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BOWLING

DIGEST

February 1997

*Jeri Edwards shows how aiming
for specific spots on the lane
can improve your scores*

Target Practice

- Bill Spigner on the perfect backswing
- Parker Bohn on ball surfaces
- A changing of the guard in the PBA
- The new-look U.S. Open

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With Time, Your Backs

■ *I have always had a high backswing. How high should an appropriate swing reach, and how can I adjust to that proper level and still keep my steady movements intact?*

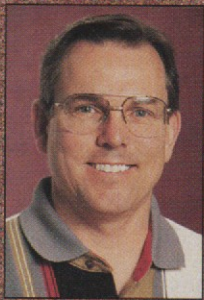
The height of the backswing and the ability to keep your approach smooth and coordinated are matters of timing. What has been considered an ideal backswing height is about shoulder-high. The reason shoulder-high is considered an ideal swing height is that that's as high as the ball can go without the upper body getting into a position to allow the swing to get higher. During the approach, the spine has about a 15-degree forward tilt, which keeps the shoulders over the step that you're taking. With this upper-body position, the ball can only reach shoulder-high at the peak of the swing; in order for the ball to get higher, either the shoulders must rotate open on the backswing, or the spine must tilt farther forward. Most players with a high backswing will do a combination of both.

The key to timing: The ball should reach the top of the swing at the completion of the step before the slide. This allows the swing to come forward with the last step, which will allow the upper body to position itself properly on the last step. With the upper body in the right position entering the last step, the ball can descend into the release zone with no effort.

If the swing is still going up as you're starting your last step, problems occur. Your upper body doesn't stay over the last step, which is reflected in a shorter spine angle; when the spine straightens close to perpendicular to the approach, the ball gets to the bottom of the swing way behind the sliding leg. When this occurs, the upper body has to move forward to get the ball in front of the sliding leg, so you can release the ball out onto the lane from the proper position.

As you can see, the problem with this is that a lot of muscle is used, and the upper body has to move a lot to get the ball to the release zone. This makes it difficult to repeat shots. Basically,

Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Mail your questions to: Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201.

