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COACH'S CORNER
ADJUST TO
CONDITIONS
BY CHANGING
HAND POSITIONS**

Bill Spigner's Bowling Clinic: Drifting on the approach

BOWLING

DIGEST

April 1996

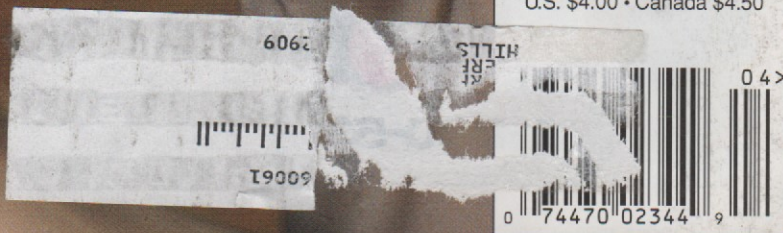
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Mike Aulby

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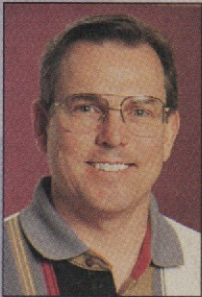
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Don't Drift Too Far

■ *I'd like to know how much "drifting" is acceptable when I'm approaching the foul line. My problem seems to be that I drift to the middle dot. If I position my left foot between the next-to-last dot and the last dot on the left side of the approach, and my target is the second arrow, what would be my best finishing position at the foul line?*



Bowling Clinic

By BILL SPIGNER

The direction in which you walk is very important. How you walk helps set up the positioning of your upper body relative to your legs, and it helps determine your swing path, the "action" you can put on the ball, and your accuracy. As a basic rule of thumb for right-handed bowlers, straight is great, left is good, and right is wrong (the opposite being true for lefties). The problem with walking to the right is that you'll walk in the way of your swing.

One of the key elements of a good swing is getting your body out of the way of your swing. The first and third steps (in a four-step approach) are the key steps that help clear your lower body out of the way of your swing and help set your upper body in the correct position when the ball is in the release zone.

The following walk-through explanation applies to right-handed four-step bowlers. Lefthanders should follow this in reverse, and five-step bowlers should pick this up with their second step.

On your first step, your right foot moves in front of your left foot. This step clears your lower body out of the way, so on your next step your arm and ball can swing past your body without your hip being in the way. Your lower body moves left, but your upper body doesn't.

When you do this, an angle is created on the right side of your body (at your hip) that lowers your right shoulder and allows your arm to swing past your body perpendicular to the floor, with your ball under your head. This angle will look somewhat like a "Y," but without the left stem of the "Y." To help you achieve this angle, it's advisable for you to

Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Mail your questions to: Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201.

start your stance with your bowling shoulder slightly lower than your opposite shoulder. This angle, set early in your approach, will make it easier to get your body set up for the release.

Step two should be straight so that your third step can fall in line with your second step, and the fourth step can slide back in front of your third step. With your third step lining up in front of your second step, your lower body will continue to be moved out of the way of your swing, so your arm can swing straight through to the release zone without your lower body being in the way.

At the bottom of the swing, the ball should be directly under your head. This positioning of the ball just before it leaves your hand is one of the key elements pros have in their

