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THE PRO APPROACH

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The Keys to One of the Best Physical Games in Bowling

CHRIS BARNES NEEDS no introduction. What makes him one of the best in the game today, perhaps second only to Walter Ray Williams Jr.?

Chris stands tall in his stance, with straight legs and a vertical spine angle. His feet are staggered, with his left heel in line with the toes of his right foot. With his right foot slightly back, his right hip and shoulder are back of the left side, creating a slightly open stance. His right shoulder is slightly lower than the left, and he holds the ball between waist- and chest-high, in line with his shoulder.

His wrist position varies from cupped to very cupped in his stance, based on how he wants to roll the ball. That's

not something I would recommend to a lot of people; I'll explain later.

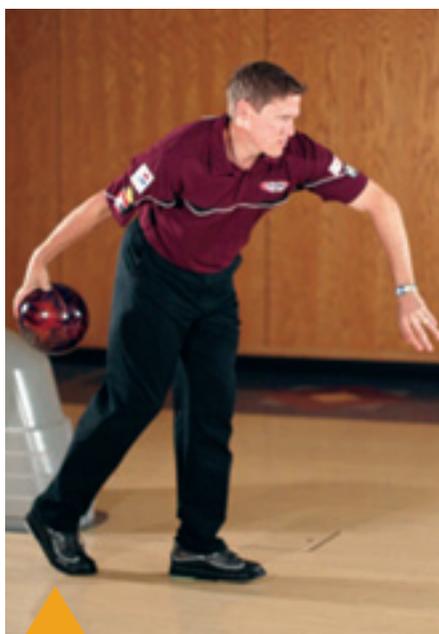
Chris' first step is a flat-footed step that almost looks like he's sliding — the same as Kelly Kulick's. His second step is heel-toe, and he remains in an upright posture with very little flex in his legs. When his second step is completed, his ball placement is done.

That ball placement involves a slight unfolding of the arms, but the arms do not straighten out. Most bowlers are taught to push the ball out in front

of the body, straightening both arms and then letting the ball swing freely. Chris doesn't extend his arms fully, but does let the ball swing the arm freely from the shoulder, evidenced by the distance the ball travels on step three.

He maintains the aforementioned cupped wrist throughout step two, but during step three, he loses about half of it. Chris is able to maintain his cup in the wrist because of his grip pressure. He digs his fingers in past the first joint, more so with the ring finger, and he uses a 1/8-inch shorter span in his ring finger than his middle finger — so his fingers are locked into the ball.

But that's not all of it. He also uses a very tight thumb hole. I'm sure you've



A very tight grip enables Barnes to cup the ball more than most bowlers, and his final two steps of his approach are picture-perfect.

seen him stop his approach after getting started because of some distraction. But when he takes his hand out of the ball, he has to work hard to get his thumb out. This very tight fit allows him to not use any grip pressure to hang onto the ball, which makes the ball feel very light and allows it to swing the arm freely with a cupped wrist. Most bowlers who try to cup the ball a lot from the beginning of the approach don't have the holes tight enough to prevent muscling in order to hang onto it.

Between steps two and three, Chris starts his forward spine tilt and is at about 35 degrees at the end of the third step. Step three is a heel-toe step and his legs remain fairly straight. At the completion of this step, his right shoulder is farther behind the left, and his hips are open (only because the left foot is forward, with the right leg back).

Step four is a flat-footed step because this is where Chris is starting to bend his knees. At the completion of step four, the ball has reached the top of his swing. This is the best position in which a bowler can be going into their last step.

Chris' spine angle has increased to 45 degrees, the bowling arm is about 90 degrees from the body, and there is a straight line from the wrist of his bowling hand through his should-

ders, all the way to the back of the left hand. His hips are straight ahead and his shoulders are open to the hips, indicating he is turning around his spine and storing up a lot of power.

Even though it looks like his shoulders are very open, they are not as open as they appear. His right shoulder actually is stacked directly above the right knee and foot, and his head is completely out in front of his right foot.

When Chris is ready to start his last step, his body is perfectly positioned for his left leg to move forward under the body with maximum knee bend — and without the upper body having to lean forward to position itself over the left leg in preparation for the ball to be released. He doesn't have to transfer his weight forward to get his upper body over his slide leg.

Chris maintains his 45-degree spine tilt for the release. When the ball is directly under his right shoulder, the wrist is slightly cupped and his arm has a little arch to it. The ball is just starting to get to the ankle at this time. By the time the center of the ball is directly in line with his ankle, his wrist is starting to unload. Before the ball is past his slide foot, his wrist has totally unloaded and the fingers are lifting up through the ball. The ball is barely past his slide foot when the

fingers release from the top of the ball.

Chris' best release is when he rolls the ball early on the lane, letting gravity roll the ball off his hand. He can loft the ball, but it's not his bread-and-butter release.

His finish position after release is textbook: left knee over the toes of his left foot, right leg fairly straight and left, with the foot pointing down the lane. He maintains his spine angle through the finish with his right shoulder ahead of his left and lower. You can see his name on the back of his shirt from a side angle — a good indication the right side is firing through the release to the finish freely.

A lot of people think Chris chokes sometimes on TV. I totally disagree. Chris is like a chess player on the lanes, always thinking of staying ahead of the moves that he's going to have to make. I believe he simply out-thinks himself on occasion.

My opinion is that Chris needs to think more like Walter Ray when on TV: Instead of making a lot of ball and angle changes, he should get a little more physical and pick up his speed to keep the ball in the pocket.

Bill Spigner is a Gold-certified coach and USBC Hall of Fame member. To view archived installments of "The Pro Approach," visit his Web site at billspigner.com.

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