

Be Slick—Study the Oil Patterns

By **BILL SPIGNER**

■ *I have been struggling in my league ever since the house I bowl in put down synthetic lanes. Can you give me some help on how to find the line on synthetic lanes? I bowl with the Columbia Messenger Titanium and have been playing the second arrow. I use a Storm spare ball for spares. Is the basic premise the same—move in the direction you are missing—or do synthetic lanes change that?*

Yes, the basic premise for adjustments is to move in the direction of the miss, regardless of the surface. But how you move is the key to making a functional adjustment.

You play the second arrow, but playing the second arrow is only good if that is the correct place to play. Bowlers are almost always taught to play the second arrow when they are first introduced to spot bowling and begin learning how to hook the ball.

Most bowling centers will oil the lanes so this area is the best place to start on a freshly oiled lane. They apply a lot of oil from the second arrow on the right to the second arrow on the left. There's very little

Playing the oil is one of bowling's biggest challenges. The better you can read the changing lanes, the greater an advantage you'll have over opponents.

oil on the first 10 boards on both sides of the lane.

This lane condition is called a 10 to 10 block, or Top Hat, because it looks like a top hat on a lane-condition graph. Rolling a ball straight, with very little hand action, will allow a bowler to play straight down the lane around the second arrow (the 10-board). With this type of release and lane condition, bowlers can play in this area merely by moving

their feet left or right to accommodate the ball reaction.

If the ball doesn't hook enough, move your feet a couple of boards to the right. If the ball is hooking too much, move a little to the left, keeping the target the same. Just keep in mind that this type of adjustment isn't foolproof—not all oiling patterns can be played the same.

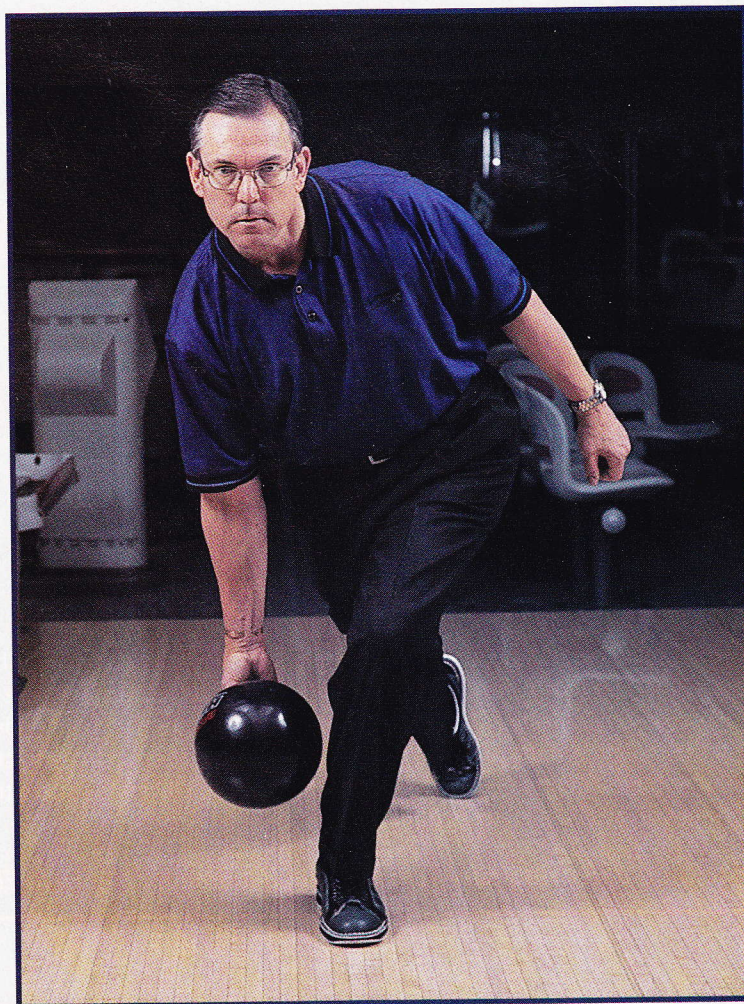
With the high-performance oiling machines of today, a proprietor can oil the

lanes easily with many different patterns. However, no matter which oil pattern is set down, there's always a way to solve it.

