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THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }



Can 20 Years of Muscle Memory Be Erased to Achieve Earlier Timing?

EVEN AS DOUG KENT CONTEMPLATES retirement after two decades on the PBA Tour, his game is worth examining. After all, he has compiled hall of fame-caliber statistics, and his delivery is very much like his personality: rock solid.

the ball (from a side view) was still out in front of his body, almost even with the left knee. The best place for the ball to be at this point

Doug is a very hard-working, consistent man not only on the lanes but also in his private life. He has positioned himself well for life after the tour, having worked his way to owning two bowling centers in upstate New York. He's also a very advanced student of the sport, and is privately teaching and mentoring bowlers, including some star collegiate players.

Doug has an unassuming game. He takes five steps, but doesn't have the contemporary high backswing and high-revving release. However, his game has been a model of consistency — he has one of the best shot-making styles bowling has ever seen. His nickname on tour is “Douggy Fresh” because of his ability to bowl well on freshly oiled conditions — a sign of a great shotmaker because, when the tour lanes are fresh, there are no dry boards to seek out for hook (except on the Cheetah pattern).

For the first 18 years of his career, Doug utilized a different style, although it may have seemed similar to his current approach. Even though the basic characteris-

tics of his game are the same, he made a major change to get earlier timing. He bowled his whole life as a “late-timer,” and decided to make the change to earlier timing.

The common definition of timing is the ability to get the ball to the top of the swing on the step before the slide, so the sliding foot, bowling arm and ball can advance forward in unison to the release. The higher the swing, the sooner the ball needs to reach the top of the swing. Pete Weber is a very high-swing player, and always has had great timing because his ball reaches the top of the swing before the next-to-last step is completed, and is on the downswing before the last step starts.

By comparison, Doug Kent falls in the category of shorter backswing strokers, along with Tom Baker, Mike Hagen and Jack Jurek. But Doug also is a power player. I'd describe him as a power stroker.

For most of his career, Doug had late timing throughout his approach. He had an incomplete pushaway on step two, which made his ball late on step three. At the completion of his third step,



Doug Kent's spine tilt and body position is now more like a power player's, but his backswing remains semi-controlled.



actually is past the right knee. But with his late timing, the right leg was passing the ball as it was moving forward.

Doug has always been very strong, and incorporated a semi-controlled swing to maintain proper spine angles and walk direction. The big thing about his walk was that step four went right in front of step three. That move was critical to his swing because it got his body out of the way so the swing could tuck in on the downswing.

At that point in his ap-

proach, the center of his ball was directly in line with the center of his head. On his downswing, the outside edge of the ball was in line with the center of his head. It doesn't get any better than that.

A couple of years ago, Doug decided to make a change in his timing — an incredibly hard thing to do when one's game is so mature. Your body gets so accustomed to things being in a certain place at a certain time and using muscles at trained times.

When big changes are

made, you can't worry about results initially because your feel will be very different and the look of the ball going down the lane also will be different. Basically, your feel and sight change, and it's difficult to make decisions about what's right, what's wrong and what to do next.

The hardest part of all when making a big change is mental. You need to ask yourself: "Is this really the right thing to do?" Personally, I have never seen a 20-year top pro successfully make the changes that Doug is attempting.

Thus far, the biggest change that I see is in his spine tilt. He has increased it in his stance by holding the ball lower, getting more forward tilt, and lowering his right shoulder for more side tilt. He maintains this adjustment all the way through the approach, and the change has made a difference in where the ball is on each step.

On step two, his spine tilt went from about 20 degrees to about 38. Even though the ball is more advanced, the angle of the arm to the upper body has not changed, which means the ball is not any farther advanced than before, relative to his upper body. In order to really change the timing early in the approach, he would have had to let the ball swing freely past the body, relinquishing some control. That would have been a bigger change than adjusting his spine angle to get the ball more advanced.

Doug's footwork also is a little different. Step one is shorter, step two longer, step three the same, and step four longer. The main concern I'd have is with the longer fourth step. When his slide is done, the ball is farther advanced

by about 18 inches and is on a flatter plane to the release. Also, the swing does not tuck inside-out as much.

I talked to Doug about a year ago regarding his timing change, and he mentioned that he had more trouble hooking the ball. The combination of a flatter angle that the ball is traveling to the release, and a less inside-out swing path, made it more difficult for him to lift and turn the ball for hook.

The angles of his body are now more like the contemporary high-swing players, but not like the strokers, who need to lift and turn up through the ball to get the revs and hook. Doug is kind of caught in-between.

I talked to Doug again just a few weeks ago, and he said he felt he needed to make the timing change in order to get the revs required to compete on tour today. He wanted to have a faster tempo and a looser swing. Also, his old later timing, coupled with being deliberate in his body speed to the line, put a lot of stress on his left knee at release; with the earlier timing, there is less stress on his knee and body.

Doug admitted that it has not been easy making the change, and that he had worked on it a few times in the past without success. He has always been able to do what he needed to get the job done on the lanes, and I'm interested to see what the changes will do for his bowling future — assuming he decides to stick around.

Bill Spigner is a Gold-level coach. To access archived instructional features, visit BillSpigner.com or the new BowlersJournal.com.



Kent's swing plane is flatter and following a less inside-out path. His challenge now is to let the ball swing more freely so as to create more consistent early timing.