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BOWLING

DIGEST

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Bill Spigner digs out the dirty deeds done to your ball

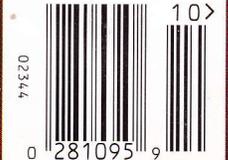
No Cushion

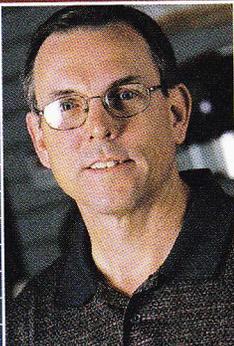
Jason Couch, the best bowler of the 2001 "mini" season, tells us what he'll have to do to pad his lead as the PBA returns to action

The Match I'll Never Forget: Bob Learn Jr.

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Keep Those Machines Clean

By **BILL SPIGNER**

Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Send a letter to Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201, or e-mail bowl@centurysports.net.

■ *I bowl in an AMF house and book a 199-200 average. The equipment in this house was installed in the 1960s. Spare parts have been replaced, but not the wheels or belts on the ball returns.*

Here is the problem: The proprietor feels that our bowling balls should be cleaned at home prior to every event or league session because some balls don't come up at the ball-return area. Plastic balls are the worst, but any ball on the alley can have this problem. The ball just sits in the area between the bottom wheel and the top of the return, spinning on the return lift belt.

I'm not a lane-maintenance person, but bowling equipment should do what it is designed to do. These returns need a little preventative maintenance, like a good cleaning of the shaker boards or other areas. The other bowling center in our area removes the shaker boards and steam-cleans them. The center also has spare boards, which allows it time to do a thorough cleaning job.

Is it the bowling balls or the equipment? I understand the need for a clean ball, but I don't think I should put the bowling ball in the dishwasher every time I bowl. The shaker boards get saturated with oil and the oil transfers to the balls in such a quantity that it gets on the equipment belts. Little or no maintenance is what's causing the problem, not the balls.

Also, can one dirty bowling ball cause all the bowlers' hands to get dirty on the lanes where the ball is being used? A scheduled preventative maintenance routine would solve that problem, too. Am I wrong?

One dirty bowling ball on your pair will not get everybody else's hands dirty. Dirt on the ball brought back from the

machines is a maintenance problem, identified by black marks on the ball and some grease that will get on your hands and clothes. It's part of the bowling center's job to make sure that bowlers don't get dirty.

A good preventive maintenance program is a daily task for the mechanics. Different maintenance needs to be done daily, weekly, monthly, semiannually, and annually, and keeping the machines clean and in good working order is a big job. Most bowling centers are open from 9 a.m. until midnight, seven days a week, and during business hours there always should be someone on the machines. During the day, when the bowling center is the least busy, the head mechanic gets most of the big maintenance done. At night, when the leagues are on, the night mechanic—besides repairing machine malfunctions—should be doing what cleaning can be done while the machines are running.

You should not have to clean your ball in a dishwasher every time you bowl. You do want to clean your ball if you need a clean, dull surface for a good ball reaction, but not to keep the ball from being stuck in the ball return.

Resin urethane balls should have no trouble coming back through the ball return. These balls are soft and really grip—just think of the increased hook you get with the resins vs. the plastics. However, the plastics and the old hard rubber balls can be a problem in the ball returns of today. The amount of oil used to condition the lanes for resin balls is about eight times what was put down on the lanes when we used only hard rubber and plastics. This increased amount of oil makes it difficult for some old balls to return. Also, some older balls may be a lit-