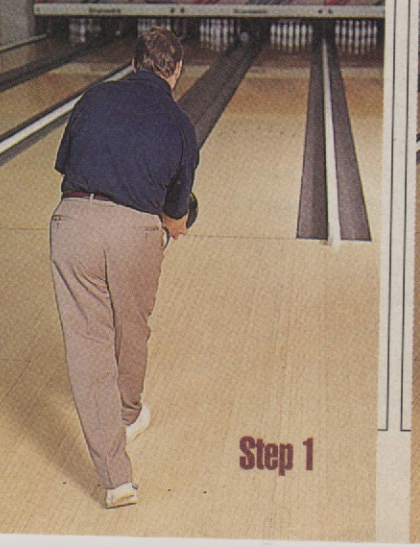
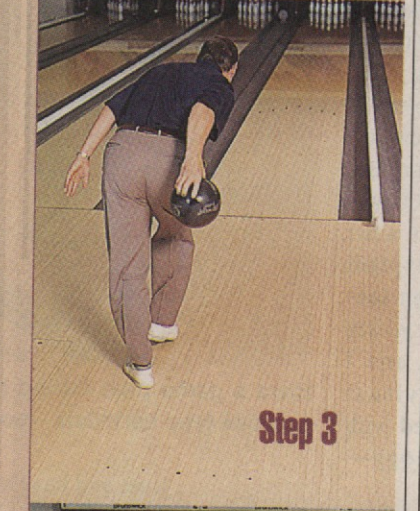
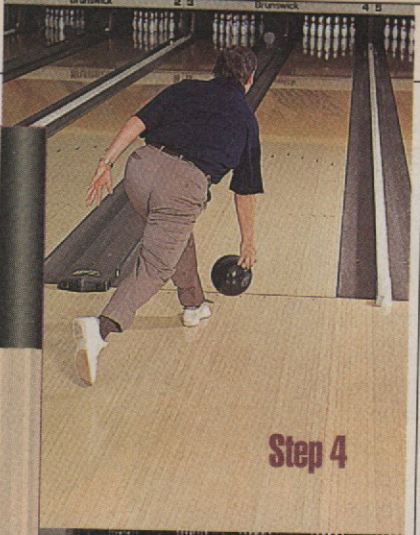
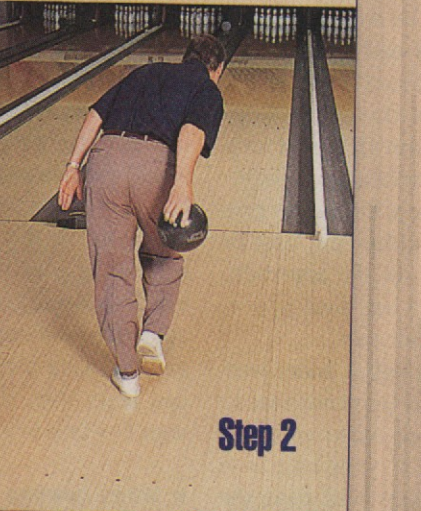
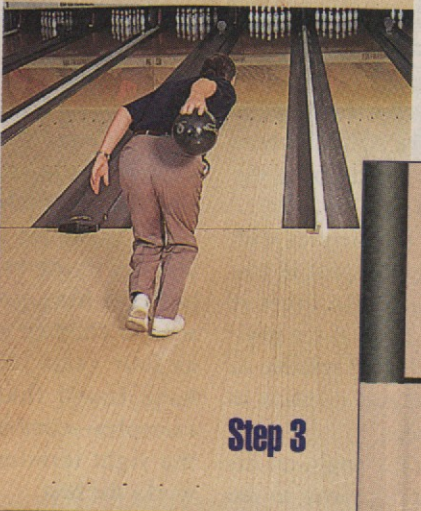
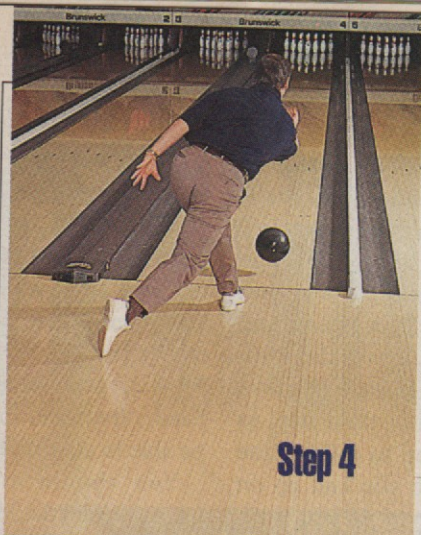
For a right-handed bowler, drifting as many as 10 boards to the left may be acceptable in that it can make it easier for you to play inside lines. Drifting right is another story: Not only does it restrict you from playing inside lines, but it limits your ball control.

game. If you drift right or overslide to the right on your last step, it will prevent the ball from dropping in under your head at the point of release.

