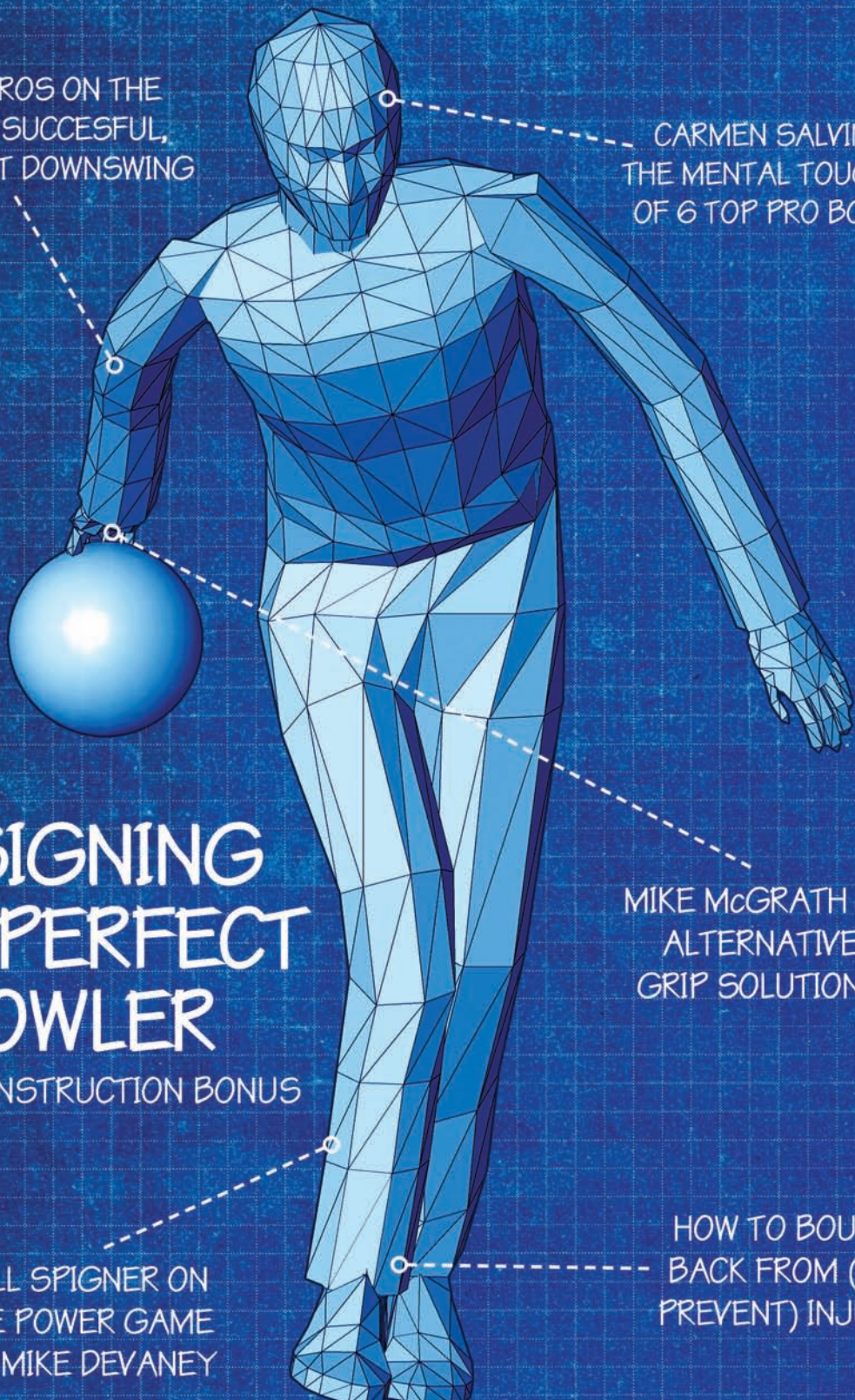


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BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



Mike DeVaney Unloads, and Proves Power and Intelligence Are the Keys to Success

UNLIKE PETE WEBER OR CHRIS LOSCHETTER, Mike DeVaney never had dreams about becoming a professional bowler. Rather, he looked at bowling as a way of making extra money. In his youth, DeVaney was an avid baseball player and spent his spring and summer occupied with that sport. In the offseason, he bowled after school.

DeVaney's take on bowling, however, completely changed when he won a qualifier for the 2001 U.S. Open at Fountain Bowl in Southern California. Initially, he figured that if he cashed, he would show a tidy profit, because he was staying at a friend's house and travel expenses were kept at a minimum. Well, he did much better than he ever expected; DeVaney made his first career television show and got his introduction to bowling under the hot lights by getting beat by Walter Ray Williams Jr. He cashed for \$15,000 that week, and the next week in Oregon, at the Earl Anthony Medford Classic, DeVaney finished fourth and took home \$10,000.

Since 2001, DeVaney has evolved into a rather consistent player. Although he only has one title — the 2003 GEICO Earl Anthony Medford Classic — DeVaney has survived for six years on the exempt Tour and made TV 12 times. Last season, he broke out for three show appearances, and he now appears poised for an even more successful future.

