

# Don't Add Weight— Instead, Accelerate

By **BILL SPIGNER**

■ *I've always used a 15-pound ball. I'm a healthy male at 6'2" and 220 pounds and throw with medium to high revs and a speed of 16.5 to 17.5 mph (18 mph at spares).*

*I've recently bought a 16-pound reactive resin ball, hoping to get more hitting power and pin action. I do, but I only seem to throw this ball at 13.5 to 14.5 mph using my same five-step approach as always.*

**What would you suggest I do to boost my ball speed, other than going back to a 15-pound ball?**

That's a lot of speed to lose just by changing the weight of the ball by one pound, assuming the lane conditions are the same. Now, when the lanes have less oil, that could slow your speed down.

But let's assume that's not the case and you're losing speed on the same oil condition. You are a medium- to high-rev player, which tells me

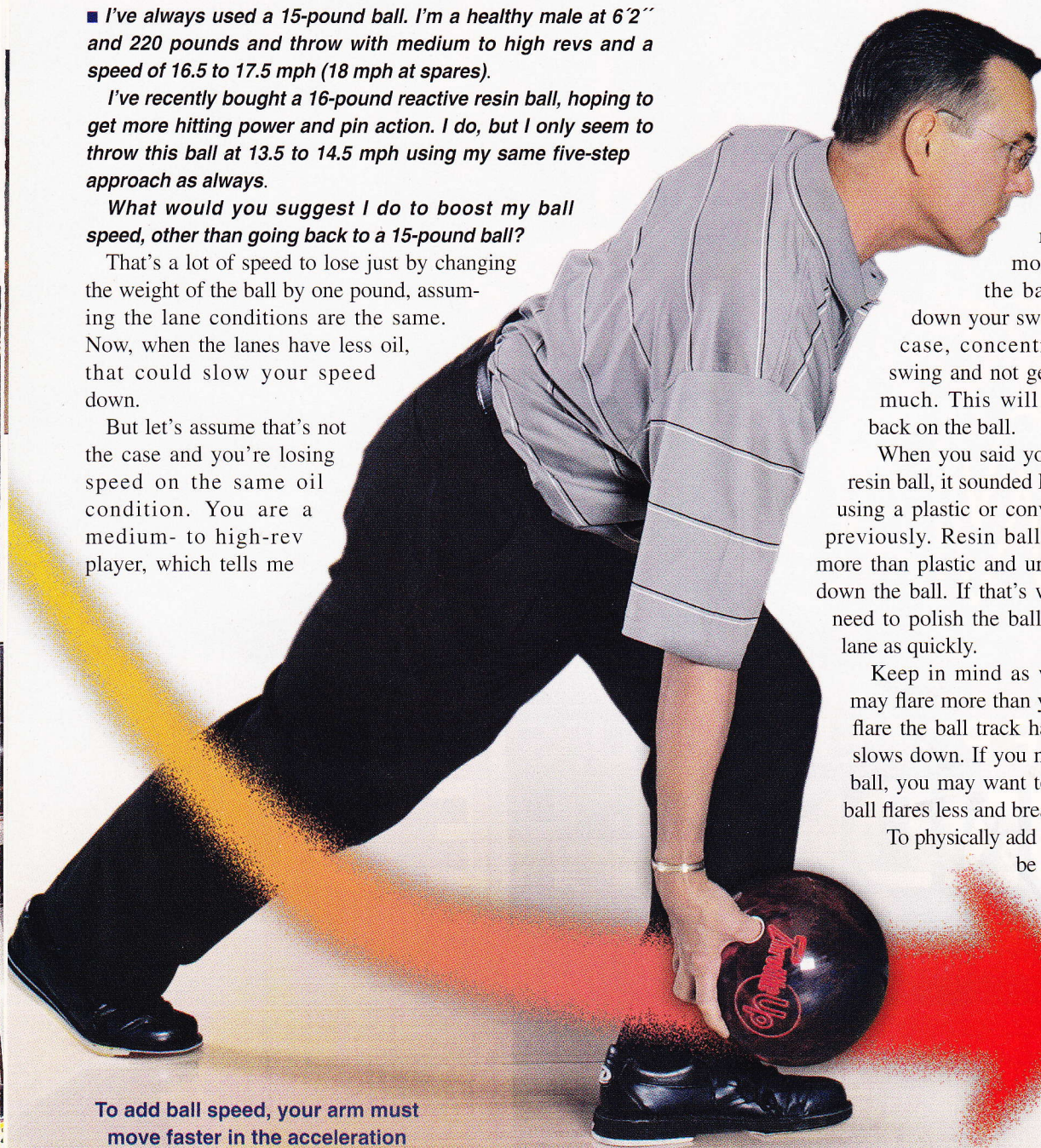
you are getting your fingers under the ball. To do this you have to slightly cup your wrist and/or slightly bend your elbow. With the extra pound, you may have to exert more effort to get under the ball, which could slow down your swing speed. If this is the case, concentrate on freeing your swing and not getting under the ball as much. This will help get more speed back on the ball.

