



A Tuck Won't Nip Your Revs Worries

By **BILL SPIGNER**

■ *Does tucking the pinky finger give you more revolutions on the bowling ball? I've been told it does and wonder how. I have tried this, but it doesn't seem to work for me. I am a right-handed stroker who has averaged in the mid-190s for the past 10 years. I've watched Robert Smith, who has the most revs on tour, and he spreads his pinky finger. He doesn't tuck it.*

Tucking the pinky finger tightens the grip on the ball. When fingers grip the ball harder, they can lift up on the ball harder. This method of getting lift works more for some and less for others, just like anything else.

Lifting up (or hitting up) on the ball was very widely used before reactive resin bowling balls, modern oiling techniques,

and the widespread installation of synthetic lanes.

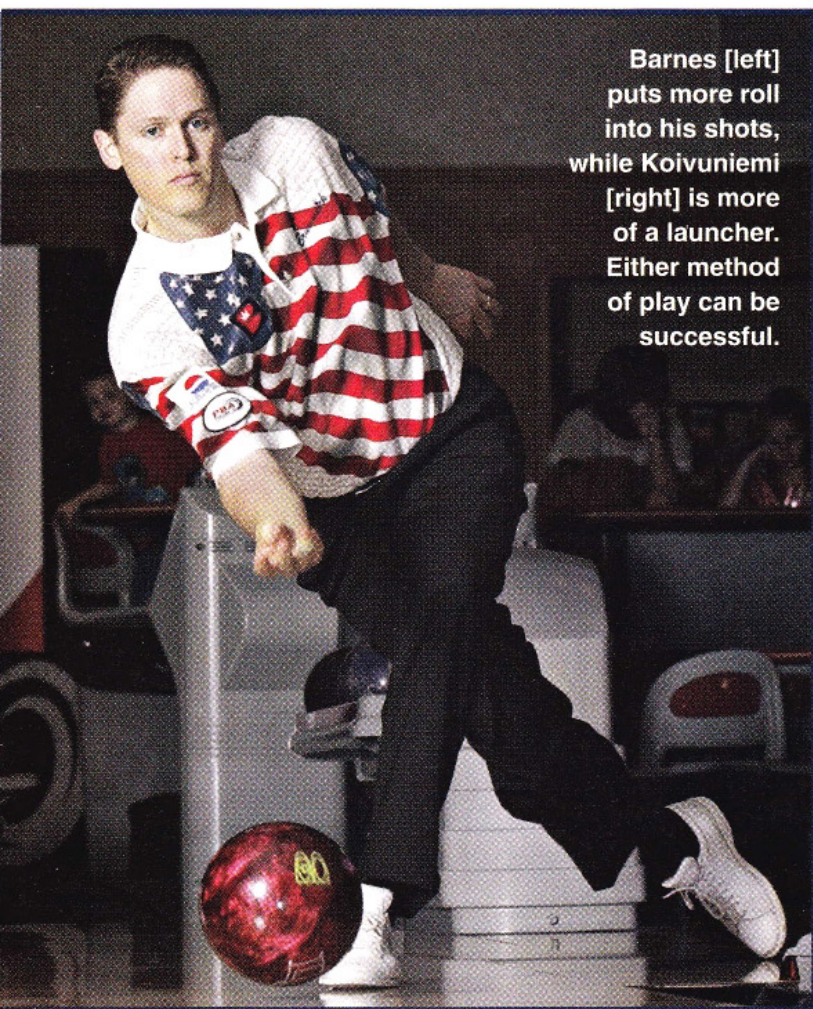
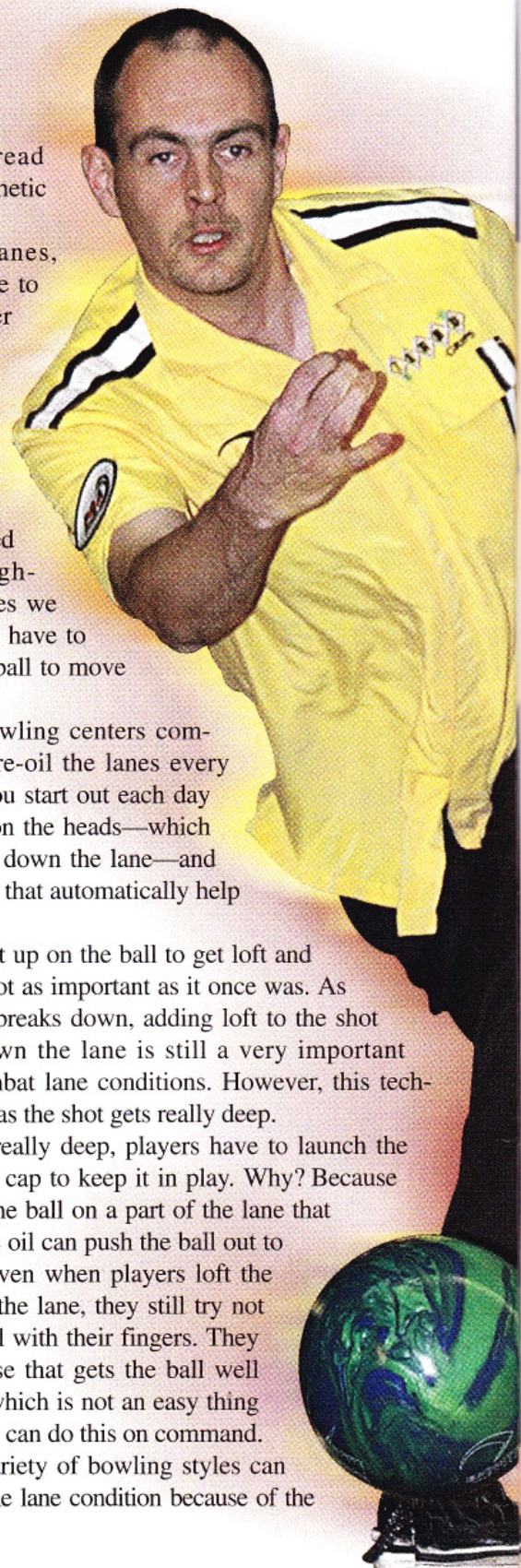
On old wood lanes, bowlers would have to loft the ball farther out on the lane to get the ball to delay its hook and have enough hitting power. With the amount and types of oil used today and the high-quality lane surfaces we bowl on, you don't have to hit up hard on the ball to move it down the lane.