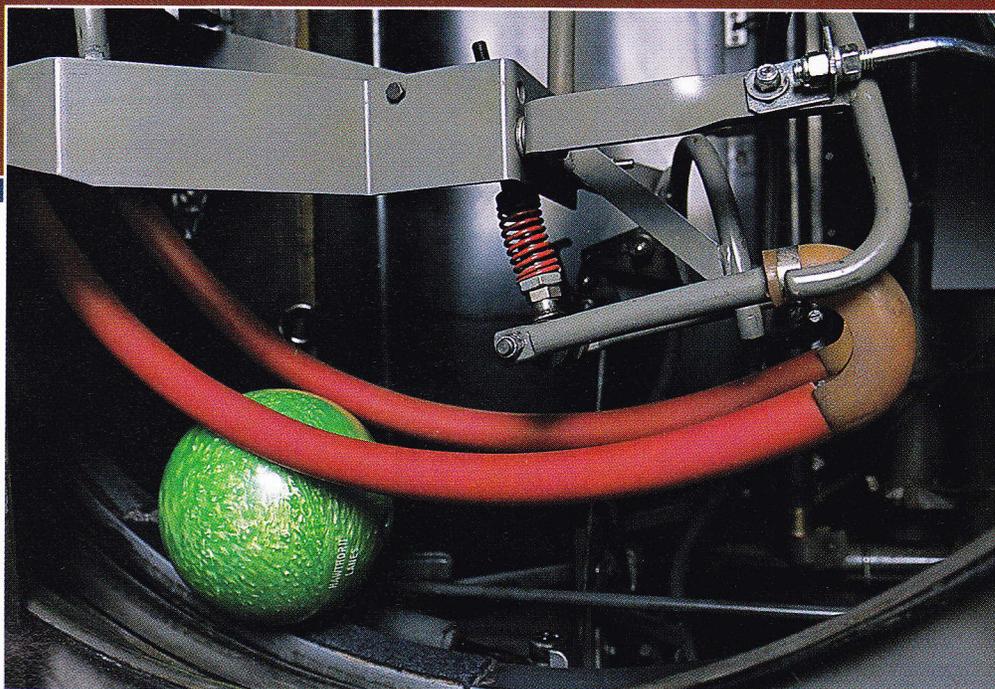
tle small in diameter, which can add to the problem. But the oil doesn't cause a dirt problem. Lane oil is clear. If the lanes are not stripped and cleaned on a daily basis, dirt can settle in the oil and then be transferred to the machines by the ball.

If your bowling center has severe ball-return problems, it's the center's fault. If there are isolated ball-return problems, or just one ball has problems returning, then it's the fault of the ball. Regardless, every bowling center needs an ongoing preventive maintenance program that includes daily cleaning, oiling, and machine inspection.

■ *I'm currently deciding whether or not to switch from conventional to fingertip bowling and would like to know a little about fingertip for bowling balls. How do fingertip help you bowl? Is it hard to adjust to fingertip after installing them? What are the differences in hook and speed between a regular ball and a fingertip ball? What is the average cost of fingertip? Would fingertip be right for me and/or my ball? I currently own a polyester plastic bowling ball.*

The fingertip grip is the best one to use. This grip is far superior to the conventional grip, so much so that almost all professional and higher-average bowlers use it. The ones that don't use a fingertip grip use a semi-fingertip grip, but such players are few and far between.

The fingertip grip is actually easier to use. The hand is spread out over more of the surface of the ball, which means you actually have to grip the ball more gently to hang on



When the lanes aren't maintained properly, oil-soaked equipment like the ball wheel above will be unable to return your ball and can dirty up balls and bowlers alike.

to it. One of the keys to using the fingertip grip is that the holes need to be tighter so you can grip the ball more gently. When you grip the ball more gently, the ball feels lighter during the swing, making it easier to keep the wrist straight for a good release.

The big benefit of a fingertip grip is the added revolutions and hook you can apply to the ball, which helps you roll strikes and play more parts of the lane. You're able to get more action on the ball because of the delay between the thumb and fingers coming out of the ball. Because the finger holes are farther from the thumb, the fingers are farther under the ball and have more time to lift and turn the ball once the thumb exits.

As far as getting used to the fingertip grip, most bowlers adjust to it and score better immediately because they can roll more strikes. One of the initial problems you might have is adjusting to spares, so continue to try and roll a straight ball for most of your spares. You can do this by changing your release or using a different ball for spares. As a matter of fact, you should buy a

new resin urethane ball for your strike ball and re-drill your old plastic ball to use as your spare ball. The combination of a new ball and the fingertip grip will increase your average without changing your form. Yes, you'll have to change where you stand on the approach for your strike ball and you'll have to move left to accommodate the increased hook. You also will have to make more adjustments during your bowling sessions because you will see the lanes change with your increased power.

