

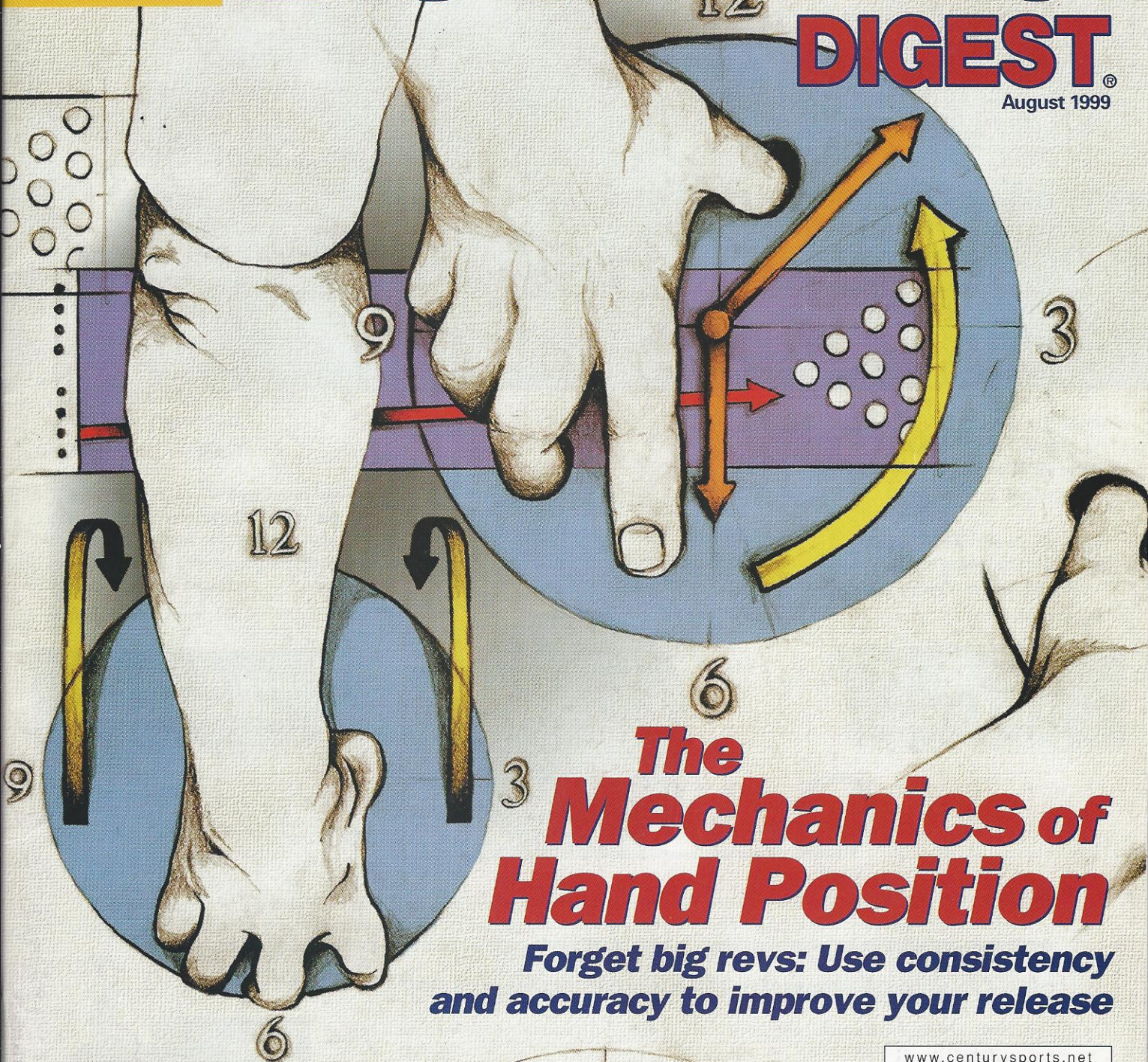
**BOWLING  
CLINIC**  
HOW TO  
MAXIMIZE  
YOUR  
PRACTICE

**PARKER BOHN ON TODAY'S BALL SURFACES**

# BOWLING

## DIGEST

August 1999



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# Find Tough Practices

■ *I'm an amateur scratch bowler (210 average) who occasionally bowls in the PBA East regionals and some local scratch tournaments. I enjoy bowling on conditions that are difficult, but with almost all bowling establishments concerned with creating and keeping customers, the tendency is to make lane conditions easier, which does not help scratch players maintain the precision to compete at a higher level. What kind of practice regimen would you recommend to sharpen a scratch bowler's skills on the relatively easy conditions available?*



## Bowling Clinic

By BILL SPIGNER

There are a number of different things you can do to sharpen your game. While it's true that lane conditions do have an influence on your practice—if you're practicing on an easy shot and you judge how well you're bowling based on the scores you bowl, you could be fooling yourself—practice is for looking at all parts of your game and working on your weak areas. And not all practice is done on the lanes.

