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'Do It... or Quit'

Chris Loschetter
Talks Himself Into
First PBA Title in
10 Years on Tour



THE PRO APPROACH

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Good, With a Chance to Be Great

RONNIE RUSSELL is one of those naturally gifted athletes, but his talents go well beyond that. In addition to being a world-class bowler, he's a really good golfer, plays guitar and is a country western singer — a complex combination of athleticism, feel, touch and artistry.

I've known Ronnie since he was in college. As he has advanced in his career, he has become a very talented bowler, always seemingly just on the edge of breaking through — which he did in March, winning his first PBA-recognized tour title in Germany. He had a lot of close calls before that, but couldn't quite seal the deal. Now, he's finally over the hump, so watch out.

Ronnie has a five-step delivery with a very solid set-up; everything is in the right place. He starts his ball placement on the second step and basically “unhinges” his bowling arm for that placement.

At the end of step two, he is right on time for his swing height. Then on step three, his swing travels a long way — about 180 degrees, which is about the same amount as Pete Weber's swing travels on that step. So he's in some pretty good company at this point.

On step four, his swing is still going up slightly, and as that step ends, his arm is perpendicular to the floor, much like Dick Allen's. (Weber's swing, at this point, has already started down.)

Ronnie's forward spine angle at the top of the swing is about 40 degrees, and he increases that tilt on the downswing to almost 53 degrees at release. He continues to increase it to about 63 degrees when his finish is completed.

Increasing forward tilt on the downswing is good, but it has to match up with how you finish. With Ronnie's steep downswing angle, the ball reaches the lowest point in the swing just as he's ready to release it — just forward of his ankle — which enables him to release the ball out in front of him.

His body is in a good position to release the ball. But as he releases it, his sliding leg straightens out and his trail foot flies off the floor. He is able to stay balanced on one leg, in his finish position, because of his athleticism.

Looking at his spine angle from a back view, the same thing happens: His tilt increases as the swing comes down and through to the finish position. At the top of his swing, his side tilt is about 40 degrees; at release, it increases to about 55, and at the finish

it ends up about 66. There's a lot of activity with the upper body on the downswing

and through the release.

All in all, Ronnie has a great swing; it's long, loose and straight as a string to the top, with a slight tuck on the downswing. He also has a very good release.

For a player with his athletic abilities, swing and release, one would think he'd have



An extremely high backswing is not inherently bad, as Pete Weber has demonstrated through the years. Here, Ronnie Russell's swing is reminiscent of Weber's, although some upper body movement has the potential to limit consistency.

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done better early in his career. I do feel his best bowling is still to come, particularly with some refinements and adjustments to his game that would make him more consistent.

What kind of refinements and adjustments, specifically? First, understanding that his very high swing causes his downswing to be too steep. When the downswing is that vertical, it's hard to flatten it out and have time for the release. Most bowlers with a steep downswing have a narrow window of opportunity to release the ball on time. Ronnie is on time, but with a cost.

What helps him have time to release the ball is the continuing tilting of his spine angles on the downswing and through the release. They are going forward, which gives the swing more time to flatten out at the bottom. The side tilt helps by creating a lot of space to swing under the body.

His execution in both areas is really good, but when you have that much movement with the big parts of your body going into and through the release zone, it's tough to have as much control over what you want to do with the ball as the Webers and the Barneses do.

There are a few things I would recommend he do that would complement each other. First, with his ball placement, I would have him keep his left hand on the ball a little longer on step two, and place the ball out a little more instead of straight down.

On step three, I would recommend not having his shoulders open as fast or as much. The fast opening of the shoulders sends the swing high and fast to the top. Keeping the left hand on the ball longer for the ball placement, and placing the ball slightly out, would help him slow

the start of the backswing so he could work on not opening his shoulders as much.

The end of the approach is the other area I would suggest tweaking. Ronnie's ball is in a good position to be released, but his forward and side tilts are a little too pronounced, which creates an imbalanced position from which to release the ball. That's why he has to straighten out his sliding leg to get back in balance — a very athletic compensating move, but difficult to time as well as a more stable body position.

Many bowlers who straighten out their sliding leg use that move to create speed and lift. Ronnie doesn't have to do that.

So, the finish position solution would simply be to decrease his forward and

side tilts, keep his trail foot in contact with the floor until the ball is well down the lane, and maintain the flex in his knee.

The shoulders not opening as much or so fast would reduce the height of his backswing, which would keep the downswing from being as steep — enabling him to have a more stable upper body position and create a flat spot for his release, without having to increase his forward and side tilts to do it.

Less upper body tilts would stabilize the upper body over the legs. And a more stable upper body position, coupled with the stabilizing of his lower body, would increase his ability to repeat shots.

These adjustments involve fine-tuning the approach, not

changing the core elements of his game. Every bowler needs to be comfortable with his style, but rare is the style that could not be improved to some degree.

The most consistent players on tour have a really strong, stable release and finish position. They also have much less spine angle movement from the top of the swing to the release and the finish position.

Ronnie Russell finally has his first PBA title. With some minor changes to his game, it could be the first of many.

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Russell is able to maintain his balance on one leg at the release point because of his superior athleticism. Two simple changes to his game could get him to that spot without as much strain or effort.

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