

**SHOOTING
SPARES**

**THE
PERFECT
SYSTEM**

How to play through—and prevent—injuries

BOWLING

DIGEST

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A Basic System for Sp

You advocate changing to a hard plastic ball when shooting spares, a tactic pros take all the time. How do you line up for doing this? It would seem it can't be off your strike line, since the urethane or resin balls used for strikes hook so much. Please explain.

Basically, when rolling a straight ball for spares, you can play the shots from anywhere on the lane. The key to having success with spares is that you have a *system* for making them. Foremost in that system should be playing the best angles on those shots. Most pros will use the middle of the lane—anywhere from the third arrow to the fifth arrow—for every spare at which they roll a straight shot.

I recommend that you use the arrows as your targets on all spare shots. First, you need to know where the pins are in relationship to the arrows. When you look at the pins, you can see seven of them: the 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 10. There are seven arrows on the lanes and seven dots at the foul line. The pins, arrows, and dots all line up with one another. Also, there are two rows of dots on the approach that line up with the arrows and the pins. (On some approaches there are only five dots across the width of the approach; the dots that are missing are the ones that would line up with the 7- and 10-pins and the arrows closest to the gutters.) Counting the arrows right to left (facing the pins), the 10-pin lines up with the first arrow, the 6-pin with the second arrow, the 3-pin with the third arrow, and so on.

Once you understand where the pins are in relationship to the dots and arrows, it might seem logical to just roll the ball straight over the first arrow when shooting at the 10-pin and over the seventh arrow when shooting the 7-pin. But it's very difficult to roll the ball that close to the gutter. Pivoting off a target located in the center of the lane is the best way to develop a system for making spares.

Let's build a basic system with the fourth arrow—the middle arrow—as our target for all

spares, which should be shot with as straight a ball as possible. This system should be seen merely as a good foundation for what you can do; you'll have to make some modifications based on how you roll the ball.

Let's start with the 1-pin. Your laydown point will be the center dot (the 20th board) at the foul line; if you roll the ball directly over the fourth arrow, it will hit the 1-pin straight on.

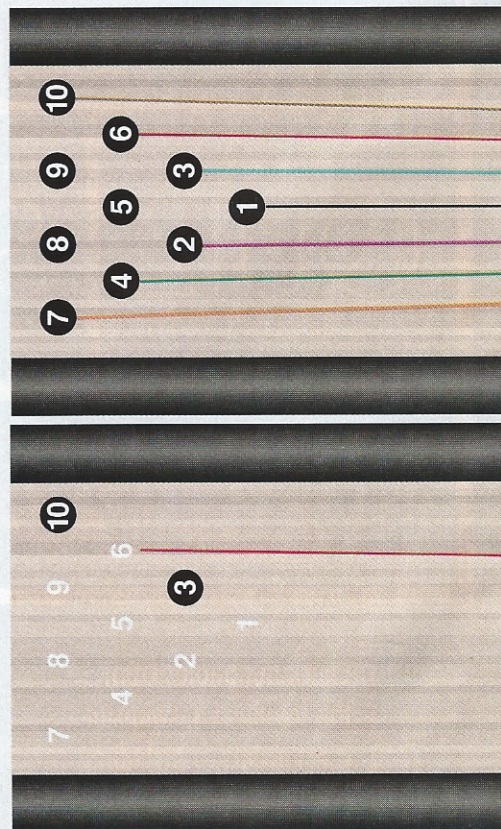
Now, for every pin left of the 1-pin, you'll have to move your feet to the right so your laydown point is further right. To convert the 2-pin, move your laydown point to the 18th board. For the 4-pin, your laydown point will be the 14th board. For the right-side spares, do essentially the same thing, moving your feet and the laydown point to the left. For the 3-pin, move your laydown point to the 22nd board; for the 6-pin, it should be the 24th board; and for the 10-pin, it should be the 26th board.

That only covers how to make seven single-



Bowling Clinic

By BILL SPIGNER



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.

are Shooting

pin spares. But by using the knowledge of how to make these seven key pins, you can figure out how to attack any spare. For example, if you leave "the bucket"—the 2-4-5-8—the key pin in this cluster is the 2; line up where you would to make the 2-pin. If you have the 3-10 split, the key pin to shoot at is the 6, even though it's not standing. If you leave the 6-10, you have two key pins for this shot; in this situation, split the difference on where you would play the two key pins.

It's very difficult to roll a perfectly straight ball; if you have a slight curve, you'll have to adjust your laydown point. If you have a *very* slight curve—let's say three boards—adjust your laydown point by about one board to compensate for the three-board curve. If the curve is about six boards, adjust the laydown point by about two boards.

Now, let's discuss where your start should be on the approach. You'll have to figure out where you need to start so that you'll end up with your laydown point in a beneficial spot in relationship to your target. The laydown point of the center of the ball will be approximately six to eight inches away from the inside edge of your sliding foot or your ankle. For example, if the inside edge of a right-handed player's sliding foot ends up on the 20th board, the laydown point of the center of the ball will be around the 12th or 14th board.