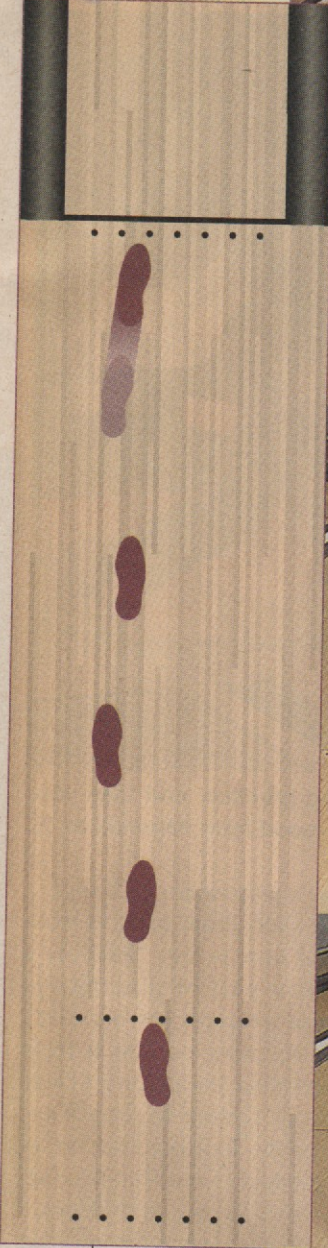
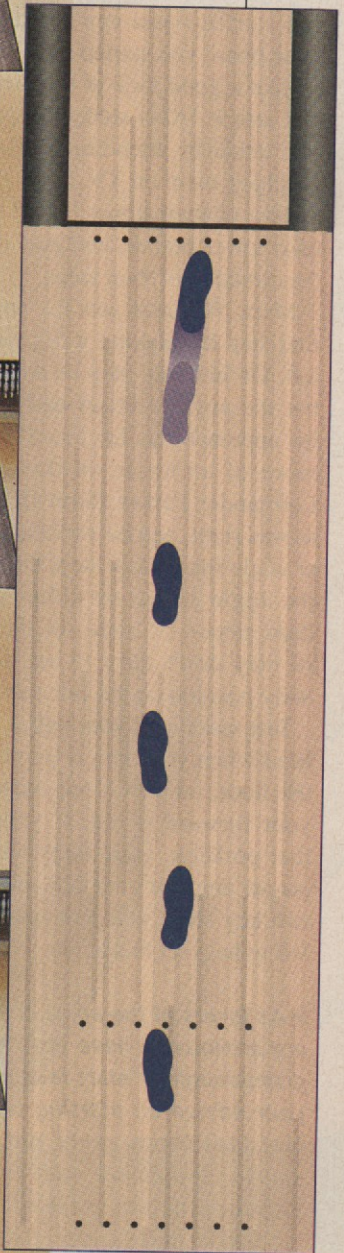
The best position for you to end up in at the foul line is along the same board you started on. In your case—you're starting at about the 28th board—you should slide on about the 28th board. But by sliding on the 28th board, it would be very difficult to hit the second arrow and still be able to control the ball. I would recommend that your left foot end up no farther right than three boards from where it started on the approach. It is best to end up along or slightly left of your starting position.

Also, drifting a little to the left makes it easier for you to play inside lines. In fact, some bowlers can end up as many as 10 boards left of where they started, and still be very effective. Drifting right will restrict you from playing inside lines, and the more you walk right, the more restricted you become as to where you are able to play. If you drift right, you'll

Drifting Right



Drifting Left



either have to roll your ball straighter or, if you have good hand action, you'll need a lot of swing area to be effective.

I would recommend that you change your starting position and the way you walk. Start off on the 20th board, and force yourself to *end up* on the 20th board. To do this you'll have to move left on either your first or third step, to allow your sliding step to fall in line with your third step so you end up on the board you started on. If you walk perfectly straight with your first three steps, your last step has to slide in front of your third step to get your body in position for the release. By walking this way, you'll end up to the right of where you started—you *can't* end up on the same board you started on.

Take a good look at the pictures with this article. Also study the pros if you can, either by attending a PBA event or watching them on TV. Look at the positioning of their upper bodies relative to their lower bodies, and pay attention to the direction of their steps.

Mark Williams sets his angle on his first step by making a big move to the left. On his third step he walks straight, but the angle was set early enough in his approach that he doesn't have to get more of an angle on this third step. Lefthander Parker Bohn III's first step moves right, and he establishes a slighter angle for his last step. Every pro gets the angle set up on either the first or third steps—or both—of the approach, so they don't have to set their upper-body position on the last step.

