

SPECIAL REPORT
The PBA's
TV
Future

An extra finger hole may be what you need for a pain-free grip

BOWLING

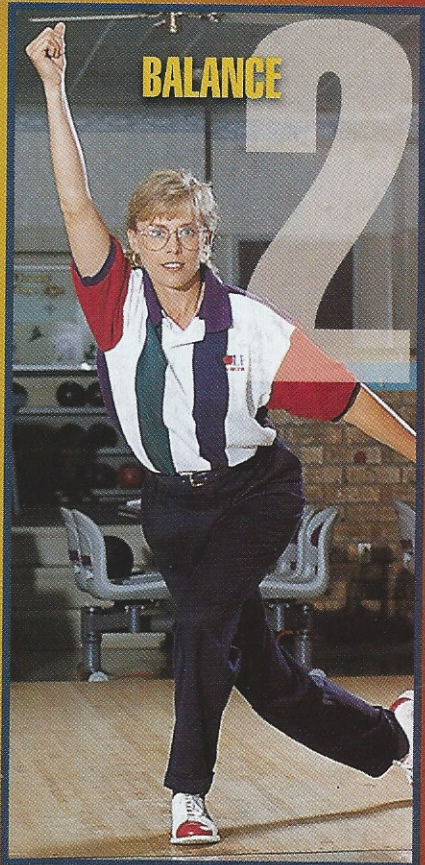
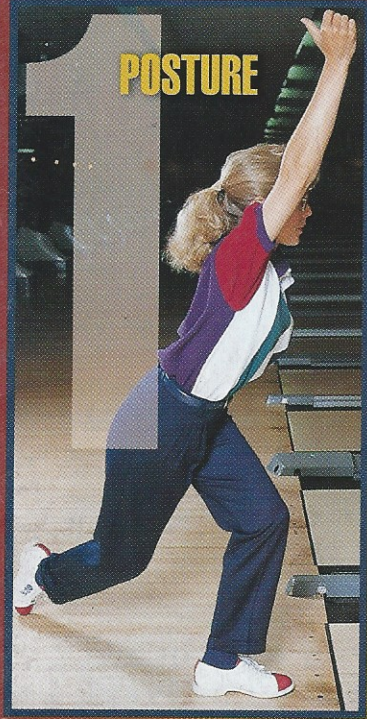
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October 1997

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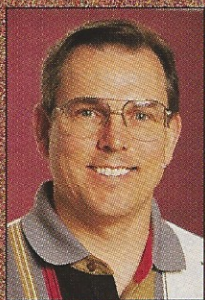
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An Extra Finger Hole

■ *I love to bowl and will until I die, if my hand holds out. I bowl four times a week. I have arthritis in my fingers, and I have a hard time rolling the ball because of the pain. I use two fingers now—should I try three or four fingers? If so, what effect would it have on my bowling?*



Bowling Clinic

By BILL SPIGNER

There are a few things you can try. The first thing is to add a finger hole. I've experimented with three-, four-, and five-finger drillings over the past 15 years. What I've found to be most beneficial is the use of the pinky finger. I started using my pinky finger on a regular basis about 10 years ago. When I started using it all the time with success, many bowlers asked me why I used it, and some wanted to try it. At first I didn't recommend it to people, but in the past four or five years I've changed my tune because of the success so many people have had with that grip. I now recommend it to certain bowlers I think it will help. Of the people I feel the grip will definitely help, about 90% of them have stayed with the grip—that's a very high percentage.

Right now there are successful bowlers on all three pro tours who use the pinky finger. On the men's tour, two-time Tournament of Champions winner Mark Williams has been using his pinky in the ball for about four years, and it's helped him have some of the best years of his career. On the women's tour, multiple champion and runner-up on the 1996 money list Kim Adler uses this grip. Pete Couture, 1996 Senior tour rookie of the year and a former national tour champion, has been using this grip the past five or six years.

Another grip that's been used successfully in the pro ranks is with the index finger. LPBT stars Dana Miller-Mackie and Sandra Jo Odom are using this grip. Also, ABC Hall-of-Famer Steve Fehr used this grip for much of his career, although he currently does not use it.

The players I've mentioned who use an extra

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.

gripping hole do it for different reasons. Fehr first used his index finger because of a wrist injury. Couture, Williams, and Adler chose the pinky for added comfort and control. To my knowledge, no pros have successfully used all four fingers in the ball. I've put some people into that type of grip when they've had severe gripping problems, but to me the use of all four of your fingers should be a last-resort grip.

