

BowlersJournal INTERNATIONAL

JANUARY 2026

2026 PLAYERS TO WATCH

DREAM BIG

Youth Bowler
Nehemiah Keefer
Has Lofty Goals

BREAKDOWN:
SPIGNER EVALUATES
ETHAN FIORE'S GAME
PG 36

SWEET REVENGE
FOR LUKOSIUS
AT PWBA
SHOWDOWN
PG 42

ZAC TACKETT
IS CREATING HIS
OWN IDENTITY
PG 58

BOWLERSJOURNAL.COM
\$5

THE OLD SCHOOL FINDS A DISCIPLE

How Ethan Fiore combines old-school form with the two-handed game to set himself apart on tour.

by **BILL SPIGNER**





Finger Point

Fiore spreads out his index finger to create more turn when moving in. Here, his index finger is inline with the ring finger of his left hand. This places the right hand inside the supporting hand, enabling that hand to execute the kind of inside-out turn that will position him to more easily swing and hook the ball.

The case can be made that Ethan Fiore is as close to an overnight sensation as the PBA Tour has seen in recent memory.

Consider the improbability of his rise to prominence on tour: He started out the 2025 season as a non-exempt player, meaning he had to bowl the PTQs (Pro Tour Qualifiers) to get into a given tournament. As any PTQ warrior can tell you, the cuts are steep in these events; about 1 in 10 make it each week. Fiore, for his part, missed making the cut in some and led a couple others.

The turning point for this 20-year-old, who first shoed up on tour at age 17, was the Mike Aulby PBA Nevada Classic at the National Bowling Stadium in Reno. There, he led the PTQ and went on to make the TV show.

The upstart hardly stopped there, winning his first-ever televised game against another rising star, Alec Keplinger, to earn the right to face the best bowler on the planet over the last three years in the semi-final match — EJ Tackett. And, oh, what a show of talent, will and poise this young man flaunted — all attributes he possesses in quantities beyond his years.

His match against EJ became an instant classic. A 238 tie sent them into the PBA's one-ball, sudden-death shootout procedure. It lasted a record seven frames as Fiore and Tackett combined for a 300 game with dueling six-baggers before Fiore left a 7 pin on his seventh shot. Tackett, veteran of clutch moments that he is as a 27-time PBA Tour champion, struck again to punch

through for the victory. Nonetheless, it was definitely a coming-out party for Fiore and, crucially, a huge confidence builder.

Fiore wasted no time riding that tsunami of confidence to the top of his profession, as he soon went on to make his first PBA Tour title a major at the PBA Players Championship. This time, he was the top seed, placing him in the luxurious position of having to bowl just one game to close in on the title. Once again, he faced another rising young star, Ryan Barnes, for the title.

An Accidental Career

Fiore wasn't a child prodigy like Tackett. He did not start out looking to be or training to be a pro. Having begun bowling at age 7, he deployed the traditional, one-handed style until age 13, and he had no real coaching, as his engagement with the sport was more of a causal pastime.

And just as is the case in any casual pastime, he played around a bit, at one point trying his luck at the two-handed game when he was 13. As plenty of youth bowlers before him had discovered, Fiore was able to instantly hook the ball — something he could not do well bowling one handed. Prior to this gambit, Fiore had form, but no release. Switching styles changed everything, as his ability to hook the ball a lot more easily made the sport fun for him and ignited a love affair with bowling that would pave a path toward a career on the lanes.

He didn't bowl junior scholarship tournaments, but after becoming a two-hander, he told his dad he wanted to bowl Junior Gold. His dad said if he got good enough,



Lofty Heights

Fiore's lofty game requires some quite visible contrasts between his usual delivery (left) and the delivery he deploys to ensure his ball gets some air under it when needed (right).

he could try it. That summer, he took his father up on the deal and worked his butt off to get better.

Fiore said he would walk two miles to the bowling center every day, bowl 20 games, and when pricing specials went into effect later at night he would bowl 20 more games. He bowled 40 games in a day many days that summer. Today, his practice regimen on the lanes is less, as he rolls about 100 shots per session, incorporates stretching beforehand, three-step drills for timing, some versatility work and spare shooting, and never bowls for score.

He bowled his first of two Junior Gold events at 15 and the second one at 17. In the first one, which he bowled in 2019 in Detroit, he finished a very respectable 78th out of 715 U15 contestants. The following year was a Covid year, so he returned in 2021 to Indianapolis to compete in the U18 division and placed an impressive 28th out of 1,169 players — an exceptionally good showing.

