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APRIL 2011 • \$3.95 • www.bowlersjournal.com

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PLUS: SHOCKING FINISH AT U.S. OPEN • PRO APPROACH: JACK JUREK • WENDY MACPHERSON: MVP

THE PRO APPROACH

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Jack Jurek Is Proof: Different Strokes for Different Folks

JACK JUREK DEFINITELY HAS a different style than what we typically see on the PBA Tour today. He is a “tweener/stroker.” It used to be said, “Stroke, you go broke... crank, you go to the bank.” But not so for Jack.

Of course, I’m dating myself a bit because that’s the way it was in the 1980s with the advent of urethane balls. Most of today’s pros use a lot of speed, whether they hook it or go straight. Jack, on the other hand, is soft with a medium-size hook — right in-between.

Jack has a very unusual set-up for his five-step approach. In his stance, his right (bowling) shoulder is significantly lower than his left shoulder. He stacks his right side, putting his head over his right shoulder, with his arm, hand and ball below the shoulder and head — pre-setting his shoulder angle for his release. And it stays at that angle throughout his approach.

With most good swings and all good release positions, you want the swing side stacked as the ball passes the body on the backswing and returns to that position for the release. Jack eliminates the chance of the right side not being stacked on the backswing and at the release position. Tom Baker works his set-up the same way.



Jack Jurek’s hand position as the ball passes his body on the backswing has his thumb at 12 o’clock and his fingers at 9 o’clock — unusual for a stroker.

Jack told me the idea came from bowling guru and ball designer Mo Pinel. I like this set-up for players with shorter swings and more vertical spine angles (from a side view). It does take a strong, flexible body to do this.

Jack’s set-up from a side view looks normal, other than the low right shoulder. His upper arm is along his side, perpendicular to the floor, and his forearm is parallel to the floor. His feet are staggered about half-a-foot with the left foot forward, and his feet and body face straight ahead to his target.

When he starts moving the ball, he places it out and slightly downward on step two of his five-step approach. He walks with his spine angle straight up for the first three steps. Most players would have already started their forward tilt by the second step, as those who have no forward tilt early in the approach can’t get the arm to swing back straight under their shoulder. But with his exaggerated low right shoulder, Jack’s arm does pass his body perpendicular to the floor in the backswing. Jack starts his forward tilt just before the fourth step begins, and tilts forward about 30 degrees mid-way through that step — less

than most of the other pros.

His swing also is lower than most of his peers'. It reaches only shoulder-high, and gets there just as his left knee is moving forward and parallel to the right knee on step five. His downswing starts just as the left knee starts passing the right on step five — very good timing for his swing height.

Jack has a very good slide and knee bend. He keeps the toe of his right shoe in contact with the floor throughout the slide and release, giving him a very stable foundation to support his upper body. His slide ends just as his thumb is getting ready to exit the ball, and then his fingers lift up the back of the ball.

From the rear is where you can see the exaggerated shoulders in the stance. His swing is very straight and slightly inside-out. He doesn't have a loose swing, but it's not controlled, either — kind of in-between, like his overall style. The swing height is lower than most because his shoulders don't open up.

Jack's hand action during the approach is different than a stroker normally would have. In the stance, he has his hand under the ball — very balanced, very normal.

However, during his ball placement he starts rotating his hand and arm clockwise, and when the ball is passing his body on the backswing, his thumb is at 12 o'clock and his fingers are at 9 o'clock. This is not unusual for some of the big swing players who have a lot of forward tilt and upper body rotation, but it's very unusual for a stroker.

With his hand opening this much, it can be difficult to square up the hand and

forearm for the release. After the ball gets to the top of the swing, Jack's first move in the downswing sees the forearm and hand square up to his release position. His right shoulder then moves his hand to the position he will have when his thumb comes out of the ball. The shoulder moves the fingers to about 5 o'clock when his thumb exits.

At this point, his fingers are at the equator of the ball — midway down, not under it. As Jack's thumb exits, his fingers lift straight up. That release, coupled with a slight inside-out swing path, produces enough side roll and axis tilt for the ball

to hook a good amount. His rev rate matches up well with his tilt and rotation so he's able to match up on a wide variety of conditions.

Jack has been working on his hand position for a long time. He has tried to eliminate the extreme opening of his hand on the backswing to no avail. The problem is caused by the early turn on the downswing because he has to square up the arm and hand without the aid of a long swing and upper body rotation. Thus, the time he has to square up his forearm and hand for the release is very short. If there's any pull from the top of the swing,

his right shoulder will rotate the arm and hand too soon.

So what Jack has done over the years is to work real hard at allowing the arm and ball to drop from the top. He also has worked hard to develop a soft hand at release. Being soft doesn't mean you just let the ball dump off the hand with no feel. You have to have a lot of feel for the ball without fighting its weight, yet still accelerate through the shot with an aggressive finish.

Besides constantly refining his game, Jack now works out more than ever. A few years ago, he had what he thought was a knee injury, but it turned out to be a weak quad muscle in his left leg. Jack gets a lot of knee bend, and that puts a lot of pressure on the leg, so now he uses a personal trainer a few times a week to make sure his workouts are correct.

It has taken Jack many years of hard work to put the pieces of the puzzle together. He has one of the steadiest heads on tour; it barely moves at all during his approach and finish. This, coupled with a very solid lower body position, helps him repeat precision shots. The package he has put together will last many years.

Bowlers like Jack Jurek demonstrate there are no absolute rules of form. Bowlers with unique personal idiosyncrasies still can reach the highest levels of our sport and be competitive on a regular basis. Jack's head is steady not only on the outside, but also on the inside, benefiting his bowling game and his life.

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It's not until the fourth step of his five-step delivery that Jurek's forward tilt kicks in. For most players, the forward tilt begins during the second step.