Just make sure your ball is under your head when your arm is perpendicular to the floor, on both your backswing and your forward swing. If your ball is in that position, your body will have the proper angle at your hip, and one of the two key steps will have moved slightly left to help set this angle.

■ ***As lovers of the sport of bowling, we are anxious to have our two-year-old granddaughter start lessons. What is your advice on starting lessons? We feel that three years old is not too young. Should we start teaching her ourselves, or take her to a local coach?***

I would have to say that three years old is a little young for structured

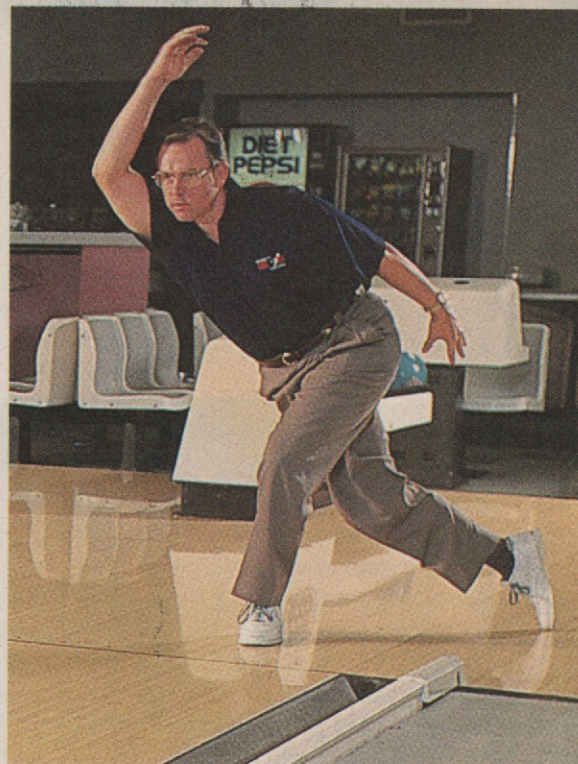
lessons, but three is not too young to get started with bowling. In fact, I drilled bowling balls for my two sons when each was three. What is important is that the ball has to fit your granddaughter's hand; otherwise, she won't be able to control it.

You should consider taking your granddaughter bumper bowling, which makes it easier to teach her to walk, swing, and roll the ball, because she'll hit some pins. You can do some of the basic training yourself, using other bowlers as examples for what you are trying to explain to her. I have given lessons to children as young as four years old, and I have found that visual examples—combined with the right terminology—works the best.

It's important for you to teach your granddaughter a normal four-step approach. Letting her roll the ball between her legs will only make teaching her the proper approach harder when she gets older. If even the lightest ball is too heavy for her to throw, teach her to throw the ball with both hands, simulating a swing. This way she'll get used to swinging the ball with an approach, not standing at the foul line and throwing it between her legs. If she can learn this, she'll soon be ready to start bowling in a bumper league.

■ ***When bowling in a league with four-player teams, I have found that generally about five minutes goes by between turns. While waiting my turn, I have a tendency to get cold and out of rhythm. When practicing alone or with a friend, would it be a good idea to institute a similar waiting time between shots?***

When practicing, you should have a game plan, parts of which should reflect how fast you bowl and the rhythm or tempo of your approach. It's difficult to practice when you wait five minutes between shots, but you should take your



Have a game plan during practice, and take your practice time seriously—good form depends on it.

time and have a purpose for each shot.

After each shot, think back to what happened and how it felt. "Feel" is a very important part of playing the game; because we can't see ourselves roll the ball, focusing on how it feels helps us determine the quality of our shots. From this feeling we can determine whether the ball reaction we're getting is a product of our shot-making, or of where we're playing on the lanes.

You should develop a tempo that you're able to repeat, whether you're bowling by yourself or in a league environment. When practicing by yourself, it's easy to experiment with different things, and due to the fast pace you can repeat your movements more easily because your body stays loose.

But remember: It's easy to be fooled by practice. Let's say during one practice you decide to try and hook the ball a lot. It works great in practice, but you try it in your league and fall apart. The key is to work on your *form* during practice, so you don't have to work on it during league competition. You want to bring your best game with you to the competition—not try to find it when it's all on the line. ●