Fiore says of his first Junior Gold experience that, “Your first time going to JG, take it all in, have fun. It’s an experience. Learn all you can from it. Go home and work on the things you struggled with. For me after my first JG, I went home and worked hard to get better at spares and become more versatile, something everyone should do, and things I still work on. My second time, I felt more prepared and had the mindset to win.”

From Casual Player to Major Champion

Fiore’s ability to blossom from a 13-year-old who didn’t care much about bowling to a major PBA champion derived from a

combination of things. First, he developed a burning desire to get better, and second, he was watching a lot of YouTube videos of two-handers’ releases and lane-play decisions, and three, he landed a coach to bring an objective set of eyes to the festivities, and have a voice off of which to bounce ideas and talk through bumps in the road.

Fiore is a five-step player whose approach features long strides. He starts at the back of the approach and walks straight. This sets him apart from peers. In today’s game, we see many of the tour’s right-handed two-handers use shorter steps and start at or even in front of the front row of dots. They also tend to walk left.

It is here that his style bears some resemblance to the stokers of the sport’s old school — a very smooth player who reminds me a lot of David Ozio. Like that great champion, Fiore’s style exhibits great form with a strong release, versatility, and tremendous extension through the ball to

go along with his pinpoint accuracy. Fiore occasionally practices taping a dime on the lane about where his break point would be and works at hitting the dime.

