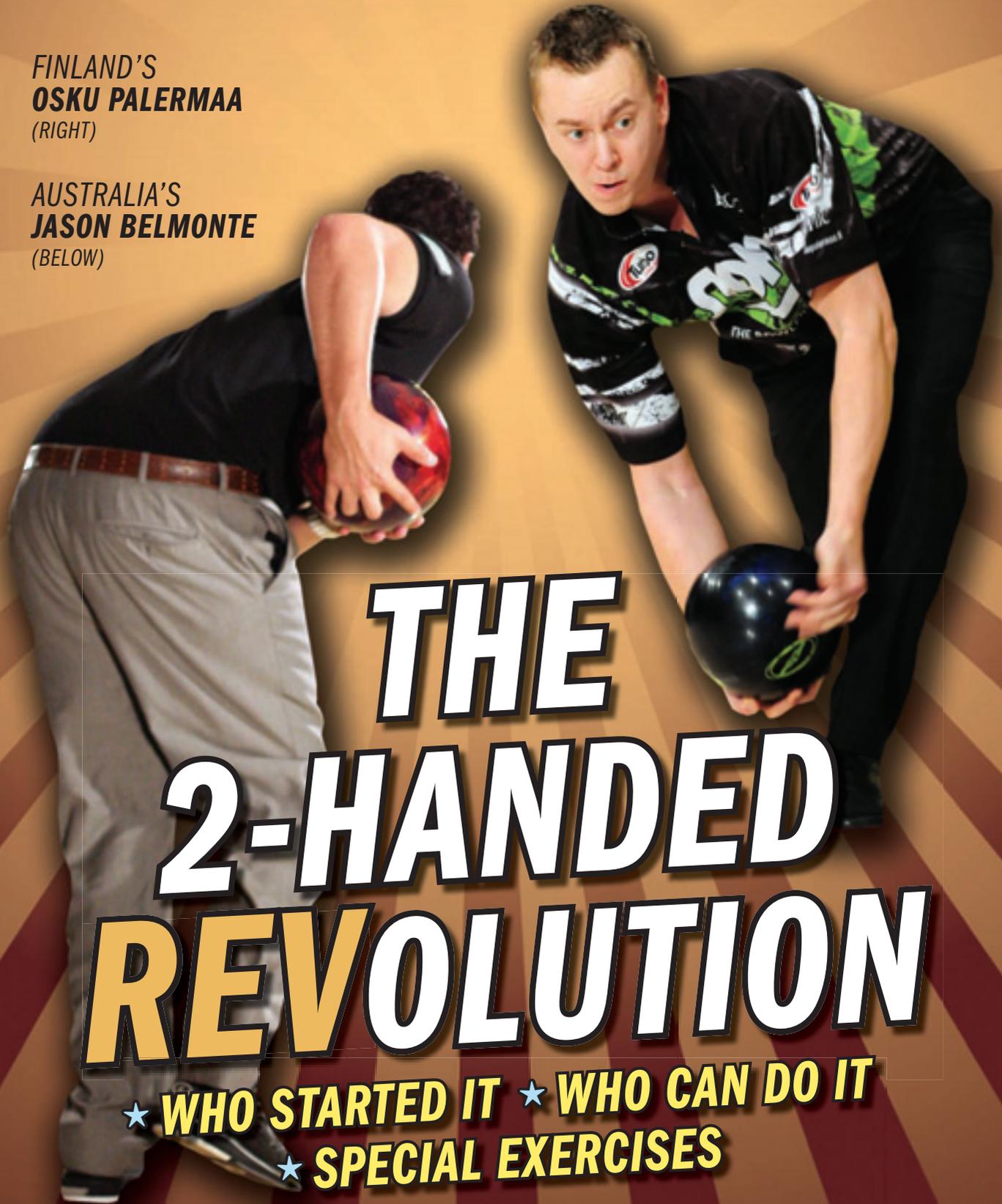


# Bowlers Journal

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FINLAND'S  
**OSKU PALERMAA**  
(RIGHT)

AUSTRALIA'S  
**JASON BELMONTE**  
(BELOW)

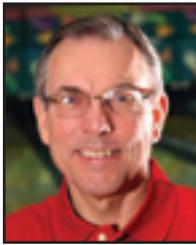


## THE 2-HANDED REVOLUTION

★ WHO STARTED IT ★ WHO CAN DO IT  
★ SPECIAL EXERCISES

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ALSO INSIDE: TOP HIGH SCHOOL PROSPECTS ★ BJI POWER POLL



# THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { [bills@bowlersjournal.com](mailto:bills@bowlersjournal.com) }

## A 'New' Style 40 Years in the Making

**TWO OF THE BEST** bowlers in the world, Australia's Jason Belmonte and Finland's Osku Palermaa, use the "two-handed" delivery. There could be very heated arguments over which one is the best. I won't render an opinion on that — their careers ultimately will provide the answer — but I would like to make some observations on both.

It's interesting that neither of these players is American. Could it be that the coaching style that was prevalent in the United States didn't allow for unconventional styles and ways of thinking? That's part of it, but we now see more two-handers in the U.S. than ever before.

I believe this style could have had its genesis during the 1970s. I was about 17 or 18 and went to New York one Saturday night, seeking out where the action was at that time: White Plains Bowl — a two-level bowling center with an almost-all-glass front.

We walked in and went upstairs. At the high end, there was a doubles match going on that a lot of people were watching and had bet on. So I went over to see what was up.

There was this 13- or 14-year-old kid who was bowling with what looked like his grandfather against two other guys. The kid really caught my attention, not only because of his age but because of his style: He was using two hands to deliver the ball.