The essence of playing this sport at a competitive level is the ability to play the oil. So the first priority for on-the-lanes practice is to have oil on the lanes. Most bowling centers put down plenty, but there are also dry areas. The key to scoring is the ability to line up on the oil line and adjust to it as it changes.

Most of today's oiling procedures provide an oil line for you, so the condition gives you a head start on figuring out the playing area. If there were not an oil line, there would be no defined place to play the lanes. Years ago the lane finishes were soft enough that a track wore into the finish, which left a defined play area that a bowler could come in and play every week. Today's lane finishes are very hard—no track wears into the lane—so the proprietor has no choice but to oil the lanes so there is a defined starting point to play the lanes. You can use these built-in oil-dry areas to determine where you want to practice: You can play in the

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*Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Mail your questions to: Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201.*

oil, in the dry, or on the oil line.

Now you have to determine how you want to approach your practice session. This article will focus on how to maximize your practice on easy lane conditions.

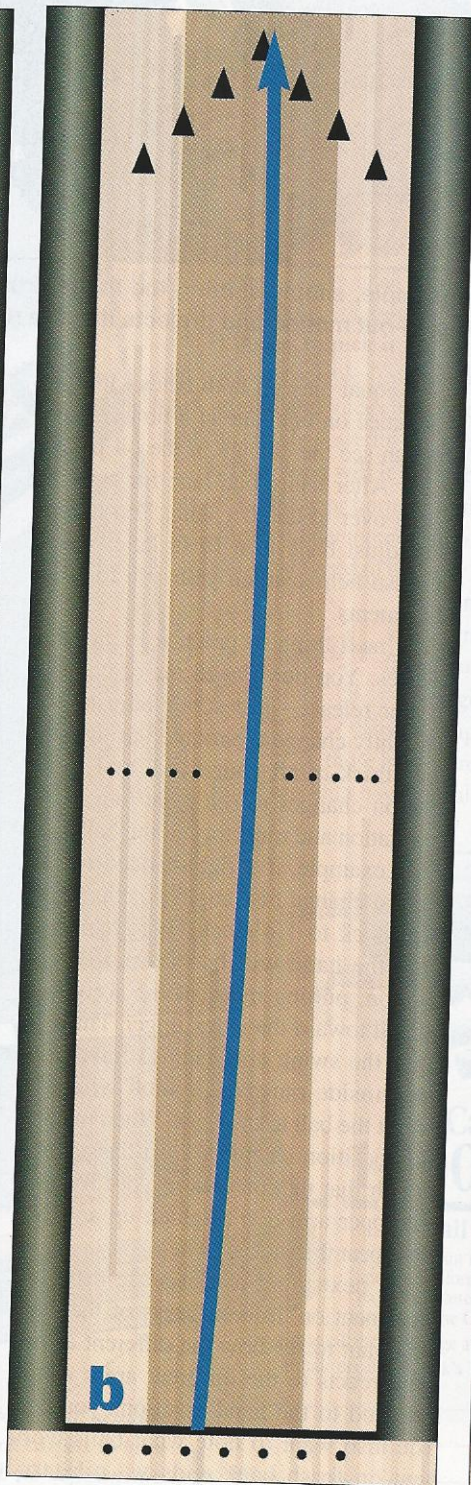
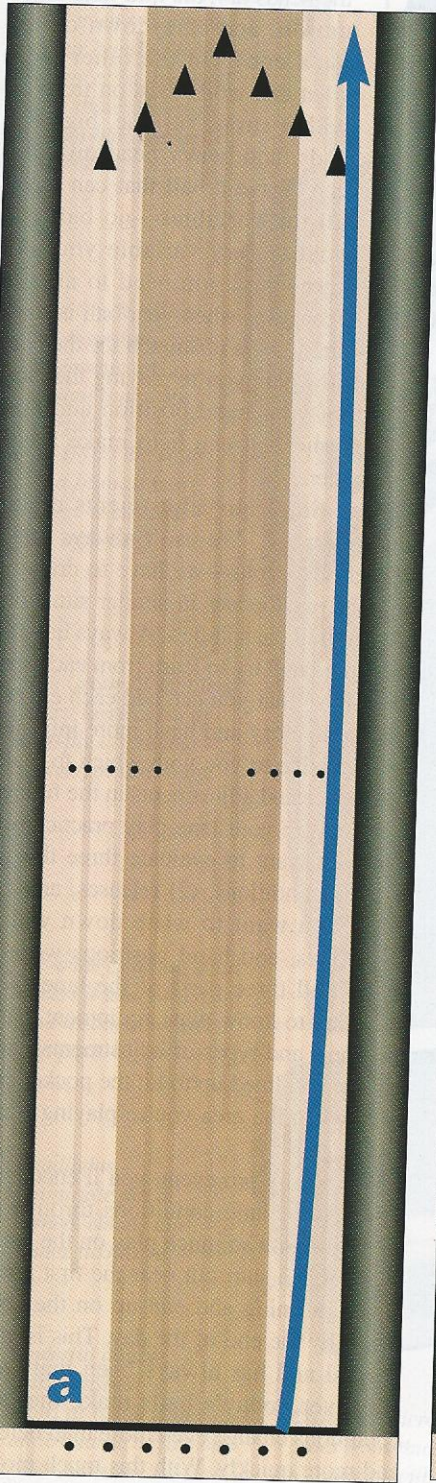
To start off your practice session, the first thing to do is get loose, and rolling a ball down the lane is the best way to loosen up your bowling muscles. As you're getting loose, you want to start thinking about two things: (1) how you feel rolling the ball, and (2) how the ball looks going down the lane.