Today, many bowling centers completely clean and re-oil the lanes every day. That means you start out each day with plenty of oil on the heads—which helps the ball slide down the lane—and bone-dry back ends that automatically help the ball hook.

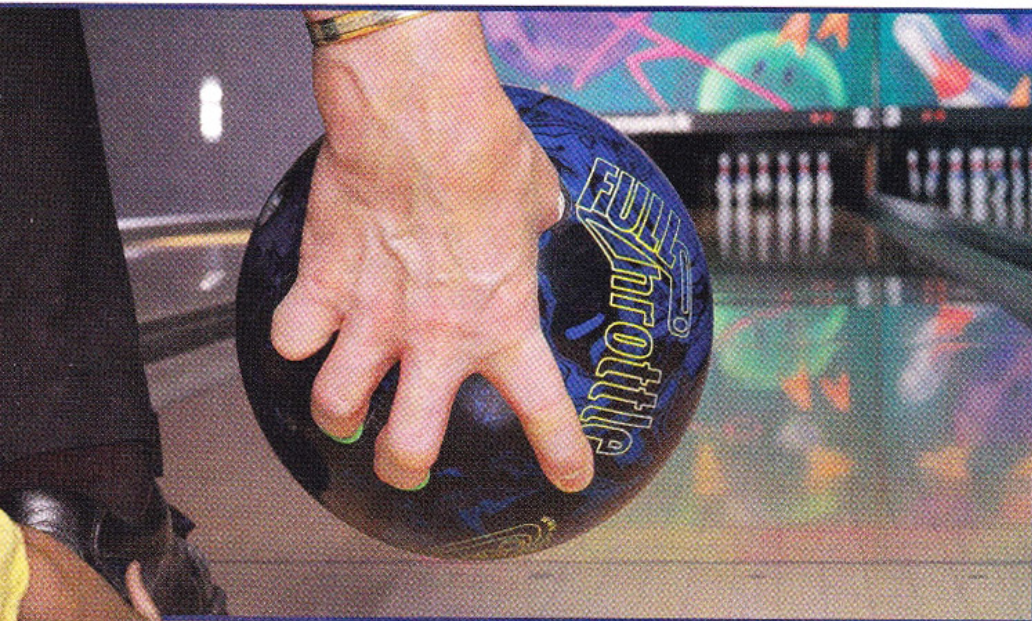
So the need to hit up on the ball to get loft and delay the hook is not as important as it once was. As the lane condition breaks down, adding loft to the shot to get the ball down the lane is still a very important release tool to combat lane conditions. However, this technique is used more as the shot gets really deep.

