

Bowlers Journal

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INTERNATIONAL

A photograph of a man and a woman riding a camel in a desert. The woman is in the front, wearing a black top and a headscarf, and the man is behind her, also in a black top and a headscarf. The camel is wearing a colorful striped head covering. The background is a vast, flat desert under a clear blue sky.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

**HOW BOWLING'S
NEWEST 'POWER COUPLE'
EMERGED WHILE
TROTTING THE GLOBE**

THE PRO APPROACH

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A Sensation for Another Reason

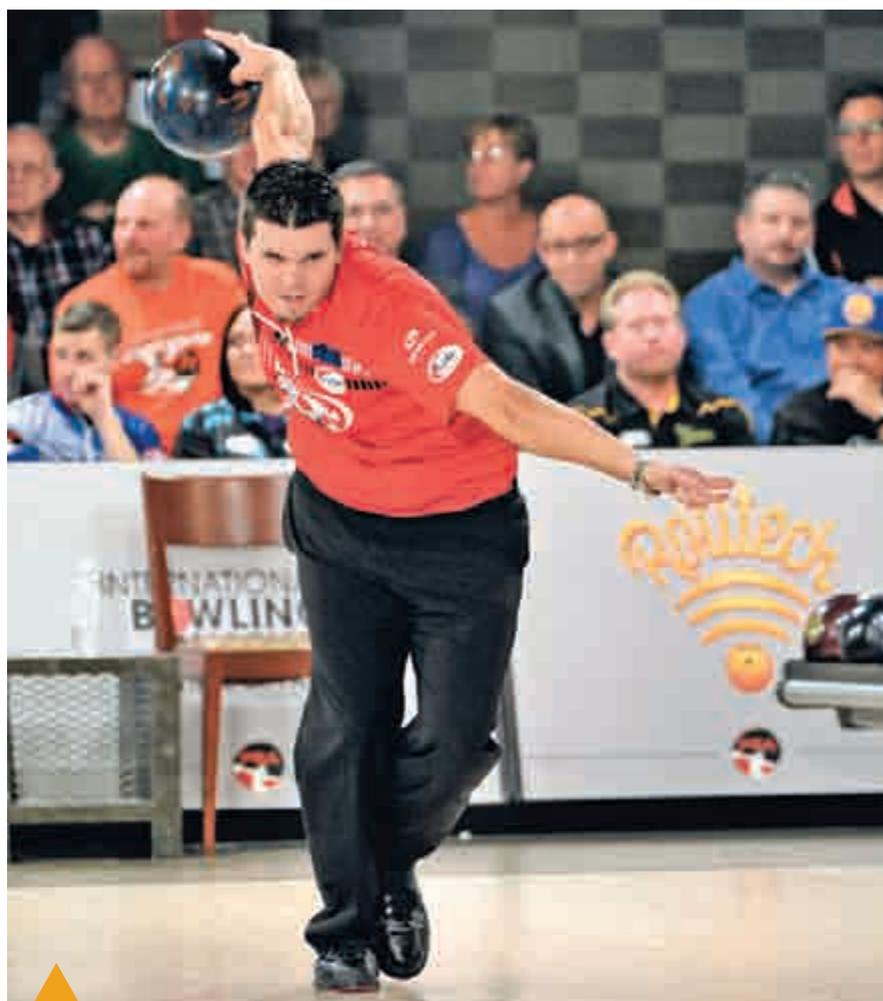
JOSH BLANCHARD had been quietly flying under the radar on the PBA Tour — except for that unfortunate experience when his thumb stuck in his spare ball and he went down on the lane, becoming an internet sensation overnight.

Since that incident, he continued to lead a quiet existence on the tour, but he also won two PBA national titles. Those wins, Rookie of the Year honors, a number of top-five appearances and recently being named the Steve Nagy Sportsmanship Award recipient have combined to get Blanchard's pro career off to a really nice start. The days of being under the radar are gone.

Josh would be considered a “tweener” in terms of his style and delivery. In this age of the high-rev, fast-throwing guys on tour, he is a throwback to another era. He hooks the ball too much to be classified as a straight player, doesn't have the speed or revs to be classified as a power player, and he doesn't hook the ball enough to be considered a hook guy.

The great thing about our sport is that pretty much any style will work if you do it well enough. The hard part is having the patience to handle the ups and downs, and the successes and failures, of being on the PBA Tour.

