

Bowlers Journal

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INTERNATIONAL

*Mom,
We've always had
a special bond...*



Alpha Moms

ours is just a little different than most

Why Mother's Day means more to the Wodkas and Nortons than it does to the average bowler

From left to right: Kathy and Dave Wodka with Scott and Virginia Norton

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { billspigner@aol.com }



Overcoming Lessons of Youth

MATT O'GRADY has arrived. You could call him a little bit of a late bloomer. Matt has been slowly climbing to the top ever since he started bowling, enjoying early success by making Junior Team USA, having a stellar collegiate career at William Paterson, and being a successful PBA regional player before stepping onto the big stage.

It usually takes a player three to five years of bowling on tour, presuming they have the talent, to gain enough experience to become an everyday player — meaning they make cuts regularly and, when things go right, they can win. Matt is in his fifth year of bowl-

ing a full tour schedule, so he's right on schedule to become an elite player.

Matt has an East Coast swagger about him, with an animated walk and reactions. He has a bubbly yet edgy personality. He grew up watching and bowling late-night action that had

high entertainment value with a lot of trash talking, and that became part of his bowling personality. He exhibited some of that during his Tournament of Champions win in February. Bowling action prepared him to bowl heads-up matches and for throwing one shot for all the wheat — which he did to win on TV.

Matt has some unique things in his very sound game that were developed because of the environment in which he grew up. When he got serious about bowling and started to learn how to hook the ball like the pros, he was



O'Grady's Three-Part Final Step: Picture one (left) shows Matt at the top of his backswing ready for his last step. The second picture (center) shows that Matt has taken almost a full last step and his swing has not started down. That's a lot of hang time, which greatly accelerates the speed of the downswing. The last picture shows he has completed his slide and the ball has only descended to waist high, with the shoulders, hand, arm and hips still wide open. A lot has to happen to square up the hand and body for his release. Matt does this in a very smooth way, something everyone should work on at the end of their approach. Many that have late timing will exert a lot of effort to square everything up for the release. Follow what Matt has trained himself to do; have patience to complete the shot.

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bowling on Guardian, a thin film overlay applied to either wood or synthetic lanes that are in need of repair. It's the softest surface there is.

The center at which he bowled had wood lanes, and the Guardian was applied over the head area, or about the first 15 feet of the lane. The hardness of a lane is measured by the Sward Scale. Guardian is about 15 to 25 on that scale, wood is about 25 to 35, and synthetics can range anywhere from 50 to 90 depending on the manufacturer and model.

Matt was a smaller kid. Thus, when he began learning how to hook the ball and bowl on this soft surface — which makes the ball hook earlier than on a harder surface — he had to throw the ball hard and with a lot of spin/axis tilt. The speed, lower ball track and higher tilt really helped him get the ball down the lane so it had plenty of energy at the back end.

Matt's early days remind me of how the great Mark Roth developed his game. Roth learned to bowl on dryer wood lanes, so he developed loft, speed and spin to combat the lane conditions.

For a young, smaller person, emulating a few of Matt's techniques can help develop the necessary speed and spin to complement a strong-hooking ball.

Matt developed his style by basically just dropping the ball into his swing early — something he still does today. The effect of this early ball placement got his body moving faster. He developed a pull at the beginning of his backswing to get it high, much like Pete Weber did when he was a youngster and developing.

The next thing Matt developed was his hand action during the swing. He learned to open the hand a lot, which helped him develop his turn from inside out through the ball. His hand doesn't start to open until it passes the right leg at the beginning of his backswing going up.

Opening the hand later in the swing, rather than in the stance, is the best way to do it. Doing it in conjunction with the shoulders opening as the swing is going to the top will develop a

loose, long swing.

Matt's hand, looking from a back view, opens so much that it's actually under the mid-line of the ball and on the inside of it. That's not quite in Jakob Butturff territory, but not far from it.

Even with Matt's ball placement, he has very late timing at the end. His swing hangs at the top for a long time, one of the longest delays I have seen. His slide foot is stopped just before his swing has descended to waist high, while his hand is still wide open.

Most of the time, someone that late will pull the swing down. But Matt has trained himself not to do that. The big thing he does at this point is to start bending the elbow. That, in conjunction with his shoulders squaring up, gets his hand back behind the ball just as he is ready to release it. At the release, his elbow straightens out and goes from outside the ball and shoulder inward to the inside of the ball and under his chin as his hand is extending through the ball.

He gets a lot of his turn from the elbow moving right to left during the release and straightening out as the ball exits his hand. This movement really accelerates the fingers from under the ball to the top, producing a lot of revs and turn. There's a lot going on there, but he has trained himself to do it effortlessly and smoothly.

Matt likes to play right and straighter, on top of the shape of the pattern in the midlane. He says he often struggles on tour when his ball doesn't read the midlane early enough, something that is crucial to his success. That issue is directly related to his upbringing on Guardian, creating spin and speed to combat the early hook he'd get on that surface.

Tour conditions have a lot of oil, and today the pros always bowl in centers with harder synthetic lanes. So, the big thing he's working on involves getting his ball to read earlier. He is trying to raise his track up a little to get less axis tilt, which will help the ball read the pattern earlier.

When the patterns are sport compliant, it's very important to get the ball to

LESSON PLAN

MATT O'GRADY made some big changes in his grip the past couple of years that really helped. He used to use a very tight thumb with 1/8 left, zero reverse, no grips and a lot of bevel. He made a change when he tried to throw hard at a split and the ball hung up on his thumb, went straight up, and came down, hitting him in the head and briefly knocking him out — scary, to say the least.

After that incident, he changed his thumb pitches to 1/4 reverse and 1/4 left, drilled an oval-shaped thumb hole that was larger than he'd been using, and increased his span by 1/8 of an inch. The combination of all the changes has resulted in a much cleaner release. It was clean before, but mentally he had to think about flicking the ball off his hand at the right time; now, he doesn't have to do that.

If you have to work hard at getting the ball off your thumb cleanly, you really need to have it looked at. It might be as simple as carving the hole to get a cleaner release, or it may involve changing a number of things to get a better thumb exit, something that's critical to consistency.

— Bill Spigner

read the pattern in the 20- to 30-ft. area of the lane because that's where the pattern has the most shape.

With his new off-the-lanes workouts and recognizing the things he needs to do to finish higher more often, Matt O'Grady is going in the right direction. Winning the Tournament of Champions should be a confidence booster, too.

Bill Spigner is a Gold-certified coach and member of the Team USA coaching team. Archived "Pro Approach" columns may be accessed at billspigner.com.