If the shot gets really deep, players have to launch the ball over the gutter cap to keep it in play. Why? Because they have to play the ball on a part of the lane that has some oil, so the oil can push the ball out to their breakpoint. Even when players loft the ball farther out on the lane, they still try not to hit up on the ball with their fingers. They want a clean release that gets the ball well out onto the lane, which is not an easy thing to do. The best pros can do this on command.

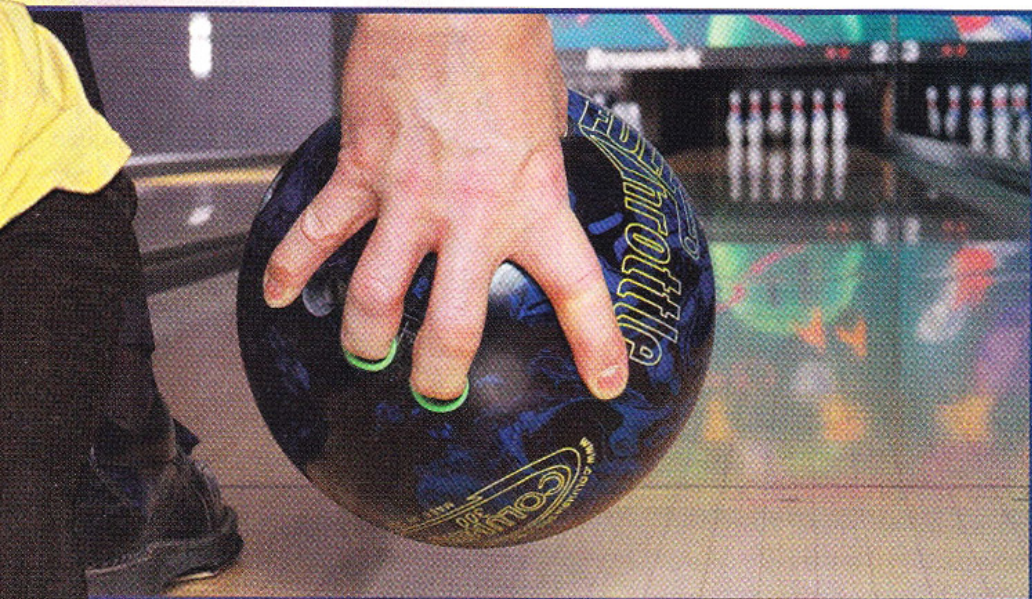
These days, a variety of bowling styles can compete on the same lane condition because of the



Barnes [left] puts more roll into his shots, while Koivuniemi [right] is more of a launcher. Either method of play can be successful.



Tucking your pinky [above] is a mostly outdated method of increasing revs. It's more important these days to have the fingers behind the ball [below], which lets swing speed generate revs.



great lane surfaces we play on. On the pro tour during any given week, you will see this variety on display. You might see a bowler like Mika Koivuniemi launching the ball way out onto the lane while bowling against a Chris Barnes, who is rolling the ball at the foul line—and both players have an equal chance of winning. (Barnes has the added versatility of being able to launch the ball well onto the lane when he needs to.)

You don't see as many pros tucking their pinkies anymore because they work hard at releasing the ball very smoothly off the hand. They don't grab the ball,

regardless of the action they are applying to it. Tucking the pinky can cause you to tighten your finger-grip pressure, which can make you grab the ball at release.

To get a lot of revolutions on the ball, you need to have your fingers under the ball at the bottom of the swing. The hand should be behind the ball, with the wrist slightly cupped. The thumb exits the ball with the fingers still underneath and the hand behind the ball. That way, the speed at which the swing is traveling and the speed that the fingers travel from under to the top of the ball determine the number of revolutions. The faster the fingers move up and through the ball, the more revolutions you get. (Remember, if you are a stroker, you will not have the arm and hand speed to create a lot of revolutions.)

