

Bowlers Journal

MAY 2014 • \$3.95 • www.bowlersjournal.com INTERNATIONAL

FEAR AND BOWLING IN LAS VEGAS

THE COMPLETE TRAVELER'S GUIDE

Brooklyn Bowl Makes
A Big Impression

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }

How to Practice Correctly

I GET QUESTIONS all the time about how one should practice in order sharpen their game, and how to practice on tougher conditions when the only thing they see are walled-up house conditions. With summer approaching, it's a great time to practice; prices generally are lower, there's more lane availability, and it's easier to schedule a few lessons with your favorite coach.

There are a number of things you can do to sharpen your game. Lane conditions have a big influence on your practice, so if you're practicing on an easy shot and piling up some really impressive scores, you could be fooling yourself.

Keep in mind that when you worry about your score, you're really not practicing; you are competing, even if it's just against yourself. Once a score goes up on

the overheads for all to see, most bowlers start worrying more about that, rather than working to improve their game.

"I bowled a great game in practice, but bowled bad in league," is a familiar lament among bowlers. They need to realize that bowling a big score in practice means nothing. Extended practice sessions are for looking at all parts of your game, working on your weak areas, further strengthening your strong points and expanding your range of play.

If you are going to bowl just one game before a league session, use it to loosen up and get an idea about the lane pattern you'll be facing — even if it's a walled-up shot. Roll your first shot to the left corner, the second shot outside of the area you think you'll play, the third shot to the right corner, and the fourth shot inside where you think you'll play. Continue this procedure through the full game. This way, score doesn't matter; you're just trying to loosen up and get familiar with different parts of the lane. That's a warm-up game, and one that should help you get ready for the league session.

When you want to have a real practice session, there are a few things

that you should do. Practice, to me, is very private; it's not a social gathering. You need a lot of concentration when you practice, because you need to have a plan on how you're going to execute your shot, then you make the shot, and then you evaluate it. If you're with a group, you can't do that.

Go to any driving range and watch the high-skilled players practice their swings. They are by themselves, or they might have a set of eyes on them to discuss the shots.

The top bowlers do the same thing. If you and a buddy decide to practice together, you need to have a plan.

First, get just one lane and alternate frames so that neither one of you has a score. Once the names are punched in separately, then you each have a score and you will no longer be practicing; you will be competing, even if you say that you aren't. That score up there is a big distraction to practice.

If you are working on your form and rhythm, you should roll first-ball shots only. Staying on one lane and getting lined up to hit the pocket is the first order of business. Also,



Reprinted/Posted with permission from *Bowlers Journal International*.



you want to stay on one line for as long as the lane allows you to.

Staying in one area of the lane and rolling only strike shots will help you focus on the dispersion of your shots — what the misses look and feel like compared to the good shots.

From the sight of the shot, you backtrack to the feeling of the ball off the hand and relate that feel to the performance of the ball — good or bad. From that feel, you can start to learn how to backtrack through your approach to the beginning of the shot.

The beginning has a huge impact on the rest of the shot. The feeling of the release tells us a lot about what happened to get that release.

Another advantage to playing just one area of the lane is that it gives you an idea of how the lane changes and how fast it changes. If you bowl in a five-person league, there are nine first-ball shots rolled on each lane before you take your next shot on either lane. That's almost a full game, and a lot can happen in that span. By

sticking to one line on one lane, you will experience the shot gradually changing. If you bowl on two lanes by yourself in practice, you will not see how fast a condition changes.

If you are going to have a real long practice session, getting two lanes is okay. But don't have the lanes set up as a pair for scoring. Bowl on one lane for four or five games, then change to the other lane. That way, you "beat up" one lane, and see the transition and how it affects your ball. Then you go to the other lane and do the same thing, now able to anticipate the changing lane pattern.

For advanced practice, when you want to play on tougher conditions, it can be difficult to find a center that puts out Sport patterns. But there's a way you can make the typical 10-to-10 house shot play tougher.

Normal house shots have a hard oil line around the 10-board. From the 10-board to the gutter, the oil is pretty flat. And from the 10-board on the right to the 10-board on the left, the oil is very heavy, but it's also fairly flat.

