

Bowlers Journal

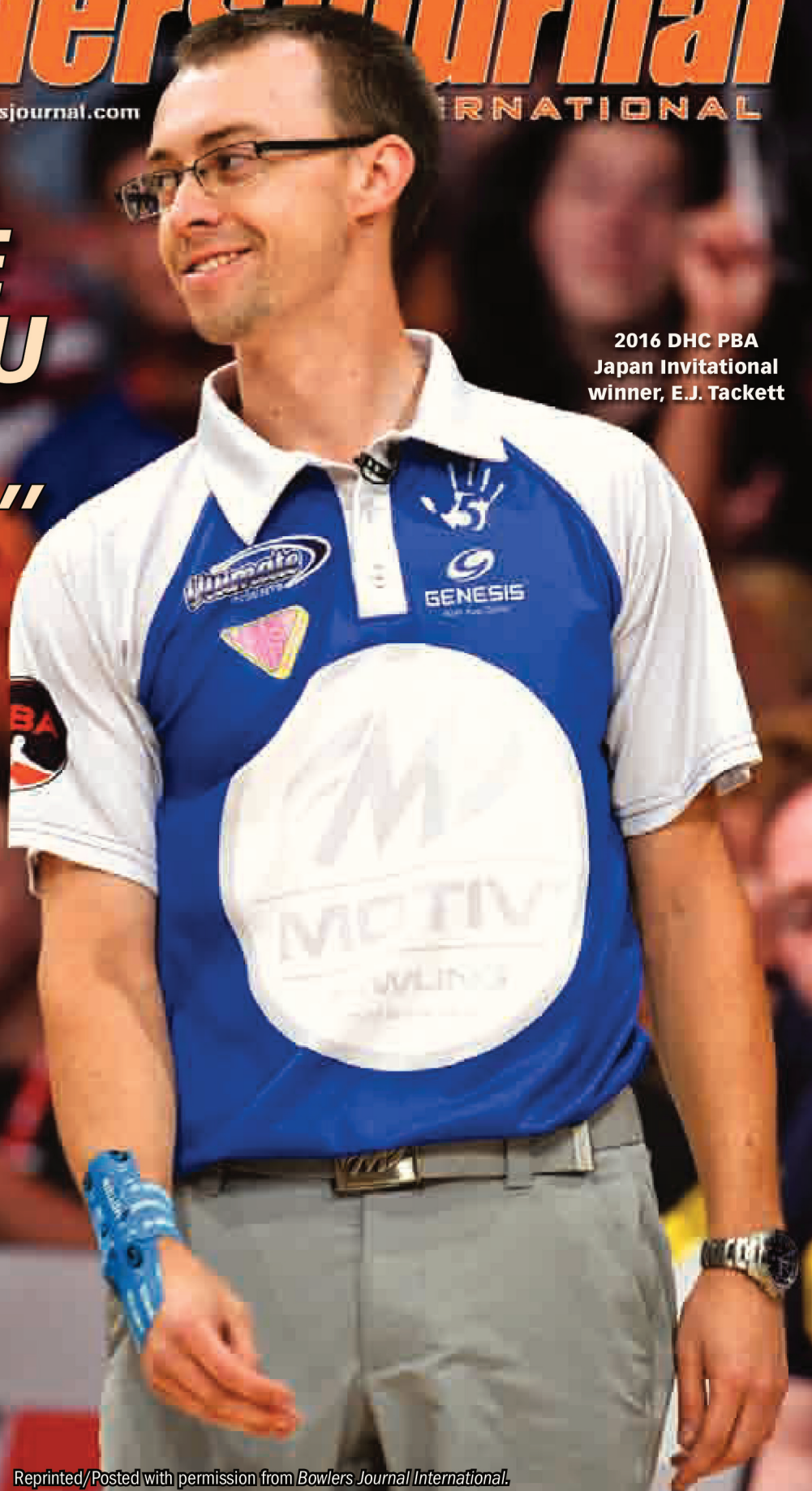
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INTERNATIONAL

**"I'M THE
GUY. YOU
COME
GET ME."**

Once dreadful
for E.J. Tackett,
TV now is dreadful
for his opponents

2016 DHC PBA
Japan Invitational
winner, E.J. Tackett



THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { billspigner@aol.com }



Do Not Try This Approach at Home

JAKOB BUTTURFF is one of the most interesting bowlers in the world today. He had a breakout year in 2016, winning two PBA Tour titles and a record nine PBA Regional titles. When he gets it going, he's difficult to beat. But he seems to either win or not be close.

That probably can be attributed to his youth. He's 22. The big swings between winning and finishing down in the standings should diminish with experience. It takes something special to be good enough to win as often as he does when he gets the chance.

Jakob has the most unusual style on the tour today. In an era when effective styles have greatly expanded, fueled primarily by the two-handed players, Jakob's game is kind of a cross between a two-handed and a traditional one-handed delivery.

