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JANUARY 2014 • \$3.95 • [www.bowlersjournal.com](http://www.bowlersjournal.com) INTERNATIONAL

# 2014 ANNUAL

## FEATURING

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**CHRIS  
HARDWICK**

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# THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



## 'Old-School' Style Still Works



**2013 U.S. WOMEN'S OPEN** champion Liz Johnson demonstrates that solid, "old-school" fundamentals never go out of style, even as the game itself evolves. We have a perception of what the successful modern bowler should look like, and Liz doesn't look anything like that — yet she continues to be one of the top women players in the world.

Liz has long been known as one of the two or three best when the lane conditions are tough. The 2013 U.S. Open featured a flat pattern — the same as the men have been bowling on for a number of years. And she came out on top.

Liz travels everywhere to bowl, and makes stops in the Chicago area to compete in two tournaments known for their tough lane conditions: the Petersen Classic and the Grand Boot Hill. Anybody in the world can bowl the Petersen, and the Boot Hill attracts all the best amateurs and pros that are eligible. Liz has won both tournaments, and in the years she didn't win, she was in contention.

Breaking down her game, Liz has a basic four-step approach, and her set-up has a somewhat contemporary look to it. Looking from behind, her right shoulder is significantly lower than her left, her side tilt is about 25 degrees (more than most), and her right

shoulder is behind the left, giving the appearance of being open. She tucks her elbow into her side, and her ball is outside the elbow with the forearm facing right of her target line and the hand under the ball.

From a side view, her feet are staggered, the right foot back of the left almost the full length of her left foot. Both feet face slightly out and in line with her forearm, which also is facing out. This sets up her hips and shoulders open, facing the same direction as her arm.

From the rear view, her set-up places the ball under the right shoulder and head. She is pre-setting her body to create space under her shoulder so that once her approach starts, the arm can swing under the head and shoulder on the backswing without increasing her spine tilts. Liz says her best friend and coach, pro shop operator Sue Jeziorski, developed this set-up for her 15 years ago because of her back problems.

Liz has a late ball placement. On step one, she moves the ball only a couple of inches, and her arm is still hinged in the same position it was in the stance. On step two, she unhinges her arm, and the ball is out in front of her, about knee high. Her spine tilts at this point are about 38 degrees side and about 32 degrees forward. For most bowlers, those numbers are reversed and not as high.

On step three, her right leg is going forward and her right arm is passing the right leg at the same time — a very imbalanced position for most bowlers. Because of the weight of the ball, most would have to make some kind of compensating move to seek balance.

But Liz is able to make this

work because of her very loose swing after the ball placement, the strength of her legs and core, and a superior ability to maintain balance without disrupting her approach.

Her third step also is her longest. The first step is long, and her second step is shorter than the other two. A long third step is good for someone with a late ball placement; it provides more time for the swing to reach the top.

For Liz, her swing is not at the top at the completion of step three. Rather, her head-high swing reaches its apex just as she is entering her slide, which makes the swing on time at that point.

So, her timing sequence is: step one, late; step two, late; step three, late; and entering the slide, on time.

Her spine tilts show a slight increase on step three, but entering her slide, in getting her body set up for the release, she has a decrease in spine angles. This is caused by her old-school way of setting up her legs to support her release: She drops her bowling-side knee toward her sliding leg's calf.

The thought behind this is to keep the little toe of that foot on the floor. When you do that, the upper body straightens up slightly and keeps the shoulders from leaning forward. This is still a good way of setting up the release if your fingers are not under the ball.

Doing this when the fingers are higher on



The front view illustrates how low Liz Johnson's right shoulder is in her set-up, and the degree of side tilt she has.

the ball helps you lift up the back of the ball; you don't get as much axis rotation, but you do get revs. You still need the arm to lift the hand, not the hand/fingers separately lifting the ball. The arm needs to continue long and up, and then the fingers will naturally provide lift.

The sliding leg's knee will end up about mid-calf high and almost touch the calf. The spine tilts for this type of release position are

shots. Also, because she doesn't cover a lot of boards, she keeps the ball in the pocket more than most bowlers on the toughest of conditions.

When Liz's name comes up, fellow bowlers usually note that she spots at the foul line. She doesn't do exactly that, although it looks like it when she releases the ball. "As I get up onto the approach," she says, "I draw an imaginary line to my break point and back to where I want the ball to hit at the arrows. As I walk to the foul line, I drop my eyes at my release between the foul line and the first set of dots. This is something I've been doing since I started bowling at the age of 4 or 5 on my own."

Pretty mature way of learning how to target at such a young age. Wes Malott targets in a similar way... and as you may have noticed, he won the men's U.S. Open in 2013. Kind of tough to argue with success.

*Photos by Beat Grauwiler. Bill Spigner is a USBC Gold-certified coach and a member of the USBC Hall of Fame. Archived "Pro Approach" features may be viewed at [billspigner.com](http://billspigner.com).*



Johnson's old-school finish position — with very little forward tilt and her right knee finishing close to her left calf — has stood the test of time in producing good balance and lift.