

A NEW APPROACH TO BETTER TIMING • SECRETS OF THE JUNIOR GOLD CHAMPIONS

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MONEYBOWL

A CONTRARIAN'S VIEW OF BOWLING STATS

THE PRO APPROACH

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Not All 'Good' Timing Is the Same

GOOD TIMING can be a fleeting thing. After some bowling sessions, we'll look back and think, "My timing was great today." Then on other occasions we'll shake our heads and think, "My timing was really off today." Either way, the feeling usually is connected to how we felt we had delivered the ball.

Now that we've covered the stance (April) and ball placement (July), it's time to take a close look at timing — something that's critical to success in bowling. But just as there are different ways to set up for a shot and initiate ball movement, there are

different types of timing.

We have been trained to refer to timing at the beginning of the approach, in relationship to ball placement, as early, late or on time. All three can work well when they're correct in relationship to the rest of the approach.

Over the years, the majority of the top male pros have had on time to early starts in their ball placement. In comparison, many of the top women have tended to have late starts. I don't recall there being any studies about this, but I think it happens because of strength.

As a general rule, men are stronger. They play a lot more sports when growing up, and are accustomed to creating power and speed in order to be competitive. So they tend to seek out power before refining their game.

Women, because of not having the strength and opportunities to participate in as many sports as men, develop their games based on sound fundamentals that create precision, but not a lot of power.

As we now examine tim-



Bill O'Neill (left) and Norm Duke are "on time" players. Don Johnson used to call this position in the third step of a five-step approach "the pro zone." Both players utilize medium-high backswings.



Steve Jaros has "late" timing, as demonstrated here at the beginning of the second step of his four-step approach. Bowlers with this timing typically have more vertical spine angles and shorter swings.

ing, let's consider the ideal place for the ball to be at the completion of the step after the ball placement. That would be just past the bowling-side leg.

Using a four-step approach as the basis for timing, once the first step is complete, the ball is released into the swing. (This goes for the second step in a five-step delivery, the third step in a six-step approach, and so on.) At that time, the bowling-side arm is swinging back as the non-bowling-side leg is moving forward. This type of motion makes the beginning of the approach well balanced and fluid.

The right leg (for a right-handed bowler) is the foundation that supports the body weight and pushes it forward. It's just the opposite of how we walk. When we walk or run, the right arm swings back as the right leg moves forward, and reverses when the left leg moves forward. Our start in bowling is exactly the opposite of what we naturally do, so you can see how hard it might be for some to have ideal timing at this point in their approach.

Also on this step, the upper body starts its forward tilt and begins to open up some for many players with on time approaches. This helps in getting the ball in back of the bowling-side leg at the completion of the second step.

Some of the top players who have this ball position on this step are Walter Ray Williams Jr., Bill O'Neill, Robert Smith, Sean Rash, Norm Duke, Parker Bohn III, Kelly Kulick and Chris Barnes.

This position was referred to as "the pro zone" by the late, great coach and

hall of famer, Don Johnson, and it's the best place to be when analyzing timing at the start of the approach. (There are two critical places to check for good timing at the end of the approach, but for now, we'll look only at the beginning.)

With a late ball placement, the bowling

arm and bowling-side leg are passing each other, just like when we're walking. The problem with this is that you have a ball that adds weight to that side of the body. Couple that with some side and forward spine tilt, and you have an unbalanced position. The opposite leg and foot are stationary, but the bowling-side leg and arm are in motion, passing each other, and not supported. If you were to stop your approach at this point, you could be knocked over with a feather.

That's one of the biggest reasons that ball placement is so important at the beginning of the approach. Even though there have been many successful bowlers with timing like this, most of them have more vertical spine angles at this point in their approach, as well as shorter and flatter swings, than a lot of contemporary players (discounting

the two-handers and no-thumbers). They don't hook the ball a lot, but they are pinpoint accurate which, in the past and occasionally today, makes up for lack of power.

But with today's synthetic lane surfaces (which are not as flat as wood) and the powerful balls, speed and revs are the order of the day. Timing at the beginning of the approach has a lot to do with creating both.

Some of the top players who embrace late timing at the beginning of their approach are Carolyn Dorin-Ballard, Liz Johnson, Steve Jaros, Wendy Macpherson, Tom Baker, Kim Terrell-Kearney and Doug Kent. All have medium-high backswings, roll the ball straighter down the lane, and have more muscle in their game than the earlier-timing high-swing players.

The early ball placement bowlers of today are those

with high backswings. When I was on tour, Marshall Holman and Del Ballard Jr. had early ball placements that propelled them to hall of fame careers, but they had short backswings and softer speeds.

Some of the early ball placement, high-swing players today are Tommy Jones, Pete Weber, Chris Warren, Amleto Monacelli, Missy Parkin, Ronnie Russell and Rhino Page.

With these players, the ball placement is done well before the completion of the key step — the first step in a four-step approach, and the second in a five-step approach. The swing for these players travels a long way on the following step, and in most cases is head-high or above.

The term "key step" comes from Tom Kouros in his *Par Bowling* books. It identifies the step during which the ball is moved, or where

the ball is at the completion of the step. When thinking about ball placement (another Kouros method of identifying a key movement in the approach), focus on where the ball is on the key step. This will unlock the door to the rest of the approach.

When it comes to timing, there is no single "right way" and there always are exceptions. But in today's bowling environment, with the uneven surfaces of synthetic lanes, speed is more important than ever before in keeping the ball on line.

Your timing at the beginning of your approach creates natural momentum for developing speed. Think "earlier and free" to get the swing high and the body going.

For archived "Pro Approach" columns and more, go online to: billspigner.com.



Missy Parkin and Pete Weber demonstrate "early" timing in the third steps of their five-step approaches. Parkin is one of the few high-backswing women bowlers. In each case, the ball is in an ideal position.