

Bowlers Journal International

MAY 2017 • \$5 • www.bowlersjournal.com

Madalyn, with Dad Josh and Mom Aimee, performs her Grumpy the Dwarf impression.

'Reality' to FANTASY

Josh Blanchard ends dry spell at 'Reality Check Classic,' heads to Disney World

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { billspigner@aol.com }



Tangs: Not as Similar as You Think

YOUNG PLAYERS having their way is no longer merely an occasional occurrence on the PBA Tour; it's a trend. And at the 2017 USBC Masters — taking nothing away from Jason Belmonte's unprecedented fourth victory in that event — we were treated to the Tang brothers taking center stage for the live ESPN finals.

The show started with the fourth-seeded Michael Tang facing the No. 5 seed, Martin Larsen. Waiting in the wings to face the winner was the No. 3 seed, Darren Tang. With the brothers' parents in the audience, it brought a lot of anticipation and intensity to the opening match to see if the brothers would square off — which they did. Michael beat his brother and then topped Alex Hoskins to face Belmonte for the title, but there was no beating Belmo on this day.

Besides the anticipation and excitement of the brothers facing each other, it also was impressive to see the combination of composure and intensity that both demonstrated. You would have

thought they had been in this situation many times before.

One couldn't help but wonder how they were prepared to bowl like seasoned veterans despite their ages. The old-school learning curve simply no longer applies. When I was on the PBA Tour, it would take a couple of years to

become ready to even think about making shows and winning. The learning curve for the kids today includes preparing for and bowling in Junior Gold events, making Junior Team USA and college bowling. These programs have very tough conditions, which makes the bowlers who experience them more prepared for tour conditions than ever before.

Both Tang brothers attended San Jose State University, with Michael now finishing his senior year and planning on getting his PBA card this summer to join older brother, Darren, on the PBA road show.

The Tang brothers have very similar release and finish positions. Both Darren (left) and Michael (center) have a high leg kick, which was popular years ago. This style is still good to help create power from the legs. If you have a high leg kick and the trail foot comes down and you don't fall off balance, it shows you were well-balanced at release even with the trail foot in the air. The key to maintaining balance is to keep the slide-leg knee flexed and not lift the bowling shoulder. Both do this and look the same with a posted finish (like Darren, right) when the foot drops back to the floor.



Reprinted/Posted with permission from *Bowlers Journal International*.

San Jose State had not been a powerhouse team since the days when the late, great PBA star, Tony Reyes, was enrolled there. Tony encouraged Darren to go there and help jumpstart the bowling program, and get it back on the map again. Darren, on his own, recruited four other top Bay Area youth players to join him, with the goal of making the program great again for Tony. He did, as the team had a third-place finish in the Intercollegiate Bowling Championships in 2014.

By the time Michael was ready to attend college, there were more options available because of his early notoriety. But he chose to follow in his brother's footsteps. Bowling was important to Michael, but his education had to come first, just as it did for Darren. Plus, both were able to stay close to home.

The two boys have been bowling most of their lives, and Michael at one time was the youngest to roll a 300 game at age 10. When they started bowling, their dad was their coach and he is basically the only coach they've ever had.

Darren started with a game similar to

LESSON PLAN

BOTH TANG brothers think about playing the right part of the lane with the correct angle, ball and release, but they don't concern themselves with splitting boards.

As Darren Tang put it, "You should know what your intention is with the ball before you throw it, then execute the shot and not worry about anything else except whether it was the correct shot for the situation."

This is a strategy that requires consistent shot making, so work on that aspect of your game every time you practice.

— Bill Spigner

Tom Smallwood's or Tom Dougherty's, using the cupped wrist with a short swing to create a lot of revs and hook the ball like the big boys. The only difference was he inserted his thumb all the way in. At 13, he switched to a high, free-swing delivery like his

younger brother. When Michael started to develop his game, he took the route of copying Tommy Jones's game.

I asked them whether there was any sibling rivalry while they were growing up, and both answered in the affirmative, saying they wanted to win at everything and were very intense about it. Darren said he would get very angry when he'd lose, even at board games. He'd flip the board, throw things and even make Michael keep playing until the outcome changed.

