

BowlersJournal

JULY 2012 • \$3.95 • www.bowlersjournal.com NATIONAL

TECH TIME

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THE PRO APPROACH

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3 Basic Ball Placement Options

THE SET-UP IS THE FIRST THING a bowler should pay attention to and work on to help make the initial ball movement and the transition to the swing consistent and effortless. If you missed my feature on that topic in the April issue, check it out. A proper set-up is extremely important.

Equally important is the first movement of the ball from the stance position. Everything that follows will be

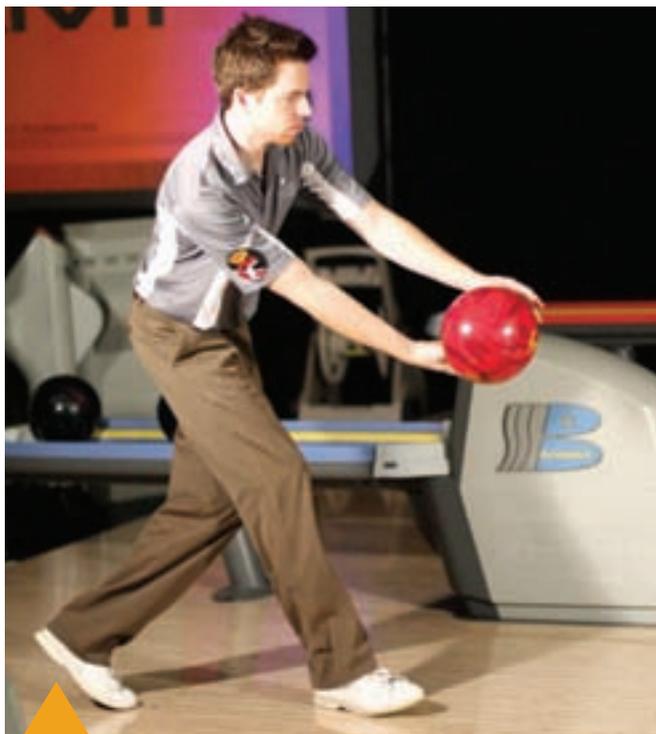
impacted by this initial movement. There's an old saying in bowling: "If you have a good start, you will have a good

finish." Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to get your approach off to a good start. No single way is per-

fect; the movement needs to match the player. Let's talk about three different types of ball movement...

1. The standard term that most use to describe the movement of the ball at the start of the approach is the "pushaway."

2. Then there is the concept of "ball placement," which USBC Hall of Fame coaching



Mike Fagan's "over the bar" pushaway puts his body in the perfect position to initiate his great armswing. Fagan had a breakout season on the PBA Tour in 2011-12, and was one of three "finalists" in the Player of the Year voting.



If ever there were a perfect position at the end of a pushaway, this would be it. Parker Bohn, who pushes the ball straight out, has enjoyed a hall of fame career based on consistently having everything in the right place, and in time.

great Tom Kouros describes in his book, *Par Bowling: The Challenge*. Kouros feels “ball placement” is a better way of describing the movement because the term “pushaway” implies a forceful pushing of the ball away from the body.

3. The third term used is “hinge start,” describing how the arm “unhinges” the ball in a downward movement. This is probably the least-used method, but it can be an effective start for some.

No matter what you want to call it, this discussion will be about the movement involved in placing the ball into the swing.

Let’s start with some basics. The movement of the ball should be completed by the end of step one for a four-step delivery, by the end of step two for a five-step delivery, and by the end of step three for a six-step delivery — regardless of the bowler’s style.

The arms should be extended (but not locked straight) at the elbow joint, and the movement should not be over-exaggerated. The shoulders do not move from their stance position with the movement of the ball. A set-up that’s correct will establish the angles of the shoulders and spine, and the

hand positions on the ball, that will allow the shoulders to be in the correct position at the completion of the ball’s movement into the swing.

The movement should be with both hands, performed in a smooth (not forced) manner, and toward the target. The opposite hand comes off the ball at the completion of the placement.

