more axis rotation, but in Coté's case it also has resulted in a painful callus on the tip of that finger. This index-finger pressure was very common back in my day on tour.

Another distinctive feature of Coté's game is her cupped wrist; she uses a firm grip with her thumb which contributed to yet another callus, this one on the back of her thumb. She wears thumb protection tape for that. It all adds up to a very firm wrist and grip, but she doesn't let it impede the freedom of her swing or affect its direction

### **Staying Sharp without a Tour to Bowl**

Without a tour to compete in after graduating college, Coté had to wait until 2015 for the PWBA to start up again. During that time, she kept sharp by bowling a couple of leagues a week, lacing up for every local tournament she could find, and bowling the couple of majors that were still contested annually — the Queens and the U.S. Open. She also worked fulltime in her father Dallas's janitorial business, which she still does today and keeps her mentally fresh for bowling.

When the tour restarted, that intense bowling schedule enabled her to hit the ground running. In her second year, 2016, she won her first title. But it took five long years to get title number two, the 2021 ITRC Classic during January's PWBA Kick-off Classic Series. One thing she learned to accept during that long wait between titles was that the more she fretted about standings and scores, the more her performance suffered. She put too much pressure on herself and that prevented her from staying in the moment.

These days, her advice to any player who will listen is, "The shot you just made is done. You can't change it, good or bad. The next shot is the only one that counts, so stay in the present rather than living in the past or thinking about the future." Having a short-term memory is not easy in this or any other sport, but it is absolutely essential to success. Coté,



#### **Support System**

*If you ever have heard a coach tell you to use your legs, Coté's rock-solid finish position here is exactly what they mean. Her feet support her legs, her legs then support the upper body, and her upper body then supports the arm, which then supports the hand.*

to her credit, learned to focus on just one thing at a time and eliminate the external things that were distracting her from the task at hand.

### **Keeping it Simple: Coté's Physical Game**

Coté has a very simple, five-step delivery with a late pushaway that is common among women bowlers. Late pushaways can be tricky things, chiefly because the ball-side arm and the leg pass each other at the same time. This creates an unbalanced position at that moment in the approach. The key to so-called "perfect timing" early on in the approach, conversely, is that the ball passes the bowling-side leg before that leg goes forward — step two in the four-step delivery and step three in the five-step delivery.

Coté says she has always had problems slowing down her feet, which makes sense because of her timing and super-free,

fast-moving backswing. With this timing, you have to really let the swing go totally free, which she does. This ensures that the weight of the ball doesn't pull her off balance, among other bad things that could happen if she were to grab the ball as it passed the bowling-side leg on the backswing. Another important attribute that enables her to stay balanced is her leg and core strength, which for Coté is the benefit of working with a personal trainer three days a week specifically on strength and endurance training.

### **Trail-Leg Dilemma**

Coté sets her hand in the stance, takes very little time there, and goes. She then always sticks the finish. Her finish position has been an ongoing project over the past five years, and the challenge here has been her trail leg. She used to finish with the medial side/arch of her trail foot on the floor, like PBA Tour champion Jakob Butturf does as he enters the



#### **Swinging Free, and with Power**

*While this technically is an unbalanced position with all Coté's weight and the ball right off her left leg and her right foot off the floor, it's also a testament to the strength of Coté's legs and core. Most others who stood this way with a 14-pound ball in their hand wouldn't be able to do it without leaning to the left to counterbalance their right side.*

release zone. This type of foot position keeps the hips open and, with the trail leg behind the sliding leg, it can cause the bowler to release the ball like they are standing on a balance beam — a weak position.

In order to make better use of her legs during the release and finish, Coté has been working on getting the trail foot to the lateral side/pinky-toe side of the foot. When she was releasing the ball from the old trail-foot position, she would constantly pull up out of the shot. Working on the trail foot/leg has helped her tremendously with staying down through the shot during the release and finish, hence using her legs better. This change of the trail-foot position is very difficult; after five years of working on it, it is an aspect of her game that remains a work in progress.