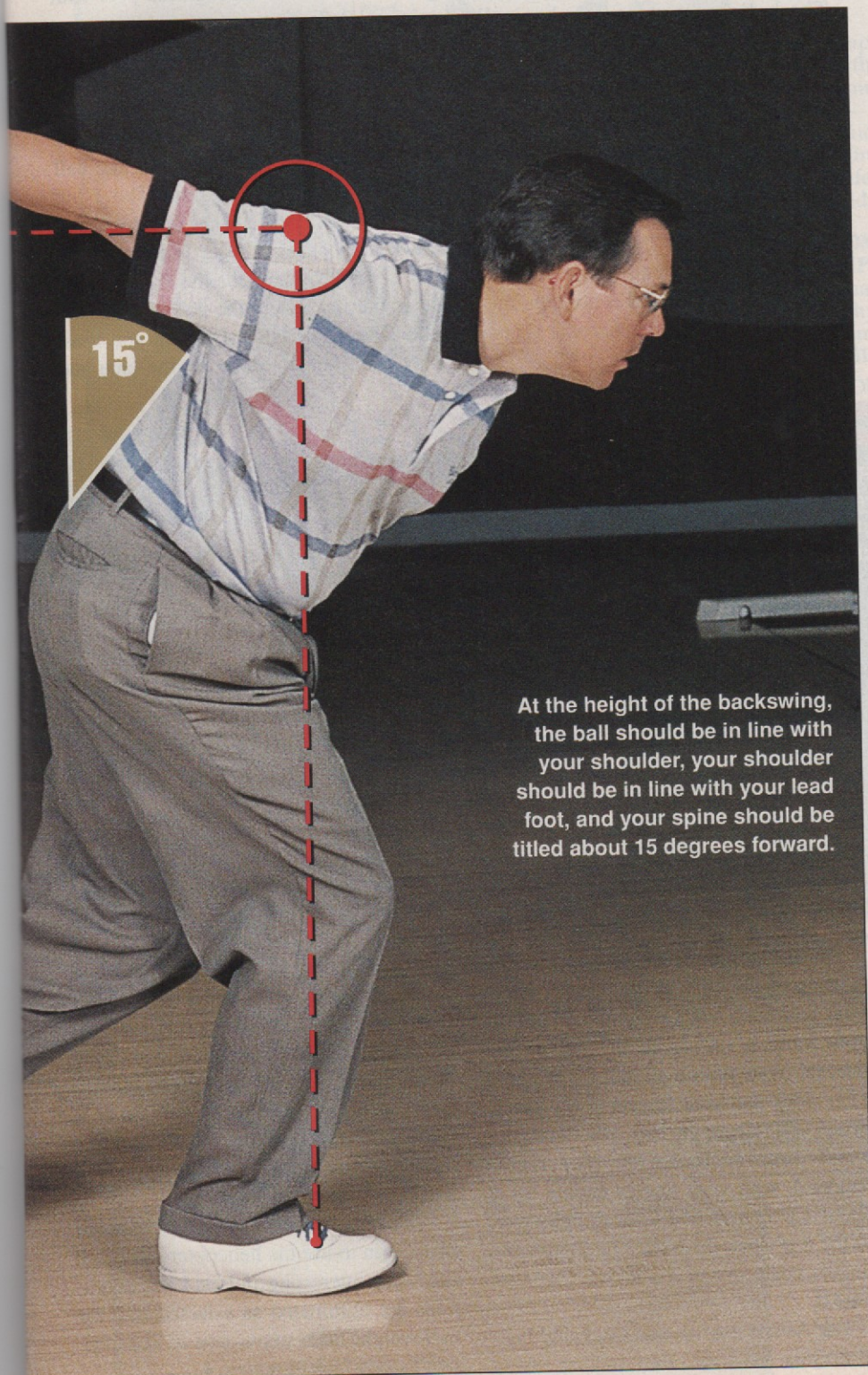


Bowling Clinic

By BILL SPIGNER



Swing Will Be Fine



At the height of the backswing, the ball should be in line with your shoulder, your shoulder should be in line with your lead foot, and your spine should be tilted about 15 degrees forward.

there are too many moving parts on the last step to be consistent.

There are a few key things you should think about to keep your approach smooth and well-timed. One is the speed of the swing from the start to the top. You want to keep the backswing slow. The ball has to stop at the top—if the swing is too fast to the top, you'll have to muscle the ball to stop it, and you'll also have to muscle the ball down through the release zone. So keep the tempo of your backswing slow and smooth.

Next, you want to make sure you don't force the downswing. Wait for the ball to reach the bottom of the swing before you do anything to the ball. You need to do this because your swing is very high, and with a high backswing the shoulders will have to open a lot to get the ball high. If you pull the ball from the top of the swing, the shoulders will close early, causing you to turn the ball early and throw your swing off its proper plane.

The "swing plane" is very important for accuracy. The swing should drop straight from the top and down through to the release zone. If the swing is knocked off this straight line, the dispersion of the ball on the lane increases. The key is to allow your shoulders to square up to your target line while keeping your swing on-line to your target.

With all things considered, all backswing heights are OK as long as your whole game fits together. This is not to say that bowlers can't adjust the height of their backswing—watching the men's and women's pro tours tells you that all types of swing heights work. The key to success is that your whole game complements your swing, mentally as well as physically.

■ I'm a once-a-week bowler with a 180 average. I want to average at least 185. How many practice games a week should I bowl to achieve this goal? Is it realistic to think I can reach 185 by bowling only once a week?

It's possible to bowl once a week and average 185, but only after you've put in the time and effort needed to make you a more polished and consistent player. Somewhere along the way, all good bowlers put in a lot of time to develop

their physical and mental games.

Considering your modest goal of improving by five pins, I think one practice session a week would be a wise choice. It's difficult to get a feel for the ball when you only bowl once a week; you're usually forced to begin each session by just trying to get a feel for yourself and the lanes. By adding a practice session, you develop more continuity and comfort. Your practice session should also be close enough to your scheduled bowling day that what you've worked on stays fresh in your mind.

What you practice is very important. Take some notes about your bowling on league night. The first thing to look at is how regularly your ball hits the pocket. When you miss the pocket, do you miss it to the left or to the right? Also note when you "lose" the pocket, and when it's easi-

■ I'm interested in learning about the "helicopter" technique, a style I hardly see used in this country. If this Asian technique is so successful, why isn't it being practiced here? Can you explain how the helicopter technique works? I've been bowling for 20 years and have yet to improve beyond a 170 average.

The helicopter release is basically rolling a full-spinner. The spinner release was popular in the United States in the 1920s, when shellac was the primary coating applied to the lane surface. The shellac was soft, and the spinner release was used to combat the hook so the ball would have some lift to it when it reached the pins.