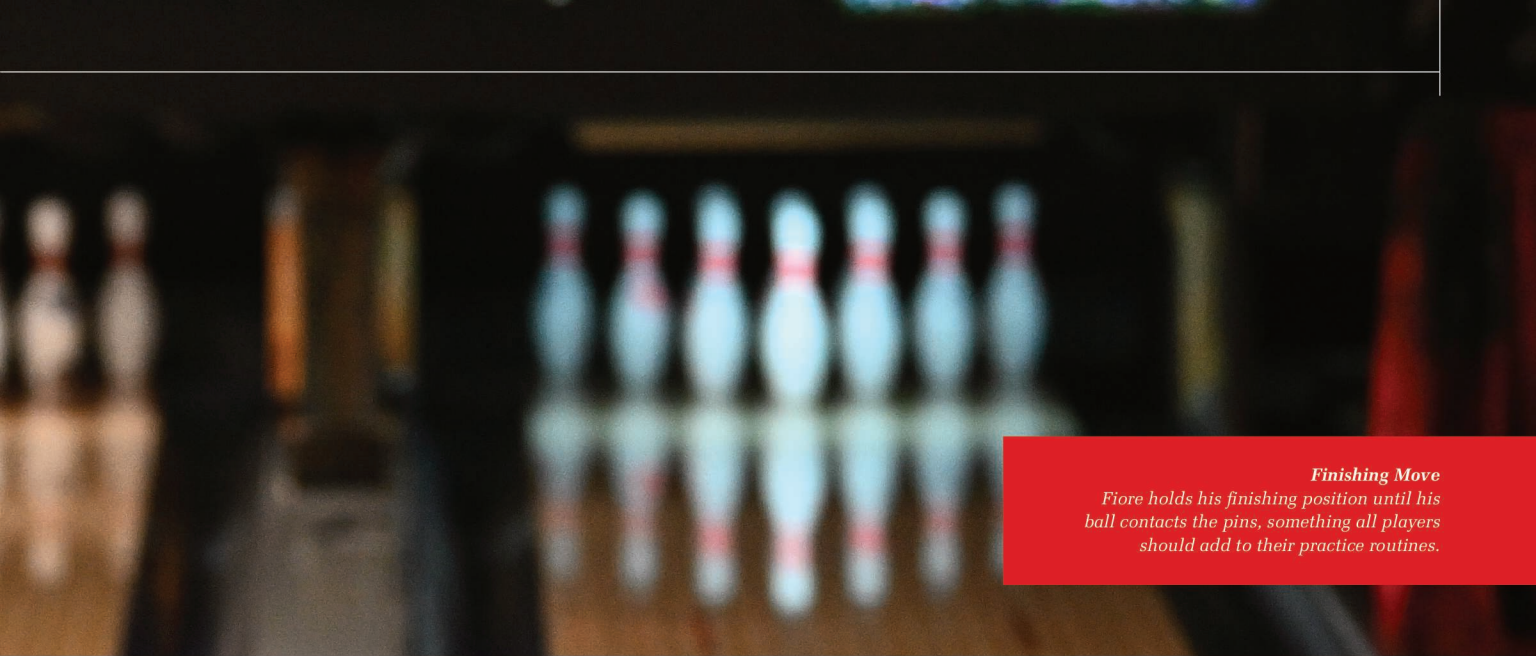
Three Steps to Success

Another distinctive element of his game that distinguishes him from peers deploying the same style is his embrace of the three-step approach — a tack he took to facilitate greater versatility. While Fiore was very good playing most of the lane with straighter angles, it could, at times, be a bit of a different story when the lane-play angles got steeper.

In those cases, he sometimes had trouble opening his angles when moving left. The three-step approach allowed him to move way up on the approach and get a lot farther left on the lane. Additionally, going to the three-step delivery increased his ability to loft the ball. It was in this way that his three-step delivery came







Finishing Move

Fiore holds his finishing position until his ball contacts the pins, something all players should add to their practice routines.

to his aid in an impactful manner and continues to, as lofting the ball is easier to achieve by taking shorter steps because doing so keeps the legs straighter and gives Fiore the ability to release the ball from a higher position.

When he rolls the ball, the release is very close to the lane, and he says it is like skimming the ball down the lane. Lofting it, he releases the ball well above his ankle and can vary how high he lofts the ball by releasing it from farther off the floor. This gets the ball farther out onto the lane without physically working hard to do it.

In addition to his frequent deployment of the three-step delivery, Fiore, like other top right-handed two-handers, has three-step timing. Fiore's timing is very similar to Kyle Troup and Chris Via, as all three of these players' games lean toward the stroker category. These players move the ball into the swing later, walk tall the first few steps and finish lower with increasing forward tilt going into the release.

The Postman

Fiore continues getting lower through the release and into his finish. His knee-bend at the completion of his shot shows his left knee moving forward past his toe, which is called knee-continuation — yet another old-school way of finishing the shot. He uses more knee-bend than top tour players, one or two-handed.

In the past year, he worked at posting his finish like a statue, holding the finish position until the ball gets to the pins. He said he started doing this at the recommendation of his coach and found that it helped

his shot-making become a little more consistent and made him feel more confident.

Jason Belmonte's game became better when he started practicing walking taller during his approach and posting his finish. Fiore, for his part, found that finishing off his shot by holding his finish not only made his shots a little more repeatable, but also gave him time to really watch the ball all the way down the lane through the pins. This helped him see his ball reaction better, which helped him understand when the reactions were driven by oil, burn, or topography — especially since seeing topographical influences on a ball is the hardest to learn and see. Posting his finish also helped him understand the feeling of his physical delivery of the ball, good and bad shots.

Loft Game

Fiore's ability to manage his loft angles on command with control is a great tool for players generally to have in their physical repertoire. Lofting requires a few different adjustments in Fiore's normal delivery. These include:

- He moves up on the approach, from the back of the approach to in front of the first row of dots.
- He changes from five to three steps.
- He takes shorter steps.
- He uses a lot less knee-bend to release the ball higher off the floor.
- He releases the ball on the upswing instead of parallel to the lane.

Feeling His Way

As with many tour players, he too plays the lane by feel, doing what he feels he

needs to do to get the ball into the pocket. He looks down-lane and draws a line back to him that he wants the ball to travel to get to the right area so the ball will have enough angle to strike and have some room. He uses mental imagery, visualizing the shot that he wants to create. He doesn't really analyze the pattern that's on paper, as he instinctively knows from experience what he wants to see and how to experiment in practice to figure out how to get the right angle to start.

Carry On

One thing Fiore says he had problems with was pin carry. The big thing he did to increase his carry percentage was to slow down his ball speed, reducing his benchmark speed from about 18 to 16 mph. These numbers are the ones that you see on the computers in many bowling centers, recorded down-lane by a scanner. It's really not mph, as it calculates how long it takes for a ball to travel from the point it reads it until it contacts the headpin and sends the info to you in mph. When the ball reads about 18, it truly came off the hand about 20 mph. Fiore found that a number in the 16s carried better than one in the 18s.

Limitless Potential

The sky's the limit for Fiore, as his blending of old-school, proven techniques combined with the contemporary two-hander's release at a young age accelerated his learning curve dramatically and positioned him to capture a stardom he seems likely to perpetuate for years to come. ■