■ *Is it possible to stay proficient while bowling in separate leagues using both your right and left hand? Six years ago at age 64, I had surgery on my right shoulder but was determined to continue my bowling. My physician thought bowling with my left hand while the right shoulder healed was a good idea. I practiced until I had enough confidence to enter league play. My first season ended with a 169 average. The next season I returned to my right hand and averaged 196 to 202, my best ever, in two different leagues, with minor*

pains here and there. This past season I again returned to my left hand while bowling in three different leagues, ending with averages of 177, 179, and 183. My thinking for the 2001-02 season is to split my leagues using both hands as appropriate. Would you think this would be a matter of choice or would it be to my advantage to stay on one side for proficiency?

It's a matter of choice. If it's fun for you to bowl with both hands, then do it. You can compete against yourself, trying to get the left to beat the right. But you don't want your right side to start complaining when the left side starts beating the right because the lane conditions aren't fair. Just kidding.

It's neat to be able to play the game proficiently with both hands. On the Senior tour, Matt Buxton competes with both hands. He learned how to bowl right-handed and, like you, took up left-handed bowling because of an injury. He became very proficient playing both ways and was the first bowler to bowl sanctioned 800 series with both hands.

Many high-level players can bowl well with their opposite hands. To get real good, you have to spend a lot of time on the lanes. Sooner or later you start trying different things, and bowling opposite-handed is one of them. If something should ever happen with your right hand again, you can continue to bowl without going through the growing pains of learning to bowl with your opposite hand.

Bowling opposite-handed is like cross-training your body for our sport. Bowling only right-handed works your body from your right hand through your left foot. If you don't have a good conditioning program, you'll never train your left hand through your right foot. By bowling both ways, you actually can work your whole body. This might not make you a better bowler, but it does raise an interesting point about developing your body symmetrically.

Whatever you decide to do, have fun with it. If anyone ever challenges you to

an opposite-handed match, you will probably have an advantage.

■ ***It has been determined that throwing hard and straight is the best method for converting spares because there's usually more oil in the center of the lane. Wouldn't it be best to shoot all spares over the 4th arrow to keep the ball on line, and not hook away from the spare because of more oil in that area?***

Your theory is correct. Using the oil in the center of the lanes is a good way to keep the ball straight for spares. Using anywhere from the 3rd to the 5th arrow is a good range for spare shooting when rolling a straight ball. Many times it's difficult for

faster because of reduced friction: the oil and a hard ball. What many bowlers find is that even though they want the ball to roll very straight for spares, if the ball hooks just a little they are more comfortable with the feel of the shot and the look of the ball going down the lane. By changing to the hard plastic ball, we play the oil, so we have to make the smallest changes possible in our release to make the ball roll much straighter down the lane.

Also, with the amount of oil in the middle of the lane, a hard, shiny, plastic ball can have a tendency to overskid and actually hydroplane out. If you miss a little right for righthanders (or left for lefthanders), the ball has a little turn and will push to the



Going straight at spares is easier when a ball has its polish sanded off [right]. A ball with too much polish [left] may hydroplane out once it hits the lane oil.

some right-handed bowlers to use the fourth arrow for the left-side spare. It's the opposite for lefthanders. Many of these players need to go more cross-lane to get their shoulders aligned right so their swings will travel in the right direction. Whatever target you use, make sure your shoulders and body are aligned correctly to the destination of your shot.

With the amount of oil used today, you don't have to throw your spare ball much harder to get the ball to roll faster. There are two things that will make the ball travel

right even more. Today, many players will actually take the polish off the plastic ball so it has a chance to roll, which helps control the direction of the ball in the oil. Take the polish off the ball with 600-grit sandpaper using a ball spinner.

You have three decisions to make for your spare shooting: 1) where you stand and target; 2) the release you will use; and 3) the ball. Take all three into account when designing your spare-shooting system. If something doesn't work for you, try something a little different. ●