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This Dad's Life

The untold story behind Matt Ogle's first PBA Tour title is a tale for anyone who has a dream

PBA Tour champion
Matt Ogle with son Gavin

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { billspigner@aol.com }



A Drill for Staying Behind the Ball

WE GET QUESTIONS from *Bowlers Journal International* readers who are having problems with their games. So we've decided to answer some in this column. If you would like to submit questions for future consideration, please email them to bjieditor@gmail.com.

This one is from Mike Bitter, who writes, "I have a hard time staying behind the ball. My thumb is positioned at 9 o'clock at release. I feel like I've tried everything, but continue to release the ball incorrectly. What can I do?"

Mike, with your thumb at 9 o'clock at release, your wrist has to be totally flexed back, and your hand is on top of the ball — a tough position to get a good release.

I recommend using the no-step drill. With this drill, you will be taking your approach totally out of the process. You will be working on your game from the release and finish position to learn what it feels like to have a good hand

position with a rock-solid release and ideal body position.

To start, you have to get into a well-balanced position at the foul line. The pictures will show you how to do it, from the set-up to the pushaway, swing and finish. The bowler is 2019 PWBA Player of the Year Shannon O'Keefe, the women's head coach at McKendree University and a veteran Team USBC member. O'Keefe uses this drill for

her own game, and also teaches her students with it.

The first two pictures illustrate how you set up at the foul line from the back and side views. The set-up is the most critical part of executing this drill.

To begin, you need to get your legs as close as you can to the position that Shannon's are in. The position with the legs and trail foot is like having a tripod under your body.

After you get your legs and feet positioned, then you lower the ball so the arm is hanging straight down to the floor, directly under your shoulder with the wrist straight and the palm directly behind the ball.



No-Step Drill: The no-step drill enables reigning PWBA Player of the Year Shannon O'Keefe to ensure good hand position with a rock-solid release and ideal body position. This month's edition of *The Pro Approach* unpacks the drill for you in detail so you can begin practicing it at home.

In the next position, the non-bowling arm is extended to the side with the palm midway between the shoulder and waist, the thumb pointed toward the approach and the palm facing back. This is an important position for that hand and arm to be in to firm up the non-bowling side and help counterbalance the bowling side.

This position will help you train your body to get into a well-balanced, solid position to support the armswing, release and finish position.

The next two pictures show the pushaway and backswing. The pushaway and backswing are done twice, with the ball released after the second pushaway and swing. The first one serves as a rehearsal to get a feel for the pushaway, swing, ball and staying balanced.

The keys are the speed and length of the pushaway, and the backswing has to be relaxed and short enough that you don't lose balance and you are able to keep your wrist straight.

You are not trying to score while doing this. You are trying to learn how to stay behind the ball so you get the feeling of what it's like. Notice how "quiet" O'Keefe's whole body is throughout the

drill; the only moving part is the swing moving from the shoulder.

For the release, you want to roll the ball with the palm facing the pins. Don't try to throw it hard. The key is to hold your finish position until the ball is at least halfway down the lane. If you were to take a full pushaway and swing, it would be very difficult to maintain balance, which is one of the keys to the drill. The follow-through should be your normal length.

This drill trains you not only how to keep the hand behind the ball, but what it would look and feel like to post your finish. Also, because you are not trying to generate any more speed than the height of the swing will allow without forcing it, you also will get the feeling of a free swing.

It's very important that the thumb hole is tight enough so you don't have to grab the ball during the swing. You need to have enough tension in the hand and wrist so it is very stable throughout the exercise. If you have to grab the ball to hang on to it, the weight of the ball will throw you off balance and you will not be able to perform the drill properly. You might want to consider doing this

drill first with a lighter-weight ball.

Another option is to do this drill at home using a ball you can hold in your hand. The keys are the same: You want to get into the well-balanced release position and think about rolling the ball off the front of your hand.

Still another option is to try rolling a reverse curve. Doing this, your elbow will stay inside of the hand and the fingers will be to the inside of the ball, where many pros start their turn.

I would encourage anyone to do this drill because of all the benefits you can get from it. Essentially, you will be working your game backwards. After you learn the feeling of the release and rock-solid finish position from the drill, then take your full approach.

For the first few shots, you need to really work hard mentally to get your body into the drill release and finish position. You don't want to work hard physically throwing the ball.

Again, as with the drill, you are not trying to throw the ball hard to knock pins down; you are working at getting into a position that will enhance your shot-making ability. You should think about working at 20% of your maxi-

imum effort. When you are able to repeat the rock-solid release and balance position, it will greatly enhance your ability to understand what happens in your full approach when you don't achieve it.

If this drill works for Shannon O'Keefe and her champion McKendree team, it will work for you, too.

Bill Spigner is a United States Bowling Congress Hall of Fame member and a Gold-certified coach. Past "Pro Approach" columns are archived on billspigner.com.