Keep working on your style and expand your abilities to do more with the ball. Just look at Walter Ray Williams Jr. He doesn't hook the ball a lot, but he gets a good number of revs and throws it hard. You see him a lot on TV, don't you? Even with all his power, you see Robert Smith much less often. But if his game continues to evolve, Smith will be on TV more often in the future.

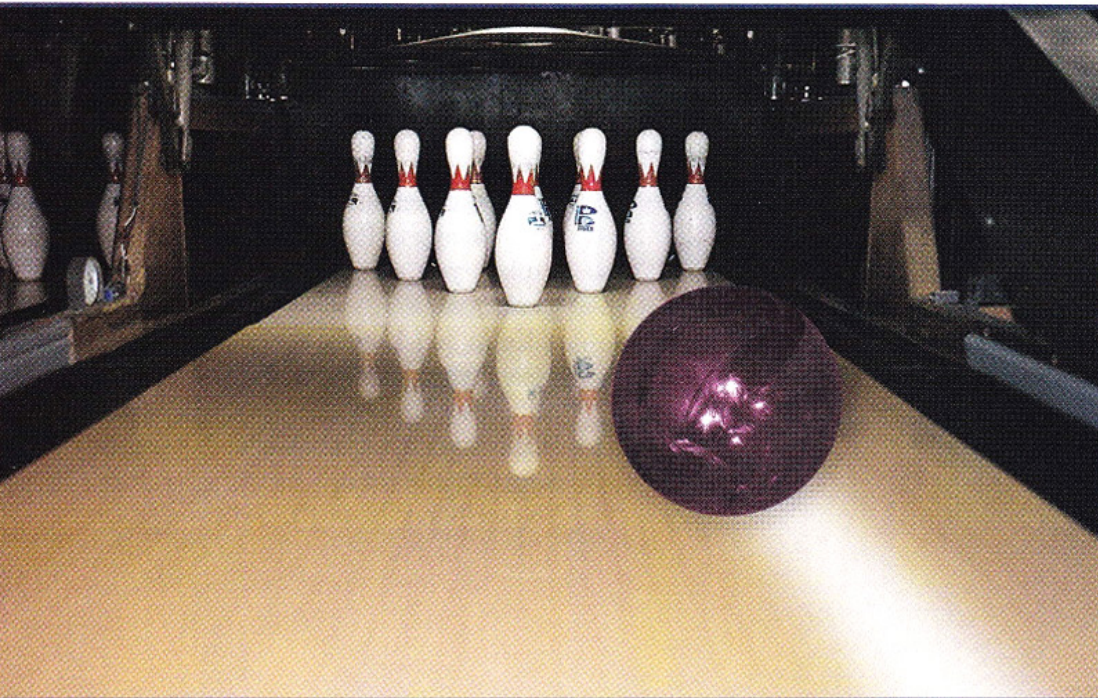
■ *I'm currently deployed in Iraq and I want to maintain my mental focus on bowling. I'm carrying a 198 average and want to carry at least 220. I want to be at the next level. I've just ordered new equipment: balls, shoes, and a glove. I'll be stationed here for six months. What kind of exercises can I do to help my bowling focus?*

It's great you are thinking ahead. In addition to your equipment, pick up *Focused for Bowling* by Dr. Dean Hinitz. He is a sports psychologist who works with many of the top pros and amateurs in the country. This book will help you strengthen your mental game.

Do a lot of mental practicing. First off, think about your form—walk yourself through your approach. You can do this when you are relaxing or even as you're walking. Think of the cadence of your steps and try to mentally coordinate the swing to the steps. Then simulate the finish position and the release you want.

If you have access to a mirror that's large enough, walk toward the mirror simulating your approach and focus on what you see. Have a little weight in your bowling hand so you can simulate having a ball in your hand; the weight will help you feel the swing and hand position better.

Second, mentally play the game.



Imagine your ball as an eraser that removes oil from the lanes as it rolls.

