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2020 PBA
Hall of Fame
inductee
and Hall of
Fame Classic
champion
Tommy Jones

Fame — AND — Fortune

The story behind
Tommy Jones's fairy tale
weekend in Arlington

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { billspigner@aol.com }

Getting the Arm Back in Line

CONTINUING WITH our series of questions from readers, we have one dealing with the armswing. It comes from Paul Heger.

Paul writes: "I'm a right-hander and have been bowling for 25 years. I was a high-average bowler and still am at times. Suddenly my backswing seems to be locked up. I can't seem to get the ball in the slot consistently, and my ball speed has dropped considerably. It feels like I'm locked up and can't get my backswing to the top. I'm hitting my spot consistently but at different angles. Maybe it's just age. Thanks for your help."

Well, Paul, as we get older we lose flexibility, which can play havoc with our game. Our steps become shorter and

to generate power and repeat shots, they would be our legs and our swing.

The feet and legs provide the foundation for supporting the whole system of delivering a bowling ball. The feet control direction and speed, and provide support for the legs and upper body. This supports the swing, which, in turn, supports the release. All of that put together correctly gives us consistency and power.

Starting with the legs, it's normal to take shorter and slower strides as we age. But knowing that we need foot speed to gain enough momentum to

The next thing to do at the start is to get the ball moving sooner than you typically have been doing in order to get the ball into the swing earlier than what has been normal for you. This earlier ball placement will get the feet moving faster, which will help speed up the swing.

You can do this by shortening your push-away or by unhinging your arms instead of pushing the ball way out. The key is to relinquish control over the ball after the push-away so the swing frees up.

Initially, you might lose some hand action. But with today's house shots, there is always a place on the lane to help your ball hook without forcing hand action to hook it.

Also as we get older, our flexibility in the hips lessens, which can make you lose some lateral spine tilt. Without enough lateral spine tilt, the arm will not swing under the head and bowling-side shoulder on the backswing. This is where a weaker hand position becomes an asset to free up the backswing.

In this day and age, everyone thinks they need to be behind the ball, cupping the wrist and the fingers inside the thumb from the set-up throughout the approach. This is great if you have the lateral spine tilt to let the arm swing back, perpendicular to the floor, as it's passing your bowling-side leg.

However, without sufficient lateral tilt, we need a weaker hand position so the ball plays lighter during the swing. This will enable you to have a freer swing, which will greatly help in the consistency of its direction.

Another thing: If your push-away is late, a weaker hand position will free up

IF WE WERE TO PICK OUT THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT CONTROL OUR ABILITY TO GENERATE POWER AND REPEAT SHOTS, THEY WOULD BE OUR LEGS AND OUR SWING.

slower, we get less forward and lateral spine tilt, as well as less knee bend. This, in turn, can be part of the cause of the swing getting out of line, shorter and slower.

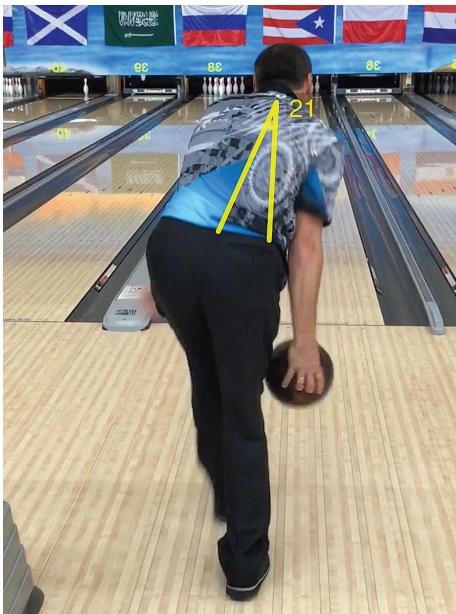
That's the bad news. The good news is that there are things we can do to combat the impact of the aging process on our game.

If we were to pick out the two most important things that control our ability

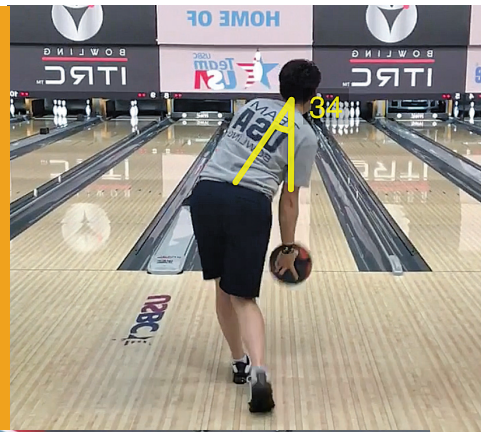
propel the ball down the lane with sufficient speed, we need to do a couple of things to free up the swing and move faster.

In your stance, you need to have a hand position that is in a neutral position. I would recommend that you have your thumb positioned at about 10 or 11 o'clock (for a right-hander like you), without cupping the wrist. This will put your hand in a relaxed position.

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It is key to match up your hand position on the backswing with your lateral tilt and your timing. The less side tilt, the more the hand should be on the outside of the ball at that point. The more tilt you have, the more the hand and wrist can move progressively toward the inside of the ball on the backswing. The most important thing is that your hand is in position to make the ball feel very light, and make yourself feel like you are working less physically to deliver the ball. Working hard physically to deliver the ball greatly reduces shot repeatability.



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the swing. And a free swing becomes a more consistent swing.

The next thing to think about is your thumb-hole size. If you have to re-grip or grab the ball to hang onto it during the swing, it will play havoc with your swing. The two critical places this happens are when the swing is passing the bowling-side leg during the backswing,

and/or on the downswing before the release. This is hard for many people to feel, so it will require concentration to think about whether this is happening. (A second pair of eyes, from a qualified coach, can also be quite beneficial.)

Once you start to understand that you might be grabbing onto the ball, you can take steps to work on not doing that.

Paul, one of the things you said was you are hitting your target but at different angles. This is normally a result of the walk and/or swing direction being inconsistent. Check to see if you are sliding on the same board at the end of the shot each time.

Besides that, I would recommend that you concentrate on finishing off the shot the same way every time physically, and not worry about hitting a particular board. If you walk two boards right one time, then two left the next time, the target is no longer correct and trying to hit the target, instead of completing the physical shot, will affect the angle at which you cross your target.

Posting your finish (completing the physical shot) will give you the ability to project the ball down the lane on a consistent path.

LESSON PLAN

FREEING UP your armswing will quicken your approach to the line, make it smoother and enable you to complete the shot by posting your finish.

It's hard to relinquish control. But "allowing" the swing and footwork to happen helps greatly with developing momentum to the line.

Like the old saying goes, "Trust is a must or your game is a bust." Let the ball swing without grabbing it, and your swing and feet will speed up and you'll be more consistent.

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