

Bowlers Journal

APRIL 2010 • \$5.99 • bowlersjournal.com INTERNATIONAL



The Real Deal

Bill O'Neill lives up to his nickname in winning the U.S. Open.

PLUS:

Masters: For Walter Ray, 50 Is the New 47

Breaking Down the Game of Kelly Kulick

Pro and Con: Drinking at the USBC Open

Posted with permission from *Bowlers Journal International*.

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



Kelly Kulick: A Gifted Athlete Working to Get Even Better

KELLY KULICK'S BOWLING CAREER almost ended before it really got going. With the demise of the PWBA, the women had nowhere to bowl and Kelly was facing life without the possibility of a professional bowling career.

Then the PBA changed its rules, allowing the women to join and compete with the guys. Kelly and a few other women started bowling on the “men’s” tour, and Kelly

has worked to become a top athlete, regardless of gender.

Her early training took place at Dick Ritger Bowling Camps. She was 12 years old when she first started attend-

ing, and was a Ritger student for six years. After that, she interned as an instructor and has been teaching with the Ritger coaches every summer since. In case

you didn't know, the Ritger program has been and still is one of the best fundamentals-focused instructional programs in the world.

The fundamentals learned in this program gave Kelly the platform upon which to build her game. Most parents dream of their children becoming great at what the kids think they want to do, and



Kelly Kulick has a beautiful pushaway that she completes on step two. Note her upper body position; it's identical to the position established in her athletic stance.



By the third step of Kulick's approach, the ball has traveled about 100 degrees. The ball is swinging freely, and Kulick has initiated her forward tilt.



provide the opportunity to do it. Kelly is a rare example of a child who was given the opportunity, pursued it and actually succeeded.

The hallmark of Kelly's physical game is the set of solid fundamentals she learned at an early age: timing, free swing, a balanced finish and a good release.

Kelly starts her five-step approach with a very athletic set-up. Her feet are staggered, with the left foot in front of the right, her knees flexed, and the ball held between waist and chest-high.

Step one, with her left foot, is a gliding step — almost a slide — and her foot remains parallel to the floor and barely loses contact with the approach. Her second step is a very slight heel-toe step

that stays very close to the floor as it crosses over to the left, in front of the first step.

Kelly has a lot of flex in her knees in her stance, and maintains that flex throughout the approach, requiring a more flat-footed walk.

Step three is a gliding/sliding type of step again, while step four is a heel-toe type of step that still stays very close to the floor. Then comes step five and the slide.

For the third, fourth and fifth steps, her direction is straight. She has very smooth, rhythmic steps. What's unusual is that steps two, three and four are almost identical in length — not that this is bad or wrong, but most players have at least one middle step that is longer or shorter than the others. For

any bowler, the steps need to be as natural as possible, and this is what works for Kelly.

Timing-wise, Kelly's is right on the money. She has a great pushaway that is complete by the end of step two. It is out and slightly downward, and her upper body from the waist to the top of her head doesn't move. The only movement involves the arms straightening out, but they don't lock out.

At the start of step three, the swing starts and travels about 100 degrees. During step four, the ball travels another 90 degrees and finishes its arc just as step five is ready to start. Kelly's total backswing arc is about 190 degrees — a little more than a half-circle — and it doesn't get much better than that. She has a totally effortless swing; there is no muscle.

Her spine angle from a side view has a gradual tilt forward, starting on step three and finishing at about 45 degrees when the ball goes by her ankle for the start of the release.

Kelly's smooth, rhythmic approach delivers the ball with less power than that of a lot of her male counterparts, but more than most of the women.

Even though she has a very loose "gravity" swing, there's one thing that gets in the way of developing more power: In her set-up, from a back view, she holds the ball a little outside of her shoulder with her forearm and upper body facing outside of her target line. From this position, her pushaway goes right as the second step is going left.



At the completion of step four, Kulick's ball reaches the top of the swing, completing her 190-degree backswing arc. Note the flat wrist and good hand position at this point.



With her right foot going to the left, her chin over the toe of her left foot, a good knee bend and her right shoulder low, Kulick's body is well-positioned for a perfect release.

Pushing the ball right, away from the body, puts it outside of her head, making the backswing direction outside-in at this point — and that makes the swing get inside too soon. Between steps three and four, the ball will be behind her left shoulder, and from this position the swing is blocked out and has to bump out to the right to realign itself for the downswing.

Kelly does realign the swing well, but this move delays the acceleration of the downswing — you can't fire through from the top of the swing to increase the downswing's velocity. Think of a figure skater who's spinning. When the skater starts revolving, her arms are out, but as she speeds up, the arms start coming in close to her body; the faster she spins, the tighter her arms are to the body.

With a bowling swing, the arm on the downswing needs to draw in

closer to the body in order to accelerate the swing. If the arm is behind the body and has to move out from behind on the downswing, its acceleration will be delayed until it realigns itself. It usually takes a lot of muscle to do this and generate speed.