When you said you purchased a reactive resin ball, it sounded like you may have been using a plastic or conventional urethane ball previously. Resin balls grab the lane much more than plastic and urethane, and that slows down the ball. If that's what is happening, you need to polish the ball so it doesn't grab the lane as quickly.

Keep in mind as well that the new ball may flare more than your old one. The more flare the ball track has, the quicker the ball slows down. If you now have a high-flaring ball, you may want to get it redrilled so the ball flares less and breaks later.

To physically add more speed, you need to be able to get your arm to travel faster just before your release. In other words, you have to create a better "acceleration zone."

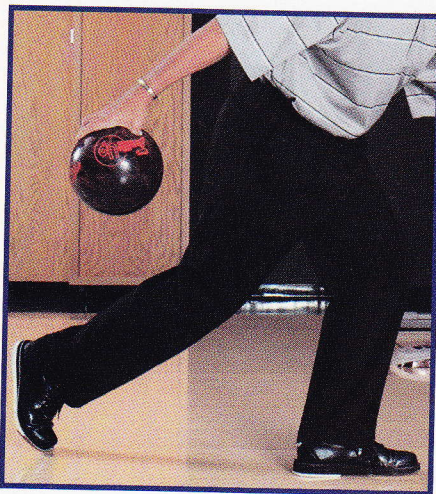
Your acceleration zone should begin about 12 to 18 inches



**To add ball speed, your arm must move faster in the acceleration zone, depicted in red.**

before the ball reaches the bottom of your swing (in other words, just before the ball reaches the back of your leg), so that the ball is traveling at its peak speed when it releases off the thumb. The armswing needs to gradually build up speed from top to bottom. Don't *pull* the swing down—let gravity bring the ball down. That way, when your body gets set up for the release, you'll have a stable position to release the ball from, enabling you to accelerate the arm and hand through the release zone.

The timing has to be right. Your slid-



**Sledge Hammer, Truck, and Brunswick Zone HPD. The first game I play slow, around the 10-board. The second and third games, I have to move left and play inside out with a lot of speed. The lanes are oiled 20 feet, buffed out to 38 feet. I have seen the owner struggle and throw up to six different balls around 20 mph from the 5- to 10-board.**

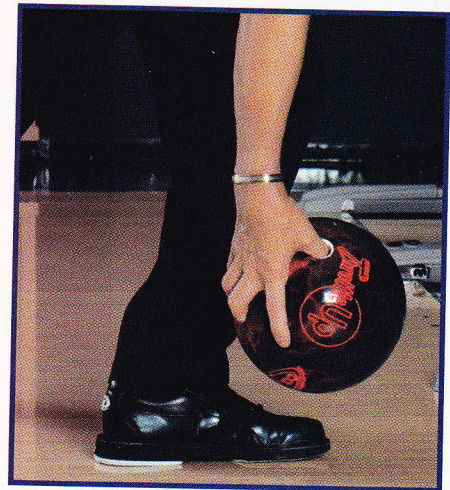
**The owner was in another bowling center for 20 years and just bought this center. I bowl two nights per week and have done so for 25 years. The lanes**



Knowing the owner plays between the 1st and 2nd arrows with a lot of speed tells me the lanes are pretty dry to the right of the 10-board.

