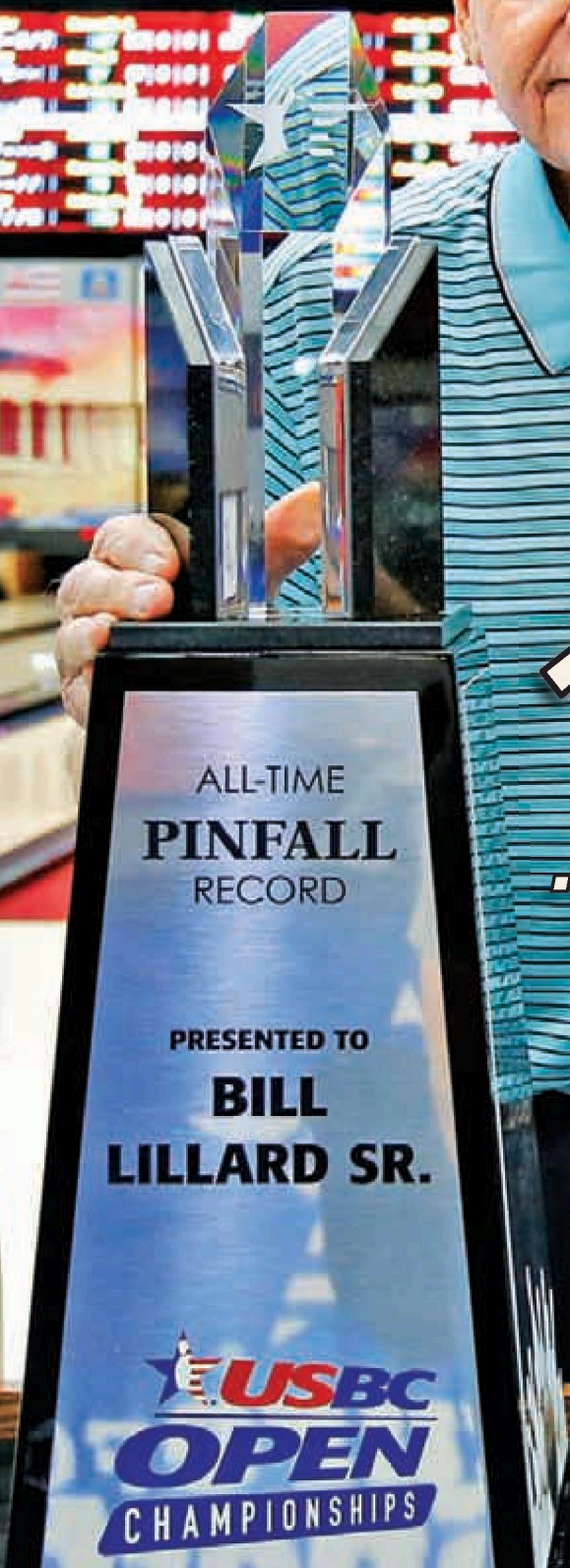


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THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



Tackett: Fast, Loose and Talented

ONE OF THE MOST dynamic bowlers on the PBA Tour is 22-year-old E.J. Tackett. Even though he was quite young at the time, he joined the tour with some solid experience, having been a Junior Team USA member twice (2011 and 2013) and a Team USA member in 2011, when he was still in high school.

In his first event on tour, Tackett finished fourth, and he ultimately would be named PBA Rookie of the Year for 2013. For many players, a good start like that is tough to follow up because success can sometimes increase the pressure to succeed; it becomes an expectation, rather than something to be savored.

But Tackett avoided that mental trap and subsequently qualified for another four telecasts, including one that resulted in a second-place finish in the 2014 USBC Masters. That was a great tournament but a gut-wrenching loss, as he came up short against Jason Belmonte after earning the top-seed position.

Tackett had a tough decision to make about his future, one that many would love to have: whether to bowl or play golf. He was a plus-2 handicap in golf, which is great for a young player, as the best PGA Tour players are in the plus-5 to plus-7 range. Given his early bowling success, however, he has decided to stick with tenpins, but has his sights set on playing in a few golf mini-tour events in the future.

