

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



It May Not Be a Conventional Approach, But It Works Well for Patrick Allen

IT TOOK PATRICK ALLEN just seven seasons to register 10 titles on the PBA Tour. Among modern-era players, only Tommy Jones got to 10 — the long-time, if unofficial, barometer for election to the PBA Hall of Fame — faster.

If you look at some of the great names that have 10 or more titles, it's interesting how long it took some of them to get there. Norm Duke took 12 years, Walter Ray Williams Jr. 10, Chris Barnes 10, Parker Bohn nine, Pete Weber eight and Jones just six — particularly impressive with the more limited Tour schedule now in place. Obviously, Patrick Allen is in very select company.

How did P.A. get there so fast? He started bowling at age 3 and joined his first league at 9. Later, he had the opportunity to compete on the Junior Bowlers Tour in New York and surrounding states. JBT tournaments have been a training ground for many of the top junior bowlers in the East since 1975. When he was 16 — the year he rolled his first 300 game and 800 series — Patrick won 10 JBT titles, a single-season record at the time, and averaged 209.

Patrick attended the Dick Ritger instructional camps three times, and that's where he developed his pushaway, free armswing and balance. Combine that exceptional training in the fundamentals

with the strong competition in the JBT, and he had a very good springboard for becoming a solid PBA Tour player.

There are some unique things about Patrick's game. His set-up is very open; his left foot is open about 30 degrees, and set back almost to the back of the right foot. His hips and shoulders are facing the same direction as his left foot.

He takes six steps, with his first step actually going left, the same direction that his left foot and body are facing — usually not a good thing. But his second step straightens out. The third step crosses over in front of his right foot, a very important move for this step. If he didn't step in, he would not be able to get the correct amount of side body tilt to allow the ball to swing under his shoulder on the way back.

Patrick uses a big pushaway to move the ball. He pushes it straight out in the direction of his target. This big pushaway is the start of a long, loose swing. He has his wrist relaxed or slightly bent back at the start of the swing, allowing him to let

the ball swing totally free to the top. He employs a straight inside-out swing.

Patrick walks right on steps three, four and five. This allows his body to get out of the way of his swing path. If he didn't get out of the way of his

swing, it would get "trapped" behind him and he would not be able to swing through from the top down in a straight inside-out line to the release.

Remember that his wrist is arched back slightly to the top of the swing. Patrick does not cup the ball, but on the way down to the release, he does load up a little. His arm bends very slightly and the wrist firms up so it is straight for the



release. Patrick calls himself an “in-betweenener,” not quite a stroker and not a cranker.

The flat wrist is very important when it comes to playing the left side of the lane.

Southpaws don't encounter the amount of conditioner carrydown that the right-handers do, so the ball needs less power on it in order to be controllable on Tour conditions. Patrick has been working on getting more behind the ball. He needs this so the ball doesn't overreact when it gets to the end of the oil pattern.

Another unique thing about Patrick's game is what his right arm and hand do during his approach. After the pushaway, when the ball is passing his body on step four (remember, he takes six steps), his right arm also goes back; it doesn't stay out in front of him. On step five, his

right arm moves back out to his side and in front of him (from a side view). Then on the last step, his right arm goes back. The palm and arm are rotated counter-clockwise, with the palm facing toward the wall to his left and the thumb pointing down.

The function of the opposite arm in bowling is to provide balance. But just holding the arm out to the side is not enough. With the speed and power that is necessary in today's environment, the opposite side of the body has to play a role in generating power and balance. For a test, stand up and have your balance arm out to the side of your body, with the palm facing forward. Now rotate the left arm clockwise for a right-hander or the right arm counter-clockwise for a left-hander, spread the fingers out, and

keep rotating. You will feel the whole side firm up, from the fingers all the way through the shoulder. The best time to implement this rotation of the opposite arm is at the completion of the pushaway as the ball starts into the swing.

Patrick releases the ball with the fingers a little on the side, at about 7 o'clock. When his thumb comes out, the fingers do not rotate; they move straight through the ball.

Patrick says his favorite PBA pattern is the Chameleon, on which he has won four times. This pattern is 40 feet in length, applied in strips that require playing a specific zone. Patrick likes to play this pattern between the 5- and 8-boards. This is not a condition that allows the player to swing the ball a lot; a straight trajectory through the heads is best. The strongest part of

his game? He says it's knowing what his equipment does, which balls to use, and when to make a change. Patrick relies more on changing balls than changing his physical game. He likes to keep his game simple, and the best way to do that is by changing very little physically.

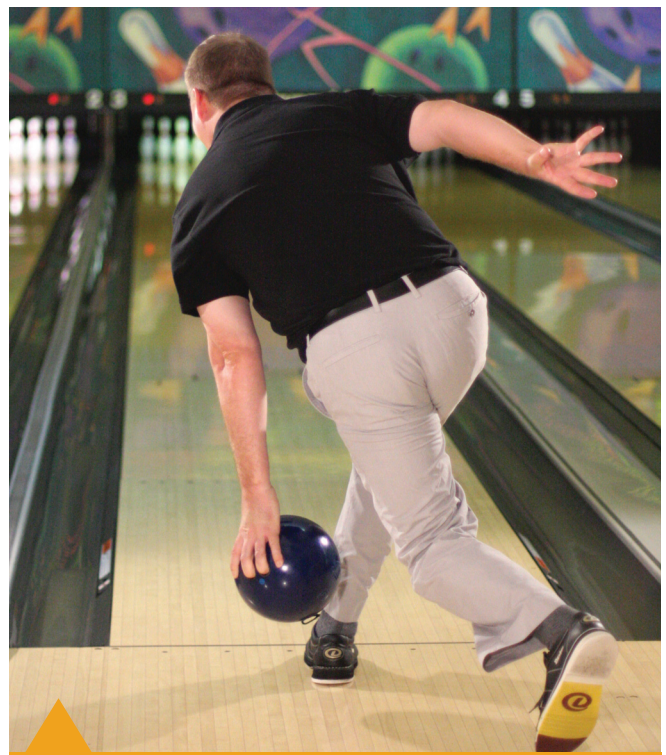
Bowling is a very private individual sport, so it's important to have confidence, which is gained through experience. But cockiness is another matter.

“Be humble,” Patrick urges up-and-coming bowlers, “because the minute you think you have it all figured out is when you get your [butt] handed to you — especially when you go out on Tour.”

PBA champion Bill Spigner is a Gold level coach. Visit his Web site at billspigner.com.



Allen pushes the ball straight out in the direction of his target.



In his release, Allen's fingers move straight through the ball.