From there you want to get lined up on the condition and make good shots. Spend about 20 minutes just trying to get your rhythm down and make good, free, clean shots, playing the lane wherever it dictates. If you're having difficulty making good shots, work on it for a more extended period of time. You have to make sure you don't fool yourself into thinking you're making good shots just because every ball hits the pocket. Watch the path the ball takes down the lane and its angle to the pocket—consistency is the key, regardless of the lane condition. If possible, it would help to have someone look at your ball going down the lane to help you understand where the ball is actually going and where it starts to hook, so you can better understand what you're seeing.

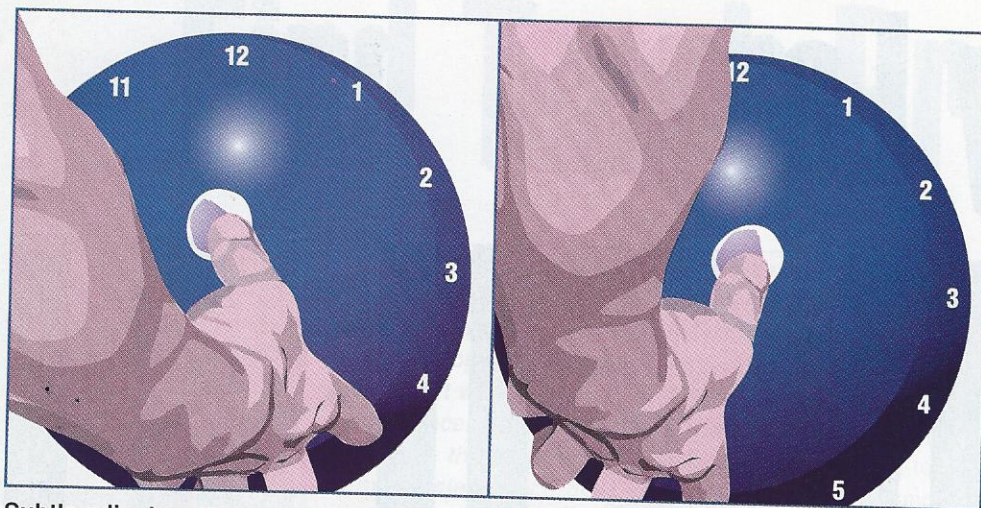
There are three areas of the lane you can play on a wet-dry oiling pattern. First is the oil line, which you play while loosening up and practicing your form. The other two areas to play are right in the middle of the dry area, or in the middle of the oil.