Josh has a proven record of being able to handle adversity. This is the mental side of the game that is so vital to one's long-term success. He has the mental toughness to go out there every day and give it his best, regardless of the situation.



Josh Blanchard is in great position here, right on time entering his slide. His backswing is above head-high, ready to descend just as his slide foot is ready to contact the floor.

Josh is one of many young PBA players today who have come out of the college ranks. He bowled in one of the best programs in the country at Wichita State, where he earned Collegiate

Bowler of the Year honors.

Josh has a classic five-step approach. He starts standing tall, with his feet slightly staggered and holding the ball a little above waist high and the “Shocker

cup" in his wrist. (It seems like a lot of Shocker players set up with a lot of wrist cup.)

During step one, he lowers the ball slightly. When step two starts, his push-away begins from a slightly lower position than in his stance. He has an over-the-bar push-away, which the late, great Hall of Fame coach, John Jowdy, taught. Josh moves the ball up about 5 inches and places it out in front of him on that second step.

His arms are not locked; both are still slightly arched and very soft at the completion of step two. This shows he has a relaxed start, devoid of muscle tension. He said he learned the over-the-bar method at a young age to free up his swing and create power through a flowing approach.

Even though his wrist is cupped, he has learned to not use tension in the wrist. This keeps him from grabbing ahold of the ball weight, and allows him to have a loose, straight swing. Many bowlers who cup the ball a lot over-control the ball and don't have a free swing. For anyone who cups the wrist in the stance, it's very important to work on getting a free swing because the tendency is to have a lot of muscle in the swing, which means it can go off line quite easily.

Josh's timing is spot on, in the traditional way, throughout his approach. His slide foot is stopped by the time the ball passes the right leg on the last step. His finish is well balanced and rock solid, which gives him the foundation to have

a consistent release.

That release also is solid, and he does some different things with it depending on the results he wants to get. He uses two different finger positions in his stance, both involving the pinky and index fingers. (The cup in his wrist is natural for him, so he doesn't change that.)

The first release, which might be called his bread-and-butter release,

matches up the best with his overall game. He spreads out his pinky finger, while his index finger is not as spread out. This set-up with the pinky finger lines up his middle and ring fingers with his forearm, and allows him to roll the ball straighter, without a lot of axis rotation.

For his other release, he tucks his pinky finger and spreads out his index finger more. This set-up tightens up the pinky finger side of the hand, which is the weaker side of the hand, and gives him a stronger grip on the ball with his ring finger. With this set-up, he gets more axis rotation, tilt and revs. He uses it when he wants to hook the ball more, enabling him to swing the ball more when the shot moves in and the lanes open up.

Josh keeps his releases simple, with basically those two modifications to change his ball rota-

tion. This is something every bowler should strive to do: Have your bread-and-butter release that is effortless for you to use, and one variation to complement it. With today's bowling balls, you



At the end of his over-the-bar push-away on his second step, Blanchard's arms are relaxed, with a slight bend in each arm, ready to start his very loose, straight swing.

LESSON PLAN

JOSH BLANCHARD sees his pro shop customers all over the place with the beginning of their approaches, which leads to a lot of inconsistency.

"The biggest thing I always work on, and most bowlers can work on, is the push-away step," Josh said. "The first two steps are going to make or break the rest of your approach. So, focus on being consistent in your push-away and footwork, and you'll see better balance at the foul line, which will help your release."

In addition to running his pro shop, Josh gives private lessons. Having this kind of variety in his life, along with his family, helps relieve the pressure of those "do-or-die" situations that can occur out on the tour if you don't perform well.

Josh has set himself up for long-term success in our sport. Winning the Steve Nagy Sportsmanship Award, which is voted on by his peers, shows that good guys *can* win.

can get so many different reactions that you don't need to do as much with your release to get varying results.

Josh's favorite lane conditions are those that are challenging, requiring different speeds and angles throughout a tournament in order to master them. He also likes conditions on which he can roll the ball with greater speed; it's easier for him to roll it faster than softer because of his free-flowing approach.

Getting to know his game and playing to its strengths is one of the big things Josh has learned over his four years on tour. Like many pros, he initially got caught up in trying to do what the other guys were doing, and lost track of his own game. Josh said he has come to the realization that he has to play his game and do what comes naturally to him. Playing his own game resulted in two titles last year. It's good advice for anyone: Play your game, learn what you do best, and stick with it, with only minor changes as they become necessary.