Practice visualizing the path you want the ball to take down the lane and what hand and stance position you would use to accomplish this. Think about how the lanes will be changing as you roll the ball down the lane. Imagine that the ball is an eraser that removes some oil with each roll of the ball and also moves the oil down the lane. Train yourself to be mentally prepared to move as the lane changes instead of being surprised that you have to move or change how you are rolling the ball.

Bowling is very mentally demanding. The more you understand how your physical game functions, the better you will get at mentally managing your game and, in turn, playing it. Unless you know why the ball does what it does based on what you feel and see the ball do, you will not be able to compete at the highest level.

This is where the game gets very tough

mentally. The better a bowler you are, the harder the game gets. There are so many hidden variables in our sport, and you can only learn about many of these through experience.

Once you fail to perform at the level you want to and realize that it's not the condition, ball, or anything else other than your own ability to get the job done,

you're on the road to improving and learning how to bowl better.

■ I am 19 years old and I have been bowling for seven years. I am having problems picking out the right type of bowling ball for heavily oiled lanes.

I also need a ball that works well with my style of bowling. I stand about six or seven boards left of center, and I have a long approach to the foul lane. The balls that I have now are not really working for me because of the oil pattern that is set up at my "home" alley. There is so much oil on the outside that I find myself moving 10 or 15 boards to the right of my original stance.

I am not used to playing so far right. I am a high-rev, high-rpm type of bowler. What type of bowling ball should I get, and what type of drilling would best fit my game?

The real question should be, what can you do with your game to help you better play this lane condition? The ball is an important factor in playing the lane condition correctly, but the right lineup, ball speed, ball rotation, and rev rate are also very important.

You said you moved your feet right 10 to 15 boards but made no mention of your target. The first thing you need to do is learn the approach and lane by board numbers. Knowing where you are standing and targeting by board numbers will help you remember where you are playing the lanes and communicate with other higher-level players and coaches more easily.

Next, think about the rotation and speed of the ball in relationship to the lane condition. The ball will need a much different approach on lanes that are heavily oiled with no recovery when you swing than a lane that hooks more and gives you room to swing the ball.

It sounds like your lanes are oiled with a flatter oil pattern. I know you feel uncomfortable playing right, but in order to become a more well-rounded player you have to open your mind to using more parts of the lane.

On a heavily oiled lane condition, you will need to reduce your rev rate and roll the ball more end-over-end (less side roll). The type of ball you need is one that rolls earlier, with a drilling that doesn't make the ball have a hard change of direction when it gets to the end of the oil.

A ball that skids and snaps with a big direction change will be hard to control. You want the ball to be rolling when it gets to the back end and arc, not snap at the back end.

It's all about control on these types of conditions. If you are able to play the lane from the right, you will already have enough angle to carry if you can get the ball in the pocket consistently.

If you can't play the lane from outside, your second option is to play the center of the lane. On lane conditions where the oil is flat (for example, a sport condition) the outside part of the lane can play as if

there is more oil because the lane surface is smoother.

To play inside (3rd arrow to 5th arrow), you want the ball to be kept on a tight line, maybe getting the ball out to the 11- or 12-board at your breakpoint. Even when playing inside, you need the ball to arc at your breakpoint, not snap.

Remember, the more difficult it is to hit the pocket, the more predicable you want the bowling ball and release to be. Having trouble with something gives you the best opportunity to learn. At 19, you have barely scratched the surface of the game. Bowling gets harder as you get better because it takes a lot of learning and work to become proficient at playing a wide variety of lane conditions.

■ I've gone from a solid 185 to 190 player to barely holding a 160 average. I've tried everything, but I can't get my game back: using new balls, moving back or up on the lane, holding the ball high or low, having fast or slow feet. I hit the pocket but don't strike. Nine, nine, nine. I try the 2nd arrow, inside, outside. Nothing works! I love bowling, but I'm ready to give it up. In a three-game match, I always have fewer than 10 strikes, catch a few splits, and the night is lost.

Your problem is not uncommon. Everyone gets lost in their game at times. Even the top pros go through it. Sometimes in an effort to get better we go backwards.