Hall of Fame bowler Jim Stefanich had to make the same decision Tackett faced when he was younger. Steffy chose bowling because, in the mid-1960s, there wasn't a lot of difference in available prize money. Tackett's decision is a lot tougher in today's world,

At just 22 years old, E.J. Tackett already is one of the PBA Tour's most dynamic players.



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because with golf's staggering prize funds, just one tournament can make one's entire year.

But bowling it is, and Tackett has a contemporary game. He takes five steps. His set-up is solid, standing tall with his feet staggered, and holding the ball above waist high with his wrist cupped and his hand under the ball.

He starts his ball placement with his first step, and when that step is done, his ball placement is almost done. His left hand leaves the ball mid-way through the second step, which is when his swing starts. When that step is done, the ball is by his right knee.

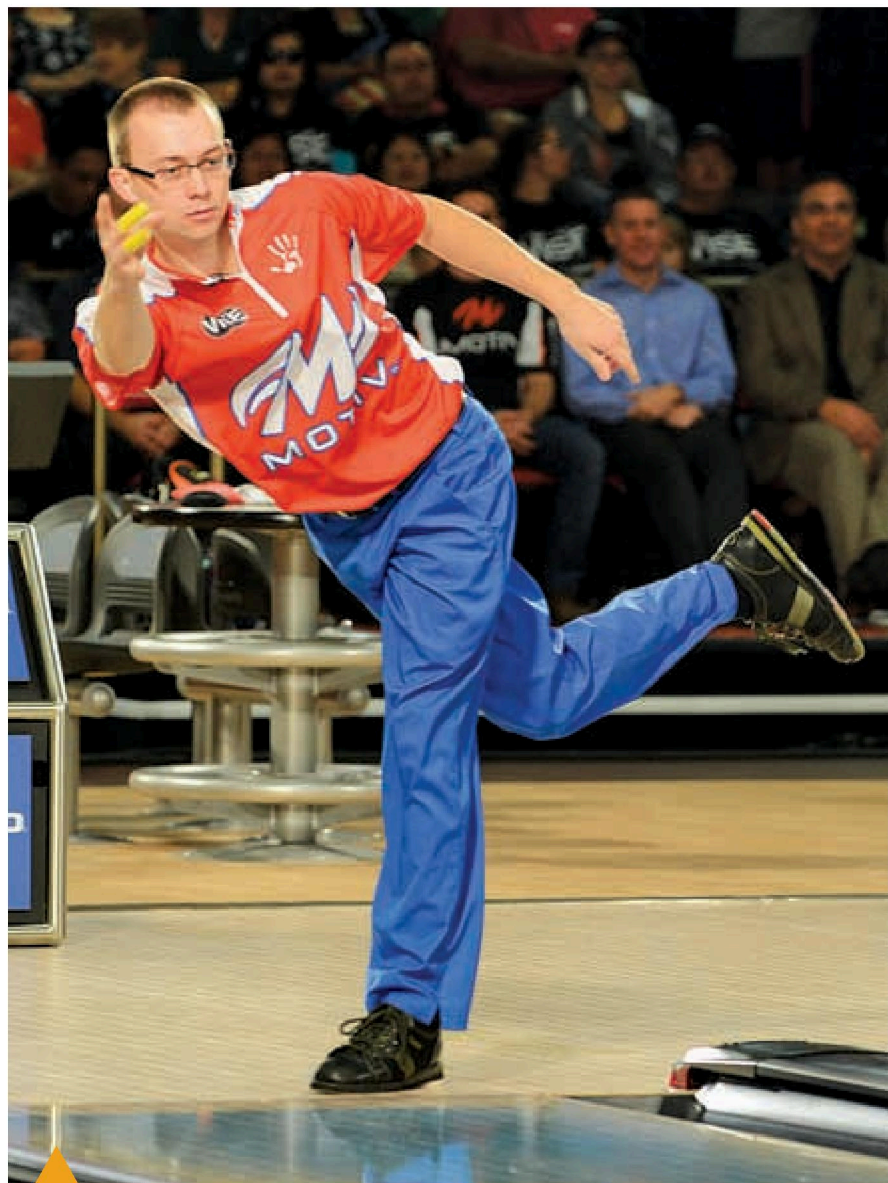
Those first two steps are just like those of Tommy Jones, who happens to have been Tackett's favorite bowler growing up — a pretty good player to emulate. His early ball movement gets his feet moving fast right away.