But not in Kelly's case. She uses no muscle, which allows her to maintain her side tilt and increase it on the downswing so the ball can get to the release zone on an inside-out swing path, with the center of the ball below her left ear at release.

Obviously, Kelly has had tremendous success with her swing because she has trained herself to not muscle it and let her natural body movements take care of it. Her ability to post a well-balanced release and finish position has enabled her to overcome that one liability in her game.

Kelly said she has been working

on the ball position in her stance, pushaway and backswing path, with the goal of getting more ball speed.

Kelly has a very good release. Her wrist is flat throughout the swing and release, with her hand behind the ball when the thumb is ready to come out. Her free swing and ability to let the weight of the ball release the ball off the hand gives her a soft, very repeatable release with power. For greater versatility, she is working on developing more hand positions and getting smarter about matching up to the changing lane conditions with equipment, ball roll and speed.

Winning the PBA Tournament of Champions, which encompassed 48 games before the championship round telecast, is proof that she has come a long way in matching up.

But as with all great champions, she is not standing still. She continues to work very hard in order to get even better.

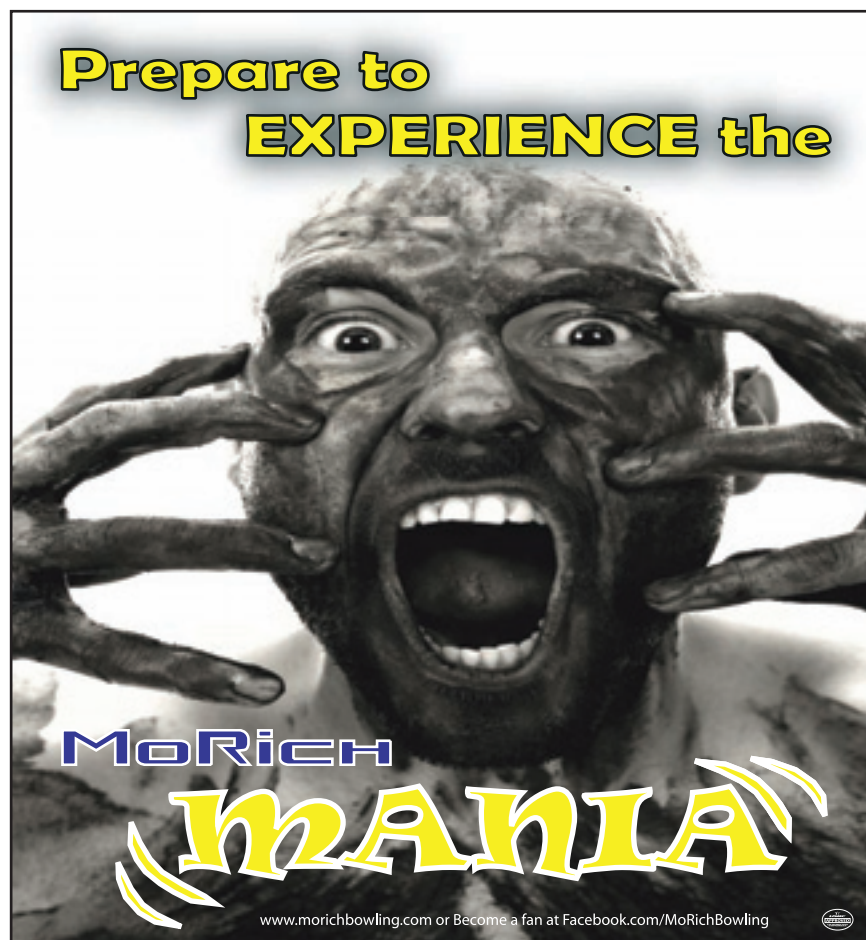
Along with working on her form to generate more natural ball speed and versatility, she does a lot of physical training. She lifts weights four days a week, working a different muscle group each day, to increase her strength and help with ball speed. She does cardio five days a week on a treadmill.

And for the past year-and-a-half, she has embraced yoga, which she does twice a week. The yoga training helps her stretch parts of her body that she can't get to with more traditional stretches. The Ujjayi breathing technique she practices has helped with stress reduction, discipline in her practice and mental preparation.

If that weren't enough exercise, she also line dances. My cousin Roe goes to the same club as Kelly in New Jersey and says Kelly is a great dancer. Would you expect anything less from this superior athlete?

Someone in Arlington should work at getting Kelly on "Dancing With the Stars."

Bill Spigner is a Gold-level coach and a member of the ABC/USBC Hall of Fame. To view archived instructional features on top pros, visit billspigner.com.



Prepare to
EXPERIENCE the

MoRich
MANIA

www.morichbowling.com or Become a fan at [Facebook.com/MoRichBowling](https://www.facebook.com/MoRichBowling)