This method is just an example of what you can do. With seven different laydown points and one target on the lane, you can make almost any spare you can think of. We want to keep spare shooting as simple as possible; learning the relationship of the pins, arrows, and dots will greatly help. Use this information to form your

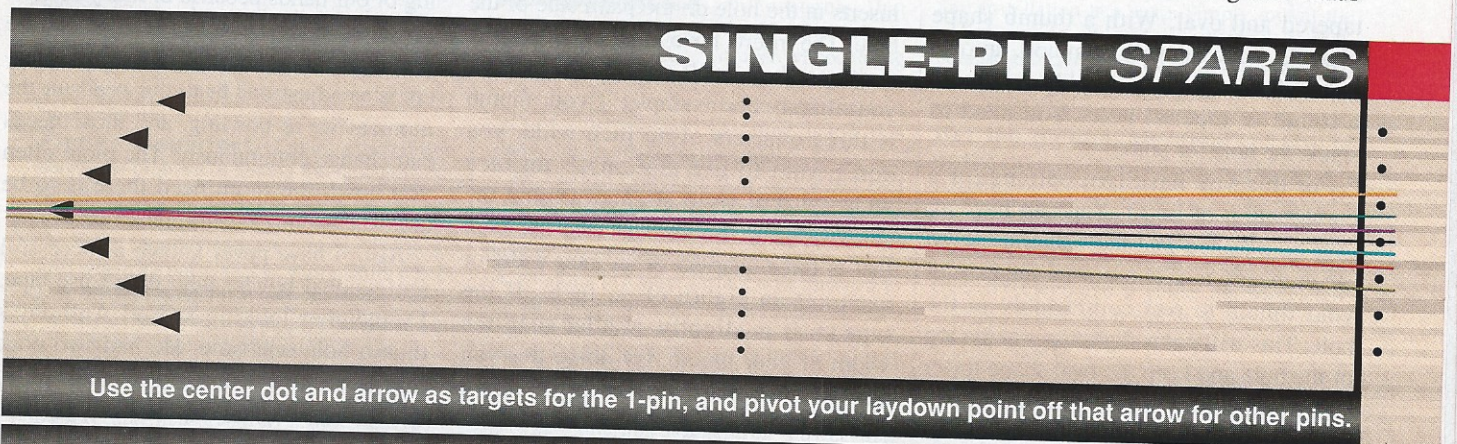
own system. You can use any target on the lane as your pivot point to make the spares, but keep your system based off the center of the lane. Have a system you can rely on, and take the guesswork out of the spare shooting.

I have a flat thumb, and it's very difficult for me to get a good grip on the ball. I've tried oval inserts, smaller thumb holes, and different amounts of tape, but nothing has felt comfortable. I prefer to have nothing but my thumb in the thumb hole. What do you recommend?

Your problem is not unusual. You have to keep an open mind about what it may take for you to have a good feel. You say you've tried oval thumb inserts, drilled small holes, and worked out the holes to fit your thumb, and that you don't want to use tape or anything in the hole. But you have to keep trying.

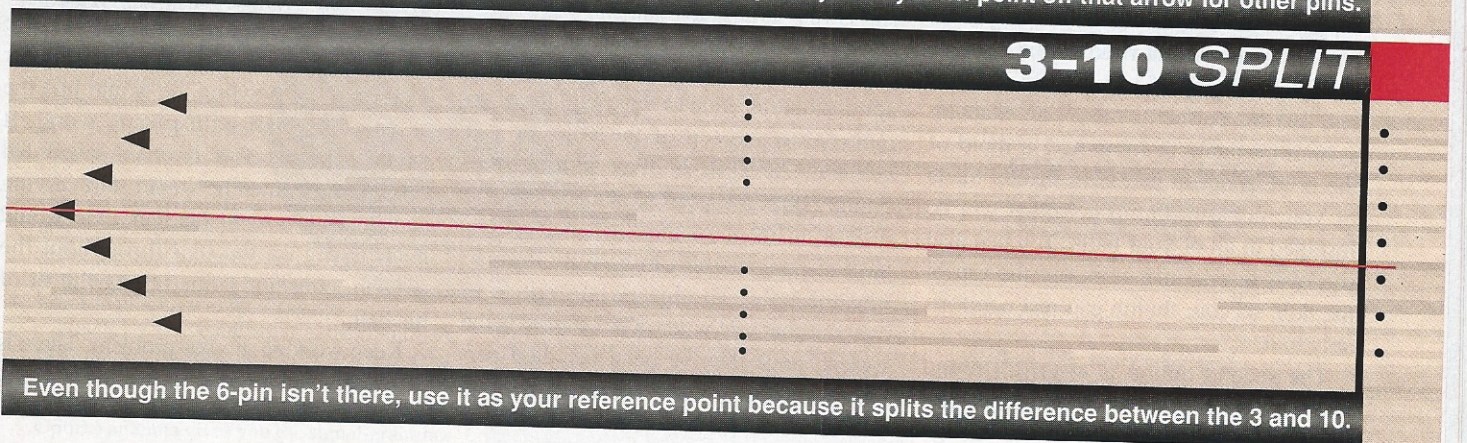
Let's take a good look at your type of thumb. At the knuckle, you are much wider than you are thick. This is very normal because the joint under the skin is wider at that point of the thumb. You get the most friction at the widest spot; this friction can cause blistering and callus-

