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THE PRO APPROACH

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Malott: His Repeatable Style Defies the Typical 'Big Cranker' Image

THE BIG NASTY. STRIKES-A-LOT MALOTT. The King of Bowling. Whatever you call him, Wes Malott had one spectacular season on the lanes.

I first saw the Malott name when he won the Regional Players Championship in Las Vegas. Not being fa-

miliar with him, I asked a couple Midwest Region PBA members about him, and was told he was “a big cranker from Texas.”

Thinking about a “big cranker,” you get a picture of a bowler with a lot on the ball, a lot of moving parts in his game and not much accuracy. But the RPC has very difficult lane conditions, so the image I had didn’t make sense to me.

The next year, I bowled the PBA National Championship in Taylor, Mich., and watched Wes throw the ball. The lanes that night were fried, and the players were really deep. Wes was playing farther left than anyone else — launching the ball over the gutter cap and out to the arrows before it hit the lane.

Most people remember Robert Smith winning his last title in Vernon Hills, Ill., lofting the ball way up in the air and over the gutter cap. But Wes didn’t throw the ball up; he had a more normal trajectory. Being 6-foot-5, he was able to play that angle while releasing the ball fairly normally.

I was very impressed with what I saw: a big man with a big ball but a very simple game. It totally surprised me. But it was a nice surprise to see so much talent with a big game under control.

Wes is a five-step player, and his footwork is very... *normal*. He walks heel-toe on every step, in a straight line slightly left, with a slide at the end. Most bowlers have some variation in the incline of their steps somewhere along the way, but not Wes — not even in his power step right before the slide step. On each of his steps, when the sole of the foot makes contact, his upper body weight has transferred over the leading foot — a critical aspect of a smooth-flowing approach.

A basic rule of thumb: The more the legs are bent throughout the approach, the flatter the feet have to land so the upper body can more easily transfer forward over the leading foot. The more incline in the steps, the straighter the legs have to be to allow a smooth transfer of weight throughout the approach.

Wes also has a unique ball placement. A five-step player would ideally complete the ball placement on step two, and it normally involves a movement of the ball away from and out in front of the body, with the bowling arm unfolding or straightening out.

Wes does neither. In his stance, he holds the ball inside his shoulder a little, toward the center of the



Wes Malott does not place his thumb into the ball until his first step actually is under way. His ball placement is unique among bowlers on the PBA Tour.



Malott walks “heel-toe” on every step of his approach, with virtually no variation in the incline from step to step — and that’s true even of his power step.

body, with a very relaxed grip. He doesn’t completely set his thumb into the ball until his first step is complete — actually taking his thumb out before the first step, then inserting it *during* his first step. His arm moves only about a couple of inches, and at the completion of step two, it’s still at about an 80-degree bend.

On step three, you would

think he’d start moving the ball out in front of him to straighten out his arm and allow it to swing back and have late timing. Instead, Wes unfolds his arm and the ball moves straight down toward the floor. The unfolding of his arm signals the start of his swing, and the arm is straight and perpendicular to the floor midway between steps two and three. At the

completion of his third step, the ball has advanced enough to put him right in time.

Wes has a very loose swing, something you wouldn’t expect from a player who does not have the type of ball placement that allows the ball to swing the arm back free from the shoulder. But his swing is free because he walks tall with his legs fairly

straight, and his wrist is flat to slightly arched back until the ball reaches the top of the swing. With the wrist not supporting the weight of the ball, the ball can swing the arm freely to the top.

Wes has less spine side tilt during his first three steps than many players. With the ball position in his stance, hand on



As the ball gets to the release zone, Malott’s wrist is firm and flat, and his elbow has a very slight arch. For throwing such a strong ball, he has amazing touch.

top of the ball when it passes him on the backswing, and his more vertical spine angle from a rear view, his swing moves outside on the way back. Also contributing to the swing going out initially is the fact that he doesn't

open his shoulders on the backswing.

On the fourth step, his swing moves inside and he starts to tilt more (about 20 degrees at this point). This gets his lower body to start moving out of the way and allows the bowling shoul-

der to lower so the swing can remain on an inside-out path to the release. When the ball gets to the release zone, his spine is at about a 40-degree tilt.

When Wes first came out on tour, the loop in his swing was much more pronounced than it is now. He didn't try to change it; it happened naturally as he learned to play straighter lines — something all players must learn in order to be competitive on more conditions (especially on freshly oiled lanes where there isn't a hook spot to throw the ball to).

Wes has a great release, and the set-up of the release starts at the beginning of his approach. When the ball is passing his body on the way back, his hand is on top of the ball with the fingers outside the thumb. When his swing moves inside at the top, his fingers move inside his thumb and the wrist cocks.

When the ball gets to the release zone, he doesn't cup it; his wrist is firm and flat, and the elbow has a very slight arch. This places his fingers below the center of the ball, and with the wrist cocked, the fingers are now pointing toward 8 o'clock. As the thumb comes out, the wrist uncocks, moving the fingers to the center of the ball and up through the back of the ball, letting the weight of the ball unload the wrist.

Wes can get more under the ball and rotate it more off the hand for additional hook when needed. He has great touch for throwing such a strong ball.

From a side view, Wes' swing is a little above head-high. He gradually tilts his spine forward on each step, culminating with about a 5-degree tilt as he releases the ball. Even though he has a slight knee bend, he releases the ball very low onto the lane in front of him.

Wes is a self-made bowler who has developed a very simple, repeatable style with all the power one could want. He never has had coaches, but feels he could have been out on tour sooner if he had. Given his success — and now being named captain of *BJI's* 2009 All-American Team — I'd say the wait was worth it.

Bill Spigner, a member of the USBC Hall of Fame, is a Gold-certified coach. Learn more at billspigner.com.

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