Michael felt the same way about winning, and said their rivalry pushed them to try to become better than the other — and that continues today. During their TV match, Darren had his head in his hands for a long time after his 9th frame, and I asked him what he was thinking about. He said he realized the game was over, and was heartbroken because he didn't expect to make TV in a major so early in his career, and given that opportunity he wanted badly to win.

Even with their personal rivalry, the brotherly love remains strong, and each is happy for the other's success. Still,



Reprinted/Posted with permission from *Bowlers Journal International*.

they want to destroy each other when they compete. Healthy competitive rivalries are positive for pushing yourself to get better.

Darren and Michael have been living together at San Jose State, with Darren being the assistant coach there — just as Tony Reyes became the assistant coach after he graduated. It's great that Darren is giving back to a program he personally helped make better, and I'm sure Tony is looking down with pride when it comes to the work Darren is doing.

The great thing about the brothers being together is that they can practice together and help each other. Their dad always stressed that they should help each other out, and they take that attitude to the team, helping the other players get better as well.

The brothers' games are very different in a couple of respects, although they probably look very similar to many fans.

Both take five steps and hold the ball about chest-high in the stance. Both have the same length and height of backswing. They have almost identical finish positions.

But on the TV show, Randy Pedersen said their games were totally different, a reference to their timing. To demonstrate, they showed a side-by-side, step-by-step view of their approaches from a side angle.

Sure enough, Darren has an earlier swing. On the first two steps, he is actually a little later, but that changes dramatically on step three. Each has a long third step, very similar to that of Tommy Jones and Pete Weber, which is good for high-swing players, as it gives the swing more time to get to the top.

The difference between the two on this step is that Darren opens his shoulders more and does it faster, which



One of the big differences between the Tangs is their timing. Darren (left) is at the top of his swing on step three and Michael (right) gets there at the completion of his fourth step, which most of the time is better. But a high-swing player can get early with their swing provided they don't pull the swing down. Regardless of the timing differences they look very similar at the top of their swings. They are in a great position for a high swing player, from the left hand through the right hand. Follow these positions and you will be in the right place to start the downswing.

pulls the swing back faster so it gets to the top at the completion of his third step. It turns out to be about a 45-degree earlier swing, based on the total arc of the backswing being 180 degrees, which equals about half-a-step.

Michael's armswing isn't complete until the end of his fourth step, and Darren's actually has started its downswing halfway through his fourth step. Entering the slide, Darren's swing is half-a-step earlier. At this point, Darren really starts bending his knees and compressing down to the ground. Michael also has knee flex then, but less.

The thing that really makes them different going into the slide is that Darren has about a 60-degree forward spine tilt, very much like that of Walter Ray Williams Jr., while Michael's is

about 30 degrees. Darren's extra spine tilt closes the shoulders faster, and he has to straighten up his spine angle to release the ball out onto the lane with speed and power. Michael, having less forward tilt and knee bend and a later swing going into the release zone, can lean a little forward on the last step to release the ball onto the lane, which makes it easier to have more power with less effort. Darren has plenty of power, but it requires more physical work to get it.

There are a few other differences, mostly with their hand positions and rev rates. Michael tucks his pinky, while Darren leaves his flat. Darren has a little more wrist-cock, which helps him get more tilt (that's why his rev rate is a little lower than Michael's, but is still in the higher rev-rate ranges).

Their targeting also is a little different. Darren is more articulate about seeing his ball roll down the lane, while Michael

is more of a free spirit when rolling the ball. Michael lines up from the arrows to a closer target, but really doesn't see what he hits — or worry about it.

I asked Darren who was better — obviously, an unfair question. He said Michael was more gifted, but on any day one could beat the other. Darren feels he has the better mental game and is more likely to dig himself out of a hole.

Having witnessed what they did on TV, I'd say there is no lack of a strong mental game or a desire to succeed with either brother. It will be fun to watch these two young talents in the future.

Bill Spigner is a Gold-level coach and a Team USA assistant coach. Archived "Pro Approach" columns can be viewed at billspigner.com.