If the oil line is around the 8- to 10-board, that's the area you have to play. With the oil being short, you have to throw the ball very firmly and on line to take advantage of the oil line in the heads—this will give you more margin for error on your shots.

If you slow-hook the ball on this condition, you can't take advantage of the oil



Don't pull the ball down to start your swing [left] to increase speed at the start [center] or end [right] of the acceleration zone.

ing foot has to have stopped with the ball still about a foot behind it so you'll have the leverage to accelerate your swing.

As a final note, very few high-level players use 16-pound balls any longer. They can throw a lighter ball harder, with less effort, at 15 pounds. Today's balls grab the lane so much more, they don't deflect as much. Don't be stubborn about having to have to use a 16-pound ball.

**are not consistent on any night. Why am I down so much this year?**

The first thing I would think is that the lane conditions have changed from last season to this one. With a new owner has come a different lane-maintenance philosophy. The lanes being oiled 20 feet with 18 feet of buff can create a very different way to play than on a pattern with a longer run of oil.

You need to rethink how to play the lanes. Divide the lane into thirds: The first 20 feet are the heads, the next 20 the mid-lane, and the last 20 feet to the head pin the back end. In your center the most oil is applied to the heads, which is normal. The oil on the mid-lane is only what was left on the brush. The back ends are dry.

With a short run of oil (20 feet), there will not be a lot of hold in the mid-lane. Even though the oil is short in the heads, I would bet there is still an oil line.

line in the heads, so what you are currently doing is the opposite of your needs.

Start out the night hard and straight. As the oil line deteriorates and there is some carrydown, move in. That way you'll move with the oil line, swing the ball a little more, and slow down so the ball can hook through the carrydown.

With the shorter oil pattern, your breakpoint will not move in as you move in to find oil in the heads and get the ball down the lane. You still will have to get the ball to the same breakpoint that you started with; you might even have to move your breakpoint farther outside because you now have some carrydown in the back end. If you miss outside the carrydown, the lane will be dry and the ball will hook back—that will give you some area to play with down the lane that you didn't have at the beginning of the night.

Keep an open mind about playing the lanes. The most consistent thing in the

■ **I have been struggling for most of the season, and my average has dropped about 15 pins. I have three balls: the**

*Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Send them to: Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201 or e-mail bowl@centurysports.net.*

sport of bowling is that the lane conditions will play differently every time you bowl.

■ ***My hand or wrist delivery is very inconsistent. I have a tendency to turn the ball instead of throwing it straight. I thought your article on chicken-winging [April 2003] was interesting, because I am a chicken-winger. I know a lot of my mistakes come from timing. Sometimes my***