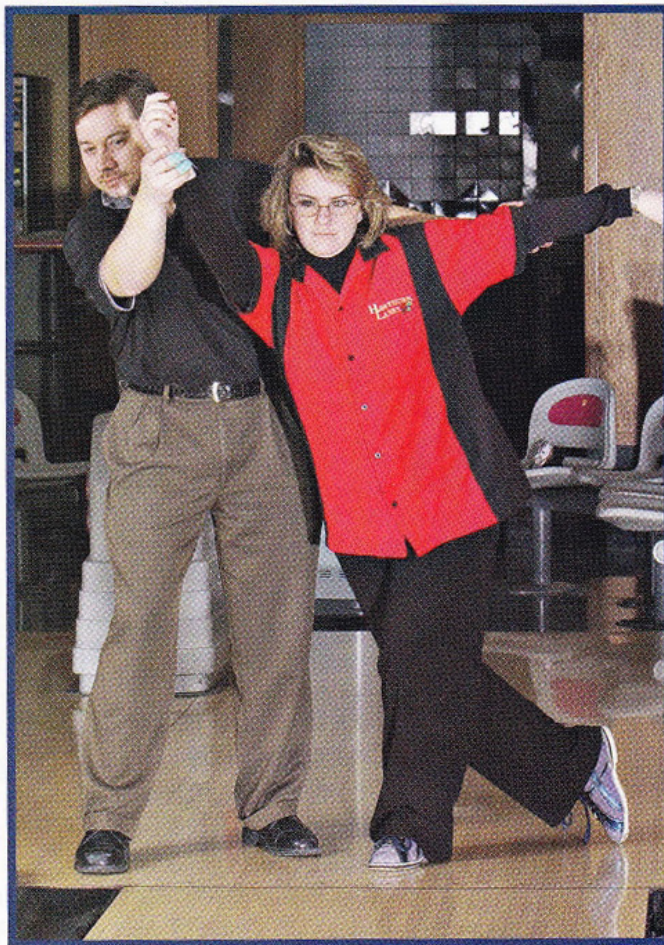
I am a big believer that you have to understand what you are doing wrong before you start changing things. You have to have an understanding of your mechanics and playing lanes. It is very risky to change things by the seat of your pants: Many times you end up changing things that you don't need to because you don't know what you're doing wrong.

In bowling, we have many "concourse coaches" who offer advice to everyone.

Normally, that advice is based on what these coaches perceive as right and/or what might work for them.

My advice is that you seek out the best bowling instructor you can, even if you have to drive a couple of hours to find him or her. The time and money will be well spent if they give you the opportunity to get on the right track to better bowling.

The proper instruction can take years



It's of utmost importance to find a qualified coach who will tailor his or her instruction to your game.

off the trial-and-error way of learning—not to mention the frustration you go through if you're taught by a poor instructor. For many years of future enjoyment in bowling, take the time to get proper training.

I've had lessons, weeks of coaching, and hours of practice, but I still can't get my thumb out early enough to keep from spinning the ball. I want to roll it. Any

suggestions? I've had the thumb hole redrilled so that I no longer have a death grip on the ball, but I still don't get my thumb out early enough.

The first thing I would look at is your timing. If you have an early swing, the ball will be out in front of you when you are still sliding, causing you to release the ball on the upswing—especially if you are trying to get a lot of lift on the ball. You want your sliding foot to stop before the ball gets to the bottom of the swing.

After you make sure your timing is late enough, then you can start to work at the timing of the ball coming off the hand and the style of release you want to use. If your foot is still sliding when you are releasing the ball, good timing is difficult to accomplish.

During the release, I would concentrate hard to make sure your thumb doesn't turn counter-clockwise. Try to keep the thumb pointing upward to about 11 o'clock. Next, think of the wrist slightly flexing back; relax the wrist so the fingers can go from under the ball to on top. It's the opposite of hitting up on the ball—you are trying to hit down on the ball, like Chris Barnes does.

Initially, exaggerate these recommendations without worrying about the action you are getting on the ball. Overexaggerating the release will give you a totally different feel. From the extreme opposites of the two releases, your old one and the overexag-

gerated one, you can settle somewhere between the two and get the results you want.

Remember, it's timing. First, getting your body to the line before the ball. Second is the timing of when the ball leaves your hand. The earlier you release the ball, the smoother it will be; the later you release the ball, the more you hit up on it. Work out the timing of these two factors and you will be on your way to a better release. ●