Tackett probably has the highest rev rate among all bowlers on tour who place their thumb in the ball. He gets the speed needed for all those revs from his fast footwork and from what his body does on the downswing and through his release.

Before going into that, we need to look at his swing from a rear view, where you'll note that he has a reverse loop. The swing starts back going outside his body, with his hand slightly closed (the fingers pointing down to about 4 o'clock) and his hips and shoulders facing straight ahead on his first three steps — similar to Walter Ray Williams.

On his fourth step, his swing is still out. As he moves into his last step, the swing reaches the top and starts down, just as his left leg is passing his right.

What he does at the beginning of, and through, much of his last step is similar to what the "two-handers" do. His right foot is facing more parallel to the foul line than the toe, facing straighter ahead. He compresses his upper body downward, creating a lot of forward tilt (about 60 degrees) and even more lateral side spine tilt (about 70 degrees). This big change in his upper body position creates a lot of space for his swing to tuck in, so it's going inside-out into the release zone. At this point, he also loads up his elbow, which moves his hand to



Tackett finishes his very aggressive approach with his trail leg kicking high, his sliding leg straightening, and the sliding foot turning sideways. He has maintained his side tilt and his lower bowling shoulder all the way to the finish. His hips open, and his shoulders face his target line. The straightening of his sliding knee helps him generate speed and helps him release the ball out in front of him onto the lane.

the inside of the ball, where the fingers are then facing about 7 o'clock.

The other thing he does that's similar to the two-handers is to keep his shoulders open a lot longer going into the release zone. This also helps him in loading up the arm and tucking it in.

That, combined with his late swing, sets

him up for his release.

Tackett has a contemporary slide length, about 1.5 feet. Most of the top players today have between 1 and 2 feet of slide once the sliding foot makes full contact with the floor.

Tackett's slide ends when his ball is at his right knee, similar to Parker Bohn's

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late timing — but what happens after that is much different. From the point where the ball passes his right knee, he starts to lose some knee bend, and he uses his left leg to add to the power of the shot. So the knee starts straightening at the same time the elbow starts to unload, and then the wrist follows. The knee straightening out, and then the arm and wrist straightening out and going in the opposite direction of the knee, combine to speed the fingers going up and through the ball.

As his knee straightens out, Tackett's forward spine tilt stays steady, and his bowling-side shoulder stays down, which enable him to continue the downward movement of the hand and then the forward extension through the ball after the thumb exits.

When he is done with the shot, his knee is straight as a pole, and his sliding

E.J. Tackett and Jason Belmonte, two of the tour's highest-rev players, each approach the release with the right foot turned out, the left foot turned out a little, and hips and shoulders open. The upper body is compressed down with a lot of side and forward tilt, creating a lot of space for the loaded-up wrist and arm to drop into the release under the body. It is tough for one-handed players to get into this position and be successful with it.

foot has turned sideways. He ends up on his toes with a high kick of his right leg, much like Ronnie Russell. The types of moves Tackett has on his last two steps are things you can't teach. They are developed naturally over a course of time.

Growing up with the modern game, young players can get their bodies into positions that require flexibility and wiry strength. The good thing is they develop a lot of speed and hand action, which is critical to success today.

You never know where someone is going to go with their game; a lot of factors can come into play. In my opinion, one

of the big factors for Tackett's growth is going to be strength. He has a loose, fast game with a great strike ball and excellent feel and lane play skills. With all that talent, the stronger he gets, the easier it's going to be for him to refine his motion so it's less complicated with fewer moving parts — especially during his last two steps and the finish.

E.J. Tackett is a fun kid to watch bowl, and it figures to be even more fun watching his game mature.

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