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Woman Bowler of the Decade

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**Who's Our Pick
for the Men?**

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THE PRO APPROACH

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Straight Ball or Hook, Norm Duke Can Do It All With a Bowling Ball

NORM DUKE is arguably the best shotmaker on the PBA Tour. He can adjust his game to play the lanes in many different ways. Like Walter Ray Williams Jr., he is best identified as a “straight” player. Also like Walter Ray, he can hook the ball when needed. But he goes about his game differently.

Norm takes seven steps. He starts with his feet slightly staggered, the back of his right heel partially off the approach, and his left big toe about 3-4 inches in front of his right big toe. His first step is actually a “reverse” step; he brings his left foot back, and as soon it stops, he goes forward with the right foot. Both of these are very small

steps, and he has developed this method as a starting trigger for his approach; it gets his body moving before he starts moving the ball.

From this point on, he takes five steps. He starts moving the ball midway through the third step (which would be the first in a five-step approach). By the time he has taken his

fourth step, his pushaway is complete — and in time.

Norm’s pushaway is out and slightly down, and it’s traditional in the sense that his upper body is right between his two feet at the completion of the movement. The only problem with this is that his upper weight is way behind his forward leg, which for most bowl-

ers would hinder a smooth transition of the body from that step to the next.

On step 5, the ball swings back, and at the completion of step 6, the ball is at the top of the swing ready to start its descent when step 7 starts. In two words: great timing.

Norm has a very straight walk with the exception of step 4, which is just a little in. What’s unusual is the type of steps he takes. You really can’t count the first two because they’re just trigger steps to get in motion. Step 3 is a long, normal heel-toe step, but longer than most five-



This is how Norm Duke finishes his seven-step approach when he’s throwing the ball relatively straight — his trademark delivery.



Duke also can hook the ball when the pattern dictates. Notice the difference in the position of his arm and hand in the follow-through.

steppers would take on their first step. If you can picture Wes Malott's pronounced heel-toe steps and straight legs, you'll understand that Norm is the opposite.

On step 4, also very long, Norm's leading leg is flexed (almost as much as his knee bend at the end of his approach — it's like he's bracing himself to release the ball) and his step is flat-footed. The more the knees bend during the approach, the more flat-footed the step lands. By having this type of step and the knee flex, his upper body is between the feet of that step. In other words, his upper body is behind the forward leg to counter-balance the ball on the pushaway.

The hard part of this is that the upper body needs to transfer forward with the next step so his head is out in front of the foot at the completion of the next step. But on step 5, Norm takes a heel-toe step, keeps some of the flex in his legs, and his body weight transitions between these two steps in a very smooth, athletic move.

Norm is very low throughout the whole approach; he looks like he is stalking the lane on the way up to it. Step 6 is a fairly flat step, and his body weight doesn't transfer completely over that foot until the last step has already started. He then finishes with a normal slide.

Norm has the ability and knowledge to engage parts of his body at the right time and speed to roll the ball very straight up or to hook it a lot, with a lot of variances between. He makes some very big changes to his game to achieve big differences in the results.

When he throws the ball straight, he holds it higher in his stance — between waist- and chest-high — has more swing, and leans forward more through the release zone, with his hand more on top of the ball. When he wants to hook the ball, he holds it as low as between waist-high and his knees. He also uses less backswing.

The interesting thing is that his arm is in exactly the same spot at the end of his

fifth step no matter how much he is hooking the ball. His wrist is arched back at this point — a little less when he is hooking the ball, which allows the ball to swing freely to the top. Remember that the fifth step for Duke is the same step as step 3 for a five-step player and step 2 for a four-step player. The significance of the arm location is that no matter how much swing he has or how fast his feet and swing are, the arm is in the same spot at that point of the approach for all of his shots.

That said, when Duke throws the ball straight, there are three big differences than when he hooks it. First, his swing is about 7-8 inches higher when rolling straight.

Second, on the downswing when he hooks the ball, he has significant bend in his elbow which allows his fingers to go under the ball more; this enables him to lift and turn from behind the ball — but he doesn't unload like the big hook players.

The third factor is his spine angle, which is the same for all of his deliver-

ies up to the last step. When he hooks the ball, he maintains the 40-degree tilt he has on step 6 throughout the release. When he rolls the ball straight, his spine tilt moves forward through the release to 50 degrees. The tilting of the spine allows him to get on top of the ball and release it more on top, resulting in much less lift. When he curls his arm up to hook the ball, and the spine angle remains stationary, he is able to lift and turn up through the back of the ball. His follow-through when throwing the ball straight is down-lane, and when hooking the ball it's up.

Norm's finishing position is a thing of beauty. He has a rock-solid platform from which to release the ball, which is what makes his shotmaking so precise. There's nobody on tour who can equal the quality of his shots. Make the lanes tough, and Duke is the king.

Bill Spigner is a USBC-certified Gold level instructor. Read archived "Pro Approach" features at billspigner.com.