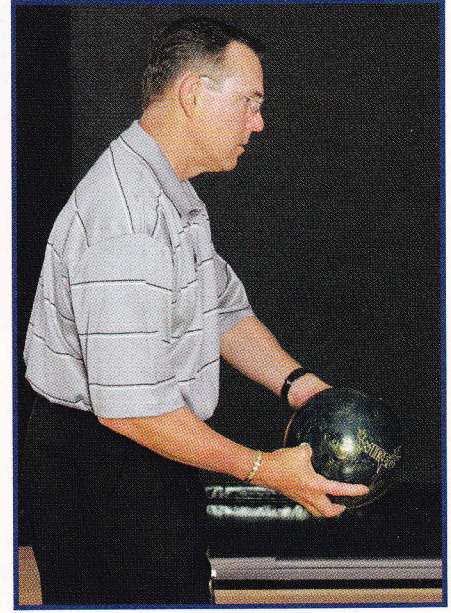
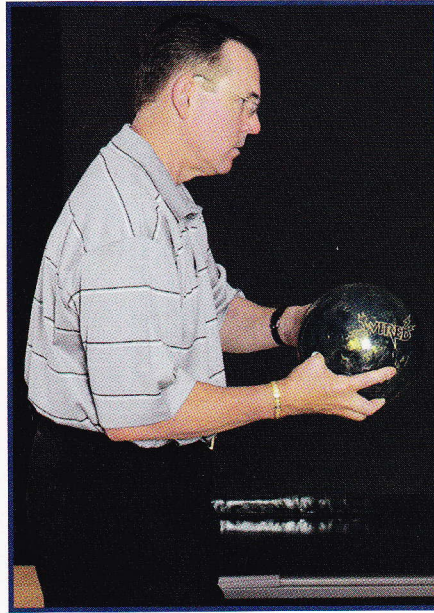
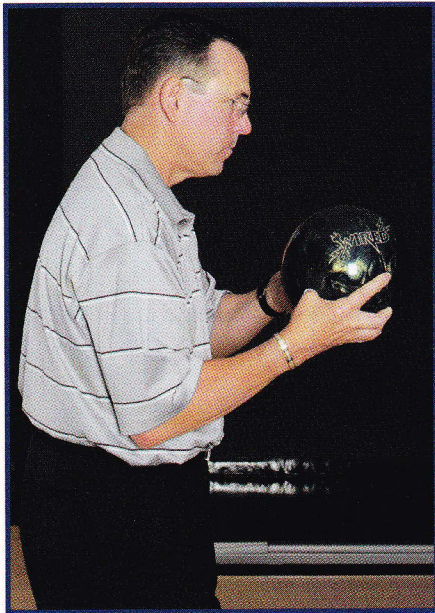
can adjust your timing simply by adjusting the height of the ball in your stance.

If you have fast feet, hold the ball lower than waist high. If your feet are slow, hold the ball chest high. If your feet travel at a medium speed, hold the ball at waist level. How high you hold the ball in your stance will help you coordinate your swing better with your steps.

Matching your swing to your feet will give you a better "feel" for the game and

if you miss, the mistake doesn't have an effect on the outcome of a game or your average. So mentally there is less pressure in practice, which again makes it easier to get into a good rhythm.

The second issue is lane conditions. When playing alone, you are developing your own track in the oil that you can play off of. You don't have other bowlers developing different tracks, and the carrydown of the oil is different with more



**Your timing is affected by how high the ball is held in your stance; the faster your steps, the lower you should hold the ball.**

***steps get too fast in my five-step approach. I would like to know the best way to practice to resolve my problems.***

First off, you don't want to throw a straight ball. Turning the ball with speed is better than having no turn and hook. You will have no chance to develop a good strike ball without hooking the ball.

With a five-step approach, you should not move the ball with the first step. When your second step starts, start moving the ball out in front of your body. When the second step is complete, the pushaway is also finished, so for a righthander the left hand should leave the ball as the swing starts, even if the arms are not fully extended. By doing this, you will get the ball started into the swing at the right time. Once you are able to complete your pushaway consistently, you

ultimately help you become a better player.

■ ***I practice often to maintain my timing on the approach. During practice sessions my timing is not a problem, but during league play I have difficulty keeping my timing on the approach, which makes my release inconsistent. What can I do?***

Your problem is very common. There are two things that result in your performance being better in practice than during league play: the pace of play and the lane conditions.

When you are practicing, most of the time you are alone on a lane. You and only you will be taking shot after shot. The pace of play is faster than in league bowling, and it's easier to get into a good rhythm and be able to repeat shots. Also,

players on the lane. In league play, it can be difficult to get a consistent ball reaction because the lanes change much faster with more bowlers on the lane.

When playing in your league, it's very important to stay in touch with what's happening on the lanes and what you are trying to do to make shots. The slower pace of play makes it very important that you develop a game that takes as little muscle as possible. The more moving parts you have in your game and the harder you have to work to make good shots, the more difficulty you will have repeating them, especially when playing at a slower pace and when lanes change fast because of the amount and type of play on the lanes.

The bottom line is that you need to keep refining your game so you can make better shots under different playing conditions. ●