He bowls with one hand and has his thumb in the ball, which is not unusual, but he uses a conventional grip with larger holes, which is highly unusual. He takes five steps and starts his delivery with his heels at the back of the approach — pretty typical. What happens after that is not what a coach would normally teach.

In his set-up, Jakob holds the ball more to the middle of his body, below waist-high, with his arms almost fully straight. He has his wrist curled and cupped, and starts his pushaway with his first step, which is early. During the ball's movement he curls his wrist more, and continues to curl it to a position where his palm is on the right-front half of the ball (when looking at it from his right side). If you were to look at it like a clock, his thumb would be pointed down to about 5 o'clock and his fingers up to about 1 o'clock — almost an

impossible position for someone with normal flexibility to achieve.

Jakob says he can get there because he is double-jointed. But there really is no such thing. It's called *hypermobility*, which gives some people extreme flexibility, especially in their joints. It's not a great thing to have, but for Jakob it allows him to get his hand in a position that others can't possibly attain.

From this extreme hand position, he cradles the ball during his backswing, which greatly reduces the length of the swing. This cradling/carrying the ball throughout his swing is very similar to

the style of the two-handed players. He has the ball rolled up onto his forearm during the approach, with about a 90-degree bend in his wrist and some elbow bend.

When he starts, his upper body leans forward to about 35 degrees during the first two steps, which is a lot at this juncture. This forward lean, coupled with his early ball placement, makes his feet go fast to stay ahead of his very short swing, which is below waist-high and is, by far, the shortest swing by a one-hander with their thumb in the ball on tour today.

His speed to the foul line is what gives Jakob the ability to roll the ball fast enough and have a very fast-moving hand though the release. His hand position and speed to the line enable him to generate about 500-rpm on the ball, which is at the higher end of rev rate. This level of rev rate is unusual for someone with a short swing and who is still sliding during and after the release of the ball.

Jakob's hand position as the ball starts down from the top of the swing (looking at it from a rear view) is a continuation of his hand position when he starts. As the ball is descending to the release, his thumb is pointing straight to the floor, at about 6 o'clock, and his fingers are up at about 2 o'clock. They stay there until his thumb is ready to exit the ball, and when the thumb starts to exit, his wrist uncocks, turning the fingers across the back of the ball until they are pointed down to the floor (about 7 o'clock). Then the elbow and wrist flex back, generating the revs.

You could say the turn with his fingers goes from 2 o'clock to about 7 o'clock when they exit. He turns down

LESSON PLAN

THERE IS not a great deal about Jakob Butturff's physical game that I would recommend trying. His mental game, however, is another matter.

Jakob has a good handle on who he is, and has surrounded himself with lots of good bowling people. Over the past two years, he has really focused on his mental game. He says he used to get very flustered by a bad shot or a bad game. Now, he is mentally much stronger, able to remain focused, and doesn't let bad shots or poor games get to him.

Any bowler would benefit from thinking that way.

— Bill Spigner



Left, Jakob's hand position at the completion of his second step. His hand is on the right side of the ball, showing his extreme flexibility. At times, with other hand positions, his hand is even more toward the front side of the ball at this point in his approach. Right, the culmination of Jakob's unusual delivery at release. All positions are in the right place to execute a very well-balanced, great release. You can see how much he has turned the ball from the left picture compared to where he ends up here. This position is one that a lot of bowlers can emulate.

through the ball, which is very common today with players working their turn from the inside of the ball.

I asked Jakob about his targeting system. He said he looks at the foul line and picks one board to hit there. This, too, is unusual, as someone who looks at the foul line typically has two or three other targets farther down the lane to roll the ball through for the line they want it to travel.

He likes to get the ball into an early roll, and says targeting at the foul line helps him do that. He also uses a lot of urethane and likes to play straighter lines, which is the best thing to do on the left side. He also said that when the lanes dry up, the left-handers have to

move out instead of in to find some oil, get away from the righties' ball track and keep the ball from hooking too much.

Jakob's game developed by being very natural and not standardizing his form according to what others thought it should be. He has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, one symptom of which is difficulty in staying focused unless it involves something that interests him. I have a lot of experience teaching kids and some adults with ADHD, and the key as a coach was learning the things that each bowler was interested in doing.

For anyone who teaches bowling, it's important to mold yourself to the student, not force the student to mold

himself to you. It would be tough to teach someone like Jakob to bowl, but coaches have to be open-minded about the good things a player has, and work within their game. Throughout our sport's history, we have seen many unusual styles succeed, and it's often the unique things in a delivery that allow a player do something that others can't... and to win.

Jakob says he would bowl 20 games a day as a youth. Bowling fit his personality, and with all those reps, he was able to develop a different style and great strike ball that is repeatable.

It's a style that worked wonders two times on the PBA Tour and nine times on the PBA Regional Tour in 2016.

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