At this point, the opposite arm (from a side view) should be higher than the bowling-side arm. The opposite hand should be ahead of the bowling hand after the opposite hand leaves the ball, initially point-

ing toward the target. The bowling-side shoulder should be lower and slightly behind the non-bowling shoulder.

This position with the shoulders is attained primarily because of the spine angles, which are established in the stance. Even though they look more pronounced after the ball placement, the shoulders don’t move; it’s the whole upper torso that has moved, creating the illusion that the shoulders have moved. So, the movement of the ball and arms are independent of the shoulders.

■ **The Pushaway —**
This method involves two

basic options: “over the bar” and straight out.

Coaching great John Jowdy is the No. 1 proponent of the “over the bar” method, which has the bowler moving the ball up about 4 to 6 inches, then out, at the start. This style has a more circular shape to it before the opposite hand leaves the ball.

The best examples of this type of pushaway on the PBA Tour come from Mike Fagan, Pete Weber and Chris Loschetter. (Although Pete originally used the hinge style of ball placement early in his career, he has gradually evolved to this method.) These players have long, free, soft swings. The “over the bar” method is very good for this style of player, and for anyone looking to have a very free armswing.

The second pushaway method is the most common: pushing the ball straight out and slightly downward. The downward movement of the ball stems from the upper body tilting forward during the pushaway.

Some of the players who use this style are Parker Bohn III, Norm Duke, Mika Koivuniemi and Jason Belmonte. They all swing the arm free from the shoulder (except the “two-handed” Jason), yet have firmer armswings than the “over the bar” practitioners.

■ **Ball Placement** — This could describe all methods of ball movement, but for this discussion, it will be the “in-between” style. It’s not a full pushaway, nor a hinge; it’s a combination of both.

The player moves the ball straight out toward the target, but the bowling-side elbow remains closer to the body than with the full pushaway style.



Wes Malott is considered the “poster boy” for the “hinge start,” which involves pushing the ball downward as the approach is initiated. It’s a method not commonly used on the tour, but it can work well for some bowlers.

The ball is being “placed” to a spot out in front of the player, who then lets the ball unhinge into the swing.

Chris Barnes is a good example of a player who embraces the ball placement method. He moves the ball out slightly, and right at the completion of his second step, his elbow unhinges and the ball drops into the swing. His movement is a combination of a slight push and an unhinging motion.

Doug Kent and Steve Jaros also have a lot of this methodology in their start.

■ **The Hinge Start** —

Wes Malott is the poster boy for this style.

With the hinge start, the bowler normally would hold the ball about chest-high so that when the arm unhinges, the ball would drop into the swing from a high position. This helps create a free swing — the kind Pete Weber had in his early years.

Wes holds the ball waist-high, and at the completion of the second step of his five-step approach, his arm is still hinged. This would be considered a late pushaway — if he had a traditional pushaway.

Once he starts his third step, the ball drops straight down and he is in time at the completion of that step.

When it comes to the initial ball movement, the method is less important than the timing and tempo of the ball placement. The timing and tempo of the placement control the speed of the steps.

For example, if a player has a late ball placement, the feet will slow down to wait for the swing. On the other hand, if a player has an early ball placement, the feet will speed up to catch up to the swing. To control the speed of your steps, you need to control the speed of the movement of the ball out of the stance.

When you start your approach well, you will have a much better chance of finishing in balance — and being able to work on your balance. So, practice your ball placement with the purpose of exploring how different set-ups and styles of placement impact your overall approach.

As you build up a mental library of “feels” for these movements, you will be better able to understand your game during competition and when things go wrong. Often, things that go wrong late in the approach are caused by what you’re doing in the beginning of the approach.

The playing environment is constantly changing. If your start is changing as you bowl — and you don’t know it — you will not be able to identify the problem should you start running into trouble.

Bill Spigner is a member of the USBC Hall of Fame. Read archived “Pro Approach” features at BillSpigner.com.