Let's take a look at how to attack a basic oil pattern. If a machine has pads only five boards wide, the lanes will always have more oil in the center of the lane than on the edge. So the basic rule of thumb, moving in the direction the ball misses, is correct on almost all lane conditions when you are rolling on a freshly stripped and oiled lane.

The beginning adjustment that should be made every time to help you find the right place to play on the lane is to move your feet *and* target, not just your feet.

There are basically two different types of lane machines made

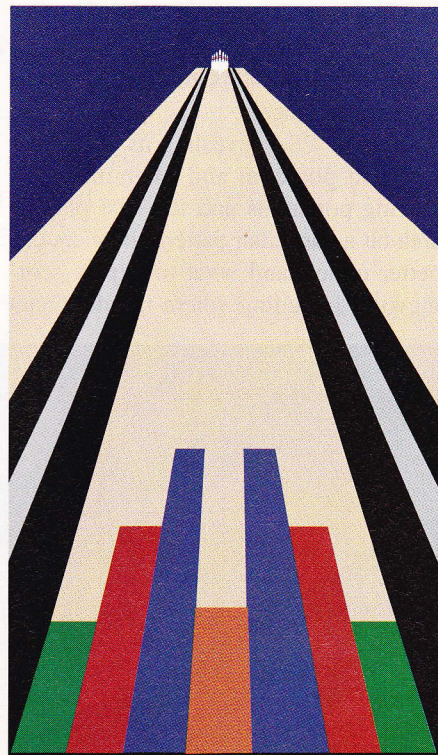


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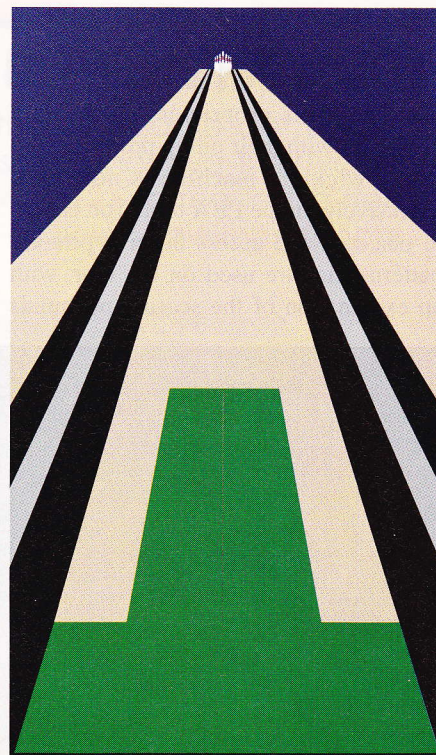
PATTERN A

When a pad machine is used to oil at varying lengths down the lane and board widths across the lane, the result is a challenging pattern that's difficult to play.



PATTERN B

The Christmas Tree pattern is created by a pad machine oiling more uniformly with five-board width pads. This oil is easier to play than that of pattern A.



PATTERN C

The basic house pattern—the Top Hat—consists of a straight band of oil across the front of the lane and 10 to 10 oil out to 25 feet in the middle of the lane.

today. One is called a **pad machine**. This machine applies the oil to the lane using three-, five-, and seven-board width pads.

The machine is programmed so the pads oil a specific length before they stop. When the machine first starts to oil just beyond the foul line, all the pads are saturated with oil and the oil is transferred from the pads to a brush that applies the oil to the lane.

In pattern A above, the pad that oils boards 1 through 7 applies oil for seven feet, the three-board pad (oiling the 7

through 10 board) for 14 feet, the five-board pad for 24 feet, and the 15- to 20-board pad for 30 feet.