#### **Why Coté Uses a 14-Pound Ball**

Another major change Coté made was with her ball weight, as that work she has been doing on her trail leg caused her to lose some ball speed. After the Queens in 2017, Rob Gotchall, her tour rep at the time, proposed a solution: Try going down in weight from a 15-pound ball to 14 to get her speed up and increase her rev rate. As Coté was already using a 14-pound spare ball, the weight change wasn't an issue feel-wise, and it really did help with speed and revs. Meanwhile, the resultant increase in hook, ball speed and revs ensures that she loses little, if any, carry going to lighter equipment. There is one drawback to her increase ball motion, however: She has a little more trouble playing straighter, outside angles. But, as her 2021 PWBA Player of the Year award makes clear, freeing herself up to play more open angles has paid big-time dividends.

#### **On Target**

Coté's targeting system is very normal and old school; she looks at the area around the arrows, and she will fix on a target a little closer than that to get the ball to roll earlier and a little past the arrows. This helps her project the ball farther down the lane. She likes to keep things simple and repeatable. Even with all the modern-day hocus-pocus, Coté's game, and the tremendous success it has brought her, proves that high achievement in this sport still boils down to old-school, solid fundamentals to make good, consistent shots and knowledgeable decisions on ball selection and lane play. Indeed, Coté is one of the premier shot makers on tour today, with a well-balanced overall physical and mental game. ■

# Lesson Plan

by **Bill Spigner**

We always hear coaches and bowlers say to use your legs more. It's very true, sure. You need to use your legs. But what does that mean, really?

Well, your feet are of primary importance in your approach because they support everything from the ground up. The way that chain of support works is as follows: The feet support the legs, the legs support the upper body, which in turn supports the arm and then the hand, which in turn supports the ball. It starts right at the beginning, building your stance from the feet up, culminating with the finish position. The best finish position will vary relative to style from one bowler to the next, as will the use of the feet and legs.

For the past five years, Coté has been working on the position of her trail foot, which affects her trail leg. The pictures here show her and Jakob Butturff (with Butturff's pictures reversed to show a right-handed position like Coté's) entering the release zone, and again after the release. There is one huge difference between the two, their trail foot. Butturff is on the medial side of his foot, while

Coté is on the toe and finishes on the lateral side. She used to be more like Butturff. The problem she was having doing this, however, was that she couldn't stay down through the finish. Instead, she would constantly pull up, even trying to stay down.

In Coté's finish position after the release, you can see how low she stays now. Butturff's sliding leg has straightened out after the release; coming up out of the shot is very normal with the trail foot in his position. The sliding leg straightens out, which in turn raises the upper body, and the trail foot lifts off the floor after the release and the shot is finished in what looks like an out-of-balance position. But for many, including Butturff, they really are in balance at the release, which is the most important thing.

Coté grew up bowling with the foot more on the medial side, which developed her into a harder, straighter player. She started working on her trail foot to get her leg in a better position to post her finish better, which is using her trail leg differently than she did until she was almost 30. This was, and is, a very

hard change for someone who has been doing this for a long time, which is evidenced by her still working on it after five years. This change has opened up her game, resulting in her PWBA Bowler of The Year.

Today, with the more powerful releases featured at the sport's highest levels, the lower body is more open going into the slide, especially with two handers. This is why we see many more bowlers entering the release zone with the medial side of the foot on the floor. If you do this, let your sliding leg straighten after the release through the finish, but don't lose your forward spine tilt, which will help the upper body and arm continue its forward momentum to better complete the shot. Trying to stay down with knee flex will result in a loss of leverage and momentum.

The moral of the story is this: Never stop learning about what you have, and making what you have better. If ever there were a case in point here, it's that Coté, here in the middle of her pro career at age 35, and even fresh off a PWBA Player-of-the-Year season, continues to refine this important element of her game.



## **Footloose**

*Entering the release zone, Butturff's trail foot is on the medial side of his foot, while Coté's is on the toe and finishes on the lateral side. She used to be more like Butturff.*