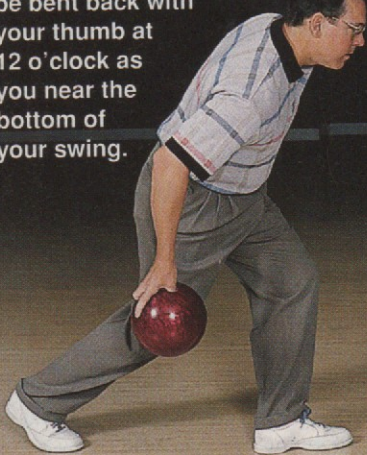
The Asians have not Americanized their lane conditions. Oil is not used there to create a path to the pocket as it is in the United States.

the lane out of play and on the ball to deflect off the pins. The spinner doesn't grab the lane, so it's sliding when it gets to the pins, and when the ball is sliding when it hits the pins, it deflects a lot. In the American version of tenpin bowling, the ball is *rolling* when it contacts the pins, and it drives through the pins with minimal deflection.

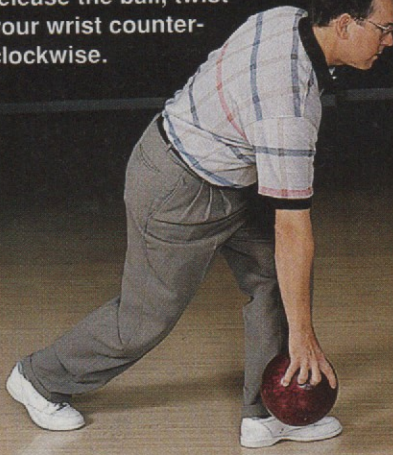
In our way of playing the game, it's crucial for the ball to take out the 5-pin to be able to strike consistently. The Asian pinfall is much different than ours: The ball still hits the 1-3 pocket, but the ball also hits the 6- and 10-pins. The 1-pin takes out the 2, the 2 takes out the 4, and the 4 takes out the 7; the 3-pin takes out the 5, which takes out the 8; the 6-pin takes out the 9; and the ball hits the 10-pin. To get this type of pinfall you must play from left of center on the lane and

The Helicopter Release

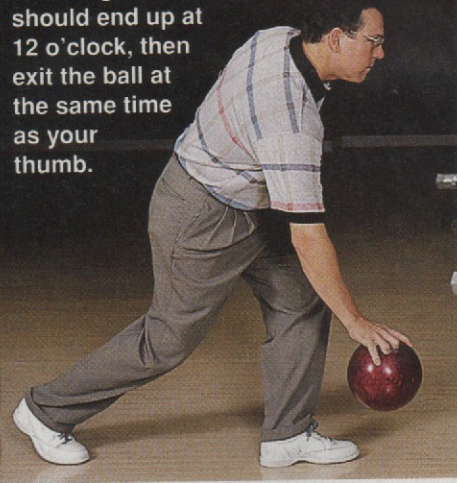
Your wrist should be bent back with your thumb at 12 o'clock as you near the bottom of your swing.



Right before you release the ball, twist your wrist counterclockwise.



Your fingers should end up at 12 o'clock, then exit the ball at the same time as your thumb.



est for you to hit it. Keep close track of your spare shooting. What weaknesses do you have? What are your strengths? And on all your shots—strike shots and spare balls—how do you feel physically? What percentage of your shots feel smooth and effortless?

Keep track of all this for a month. Make it your goal in practice to hit the pocket with a smooth, effortless shot. Don't worry about striking on every pocket hit. If you keep the ball in the pocket, you'll have easier spares to shoot at, and the strikes will come with small, smart adjustments.

The helicopter release uses a lot of twisting of the wrist at the release. To do this, you need your wrist bent back so your hand is on top of the ball at the release. Your thumb should be at about 12 o'clock and your fingers at 6 o'clock. When you release the ball, you twist your wrist counterclockwise (for righthanders), with your fingers ending up at about 12 o'clock and your thumb down to the 6 o'clock position. The thumb and fingers come out of the ball at the same time.

The Asians use 10- and 11-pound balls to do this. To score, they rely on taking

try to get the ball to hit high on the headpin and then deflect off to the right.

If you were to take up this style of bowling, it might be possible to get your average over 200. Unfortunately, however, there is very little support in the U.S. for this style of bowling, mostly due to a lack of knowledge—which means it would be difficult to learn.

With time we may see some Americans begin to use the helicopter release. It has some interesting pluses: Lane conditions are eliminated as a factor, and the lightweight balls allow you to compensate for any lack of power. ●