To play the dry area of the lane, you'll need to use either a hard plastic or hard rubber ball. Most scratch players have a spare-shooting ball that can be used for this. If the lanes are oiled "10 to 10"—with oil heaviest between the 10-boards—you can play the dry very easy. You would want to play around the first arrow so the oil line won't help steer the ball to the pocket [*illus. a*]. On the other hand, to play the oil, you'll have to move to at least the third arrow to keep the ball from being influenced by the oil line [*illus. b*]. Playing in the heart of the oil or the dry will require you

# on Easy Lanes



The most common oiling pattern—from 10 board to 10 board—may seem easy, but it gives a scratch bowler three distinct and challenging conditions to practice on: in the dry area [a], in the oil [b], and right on the oil line [c].



**Subtle adjustments can be effective. For example, simply shifting the thumb from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock gives your swing an inside-out motion and projects it to the right.**

to make very good shots to get the ball to the pocket; if you play the lanes like this you may hit the pocket solidly only 50% of the time, but you'll be able to read your mistakes better.

A good practice session incorporates playing all three areas of the lane, and as you can see, today's average lane condition—oiled from 10 board to 10 board—actually provides an opportunity to play a variety of lane condition in one house. When you play off the oil line, the condition is very difficult. The condition is easy only if you're playing it correctly and adjusting to it properly as the condition changes.

One of the big keys when practicing playing the lanes is to understand how the lane condition changes as play continues. Oil gets picked up off the lane and moved on the lane, and we need to be able to see the transition in the oil pattern.

To do this, pick an area on the lane to play, line up with the right ball, and just beat up that part of the lane. See how many shots you throw before you have to start adjusting. What kind of adjustments do you have to make to keep the ball entering the pocket at the proper angle to carry? The types of adjustments you make will vary according to how the oil changes.

When you're going to practice hard and rip up the oil pattern, try to get a lane that won't have a league bowling on it after you finish. (If you can't get a lane that won't be in use, use two lanes and try

to put equal play on both lanes.) It's best to practice on one lane at a time because you can see the change in the oil pattern easier. After using one lane for a while, switch over to another lane. You'll have to readjust back to a fresh lane, which will also help sharpen your eye for your adjustments.

The next thing to practice is different releases. You don't need major changes in your release—just subtle adjustments to slightly change the rotation of the ball. Keep track of all your hand- and wrist-position changes to see what they do to the rotation and trajectory of the ball.

For example, if a right-handed bowler were to change his thumb position from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock, what happens? First, the hand will be in a more open position, putting more of the weight of the ball toward the index finger. This will cause the swing and hand to travel in a more inside-out path, which will help project the ball to the right. When making hand-position changes, keep them small enough that the muscles in your forearm and upper arm don't tighten up and you can repeat the shot.

The next thing to do is use different equipment on different parts of the lane. You want to see how the different equipment reacts to the different areas of the lane and to the hand positions you use. You also want to note what balls work best on fresh back ends vs. oil carry down, heavy head oil vs. dry heads, and changes in the mid-lane oil. You want to

see how each ball reacts to combinations of the oil pattern: front to back and side to side on the lane.

For example, what ball works best from the fourth arrow with the heads dry, the mid-lane medium oil, and carrydown on the back end? On the other side, what ball works best on fresh oil with a strong oil line, big back ends, and heavy head oil? You can't have a ball that can cover all the variables—no ball can cover every variable you will face—and you need to be able to recognize when your ball is starting to be a mismatch for the con-

dition and where you're playing the lane. Adjusting your hand position and how you roll the ball can help make a ball work better.

Many times our adjustments are an educated guess. We can't always make the right decisions—we have to draw on previous experiences in similar situations to try to find the solution. Always have an open mind and try to learn from each shot you roll, so that you can add each experience to memory and have more information available to you with which to make better-educated adjustments in the future.

To finalize your lane-play practice session, you want to evaluate three things: (1) lane conditions, (2) releases, and (3) balls. You want to write down which balls, lines, and hand positions worked best on all three parts of the lane. You also want to know what equipment, hand positions, and types of adjustments work to keep you lined up to hit the pocket and carry when the area you're playing starts to change.

During any pro event, you'll encounter a variety of lane conditions throughout the day—with so much play on the lanes, the shot can start out near the first arrow in the morning and end up on the sixth arrow by the end of the day. This is very normal and has always been that way. However, today's balls make the lane conditions change even more than before, and more quickly. With this much movement of the playing area, the scoring levels also change throughout the day. ●