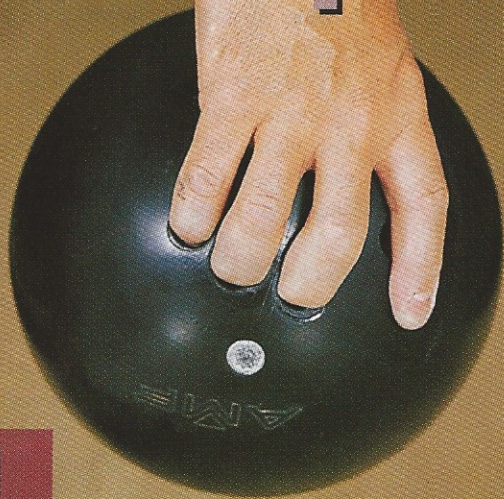
We know that both types of drillings have proved to be successful for certain players. Now the question is, which one should *you* try? The No. 1 reason to add a finger hole is to create a grip that gives you more control with less effort. However, there is a big difference between using the pinky and using the index finger. The index finger is stronger than the pinky, for one thing, and the side of the hand that the index finger is on is stronger than the pinky side of the hand. By using the pinky, you're strengthening the weaker side of the hand; if you use the index finger, you actually could weaken the stronger side of the hand.

You can use your pinky finger in two different ways: It can be curled, or it can be extended. Over the years, numerous players have had great success curling the pinky. When you curl the pinky—the first digit of the finger is bent and tucked in, with the nail resting on the ball—you tighten the muscles on that side of the hand, which gives you a stronger grip. This can help you maintain a strong wrist position and help you lift the ball more. I've never seen any player curl his index finger for a stronger grip.

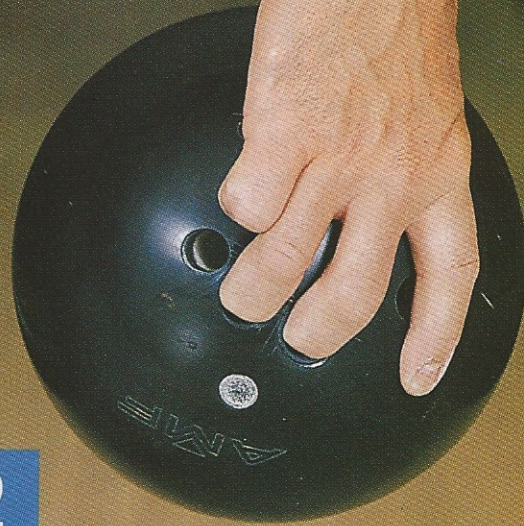
Some of the benefits of using the pinky are a more comfortable grip, a lighter-feeling ball, increased control, and a ball that feels balanced in the hand. You shouldn't expect more lift; you also don't want to *try* to lift more because of this finger being in the ball. However, because the ball feels lighter, you may be able to maintain a stronger wrist position, which could provide more lift.

The use of the pinky helps the inside of the hand function better because all the muscles are contracted the same amount, and yet it doesn't cause you to tighten the muscles in the

Can Help



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1) For most people, the best added drilling is a hole for the pinky. Using your pinky strengthens the weaker side of your hand, giving you better comfort and control.

2) Curling your pinky tightens the muscles on that side of your hand, strengthening your grip and your wrist position and helping you get more lift on the ball.

3) Using your index finger in the ball helps you turn the ball easier, but it also compromises the balance of the ball in your hand and tightens your forearm muscles.

4) Bowlers with severe gripping problems may need to put all of their fingers in the ball, but this method of drilling definitely is a last resort.

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forearm. You're able to get a better grip on the ball while still being able to maintain a light grip. You have the middle, ring, and pinky fingers working together as one unit. The index finger remains extended to help turn the ball and guide it. Many players use the index finger as a pointer, directing that finger toward their target. The problem with using the index finger for gripping is the ball isn't bal-

also need to change the thumb pitch. You want to pitch the thumb hole toward the fingers; this is a forward pitch. Pitch the thumb about a quarter of an inch forward. You also may consider a slightly shorter span—you definitely don't want a stretched-out span.

With the addition of an extra finger hole and the change in the angle at which the holes are drilled into the ball, you

watching the show, had the chance to play on it as a touring pro, and became a fan again after retiring from tour competition in 1985. All bowling fans are going to miss it. Maybe it's time for all of us to write the network about our displeasure over its cancellation of our favorite sports program.

