



THE PRO APPROACH

Pete Weber

THROUGHOUT MY BOWLING CAREER — as a pro bowler, a pro shop operator and a bowling center proprietor — the Weber name has been an inspiration to me. While bowling on Tour, I had the privilege of bowling at Dick Weber Lanes, sitting in on PBA Executive Board meetings with Dick, and competing with Dick and his sons Rich, John and Pete.

Rich and John, Pete's older brothers, bowled on Tour before Pete. John and Dick finished fourth in the PBA Doubles Tournament in San Jose in 1974, when Pete was 12.

The PBA Tour first visited Dick Weber Lanes in 1975, and that's when the barely teenaged Pete saw the great Mark Roth up close for the first time. From that point on, Pete tried to model his delivery after that of Roth, who is considered the father of the modern power game. Young Pete saw this as the best way to play the game or, at least, the way he wanted to play it — a very astute observation at such a young age, considering the other examples of greatness he grew up around (and who excelled by rolling the ball comparatively straight).

It had to be a special day for Pete when he won his 34th PBA title, putting him in a tie on the PBA's all-time titles list with Roth. But when it comes to bowling's "majors," Pete long ago eclipsed Roth,

and now has eight major championships to his credit, compared to Roth's one.

Although Pete modeled his game after Roth's, there were big differences in their styles. In their primes, both had the high backswing and big ball. But Pete opens his shoulders, while Roth never opened his. Both have a very strong forward tilt of their spines, about 40 degrees. But Pete walks with his legs fairly straight, while Roth used a lot of knee bend.

Roth had to apply a lot of physical force to his shot to make it work, because his shoulders never opened; he used his legs much more. Pete's approach, on the other hand, always has looked effortless with his long, smooth swing and great extension.

Mark had a turn-and-lift type of release, and lofted the ball way out on the lane. Pete also is a turn-and-lift bowler — but his turn comes from shoulder rotation, and his lift through extension.



BY BILL SPIGNER

Pete is a pure stroker with a powerful ball. He refers to himself as a “tweener” because he strokes through the ball very smoothly, yet can get maximum hook when needed.

In Pete’s early years on Tour, he had a release that was different than any I’ve ever seen: He was able to get 90-degree axis rotation and tilt the axis. At the bottom of his swing, his hand was totally on the side of the ball, with the thumb still in. As his thumb

came out, his fingers did not rotate farther around the ball; instead, they continued “through” the ball. The tips of his fingers pointed down the lane in the direction he wanted to roll the ball. So, his hand would end up open, as if he were reaching out to shake someone’s hand. He still uses that technique today.

If we mere mortals were to have our bowling hand in the same position as Pete’s at the bottom of the swing, we would lift up on the ball and not get the needed extension and tilt. But because of Pete’s hard-to-duplicate extension, the ball retains incredible energy and has a controllable break point.

Pete was one of the first players who could hook the ball a lot and still excel on the toughest of conditions.

Pete’s game worked great for a long time with the 90 degrees of axis rotation. It worked through the soft plastic era, the soft rubber ball era and the start of the urethane era. Then came resin urethane balls and exotic cores. At the same time, most new bowling centers were putting in synthetic lanes, and the old



(LEFT) While he shares the high backswing of his childhood hero, Mark Roth, Weber opens his shoulders during his approach, which Roth never did. **(RIGHT)** At the release point and into the follow-through, Weber’s hand opens up, as if he were about to shake someone’s hand.

wood houses were starting to replace their lanes with synthetics. On synthetics, the new resin balls would skid more in oil and grab more when they hit the dry area. The combination of the smooth synthetic lanes and the balls that reacted more would render the advantages of Weber’s 90-degree axis rotation obsolete.

As a result, Pete started having a very difficult time controlling his break point. This led to him having a bad patch for four out of six years as the ‘90s drew to a close. This followed 13 years of Pete pretty much having his way with the Tour.

After working on staying behind the ball more and decreasing his axis rotation, Pete has remerged as a threat on Tour. He saw the problem, and worked his way through it — he looked for solutions, not excuses.

Pete says he is pretty much self-taught. Dad would give him advice only when he asked for it. His brother Rich is the one he turns to now. He also has sought help from Hall of Fame coach John Jowdy and Storm ball rep Chris Schlemmer.

Through the years, Pete has developed a great, yet simple, way to play the game. His pre-shot routine is to gather his thoughts before stepping onto the approach, get set in his stance, and then go. He says the less time he spends on the approach, the better — much like Roth.

Pete has an interesting way of targeting. At the beginning of his approach, he spots about 50 feet down the lane. As his approach continues, he gradually brings his eyes back near the foul line.

Pete made a great comment at the taping of the *Chicago Sun-Times*’ “Beat the Champs” show, which was aired on Christmas day in Chicago. Carmen Salvino was the color commentator for the show and complimented Pete on a great career. Pete’s response: “I’m still trying to get better. I’m working on my straight game because I’ve been having a problem beating Walter Ray (Williams Jr., the all-time Tour titles leader).”

Well, Pete has found ways to survive for 27 years on the Tour, and I’m guessing he will master the straight game.

Pete is one of the all-time great bowlers, and shows no signs of slowing down. He is hands-down the most exciting player to watch when he’s in the hunt for a championship. He shows genuine emotion that fits him, whereas many players try to “act” and ultimately don’t perform in a way that’s natural for them. Pete says the best advice his Dad ever gave him was, “Just be yourself,” and he has done exactly that.

Bottom line: I think Pete Weber would have won many more titles if he were bigger and stronger. Or, to put it another way, Walter Ray might have been chasing him.

Not that Pete is done winning...

— *Bill Spigner is a three-time PBA champion, eight-time PBA Regional champion, Gold level coach, former head teaching pro for Professional Bowling Camps, long-time pro shop operator and coach of the Vernon Hills (Ill.) High School boys’ bowling team.*

