

Reno's National Bowling Stadium ■ Interview: Don Johnson

# BOWLING

## DIGEST

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# Bill Spigner's Bowling Clinic

**I'm a right-handed bowler with a 180 average. My friends tell me that my ball is going over the second arrow, even though my spot is the first arrow. If I move my eyes to the second arrow, I seem to pull the shot and miss to the left side of the headpin. What can I do to correct my problem and be more consistent in hitting my target?**

For most bowlers, what you look at and what you hit *are* different. Most right-handed players will miss their target to the left, and most left-handed players will miss their target to the right. When you moved your eyes to the second arrow, you probably hit left of the second arrow, which caused your ball to cross over to the left side of the headpin.

What you need to know is what board your ball crosses in relation to what board you're looking at. It's not important that you hit what you're looking at—it's important to know what you're hitting in relation to what you're looking at, so you're able to play the lanes correctly.

**When I hit the pocket, I get more 10-pin leaves than strikes. Could this be caused by the ball finishing too hard or not hard enough? Or could the pinsetter be setting the pins off?**

Most 10-pins are left because either the ball is finishing late or it's deflecting too much when it hits the pocket. I've found that pin-spotting usually is less of a culprit to 10-pin taps than how the ball is delivered. If the bowler is lined up properly for the lane condition, delivers the ball with the right speed and rotation, and hits the pocket correctly, the ball will strike.

Study your ball as it enters the pins. Watch its rotation and the angle at which it enters the pocket. Note what the ball looks like when it strikes and what it looks like when it fails to strike on good hits. To help you in visualizing the rotation of your ball, put a small piece of white tape—about 2 inches by a ½-inch—vertically behind the finger holes, directly in line with the bridge. A piece of tape in this position will travel parallel to the track, and show you the rotation of your track.

When you can visualize what your ball is doing, you should think about your release. Seeing that a strike ball does look different from the one that leaves the 10-pin will help you greatly in learning how to carry, but you also need to learn how a good release feels

compared with one that doesn't carry the pins. You should get to the point where you know when you release the ball whether it will carry. It's perfectly normal for your shots to feel a little different each time—the key is to acquire a feel for the good vs. the bad.

You can't always carry well on all conditions, but looking at a 10-pin tap as a shot that wasn't quite right will help you work at finding a way to deliver the ball to carry that pin. A good book on ball rotation is "Par Bowling: The Challenge," by Tom Kouros. Not only will this book help you better understand ball rotation, but it offers an excellent overview of the sport of bowling.

**I use only a three-step delivery. Is this good or bad?**

The biggest problem with a three-step approach is that everything happens so fast it's very difficult to have good timing. Your swing has to move extremely fast in order to keep in time with your steps, and when your swing is moving very fast it's very difficult to develop strong hand action and a good feel for delivering your ball.

For most bowlers I would strongly recommend not using the three-step approach; it's best to use four or five steps. Most bowlers need at least four steps to coordinate the armswing and footwork into a smooth, well-timed delivery.

**I'm a 201 bowler, and have been bowling for eight years. But no matter what I do, I cannot slide—I plant my foot as I'm releasing the ball. Everyone tells me I should slide, and it's getting very frustrating trying to slide. What can I do to slide, or do I really even need to?**

I wouldn't recommend that you try to learn how to slide. If you were a beginning bowler and were learning the game from the ground up with instruction, I might say sliding should be part of your game. However, since you've been bowling for eight years, your muscle memory is so ingrained that learning how to slide now could hurt your bowling. And there's no guarantee that if you learned how to slide you would get any better—or even be as good as you currently are.

In all my years of teaching I have found that trying to change from a plant to a slide disrupts a bowler's release; you can lose that valuable feel for your release and your sense of what the ball will do. Trying to learn



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would be worth it if you were having knee, hamstring, or thigh problems that were caused by planting, but since this isn't the case I wouldn't worry about planting instead of sliding.

One of the things a planter such as yourself should concentrate on is stabilizing your upper-body position. Work on keeping your spine angle steady and shoulder rotation to a minimum, with your head directly over your planting foot throughout your last step. You don't want your spine to tilt back as you're taking your last step, which is common with many planters, because this causes your weight to shift back. Then you have to lunge forward to get your body in position to release the ball, which can cause a lot of stress on your planting leg and make you muscle the ball. In addition, this also adds unnecessary moving parts to your game as you're trying to get into position to release the ball, which will cause you to be inconsistent.

Planting rather than sliding is not necessarily a bad thing to do. In fact, many very successful pro bowlers don't slide. Two superstars, former PBA player of the year Dave Ferraro and PBA national champion Ron Palombi, both plant their last step instead of sliding. ●

*Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers and will answer as many as possible in this column. Mail your questions to: Bill Spigner, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201.*