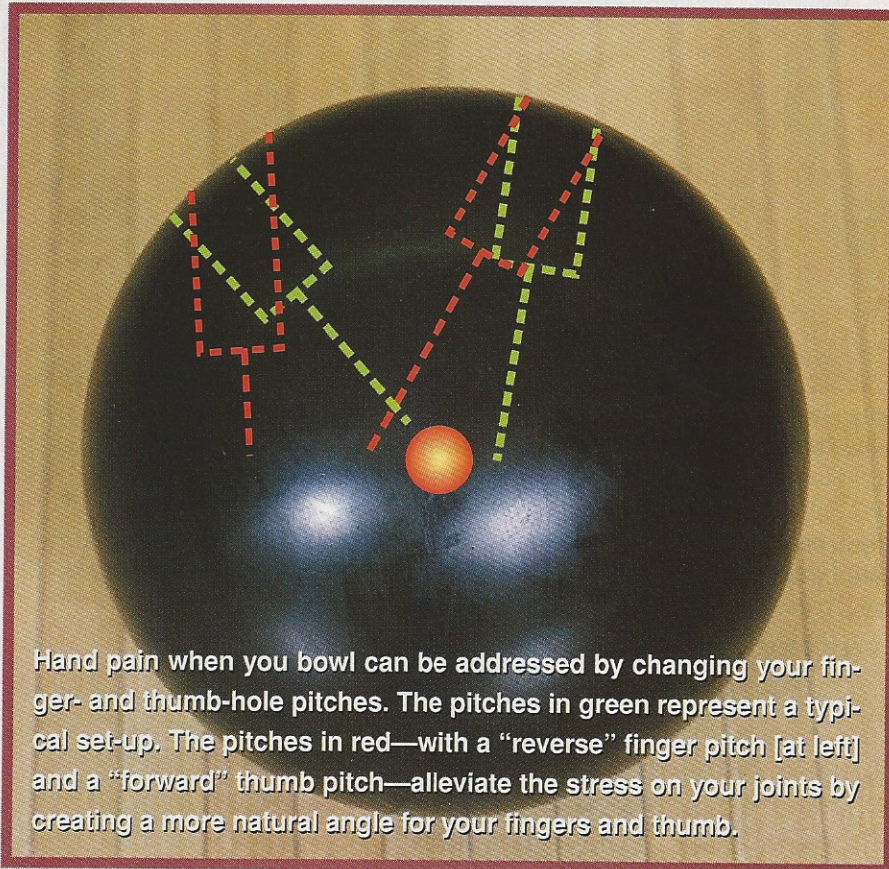
This year the PBA has entered into an agreement with Kegel Co. of Sebring, Fla., which will supervise the PBA's lane-maintenance programs. The Kegel Co., one of the leading manufacturers of lane-maintenance machines, brings a different lane-maintenance philosophy to the pro game. The biggest thing the PBA wants from the lane-maintenance program is for the conditions to allow all players a chance to do well if they play well.

This season the oil is being applied more equally across the width of the lane than in past years. And the oil is shorter. The PBA has been oiling about 35 to 38 feet down the lane, compared to about 40 feet last year. Basically, the oiling pattern doesn't steer the ball to the pocket; the players—regardless of how much they hook the ball or how straight they throw it—have to be able to have great speed control and consistency in their shots and be able to play the lanes smartly.

This has lowered the scores and put a premium on shot making, and we're quickly finding out which players can consistently hit their spots. Without a definable oil line to force the players to play a certain area on the lane, the players can pick where they want to play. But they have to get the ball to a certain break point for their shot to work. This year that break point has been around the fifth board at about 40 feet.

The players can attack this break point from a number of different starting points on the approach and the lane. Some weeks we saw Pete Weber slow-hooking the entire lane. He'd start the ball near the left gutter and swing it all the way out to the fifth board before it hooked back to the pocket. Other weeks Weber would play straight down the right side of the lane, in much the same way that Walter Ray Williams Jr. is known for.

The feeling among the pros about the new conditions seems to be pretty positive. The pros like the idea that if you



Hand pain when you bowl can be addressed by changing your finger- and thumb-hole pitches. The pitches in green represent a typical set-up. The pitches in red—with a “reverse” finger pitch [at left] and a “forward” thumb pitch—alleviate the stress on your joints by creating a more natural angle for your fingers and thumb.

anced as well in the hand and it tightens the muscles in the forearm. The big benefit is it can help you turn the ball easier.

I recommend you try the pinky grip first. I also recommend a big change in your finger and thumb pitch. Being arthritic, you don't want your fingers pitched toward the thumb, which is referred to as a “forward” pitch. This type of pitch calls for you to bend your fingers at the joints, sort of like hooking your fingers in the ball. You should try some kind of “reverse” pitch in the fingers: away from the thumb. Start with a pitch of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch in each finger. As you change the finger pitches, you

should be on the road to pain-free bowling. If the grip of the ball hurts your hand, don't continue with it. Have the grip looked at by your local pro, who can help come up with a solution to your problem.

■ I was saddened to see the end of “Pro Bowlers Tour” on ABC-TV. This seemed to be a different year on the tour. It seemed like the bowlers either played left of the fourth arrow or near the first arrow. It also seemed as if the same small group of players was at the top of the standings at most every tournament. Why was it this way?

I, too, was saddened by the end of “Pro Bowlers Tour” on ABC-TV. I grew up