

Bowlers Journal

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THE PRO APPROACH

BY BIL SPIGNER { billspigner@aol.com }



Setting Up for Success

A GOOD DELIVERY begins with a good set-up. Reader Thomas Henline asks: “What is the best way to place my feet when I set up for my approach — side by side, or one in front of the other? I am right-handed and have a five-step approach.”

A very good question, Thomas. I see so many bowlers that have so many different ways to align their feet, and one way does not fit all. But I believe the overall best way is to have the feet

slightly staggered. For a right-handed player, the toe of the left foot would be about two to three inches closer to the foul line than the right foot (the trail foot), while the opposite would be true

for left-handers.

The direction the feet face also varies from one bowler to another. Most players pick out where they stand with their sliding foot, the left for right-handers and the right for left-handers. Many use the inside edge of the foot to determine the board on which they stand, while many others use the tip of the shoe.

Regardless of which part of your foot you use for lining up in your stance, it has to be consistent and you need to be precise about where you are standing. Higher-skilled players are always precise with the placement of their feet, while lesser-skilled players pay less attention to how they set up their feet.

Of all the things you can control, number one is your set-up. It gets you prepared to start your approach, and



1 Going Direct: The foot alignment of Shannon O'Keefe, the 2018 PWBA Bowler of the Year, is straight ahead. Her hips and shoulder also face straight ahead, with her spine angle more vertical and the shoulder higher. This helps her play more direct angles.

2 Good for Versatility: Team USA member AJ Johnson has a set-up with his feet in a pretty neutral position. The left foot is straight and there's a slight flare of the right foot. This enables him to create more side tilt and places the shoulder lower for more space under it for his swing. Among our four models, Johnson's trail foot is the farthest back. It's a good overall stance for playing multiple angles.

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you really need to be conscious of where you stand and how you build your stance — starting with the feet.

A basic rule of thumb is you want your alignment foot/slide foot to be facing straight ahead. The trail foot can be either straight ahead or flared a little away from the other foot's direction. Most pro bowlers stagger their feet, with a slight flare of the trail foot.

The angle at which you position your trail foot is determined, first, by the natural way you stand. If you flare your feet out a little for comfort when you stand still, you want to maintain that in the stance. If you stand naturally with both feet pointed straight ahead, again for comfort, keep both feet straight ahead — unless you are comfortable flaring out the trail foot slightly.

One of the main reasons to have your feet slightly staggered is that it

helps to get your shoulders and spine angle set up with the bowling-side shoulder lower and some lateral spine tilt. If you have both feet side by side and facing straight ahead, it's not as comfortable to set the shoulder and spine angles.

When looking at it from a side view, your bowling-side shoulder and hip will be farther back than the non-bowling side, which sets you up in a slightly open stance. From this set-up position it makes it easier to place or push the ball away straight ahead, and then swing under the bowling-side shoulder on the backswing.

One word of caution about the alignment of the feet: Do not over-exaggerate the degree that the feet and body are flared open. Many players feel they have to really open up their stance to swing the ball more. It's doesn't take a lot in the set-up and release position

to swing the ball a little more than you normally would, or even roll it straighter. I see some bowlers that actually have the feet and body sideways in the stance. This is not a good idea. The thing to remember, even when you set up more sideways to the lane, is you still have to walk straight or left for a right-hander, or straight or right for a left-hander. If you were to walk in the direction your feet are facing, you would end up walking in front of your swing, and not many good things happen with that.

If you are going to roll to the left corner for spares (right-hander), you then would flare your sliding foot out and have your trail foot straight so your hips and shoulders are facing the direction you want the ball to travel.

Your feet are the only things that come in contact with your environment, so get used to paying special attention to what you are doing with them. Build your stance from the ground up.



3 Creating Side Tilt: Reigning PBA Player of The Year Andrew Anderson has his trail foot the farthest back of our models. The toe of his right foot is at the heel of his left foot and flared out a little more. This allows him to create more side tilt and places the shoulder lower for more space under the shoulder for his swing.

4 Inside Strategy: Here, PBA star Kyle Troup is playing way inside and has both feet angled to the right. He always has both feet facing in the same direction. If you open up your stance a lot, you have to make sure you walk away from the direction your feet are facing. You can change the angle that your feet are facing to set up the body to help you deliver the ball in the direction you want it to travel. Work on your feet first to build your stance, but always know what board you're standing on and where you want the ball to travel down the lane.