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THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



Parker Bohn III: A Classy Guy With a Classic 4-Step Approach

PARKER BOHN III NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION. He has done it all. Thirty-one PBA Tour titles (fifth all-time)... high Tour average twice... Steve Nagy sportsmanship award three times... Bowler of the Year twice... PBA and USBC Hall of Fame member. Wait a minute — this is beginning to sound like an introduction.

So, let's get on to what makes him so good...

Parker has one of the best physical games our sport has ever seen — textbook in most of the things he does. He has a classic four-step delivery. In his stance, his body weight is back on his heels, actually leaning very slightly back with a slight flex in the knees — not the type of stance a coach would normally recommend.

But Parker has a unique way of starting from this position. Four-step players need a long first step in order to have time to get the ball either pushed out or placed out in front of them — so it's ready to start into the backswing when the body weight is transferred forward. Parker starts moving his body weight forward from the heels to the balls of his feet before he starts his step. Basically, he is transferring his upper body forward to start his motion. When his weight is transferred to his toes, his pushaway starts.

At the completion of his first step, his arms are fully extended and his upper

body has gone from slightly leaning back in the stance to a forward tilt of about 22 to 23 degrees. From this point, his swing starts.

He has one of the all-time great swings, like all the bowlers who have withstood the test of time. It's not so much how loose the swing looks; it's the total arc of the swing and how free it moves from the shoulder.

The length of the swing is measured from the completion of the first step in a four-step approach and the second step of a five-step approach. The step is complete when the foot is flat, the body weight is transferred to the step, and the toe of the trailing foot has not left the floor.

From there, the swing length is calibrated; the ideal length is 180 degrees to the top, or half of a circle.

On step two in the four-step approach, the swing ideally will travel 90 degrees, or half-way to the top. At this half-way point in the swing, the ideal position of the ball is behind the trailing leg.

At the completion of the third step, the swing reaches

its highest point. From there, the ball either starts down or delays slightly.

The key point to remember about swing length is that it's measured as a half-circle from the completion of the key step in the approach (which is the first step in a four-step approach, the second in a five-step and the third in a six-step). Basically, all approaches are based on four steps for timing and swing length.

"I consider myself a power stroker," Parker says. "At least, that's what most coaches that have ever helped me believe."

I agree with that. His ball from a side view, when his slide is complete, is right next to his left knee on the downswing. This late timing occurs because his swing has a delay at the top before it comes down.

It's almost an identical position to Mike

DeVaney's when his slide has stopped, although Mike is a power player.

I classified Chris Loschetter as a power stroker, also, but he is still sliding until the ball is almost to the slide foot. Pete Weber also is a power stroker, but he's still sliding when his release starts.

You'd never think that Bohn and DeVaney would be in a similar position when their foot is done sliding, or that Weber would still be sliding during his release.

I asked Parker to assess the strongest and weakest parts of his game.

"The strongest part involves hooking lanes and



playing the gutter, because this is what I grew up on," he says. "The other thing that is pretty strong is my mental game — good luck getting the best of me mentally."

The weakest part? "Bowling on tight lanes is the toughest, mainly due to my ball speed. I am always trying to work on this."

On PBA patterns, Parker says, "The Cheetah is my best; it's close to what I grew up on. I typically play it up the gutter with a stable drilling of some sort (pin under the ring finger is best). I use a medium surface ball, with my hand curled up under it. I release the ball with my hand coming around it, more on the side with a little head belly."

He says he has the most trouble with the Shark, "mainly because the lanes are so tight and I have to slow down my ball speed. I need to keep my hand more under the ball, not on the side of it. A little less speed would not hurt."

Parker's late timing (on the last step, not before that) and fast, fluid approach

make it difficult for him to slow his ball down and maintain his rhythm.

One other thing that hinders him from staying behind the ball is the position of his body when the ball is at the bottom of his swing. He has a very deep knee bend and square shoulders to his target line with about a 35-degree forward tilt in his spine.

The spine tilt is sufficient, but because of the deep knee bend and his square shoulders, the ball reaches the bottom of the swing behind his sliding foot's ankle. From this position, the hand and arm are on the upswing when the hand gets to the ankle. It makes it a little touchy trying to stay behind the ball because he would have some trouble releasing it on the upswing. His position works best when the hand rotates to the side of the ball.

Many players are products of their environment, Parker included. He had some great tutelage in his formative years by PBA Hall of Famer Dave Davis and his wife JoAnne.

Parker says they had the biggest influence on his game.

He also has sought help from others, but says, "I have received a lot of advice that was not very useful. But as a player who is willing to try things, you listen to everyone, and learn to keep the good and get rid of the bad."

Parker has a fundamental targeting system. He uses the arrows 98 percent of the time; only when the lanes are very tight will he move his target up to the dots.

For his spares, he uses plastic and goes straight. It has made spare shooting much easier for him from center to center. For the 7-pin, he stands on board 29 with his right foot, slides on board 34, and looks at the fourth arrow. For the 10-pin, he starts on board 11, slides on board 16 and targets on board 19. Parker walks right on all of his shots.

What advice does Parker give to bowlers who want to improve?

"It's very important to make spares and fill frames at all levels, especially

the elite level," he says.

"Also, when lining up for a strike target with today's equipment, it's very important to be aware of the front part of the lane, especially where the right-handers are laying the ball down. It can be very difficult to understand what your ball is doing. For example, the ball may be hooking early and you can't see it, making you fight the lanes twice as much. Just be aware."

Too many bowlers worry too much about their back-end ball reaction. You need to understand what the ball is doing all the way down the lane, and the sooner the better. What happens in the front end can determine what happens in the mid-lane and back-end — something Parker Bohn III clearly understands.

Bill Spigner is a three-time PBA champion, eight-time PBA Regional champ, Gold level coach, former head teaching pro for Professional Bowling Camps and long-time pro shop operator. Visit his Web site at billspigner.com.



You don't win 31 PBA Tour titles without having a solid game. In the case of Parker Bohn III, so much of what he does is text-book.