

Women's Bowler of the Year: Lisa Wagner

BOWLING

DIGEST

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Bill Spigner's Bowling Clinic

■ I have a problem keeping my feet pointed straight ahead. How can I correct this?

This sounds like a physical problem; it's possible that your feet just aren't "built" to point straight ahead. The thing you should be concerned with is the direction of your walk, not how your feet point. You should be walking either straight or slightly to the left if you are right-handed (or straight or slightly to the right if you're a lefty).

Your sliding foot also does not need to be pointed straight ahead at the finish of your shot. The key is that you are well balanced and your body is in the correct position to allow your swing to project your ball along your target line; you shouldn't have to realign your swing at the release point.

■ My problem is I will string four or five strikes together and then catch a rail. It seems on the one ball I do this I'm not giving my ball room; instead I'm aiming it. What advice can you give me to overcome this problem?

The key to continuing to string strikes is to stay in tune with your shot-making and how you are playing the lanes. In your situation, you have the tendency to steer your ball; you should concentrate on trusting your swing. You probably start thinking about your string of strikes, and consequently your muscles tighten up a little. When this happens, many times on the downswing you will pull your shoulder forward, which in turn will pull your swing off line. You need to concentrate on allowing your arm to swing forward from your shoulder and not using your shoulder to bring your swing forward to the release zone. When your shoulder pulls your swing forward to the release zone, it causes you to turn your hand early, and your swing will head inside your target line.

On strings of strikes, stay aggressive and let your arm swing through. Trust your swing and your mechanics to get the job done.

■ Can you explain to me how an 80% handicap league is fair to bowlers with both lower and higher averages? I don't understand how a percentage of the dif-

ference between average and 200 can be anything but biased in favor of bowlers with better averages. Also, isn't it just as difficult for a lower-average bowler to maintain his average as it is for a higher-average bowler?

The handicap is not used to make all bowlers equal; it is used so a lower-average bowler can have a chance against a higher-average player. Not too many years ago, the most popular handicap percentage was 66.6% of 200. This was raised to 70%, then 80%, and now in many mixed leagues 90% or 100% handicap is used.

The lower-average bowler has more chance of bowling scores above his average and improving during the season because there are more scores this player can roll between his average and 300. The lower-average bowler usually only has to spare a few more times a game to improve his average, while the higher-average bowler usually has to get more strikes to improve his.

As for your second question, yes, it's just as difficult for lower-average bowlers to maintain their average as it is for high-average players—provided the averages truly represent their abilities on a given lane condition. On some conditions, a bowler with a 190 average easily can drop to 175, but the 140-average bowler more than likely will not drop to 125. Lane conditions are less of a factor to lower-average bowlers than to higher-average bowlers.

If everyone used 100% handicapping, it would take away some incentive for a bowler to try to average higher. Also, 100% handicapping would only promote "sandbagging," or the practice of keeping one's average down for handicap purposes. The lower the percentage of handicap that is given, the more incentive there is for a bowler to play his best all the time because there is less of a handicap advantage. It is true that an 80% handicap will favor the higher-average bowler, but there should be some reward for someone who has invested in practice time and in equipment to get better.

The only way to make all things



Bill Spigner has won three national PBA championships and seven regional PBA titles. He is co-owner of Hawthorn Lanes in Vernon Hills, Ill., and teaches at Pro Bowling Camps summer camp in Connecticut.

equal is to have a scratch (non-handicap) league in which every team must have the same team average, which is very difficult to do. In my bowling center, our ladies' scratch league forms new teams each year based on average, so that each team's average is within a couple of pins of the others.

■ How does a professional bowler use psyching techniques to win, and how do you counteract these techniques?

The most popular psyching technique on the PBA Tour is to outscore your opponent! In this day and age, to succeed on the PBA Tour takes total attention to one's own game, and trying to think up ways to psych out one's opponents would just waste valuable mental energy. Also, if a PBA player was purposely trying to do something to distract another player it could be viewed as conduct unbecoming a professional, and heavy fines could result.

Every player has his own style and way of showing his emotions. Some bowlers will even practice certain "moves" for specific situations—but those are used to entertain the fans, not to psych out an opponent. ●

Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers and will answer as many as possible in this column. Mail your questions to: Bill Spigner, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201.