Joe Berardi (left) was a "two-handed" bowler before he joined the PBA Tour and embraced a more conventional style. Mike Miller showed the world how to get revs without a thumb.

I don't know whether his thumb was in or out, but he unleashed the ball like I had never seen before. I didn't watch too long because I got involved in a match of my own, and I didn't see this kid again until a PBA event in Edison, N.J., some years later. Only this time, he was

bowling the traditional way, but with a very strong ball for the time. It was Joey Berardi, who eventually became a PBA Hall of Famer.

I've always wondered whether Joey would have revolutionized the game, as Mark Roth ultimately was credited with doing,

if he had stuck with his two-handed delivery.

It seemed as if the young kids of that era all were working on hooking the ball more, but with the lane surfaces of that time, hooking it a lot wasn't functional. Even Roth, with all of his power, didn't hook the ball like today's players. He had a lot of loft, speed and spin that helped the ball retain lots of energy down-lane, so his ball "finished" better than anyone else's as it went through the pins.

The next player to help lead us into the future was Mike Miller, a decent bowler who was very accurate but had virtually no power. One day, on a whim, he took his thumb out of the ball and discovered he was able to hook it and strike. He was the first bowler to have success on the national PBA Tour with a thumb-less delivery.

The thing that made Mike so good is that he had great form with his thumb in, and used that form with his thumb out. He already knew how to play lanes and make spares with his thumb in, so the transition to thumbless was only on his strike ball and a few spares that required some hook for successful conversions.

After Mike, however, no one came along to take the

bowling world by surprise and draw attention to a nontraditional way of bowling — until Osku and “Belmo.” Both of these players were cutting their teeth on the international circuit, and most Americans didn’t know

what was taking place overseas.

My son Robby lived in Copenhagen, Denmark, one summer while in college. He had already made the trip over the big pond to bowl in Europe before attending school there, and he would tell

me about Osku and Jason and how unbelievable they were. Having no idea how strong the European talent was, I took it with a grain of salt. But Robby knew, and he was correct in his evaluation.

So much for the evolution of this style in the modern era. The question is: Why is it working today?

Well, keep in mind that it doesn’t work all the time, and the best bowlers today — Chris Barnes and Mika Koi-vuniemi — are traditional-style bowlers.

The No. 1 factor that has allowed this style — not to mention the big, high-swinging, open-shoulder cranker — to emerge is lane surfaces. (The two-handers also employ the wide-open shoulders and a lot of forward spine tilt.) The lane surfaces in most bowling centers today are synthetic — very smooth, with a hard finish.

On older wood lanes, a ball track would develop over time, and one had to learn how to play in the track and be able to move deeper inside and play off the track if they wanted to have a strong release. Get the ball outside the track, and you were in No Man’s Land.

On the right side, because of the amount of play, the track was rough. To the right of the 8- and 9-boards, it was a lot smoother. So if you “leaked” the ball right, it wouldn’t recover. Even if the lanes were conditioned with little oil outside and a lot in the middle, the outside part would play like it had a lot more oil. With the advent of the smooth synthetic lanes, the blend in the oil pattern played like it was designed to play.

Another factor is the incredible lane machines that are being made today. With these machines, a laneman can apply a pattern with great consistency. And that means centers can apply more oil in the middle and less toward the edges with precision. They also can “blend” the oil down lane, so there’s more oil closer to the foul line and progressively less toward the pins.

Blended oil patterns enable a bowler to put a lot more action on the ball and still get it back to the pocket, even with less-than-accurate shots.

This also was true years ago, but because of the lane surfaces, a more

direct angle needed to be played. Blending the oil and blocking the lanes have been part of the sport forever. But today, with the combination of high-tech oiling machines and synthetic lanes, there are more “playgrounds” for young people to learn how to bowl while applying a lot of action on the ball.

I see a great many people in the 15-25 age range who bowl infrequently, throw light balls without inserting their thumb, and have great fun watching the ball hook... while getting an occasional strike. The lane patterns are the reason. They can miss way right, and the ball still hooks back, and when they miss left, the puddle in the middle keeps the ball on line.

On the PBA Tour, all of the patterns are blended except the one used for the U.S. Open. The first time I saw Osku was at the 2004 U.S. Open in Fountain Valley, Calif. I loved the way he threw the ball. Plus, he made TV on the flattest oil pattern on tour — no blend to help steer the ball, the truest form of bowling.

(If people had to bowl league on a U.S. Open pattern, most would quit. Those 210 averages on house shots, which basically are adult versions of bumper bowling, would become 175 real fast — even if the bowler worked at it.)

I didn't see Jason bowl until he came over to compete on the PBA Tour. Even with both Jason and Osku on board, I was still a little skeptical about how much success they'd enjoy. With the elimination format, bowling on one pair of lanes, the straighter player is able to carve out a track in the oil, parallel to the oiling pattern, starting in the area that has the least amount of oil.

Thinking that the two-handers are very sideways in their approach and their release is very inside-out, I figured they'd have a difficult time keeping up with the Walter Rays and Mikas. At first, they did. But both have become incredibly versatile, and both have won on the tour — Osku on a brutal Shark pattern, and Jason in a tournament that featured three different oiling patterns during the week.

USBC Coaching now teaches coaches how to teach the two-handed style.

Certified USBC Bronze, Silver and Gold level coaches now can help two-handed players get better, rather than merely telling them that it isn't the way to bowl.

The “sudden appearance” of this style has been in the works for more than

40 years. Will it revolutionize bowling? I don't think so. Is it now part of our bowling landscape? Definitely.

*For archived “Pro Approach” features, visit: [billspigner.com](http://billspigner.com)*