SINGLE-PIN SPARES



Use the center dot and arrow as targets for the 1-pin, and pivot your laydown point off that arrow for other pins.

3-10 SPLIT



Even though the 6-pin isn't there, use it as your reference point because it splits the difference between the 3 and 10.



A tapered and oval thumb is thickest at the base and thins out in the direction the tip [A], but its width is the same from knuckle to knuckle [B]. Inserting cork in the front of the hole and tape in the back [C] will help with comfort.

DAVID DUFROCHIK/BBB (3)

ing, which over time will make this part of your thumb even wider. The base of your thumb on the palm side of your hand also endures a lot of wear; calluses will form there also. For most people, the base of the thumb is thicker than the tip.

Look at the shape of your thumb in two ways: (1) around the knuckle—which we already know is very oval—and (2) at the base of your thumb. If the base of your thumb is as thick as your thumb is wide at the joint, the shape of your thumb is tapered and oval. With a thumb shape like this, which is very common, an oval hole will not solve your problem, nor will a round or tapered hole. You need to shape the hole for both.

For this you have two options (or a combination of both). You can have an oval hole drilled into the ball and carved out at the top to give room for the base of your thumb to rest comfortably in the hole. This will put a slight taper at the top of the hole and keep the oval shape lower in the hole. This method is difficult to repeat from ball to ball because of the amount of work that needs to be done to get the ball to fit; if you happen to get a ball that fits perfectly, there's an exacting system available that can take a mold of the hole, and you can have inserts made of your favorite thumb hole that can be installed in all of your balls. You can also use oval inserts and work out the top of the hole so your thumb can rest comfortably in it.

The second option is to drill a round hole or use a tapered or round thumb insert. You need to have the hole large

enough so the side of your thumb around the knuckle is barely touching the walls of the hole. Now the hole is going to feel really loose. You'll have slight friction on the sides of your thumb, so bend your thumb to get its pad to rest on the wall of the hole; this will give you a good grip. You'll need to fill the extra space with tape and/or cork inserts so you don't have to grip the ball tightly.

How the inserts are installed is a big key to comfort. You need to put the inserts in the hole on the palm side of the hole. The inserts have to be of the correct width so they don't overlap the side of your thumb. For example, if your thumb is three-quarters of an inch wide, you don't want to use tape that's an *inch* wide—it will wrap slightly around the sides of your thumb. Instead, use tape that is three-quarters of an inch wide, or even cut an eighth of an inch off the tape so it is slightly smaller than the width of your thumb. By doing this you can use more pieces, so when you take a piece out for sizing, the size of the hole changes less.

Next, the inserts need to be placed about a quarter-inch to three-eighths of an inch below the top of the hole, or just below the bevel if you have a lot of bevel on the hole. You need to start putting the inserts in lower so the thick part of the base of your thumb can be fully inserted into the hole. The inserts are put in to oval out the hole where your thumb is the widest; once they've been installed correctly, the thumb hole will have an oval shape and a slight taper to it. If the hole is

still a little too large, add tape to the back of it (opposite the other inserts). Start this tape close to the top of the hole; if you need to add even more tape, put each succeeding piece an eighth of an inch lower than the previous piece. By staggering the tape like this, you'll be able to remove one piece at a time if your thumb swells.

Keep an open mind about what you can do to get a good-feeling thumb hole. Remember, our bodies are not perfect—we will experience swelling and shrinking of our hands because of many factors. So there really is no hole that can be drilled to the perfect fit. Our job as players is to adjust our fit to our needs at the moment we're bowling, and those needs can change continuously. The more often you bowl, the more need there is to be able to customize your thumb hole.

Also, I have never known a successful professional bowler who didn't use tape. I remember looking at Earl Anthony's thumb hole one time: He had two cork inserts side-by-side in his thumb hole, along with a couple of pieces of tape. The great Carmen Salvino used to use plastic wood to adjust the fit of his ball. After each round of bowling, he would line the holes of his ball with plastic wood. It would harden before his next scheduled bowling time, then he would start carving and sanding it to fit his hand. He would be working on the ball throughout the session, constantly fine-tuning the fit of his ball.

Keep working at your problem. There is a solution for it, or at least a system you can be much more comfortable with. ●