This type of oiling pattern demands that a bowler consider a few different angles of attack on a freshly oiled lane. The very straight player can play to the right around the 5- to 7-boards, pointing the ball up top to the pocket. The player with low revs but a little more side roll on the ball can play between the 8- and 10-boards. The player with a medium strength ball roll can play around the 10- to 12-board, and the player with the big hand can play the 3rd arrow. Overall, the dominant shot at the start of the night on an oil pattern like this would be around the 10-board.

With the pad machine that uses only five-board width pads, the shot will be a little different. In pattern B, boards 1

through 5 are oiled for seven feet, boards 5 through 10 for 14 feet, boards 10 through 15 for 21 feet, and boards 15 through 20 for eight feet.

This type of pattern would be referred as a Christmas Tree. It's a little easier to attack because it allows a greater number of bowlers to play the part of the lane that their hook allows, in an area they are comfortable playing. This multi-angle pattern allows you to play off the oil line on boards 5, 10, and 15.

The typical condition put out today is oiled like pattern C, gutter-to-gutter oil for about five feet and 10 to 10 oil for about 25 feet. This straightforward condition was the one mentioned earlier, the 10 to 10 block (or Top Hat).

The other type and the newest technology in lane machines is a **wickless (no pads) machine** that can apply the oil to the lane one board at a time across

Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Send them to: Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201 or e-mail bowl@centurysports.net.

the width of the lane. Unlike the pad machines that can only apply oil based on the width of the pad, this type of machine gives proprietors much more flexibility with their oiling procedures.

The wickless machine is now used exclusively on the PBA tour. You can go to pba.com and access the five primary patterns that are used on the tour, with an explanation of the scoring potentials

playing on in terms of the oil pattern. Being uninformed about the oil makes it difficult for bowlers to evaluate their true performance.

With the PBA revealing its oiling patterns on pba.com and explaining the scoring potentials and the best playing area on a particular pattern, bowlers can better understand what to expect scoringwise, including where the dominant

less machine can help you picture the oil pattern in your mind. The illustrations on page 23 can serve as a general guide to help you see in your mind where the oil is on some standard patterns, which is helpful because you can't see it on the lane.

If your bowling center uses a pad machine, you know the oil is applied in strips down the lane. If your home cen-



Oil can't be read by the naked eye, making research and practice important components in battling changing oil conditions.

of each of the patterns and the best way to play them.

In addition, the PBA is using these patterns in its regional program a lot now. If you are a high-level player (200-plus average), you can bowl on the conditions the touring pros play on simply by bowling a regional.

The PBA has made playing regionals more inviting recently by changing its rules to allow non-members to cash in one regional a year, with no restrictions on how many tournaments non-members can bowl without cashing.

The neat thing about what the PBA is doing by publicizing its lane conditions is that it allows bowlers to understand what they are playing on, which helps them learn how to play better on certain lane conditions the more they see them. The problem we have always had in bowling is we don't know what we are

playing areas are and how the areas shift based on play. This allows the best players to bowl the best in the long run.

Golf has ratings for courses and different tees so players can play a course based on their abilities. We don't have that in bowling, but with the new technology available, we can now show interested bowlers the conditions they are playing on. A better understanding of the conditions helps you learn how to play them better.

Now let's get back to playing the lanes. Knowing that most oil patterns have more oil in the middle of the lane and less closer to the gutter gives you a head start in finding the right place to play. You can also count on there being a dominant area to play on a freshly oiled lane and an oil line to play off of.

Knowing if the bowling center where you bowl uses a pad machine or a wick-

less machine, the oil can be applied in strips as well, but the oil can also be applied in more of a blended pattern that doesn't have a hard oil line to play.

The key for you is to locate the area that holds the most and least oil on a given lane. Once you identify these areas of the lane, you can fine-tune where you stand and target in order to play this part of the lane.

Once you find the best area to play, keep an open mind about changing as the lane changes. Keep your eyes open to not only your own ball reaction, but also to that of the other players on your pair. The same adjustments don't work every night, but watching others and understanding different tendencies that occur in lane conditions will help you make better decisions with your adjustments in the future. ●