DeVaney is a self-described power player, which means he is a bit different from the smooth-stroking power stokers covered in previous issues. He claims that in order to be a consistent performer at the professional level, there are many elements of the game one must master.

DeVaney says he does not have a favorite condition; he finds all of them easy at times and very demanding at other times. As such, he feels his greatest strength — and most needed element — is his ability to learn and adapt. By watching and/or emulating successful players as best as he can, or

rasa mental approach is key to any player's success on more difficult patterns. That is because lane conditions may change at a moment's notice; if you do not keep adjusting and readjusting, you could miss out on your opportunity to strike. So, when bowling on a PBA pattern — or any pattern for that matter — plan how you are going to play the lanes and how you will change your game as the lanes change. A good rule of thumb about getting lined up on fresh oil is to always start near the gutter and work your way into the center of the lane as your ball reaction dictates. There is almost always less

oil near the gutter than there is in the middle of the lane, and you first want to find where the least amount of oil is. Once you find the place on the lane where your ball rolls the earliest, move in until you can consistently and confidently hit the pocket. I see too many bowlers go to the second arrow (or even farther in!) during practice. Successful PBA players like DeVaney start differently, erasing the oil from the part of the lane that has the least amount and then moving to the heavier volumes inside. DeVaney and other Tour players know how to open up a shot; bowling in PBA Experience leagues is a great way for you to learn the same strategies the sport's best use on a regular basis.

Of course, it helps that opening up the lane is DeVaney's forté. He has a classic power game, and generates lane-opening power by creating leverage at his release point. He has late timing and his slide foot has fully stopped when his ball is still behind his right knee. DeVaney's shoulders are open at this point and his arm has a

DEVANEY, LIKE EVERY SUCCESSFUL PLAYER, WIPES THE SLATE CLEAN EACH TIME HE STEPS UP TO BOWL.

by learning from his own mistakes, DeVaney says he often finds ways to bowl with equal or greater success.

Like every successful player, DeVaney also wipes the slate clean each time he steps up to bowl. This *tabula*

rasa mental approach is key to any player's success on more difficult patterns. That is because lane conditions may change at a moment's notice; if you do not keep adjusting and readjusting, you could miss out on your opportunity to strike. So, when bowling on a PBA pattern — or any pattern for that matter — plan how you are going to play the lanes and how you will change your game as the lanes change. A good rule of thumb about getting lined up on fresh oil is to always start near the gutter and work your way into the center of the lane as your ball reaction dictates. There is almost always less

lot of elbow bend. This elbow bend starts on the downswing as the ball travels forward. The initial movement of the ball from the top of the swing is downward toward the floor. As the swing starts to change direction and move forward



Mike DeVaney may clown around sometimes, but he's all business when it comes to creating power. His open shoulders and elbow bend allow him to unload a fistful of fury at the release point.

and down to the release zone, the arm starts to bend. The arm bend is at its maximum when the ball starts to pass DeVaney's right leg. Then, with his foot stopped and his shoulders open, DeVaney rotates his upper body, squaring his shoulders with his target line. On the downswing, when his ball gets under his right shoulder, the shoulder moves down and forward and the arm starts to straighten.

This action of unbending the arm, the wrist uncupping and the shoulder moving down and forward causes the arm, hand and fingers to accelerate. The common term for this action is "unloading." Most people think unloading is done by the wrist. In actuality, unloading starts with the shoulder. The shoulder moves down and forward, the elbow straightens and, finally,

the wrist straightens as well. The wrist will naturally unload if a player allows the ball to roll off their hand. The results of this are increased speed and revolutions.

DeVaney employs a traditional targeting system. He uses the arrows or that part of the lane approximately 95 percent of the time; sometimes he will look a little closer or farther out. I have always taught that using the arrows is the easiest way to make logical adjustments and understand the moves you make.

In addition to creating enough power to open up the lanes and hitting one's target, bowling also has a lot to do with "feel." DeVaney says he knows when he does not have "it." He says this feeling scares many players. DeVaney also says, though, that one must overcome this fear. Over

the long haul of a season, or even a career, you are going to have your ups and downs, he says. It is up to you as a bowler to figure everything out.

DeVaney also has a good tip regarding bowling balls. He says too many elite players do not know enough about balls and rely too heavily on proffered advice.

"Bowlers need to learn the cores, the coverstocks, ball dynamics and how all these relate to their own game," he says. "Most bowlers just throw the ball down the lane; if they create some area and get good carry, then they like the ball. They do not take the time to learn why the ball works so well, or why others do not work at all. The PBA Tour is not the place to learn these things, but unfortunately, 99% are forced to learn on the run. This is why you see

so many young and talented players try the Tour for a season or two and then are never heard from again. The learning curve is way too steep."

DeVaney's comment reminded me of when a young, talented bowler from Chicago came out on Tour during the early '80s. He had a ball drilled on the truck, picked up the box with the ball and came into the paddock. He opened the box and saw the ball, with three unfinished holes, no grips and shavings still in the holes. This particular bowler was baffled. Well, as good of a bowler as this guy was, he never took as much as a single piece of sandpaper to a hole to fine-tune a fit, yet was out on Tour trying to make a living. So, take it from DeVaney and me: Learn about your equipment. A smarter bowler is a better bowler.