

# Bowling Journal

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INTERNATIONAL

BREAKDOWN:  
SPIGNER ANALYZES  
DARREN TANG  
**PG 32**

NOREIKS RIDES  
CONFIDENCE  
TO QUEENS WIN  
**PG 44**



## FINISHING TOUCH

**KYLE TROUP CLOSES SEASON  
WITH PBA PLAYOFF WIN**

# TIMING IS EVERYTHING

*Darren Tang's quest to make one of the toughest changes a player at any level can try to implement.*

BY BILL SPIGNER

**The first time I saw Darren Tang happened to involve one of the most unusual moments in PBA Tour telecast history. It was the 2017 USBC Masters stepladder finals, and Darren, the 3 seed, faced a rather familiar opponent: his brother Michael, the 4 seed.**

It was the first time in history that brothers made their very first TV shows together in a major championship. The Traber brothers, Dale and Dave, were the first brothers to make a TV show together when they bowled for the title at the 1994 PBA National Championship on the same show on which Johnny Petraglia bowled his famous 300 for a \$100,000 bonus.

Michael had won his first match to set up the family feud. I can only imagine the pride — and anxiety — of the Tang's parents, sitting in the venue and watching their sons bowling on national TV. On this day, Michael proved victorious, then went on to do something a lot of players have done in recent years: finish second to Jason Belmonte. There certainly is no shame in that.

The show's historic circumstances made it a great one to watch, and

well worth a visit to the media-savvy Darren Tang's thriving YouTube page, which, as of this writing, boasts more than 56,000 followers.

Darren's well-rounded career includes a starring role for San Jose State as a college player, a stint that saw him earn All-American honors twice and graduate with a BS in mechanical engineering. Thanks to his victory in the 2022 Team USA Trials, one of the most grueling tests of versatility the sport offers, he currently is a member of Team USA and previously bowled with the team in 2018 and 2019. As a youth bowler, he also put in a stint with the junior squad, bowling with Junior Team USA in 2014.

Since joining the PBA in 2016, he has won 10 PBA Regional titles and earned regional Rookie of the Year and Player of the Year accolades in 2016 and 2020, respectively. But not until 2021 did he break through for his first PBA Tour title, trouncing Kyle Troup, 254-174, to win the PBA BowlersStore.com Classic that August. I asked him the dreaded question about not having won up to that point, which can be a tough one for players to swallow, and his

answer was pretty simple. He said he was pressing too hard to win. Instead, he just decided to relax, bowl, and let the chips fall where they may. With both a national title and Team USA Trials win to his credit now, that approach is turning out to be a recipe for success for the 28-year-old.

The first time I had the opportunity really to meet Darren came at Team USA camp in 2018, when he was trying to overhaul his timing. He had just recently changed his approach from five steps to four. The overwhelming majority of male professional bowlers take five steps, but Darren switched to four to make his timing later for more power. Theoretically, it is easier to delay your swing with four steps than it is with five because the first step in four is shorter than the second step would be with five. On the ladies' side, many PWBA players take four steps and have later timing than their male counterparts.