There are three ways to play this pattern. When you're loosening up, get lined up on the oil line and play that until you feel comfortable that you're making good shots. Next, take your spare ball out and play outside around the 5-board. Because the oil is pretty flat there, the combination of your low-reacting spare ball and the flat oil will require you to make very good shots in order to strike or even hit the pocket consistently.

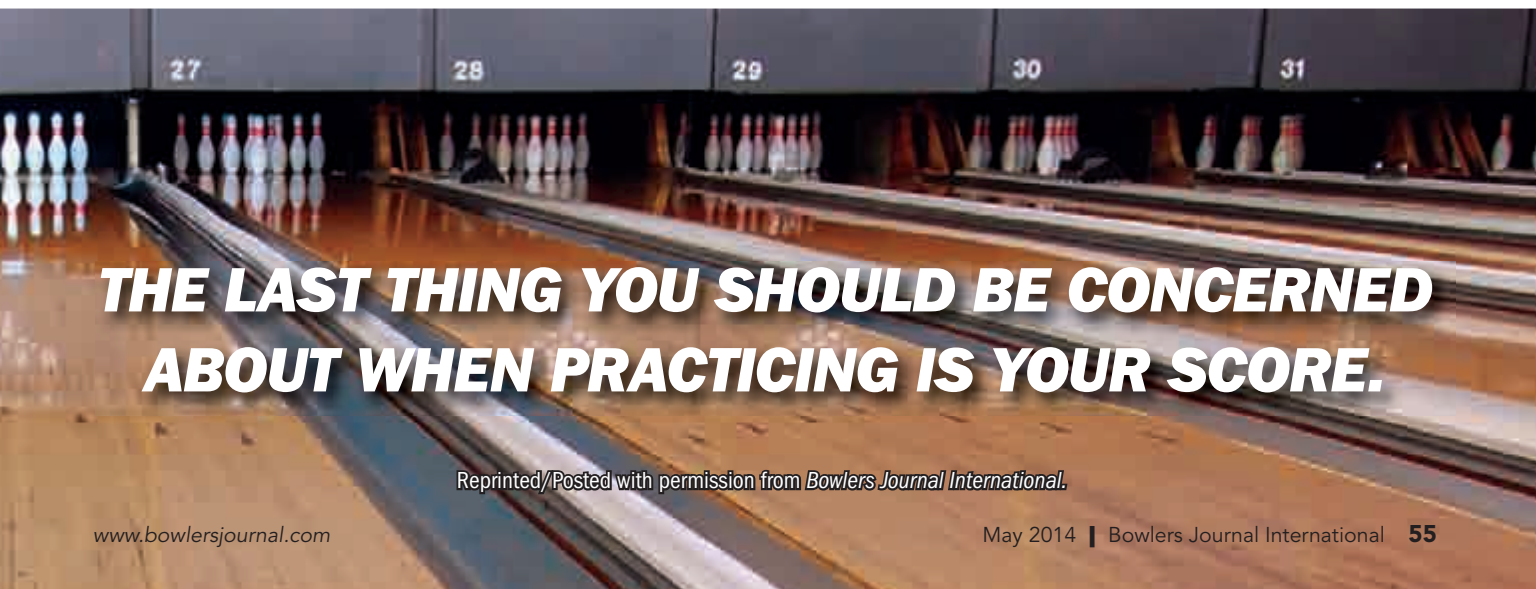
Next, practice in the middle of the lane — around the 15- to 20-board — with your normal equipment for heavier oil. Your task is keep the ball from going outside 12-13, so it stays in the heavy oil until it gets to the end of the pattern.

These methods enable you to see how consistent your shots are without any help from the lane. You'll also come to better understand the feeling of your misses. Another benefit is that once you get lined up right, the good shots will hit the pocket. You'll develop a track in that part of the lane to play off; you are, in essence, creating your own shot.

Another great way to sharpen up your eye on adjusting is to practice before the lanes are oiled or after the night leagues are finished. That way, you have to think about moving, and the more you think, the more you learn.

When you practice, always have something in mind that you want to accomplish. And that "something" should never be a high score.

To read archived columns by USBC Gold level coach Bill Spigner, visit bill-spigner.com.



Reprinted/Posted with permission from *Bowlers Journal International*.