

SUCCESS BEGINS IN THE STANCE • SNEAK PEEKS OF 4 NEW CENTERS

# BowlersJournal

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## Open and Shut Case

Pete Weber is the Undisputed King of the U.S. Open

### U.S. OPEN/ALL STAR TITLES

PETE WEBER	5
DICK WEBER	4
DON CARTER	4

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Drink Pink  
Reno Targets  
Breast Cancer



# THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }

## Why the Stance Is Important

**IS THERE A COMMON THREAD** in the styles of the best players in the game? Why are some players better than others?

Thus far, I've analyzed the styles of 16 top pros for *BJI*, and while some of the approaches and deliveries are similar, no two are exactly the same — nor would you expect them to be, considering bowlers are people, not robots.

I have always believed in solid fundamentals, with minor exceptions based on the natural game that the bowler has developed. Had Don Carter, Earl Anthony, Mark Roth, Pete Weber, Walter Ray Williams or Osku Palermaa been taught strict fundamentals from the start of their bowling days, they never would have developed their own bowling “personality.” Yet each has very good fundamentals relative to his style, even though they all look very different on the approach.

Once a solid base has been formed, then the refining process can begin. Keep in mind that this is situational; if you have a bowler who is going to bowl just occasionally, or a beginner, then you must teach the right fundamentals from the start. The difference with these top pros is that they were relentless in their practice and desire to get better.

That said, there are things that every bowler should



**Pete Weber has a very good set-up, standing tall with everything facing straight ahead. He holds the ball chest-high with his right hand under it. This places his left hand and arm higher, which sets the shoulder angle.**

work on and be conscious of:

- The pre-shot routine.
- The stance.
- The movement of the ball

from the stance — which is very dependent on the stance.

I see too many bowlers who pay very little attention to these important fundamentals. If you've ever taken a golf lesson, you know the first things the pro will tackle are the set-up and the take-away, because they have a tremendous bearing on the series of things that happen in the swing and finish.

In bowling, there are things we can control: our set-up to the shot, the movement of the ball from the set-up and the finish. In between, we need to “let it go,” yet still maintain a connection to the feel of the ball.

As simple as it may seem, the stance is complicated. So what does a good stance look like?

The feet should be square to the target and close together, and the hips and shoulders should follow the alignment of the feet. You should place a little more weight on the foot opposite of the one you start on. The feet can be slightly staggered, with the bowling-side foot back.

Your knees should have a slight flex — just enough so they're not locked straight, and not so much that it tightens



Osku Palermaa eschews the traditional set-up. Note how his left arm is out from the body and more in front of it. His left hand is in front and a little to the outside of the ball, and his bowling hand is way "inside" the ball.



Wes Malott has a very relaxed set-up, with his feet straight ahead, the ball about waist-high, both hands supporting it, his wrist flat, and his arms hanging relaxed from the shoulders, which are set at a good angle. While starting the ball in the center of the body is not recommended, Malott makes it work thanks to his ball movement, swing and walk.

the thigh and glute muscles. The upper body should have a slight forward tilt.

As for the bowling ball, it should be in line with the bowling shoulder, and the bowling-side elbow should rest close to the side. The non-bowling hand should be on the side portion, back

portion and bottom of the ball. (Basically, the weight of the ball would be distributed across both hands, with the pinky fingers pointing at each other.)

The bowling-side shoulder should be lower than the non-bowling side's, and the shoulders should be fac-

ing your target line. The height of the ball in the stance can be anywhere from below the waist to chest high.

The basic rule of thumb for ball height is: The faster your tempo, the lower you hold the ball, and the slower your tempo, the higher you hold it. There are always

exceptions, like Mika Koivuniemi, who holds the ball low but has a slow tempo; his pushaway takes care of that.

Hand positions among the top pros are quite varied. There are many “right” positions. But you should strive to rotate the hand open to the point where the weight of the ball is going to the outside of the hand. You can have the hand open provided that you don’t engage the muscles in the forearm, which can tighten the muscles all the way up to the neck.

If you follow the guideline of the opposite hand placement on the ball, you will be able to sufficiently open the hand by rotating the opposite hand toward the top of the ball, with the non-bowling elbow higher than the bowling elbow and more out in front of the chest. This will help keep you from tightening up the bowling-side arm, and get your bowling hand more under the ball at the start. Bowlers like Ryan Shafer, Sean Rash, Amleto Monacelli and Osku Palermaa do this.

Just as important as the set-up is your pre-shot routine. Watch the pros on TV, and you’ll see that the bowlers’ setups are very consistent. Each bowler has his own little quirks, but in general, each will take the same amount of time to set up on each shot.

Before they step onto the approach, they’ll be thinking about where they are going to stand, where their target or target line is going to be, the type of speed they want to generate and the release they want to execute. Only then do they step up onto the approach, align their feet and body to their target line, and place the ball in its starting position.

With most of the top players, you won’t see any variances in their set-up from shot to shot, other than hand position changes. Norm Duke would be the exception to the rule. He’ll transform his entire set-up depending on the part of the lane he’s going to play and the action he wants to apply to the ball. He’s definitely the most complex bowler on the planet.

The lessons learned from all of these pros is there is great value in establishing your own routine. Use a video camera to record your set-up — from the front, side and back — to see what you look like and if you are doing the things you think you are doing.

If you have a smart phone, download a camera app — most developed so far have been for golf, and they work just fine for bowling — and have a friend take shots of your delivery. You then can look at them instantly.

Knowing what you look like will help you better understand and connect with what’s really happening in your approach.

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