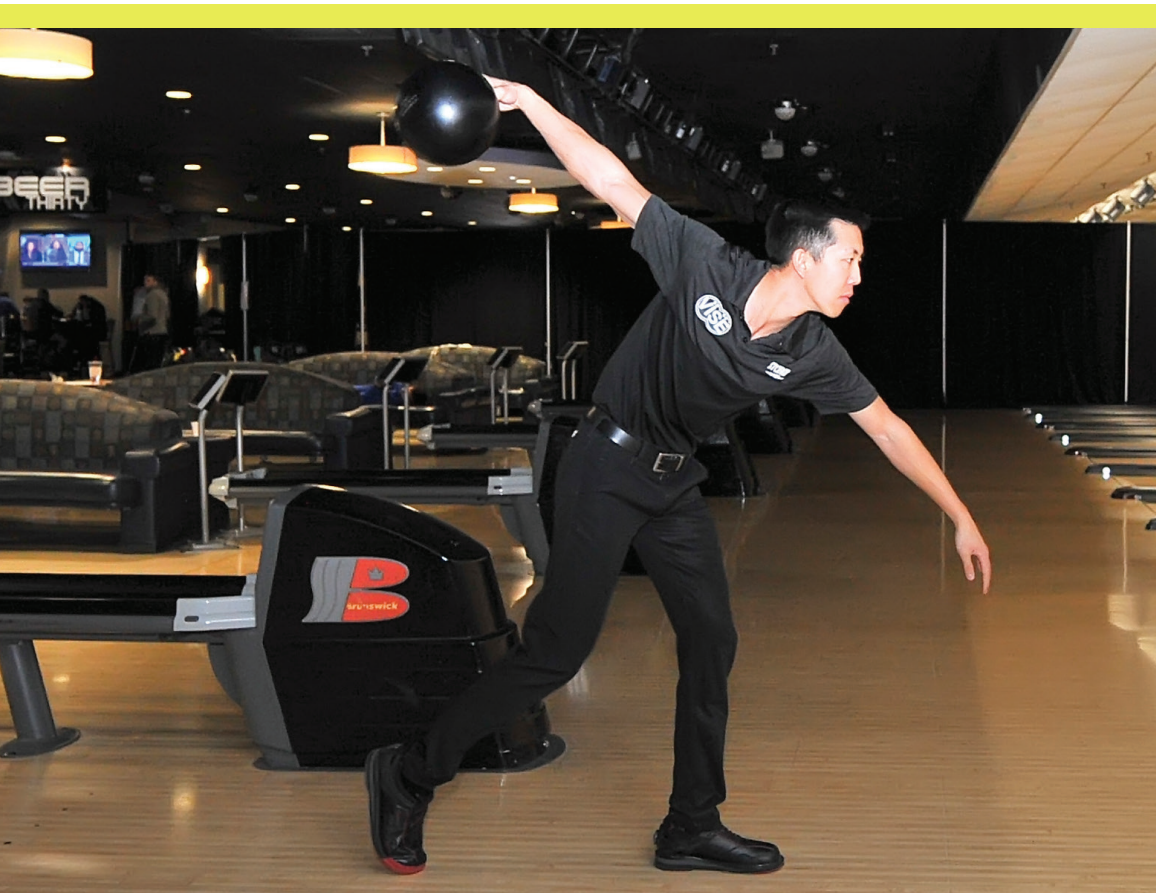
All of which is to say that Darren's reasoning in making this change was perfectly sound. But, here's the thing: Timing is the most difficult thing to change once a game has matured. Why? Well, consider this: The arm swing will seek to be in a certain spot



*Happy Days*  
A lot of trial and error led to  
Tang's recent successes.







### **An Ideal, if Unorthodox, Third Step**

While one step earlier in timing than most, Darren's third step features ideal swing height, including the shoulders and arms. This resembles the timing of the great Pete Weber with his classic, high-swing stroker timing. The key here is to have patience to let the ball fall and not pull it down.



### **Forward Momentum**

At this point in Darren's approach, his forward spine tilt has increased to 60 degrees. That's a little too much for a stroker, but it's better being a little too forward than too upright. This is where the players with a big release start bending their elbow to get the fingers.





**Ready for Liftoff**

Here, Darren's forward spine tilt is now 50 degrees, which is a great angle from which to release the ball out in front of his slide foot and onto the lane. His thumb is out and his fingers are behind the ball, ready to complete the lift and turn through extension.



**Path to Projection**

At the completion of his shot, Darren leans forward to about 65 degrees. This helps him complete the release with a long flat spot and provides the forward momentum to project the ball down the lane in the direction he wants the ball to travel.

**Hot Streak**

*Tang has found his stride after following up his first PBA Tour title with a Team USA Trials win.*



on step two in a four-step approach, and step three in a five-step approach, regardless of what you try to do to change it. The brain is so used to this particular feel that it will force you to get the ball in that spot regardless of how you change your start.

