

THE PRO APPROACH

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What Eugene McCune Does Well, Plus 3 Things He Could Do Better

HARD-THROWING EUGENE MCCUNE has been a solid journeyman on the PBA Tour for 23 years. This past fall, at the World Series of Bowling in Las Vegas, he broke a tour record, averaging 274-plus for a nine-game block that vaulted him into the lead in the Brunswick Pro Bowling Cheetah Championship, a tournament he eventually won from the top-seeded position.

It's difficult to comprehend that anyone on any condition could bowl on nine different pairs of lanes (that's a total of 18 lanes) against nine differ-

ent opponents and average that high. To be able to do so requires a very special type of delivery, not to mention an exceptional mental game.

Think about this: Eugene had to *average* a nine-bagger every game. How is that humanly possible? I know we see 900 series bowled on house conditions, but this feat far surpassed any 900 ever bowled.

Granted, the Cheetah is the highest scoring pattern used on the tour. The length of the oil is only 35 feet, whereas most house conditions are about 40 feet — and that extra 5 feet is a lot. The first five boards of the lane have virtually no oil, and then there is solid oil inside the 5-board for the entire length of the pattern.



Eugene McCune's mechanics are good, as illustrated by the positions of his hands and shoulders at end of his pushaway during the second step of his approach. The ball then reaches the top of his backswing in step four — poised for its very fast trip down the lane.

The object is to play parallel to the oil line with enough speed and rotation that when the ball hits the dry, it doesn't hook too much, and when the ball hits the oil, it doesn't slide too much. Eugene was able to play this condition by actually laying the ball down in the dry and throwing it up to the oil.

Although most of the pros averaged very high on the Cheetah, they couldn't do what McCune did — not even Norm Duke, who is considered the best “straight” player on tour.

Eugene is the straightest and hardest throwing bowler out there. There was no finessing the oil pattern. Even Duke had to make adjustments and change up what he did. Eugene was able to play the dry because he literally threw the ball down the lane as hard as he could and didn't have to move. He also was deadly accurate.

Eugene's two tour titles have come when he was able to throw as hard and straight as he wanted. But he is far from a one-dimensional player. He also can hook the lane, changing from as straight and hard as possible to slowing down and looping it.

Because he has been quite good at the extremes, the in-betweens have been hard for him. The great tour players live on the in-betweens, which means being able to go reasonably straight all the way up to and including hooking the ball a lot with control.

McCune is a five-step player who holds the ball face-high in his stance. On his second step, he pushes the ball straight out toward his target. At the completion of the second step, his arms are fully extended, the ball is above waist-level high, and his left hand has left the ball — all in all, a very good pushaway.

In step three, the shoulders open very slightly and the ball travels a little more than 90 degrees. In step four, the ball reaches the top of his swing and the swing has completed a perfect 180-degree arc.

Eugene's ball starts its descent when he's beginning to enter his slide. From a side view, he has great timing and a very loose swing. At the release, he has sufficient knee bend and forward spine tilt so the ball is by his left

leg, a few inches above the ankle.

From a rear view, his set-up is good, with the right shoulder lower than the left. His pushaway is directly toward his target, and as the ball is passing his right leg on the backswing, it's directly below his head and shoul-

der with the hand slightly to the inside of the ball with a flat wrist.

Because of his loose swing, the ball ends up directly behind his head at the top of the swing at the completion of step four.

From the top of the swing, the ball

drops inside. So, at the release, the ball is just inside the head and close to the leg, with his hand directly behind the ball and the wrist straight. His right shoulder then moves down and rotates slightly counter-clockwise, which moves his hand to the point that his fingers are pointing down to about 4:30, ready for the release.

At this point, his hand stops moving. When the thumb comes out, the fingers move straight ahead through the ball. This is his straight-shot release, with very little axis tilt and axis rotation.

Eugene is able to do this and keep the ball from losing energy on the short patterns because of the incredible speed he can generate. When he wants to hook the ball more, he cups his wrist, increases his axis rotation and lowers his speed.

Eugene's spare shooting is excellent. He throws the ball very hard and straight at everything, with a much-abbreviated follow-through. In 2000, he made John Jowdy's infamous "All-Miss Team," a dubious distinction for

the worst spare shooters on tour. He wouldn't be on that team anymore.

So why hasn't a bowler with such solid skills and versatility done better on the tour? My take on Eugene is that he's a survivor. He will do whatever it takes at the given moment to get a check or make the finals because he has to. He has never had the luxury of taking some time to refine his game.

There are three things that I feel he could do better, and they complement one another. It starts with his pushaway. While its shape is good, the tempo is not. Everything seems a little too forced at the beginning, with too much speed.

From there, his approach to the line is very fast. This extremely quick pace makes it difficult to be well balanced during the release, and Eugene has a tendency to finish off-balance. You need the solid foundation at the moment of the release to be more consistent and do more things. The speed and balance issues are what prevent him from playing the "in-betweens" of the extremes better.

No bowler should ever sacrifice balance in order to do something with the ball.

The third area in which Eugene could improve involves his emotions. He gets very intense, and this can lead to wide emotional swings.

Part of his emotions come from the flow of his physical game, and he uses that high level of emotion to keep him pumped up. But when you get pumped up to such a high degree, it can be challenging to maintain emotional consistency.

So for Eugene and many other bowlers, having better balance and a more consistent tempo are very important keys in refining their deliveries. I know Eugene could do what needs to be done, but it's hard to make changes when you're always in survival mode.

There's no lack of talent; he has all that's needed and more.

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As McCune nears the foul line, note how his hand is behind the ball and his wrist is flat. The fingers then exit the holes after going straight through the ball; no finger rotation around the ball is applied. There is very little finesse in his game; it's all about speed.