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Happy Days at the U.S. Open

Why Champs Liz Johnson
and Wes Malott No Longer
Take Winning for Granted



THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



How New PBA Patterns Shook Out

THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ASPECT of our sport involves lane surfaces and the oiling patterns applied to them. That's what made the PBA Summer Series in Milwaukee so interesting, as three new "animal patterns" were introduced. There was a big difference in not only the length of the patterns used, but also in the dominant style of players that made the shows. Simply put, it marked the return of the stokers.

The first new pattern was the Badger: 52 feet in length, contested on a wood surface. On wood, the ball rolls earlier and finishes less — especially if the lane hasn't been resurfaced in a while. On synthetic surfaces, the ball gets down the lane easier and finishes harder.

The Badger on wood was a throwback to lane conditions of the past, and it developed into a "fall-back" shot, something unheard of today.

The bowlers started out playing between the 15- and 20-board, with a direct line to the 3-pin (right-handers). The length of the oil would not allow them to swing it out to the right. The pattern did have more oil in the middle of the lane, which the players used for "hold."

As the Badger wore down, players moved in even deeper, but still couldn't swing the ball out past the 3-pin. So, they actually had the ball slide back toward the 3, and then at the end the ball needed to "tip" into the pocket, creating some angle.

The balls that were striking did not demonstrate the

angle we normally see when the bowlers play deep inside. The perception was that the ball wasn't even hooking into the pocket, yet it would get to the 5-pin and rip the racks.

This pattern brought an interesting cast to the TV show. All are straighter players and excellent shot-makers, with medium speed, revs and rotation. Josh Blanchard led, but was defeated by Jake Peters for the title. They are two of the top shot-making stokers on tour who have graduated from the college ranks.

Most bowlers believe that to play deep inside angles, you have to have a ton of revs and hook the ball a lot. The Badger pattern proved that this isn't always true; it was a stoker's pattern.

The Wolf was the second pattern, and a replacement for the Cheetah. It was 32 feet in length instead of 35, and it proved to be the highest scoring pattern. Its length leaves 28 feet of the lane for the ball to hook on.

This pattern requires one to get the ball out to between the 2- and 4-board before it starts to hook back — just



BADGER PATTERN LENGTH:
52 FEET



WOLF PATTERN LENGTH:
32 FEET



BEAR PATTERN LENGTH:
40 FEET

the opposite of the Badger, on which players needed to keep the ball inside around the 13-board before it headed back to the pocket.

The Wolf gave the players more angles through the front part of the lane for getting to the correct breakpoint. Coupled with the increased pocket-entering angle, that produced higher scores for more players.

The Wolf enabled players to use the greatest degree of hook among all the patterns. It again brought out the stokers as the dominant performers, with Chris Loschetter leading and then winning his first PBA Tour title.

The third new pattern was the Bear, which was basically the U.S. Open pattern. It measured 40 feet, with no blend in the oil across the width of the lane. It was the lowest scoring and most brutal lane condition, and produced the widest range of players for its telecast.

Advancing to the show were two stokers (Chris Barnes and Chris Loschetter), two crankers (Dan MacLelland and Jason Belmonte), and one hard-throwing, higher rev, medium hook guy (Tom Hess).

The pattern had enough backend for one to be able to hook the ball, but the flat oil provided no room right or left of target to get the ball to the pocket. With no mistake room laterally on the lane, the down-lane direction the ball travels is vitally important. It has to be on line and rolled at

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the right speed. If the speed is a little fast, the ball skates too long. If it's a little slow, it hooks too soon. All in all, it was tough to navigate with the oil changing subtly on almost every shot.

This pattern played okay from multiple angles on the fresh. Starting out, the bowlers were all over the lane, moving

the oil to different parts of the backend (the last 20 feet). Ultimately, much of the play area went to the middle of the lane. (Remember, the Badger played in the middle, too, but the difference was that virtually everyone was there.)

When the dominant shot moved to the middle of the lane, it was because

the length of the pattern was 40 feet and there was 20 feet of backend to navigate.

On the Badger, one basically threw right at the 3-pin. On the Bear, one had to arc the ball out to around 10-12 and hook it back. Without any area built into the pattern, the only area that could be created came from developing a track in the oil, the carrydown and the ball track in the lane surface.

The flat pattern is the truest form of bowling. There's no help to steer the ball to the pocket, and it takes an incredible amount of patience to be successful on it.

The fourth tournament featured all three patterns, and the cream really rose to the top, with five strokers left standing at the end: Chris Barnes, Pete Weber, Norm Duke, Mike Fagan and Jason Sterner.

Sterner has developed into one of the best players on tour, a very solid shot-maker. Fagan has made some impressive adjustments to his game, tightening up everything and using straighter lines — from his swing to his follow-through. He now can play angles that were foreign to him just a few years ago.

Here is the basic rule of thumb for playing lanes that are freshly oiled: The longer the pattern, the closer you play to the headpin; you do not throw the ball away from the pocket. The shorter the pattern, the more you play toward the 10-pin or the gutter, and start the ball the farthest away from the pocket. Long patterns give you less time for the ball to hook when it exits the end of the pattern. But as the pattern gets shorter, you have more time for the ball to hook and need to be farther from the headpin to accommodate the hook you're going to get.

For the average player, the toughest patterns are the short ones, where your lay-down point must be outside the 10-board and the breakpoint outside the 5-board.

Always play the lane based on the amount of hook the lane allows you to play, not on what and where you *want* to play.

Bill Spigner is a USBC gold-certified coach, and a member of the United States Bowling Congress Hall of Fame. Archived "Pro Approach" features are available online at billspigner.com.

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