It is no wonder, then, that Darren has since changed back to five steps. Nonetheless, he still is trying to make his timing later — five years after he started working on it! Which shows how hard it is to do. Darren has been working on this, among other things, with Coach

Mike Jasnau. He had an extended pushaway, which caused his backswing to be fast. He has been working with Jasnau on not locking out the elbow on the pushaway, instead shortening it so the transition of the ball into the swing is a little slower. The shorter pushaway keeps the ball closer to his body, which in turn is better balanced and will enable the feet to speed up sooner — the key to getting more ball speed. The long pushaway makes the feet go slower at the beginning.

For many of today's top players, the ball start is more

of an unhinging of the bowling elbow and not the big, old-school pushaway that Darren had. Guys like Tommy Jones, Kris Prather, AJ Johnson and Kyle Sherman are some that do it this way. By shortening the pushaway, Darren's game looks much more in-synch now, whereas before the arm swing looked out-of-synch with his steps.

Coach Jasnau says that Darren has a tendency to bog down at the release or, in other words, decelerate at that moment in his delivery. This happens because his forward spine-angle tilt changes twice during his last

step. He gets in a really great spot at the completion of his fourth step, with about a 50-degree forward tilt, then increases it to about 60 degrees when the toe of his sliding foot touches the floor. When his foot flattens out well before the release, his spine angle straightens up to 45 degrees, which is a good angle from which to release the ball if you are leaning forward and not coming up. This movement with the spine interrupts his forward momentum going into the release. Then, through his release, he increases it to about 60



degrees, which enables him to release the ball out in front of him onto the lane. This happens very fast and, for the player, is not easy to see or feel. Those moves cause that little slow down, which can affect the timing of the ball off the hand and play havoc with Darren's attempt to project the ball out onto the lane.

Darren is a modern-day stroker with a great swing. His best game is going straighter. He is well-known for using urethane a lot, especially on the fresh when you have to play straighter angles until the shot opens up and you have to play deeper. Darren can hook the ball a lot, but, with his earlier timing, it's more difficult than a player with later timing to hook it with power. He was struggling with this, trying to be too technical with his approach to it. He said he has since changed his mental outlook to forget about trying to be perfect and just telling himself to do it. He says this has freed up his mind, taking this approach to his shots, which is just the opposite of the technical engineer I am. The worst that can happen is something doesn't work, and I now use that as a building block for the next shot rather than beating myself up over the shot that didn't work and trying to be too perfect.

Darren likes to keep things simple. His targeting method uses the arrows as his primary point of aim,

and for adjusting. In this respect, he does something a little different as he enters his last step: He draws his eyes down to the foul line, which helps him see the ball sooner going down the lane. He keeps his ball drills pretty simple, too, as he favors 5-inch pins and will vary the pin buffer distances. He would rather do more with surface changes and releases than drilling layouts.

Darren is a diverse guy. He drills his own equipment at home, gives private lessons, does some online lessons, and has a big presence on social media anchored by his successful YouTube channel. He's one of the new breed of players who are developing their brands on social-media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

Overall, he has a very solid game which, coupled with his great swing, will allow him to bowl for many years. I like to look at him like a Norm Duke type of player — someone who isn't flashy, but rather a guy who gets down in the dirt and digs out a way to get the job done. A real grinder. His future in our sport is very bright. ■

## LESSON PLAN

As Darren is finding, it's very tough to alter timing once a game has matured. Your timing is like your fingerprint; once trained in, it doesn't like change. Even if you can change it, there's no guarantee that you will get better. The key for anyone is to understand what you have and how to work within the parameters of your timing.

Any bowlers challenging themselves to engage in the difficult work of a timing tweak have two things to think about: the tempo of their approach, and the timing of the ball off their hand. Tempo is established by the movement of the ball at the beginning of the approach — the speed and shape of the pushaway/ball placement. You can control the speed and the fluidity of your approach with this. The timing element depends on whether your timing is early, on time, or late, as this has a great effect on your shot. The key thing is to be able to release the ball out onto the lane, parallel to the lane. Once you know that you can do this, and feel it, you can adjust it for different ball reactions.

— Bill Spigner

### **Unique Backswing**

*Darren has one of the straightest back swings on tour. This great position at the top sets him up to be able to drop the swing to the inside on the way down and not have to realign it.*

