

Bowlers Journal

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THE PRO APPROACH

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The Moment of Truth Arrives

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH in bowling is the release. The set-up (April *BJI*), ball movement from the stance (July), walk (September) and swing (November) all lead up to that point.

The release and finish position, regardless of what happens up to that point, has to be solid and consistent.

All of the successful pros have a well-balanced foundation from which to release the ball, and the release and finish position has a lot of components to it. The feet, legs and upper body must be positioned correctly for the bowler to deliver the right shot for his style.

Let's start with the feet. The sliding foot should be facing the bowler's target line on the lane. Among most right-handed tour players today, the toe of the foot is facing slightly right, and among most left-handers, it's facing slightly left. Of course, when talking about tour players, the direction their foot faces is very dependent on the direction of their shot. If they are playing straight down the lane, or shooting left-side spares, a right-hander's body will face straighter ahead and the foot also will face straighter.

It's also very important for the foot to be directly under the non-bowling-side shoulder. From a front or rear view of the bowler, looking at a video, you should be able to draw a straight line from the foot up

to the shoulder. This perpendicular line to the floor would go just inside the knee. This is the balance line, and this line should be maintained through the release and well into the follow-through.

The next things to examine are the legs. The sliding leg needs to have enough flex so the bottom of the ball is just above the ankle, or lower, when the ball is at the bottom of the swing arc, ready for the thumb to exit. The sliding leg's kneecap should be directly over the middle of the sliding foot at this time.

Meanwhile, the bowling-side leg needs to start clearing out to make room for the swing. The knee of that leg moves to the outside of the sliding leg, which helps lower the shoulder for side tilt to create space for the swing. The toe of that leg's foot should stay in contact (or very close) with the floor as it moves out of the way.

When the ball is at the release zone, the bowling-side arm should be perpendicular to the floor, from a side view. It also should be parallel to the leg, just before the thumb is ready to exit. For players like Mika Koivuniemi, who have a lot of elbow bend, and

those who cup their wrist, the arm will be slightly behind the knee when the thumb is ready to come out.

One's upper body angles

have a huge influence on the release and the stability of the body for the release. Upper body forward tilt allows the ball to get beside the ankle at the bottom of the swing arc, and the side tilt creates space so the arm can swing under the body, inside-out.

The forward tilts can be



It doesn't get much better than this, as Chris Barnes exhibits the ideal release position: right leg cleared out and long, his bowling arm only as high as it needs to go, and his left arm with the thumb down and palm facing back.

anywhere from 35 to 75 degrees, depending on the cupping of the elbow and/or wrist. The more under the ball the bowler gets, the more forward and side tilt is needed so there's enough space under the body for the arm to swing freely on an inside-out path.

Jason Belmonte is on the extreme end of tilts — almost 75 degrees of forward and about 50 degrees of side tilt. Players with less cup and elbow bend use less forward and side tilt.

In today's game, you don't want to be "hitting up" on the ball; even straighter players have a good amount of tilt. Michael Haugen, one of the really good straighter players on tour, has about 50 degrees of forward tilt and 37 degrees of side tilt. His fingers are below the equator of the ball, so he needs the tilts to release the ball more forward out onto the lane, and not up and out.

The side tilt keeps the

bowling-side shoulder low, which helps to release the ball more parallel to the lane. How much tilt? A good rule of thumb is 40-45 degrees forward and about 35-40 degrees of side; that's a good middle ground from which to work. Chris Barnes is 45 forward and 40 side — a great model to emulate.

Now that all systems are "go" for the release, it's time to finish the shot, and your legs provide the foundation. Think of it like a house; without a good foundation, a house can't be built.

Successfully finishing off the shot starts with the trail foot staying in contact with the floor. From a side view, the toe of the foot should end up facing down the lane, in contact with the floor. The heel behind it should be slightly off the floor, and the leg fairly straight. This position allows the body weight to transfer

to the sliding leg, critical to maintaining balance.

As the weight transfers to the sliding leg, the upper body continues to move forward a little. When this happens, the knee of the sliding leg moves forward, ending above or slightly in front of the toe of the sliding leg's foot. The bowling-side shoulder needs to stay low, retaining the side tilt. You don't want to raise the bowling shoulder during the release and follow-through.

The follow-through should be toward the target, and the upward finish of the arm and hand should be from the momentum of the ball being released — not from forcefully lifting up from the shoulder. You want to maintain your legs in a posted finish until the ball is well on its way, while your follow-through can come right down after it has completed its upward motion.

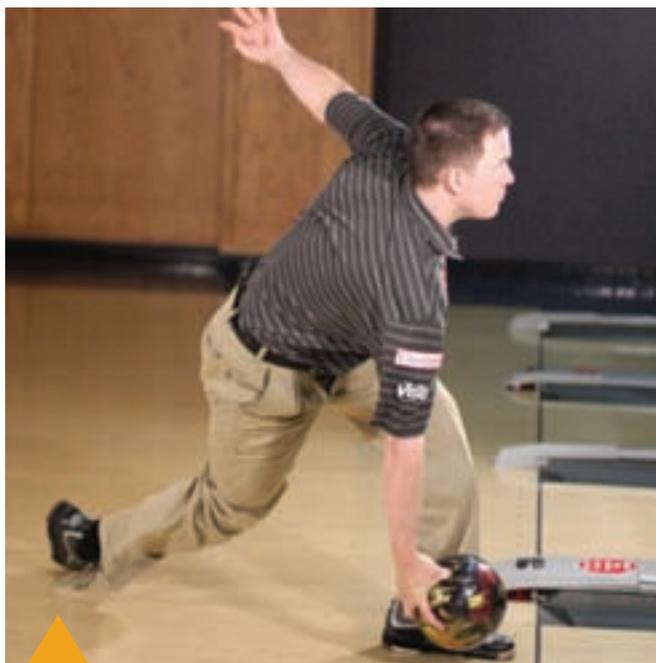
Finish the shot off in a well-

balanced, posted position, and good things will happen. There are many top players that do this. Chris Barnes, Norm Duke, Mike Fagan, Carolyn Dorin-Ballard and Missy Parkin all have great finish positions.

There also are players who don't finish in this well-balanced position. Walter Ray Williams, for instance, finishes on one leg. After he releases the ball, his bowling-side leg goes up in the air, and he does not maintain his balance line or his knee flex. But at the moment of truth, he is well balanced.

For most bowlers, however, working on a solid, balanced finish position should be a priority.

Bill Spigner is a USBC Hall of Fame member and a Gold-level coach. Archived "Pro Approach" columns can be viewed online at billspigner.com.



Sean Rash is in an excellent position to start his release with the ball by his ankle, and his bowling arm perpendicular to the floor, parallel to the leg. From the rear, note how his sliding foot is facing in the direction that his ball will be traveling, and how it's directly under his left shoulder — creating a perfect balance line.