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THE PRO APPROACH

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How Dick Allen Looks 'Wild' But Achieves Great Balance

THERE'S A NEW GUY ON TOUR. At least, that's what I thought during the PBA's Dick Weber Playoffs. I saw the name "Dick Allen" and wondered who this guy was. I soon found out it's the former Ritchie Allen.

I got to know Ritchie (Dick) Allen during the 2007 CLR Open, which we hosted at Hawthorn Lanes in suburban Chicago. I bowled in that tournament, and was paired up with him in the Round of 64. I had seen him bowl before on TV, but had never had an opportunity to watch him closely over an extended period of time.

But after bowling 14 games with him in the qualifying rounds, I gained a very thorough understanding of his game and personality. He has the appearance of being wild, not only with his game, but off the lanes as well with his tattoos. And tattooed on his left forearm is "THB," which stands for "Typical House Bowler" — a nickname he has embraced, which should tell you something about his personality.

Allen's style includes a very high backswing, and he launches the ball way out on the lane, giving the appearance that he's a cranker who needs a lot of lane help. But after bowling those 14 games with him, I realized he is anything but a THB. He has a very warm personality, a lot of emotion in his bowling demeanor, and his game has a lot of guts to it. After that event, I became a fan of the bowler and his game.

Allen is a five-step player. In his set-up, he has about a 20-degree side tilt from the rear view, as he lowers his right shoulder. He holds the ball a little to the right, with his feet together and



Dick Allen's swing travels 180 degrees on his third step. Note how his upper body is tilted forward and how open his shoulders are.

facing straight toward the foul line. From the side, one can see that he has the ball chest-high, with his right elbow resting on his side, above the hip.

His pushaway starts on his first step. By the time step two is completed, the ball has advanced into his swing about knee-high — a little early. The early movement is accentuated by his forward spine tilt going from 0 on the first step to about 16 degrees on step two. His first step is very straight, but on step two he places his right foot directly in front of his left foot — a very good move to create space under his upper body and allow the ball to swing past the body.

His side spine tilt on step two increases to about 27 degrees. It's not text book, as most of the time the forward tilt should be more than the side tilt. But remember that Allen is not your "normal" stylist.

With this movement of the ball and the extra side tilt on his third step, Allen's swing moves a little inside. His upper body angles also increase on step three, which accelerates the speed of the backswing. The swing covers a lot of distance on that step. It travels 180 degrees, which for most bowlers is a full backswing, but not unusual for the very high-swing players.

It's best that this type of player gets the ball to the top of the swing before the fourth step is complete. Allen's swing reaches the top midway through the fourth step, and the arm is vertical to the floor. By the time step four is done, the swing has started its descent — good timing for a high-swing player.

Allen's swing gets that high because of

his upper body tilt. On steps three and four, from a side view, he is at about 37 degrees, which is not a lot for a player with a high backswing or even for players with shorter swings such as Michael Haugen (who has the same forward tilt) or Chris Barnes (who has a shorter swing than Allen's but with more forward tilt).

What sets Allen apart from other players is his side tilt. At the completion of his fourth step, he's at about 50 degrees, which allows his shoulders to open more than a lot of other players' and enables the swing to get real high.

A good rule of thumb to follow for spine tilts is that the side tilt should be between 5 and 10 degrees less than the forward tilt. When the side is more than the forward, both balance and swing problems can arise. But in Allen's game, the swing stays on its straight, slightly inside-out line, and he remains in bal-

ance. What also allows him to have this much upper body rotation is flexibility; he has very flexible shoulders and hips.

On the downswing to the release, Allen's upper body angles reverse. His forward tilt increases to about 50 degrees and his side tilt straightens to about 40 degrees. This puts his body in a well-balanced position to prepare for the release.

His ball reaches its lowest point in his swing when the center of the ball is even with his toes, a little forward for a lot of bowlers. But Allen keeps increasing his forward tilt throughout the release. And that allows his hand to chase the ball down the lane, lifting and turning through the back of the ball with extension — just the opposite of a Jack Jurek-style of player (*April BII*).

But at this point he does something a little different than the modern power player: He lofts the ball out onto the lane.



Here, Allen's swing is at its apex and is vertical to the floor. His shoulders are wide open, and his body is demonstrating great flexibility.

This is very difficult to do consistently from the position his body is in and with the forward direction it's moving during the release. You would think he'd have real balance problems doing this, but he doesn't. He has to have great legs to remain balanced through this process.

One of the things Allen has been working on is to release the ball more parallel to — or “into” — the lane, like Barnes does. In order to accomplish this, he'll have to delay his pushaway, and then walk taller earlier in his approach, which would reduce his swing height. Once that's mastered, he would have to stop leaning forward so much through the release, decreasing the upper body finish position from 73 degrees to about 50.

This would result in the ball reaching the bottom of the forward swing arc by his ankle. His shoulder would still need

to lower during the release. Such changes would require some work, and the “feeling” of his shot would change a lot.

I could agree with fine-tuning his game a little, but it's an asset to be able to get the ball well out on the lane, releasing it in front of you, when the heads break down and the shot moves inside. On fresh oil, I could see him adding an earlier, smoother release, which would be an asset in getting the ball rolling sooner and making it more controllable in the front and mid-section of the lane.

Allen has three PBA national tour titles and has proven that he and his game can hold up under pressure. He will be a factor for a while to come, even if he makes no changes to his game.

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Allen exhibits very good body position as the ball reaches its lowest point. Everything is in place for the execution of a good release.