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A Star is Born

How PBA Playoffs champ went from unknown to unstoppable.



Kris Prather

THE PRO APPROACH

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Solving an Injury-Caused Slump

THE PRO BOWLING tours are not easy places to make a living. The ups and downs can be brutal. It can be difficult to experience consistency from year to year. In Andrew Anderson's first year, he cashed about 50% of the time, which was pretty good. In season two, he won two titles, including a major, and was named PBA Player of the Year. But now in his third year, Anderson has been struggling.

When players are doing well, they look good and think it will never end. But that can change in a heartbeat, and trying to figure it out when things go sideways is a difficult proposition.

Andrew had a career year in his second year. A career year is the best that it gets, and everything less than that is just part of your career path. A career is an individual's journey through one's chosen work and other aspects of life that complement it. In the case of professional athletes, they are playing against other players that also are on career paths and always working to better their craft. If one thing goes awry in a player's game, they can go from the top of the heap to the middle of the pack really easily.

Andrew has been experiencing a slump in his third season. Every athlete has them. Many times, slumps are caused by something happening to an athlete physically, whether it's an injury or something that goes off in their technique. A physical slump will often impact the mental side of the game, as a player starts losing confidence in their ability — which can prolong the slump.

In Andrew's case, while bowling for Team USA last fall at the World Championships in Hong Kong, he tore the extensor tendon in his middle

finger. These tendons are located on the back of the hand, and enable you to straighten your fingers and thumb. Andrew said he has stressed this tendon before — the problem caused

by overuse, which becomes tendinitis. This injury, when properly treated, can take three months to heal.

Because of the injury, Andrew couldn't do the things he normally does, such as changing his rev rate, loft and speed, which is critical to succeed consistently on tour. It severely limited his ability to play lanes. As a result, his expectations decreased, and that has caused him to lose confidence and question his abilities, which has been very frustrating.

Andrew has a fundamentally sound game, and I would classify him a



Swing Position: Andrew Anderson's swing gets a little too far inside on the downswing. This comparison of the apex of his swing (right) and Tommy Jones's (left) shows Tommy's is in the perfect place, as the ball is directly behind his head. There is a lot of space under his head for the swing to drop inside under his head and shoulder and to project the ball down the lane. Andrew's is in a good spot, but it's left of his head and there isn't the space for the swing to tuck in on the downswing.



Timing is Everything: Anderson's downswing when it's waist-high. The ball is behind his left shoulder and the angle of the arm is pointed way right, which can make it hard to realign to the direction the ball needs to travel. The timing of the swing realignment by the shoulders rotating and the body leaning forward can be sensitive and cause a wide disbursement of the shot based on the timing of the ball off the hand. If the ball is early off the hand it misses right, if late it misses left, and if on time it's perfect, but it's very tough to feel the difference and it can play havoc with ball reaction and direction.

modern-day stroker. He takes five steps, and his timing, footwork, (high) swing and finish position all are excellent. He is very smooth and looks effortless.

The one thing I see that could be a drawback at times is that his swing tucks in a little too far on the downswing. One of the things he has been working is to have less forward lean at the release and staying open longer to keep from missing left. But because his swing is very inside on the downswing, he needs to lean forward a little more than most to give him time to release the ball out in front of him onto the lane and keep it on line.

When I talked to him last summer, he said that he changes his swing path to play different angles. Sometimes being able to make a lot of changes to play different angles can get over-exaggerated and cause problems. In Andrew's case, the injury prompted him to start putting "Band-aids" on his game to survive, and those compensations can create their own problems.

Andrew has a contemporary release, as he loads up the wrist and elbow on the downswing, using relatively no grip pressure, then unloads both at the release for maximum revs. He also uses different grip pressures to create different reactions.

When he wants to get fewer revs

on the ball, he will tighten up his grip pressure and vary it depending on the rev rate he wants to produce for the shape of the shot he wants to play. Because of his injury, he was restricted from doing that. Also, he couldn't practice between events for four months, which makes it almost impossible to compete against the best. He said he was competitive in only half the events at the beginning of this year.

I asked him about his targeting methods for strike shots and spares.

ball straight and moving your feet to pivot off that target to change your angle and make the spare.

I believe he will come out of this period as a more well-rounded player, with much more knowledge of his physical and mental games. That's saying something considering he is so advanced for his age. Last summer at Team USA camp, I was impressed with his knowledge of the game and his maturity, both of which will serve him well as he moves forward with his career.

LESSON PLAN

IF YOU look at the careers of some of the greats, Norm Duke won a tournament during his first full year on tour but didn't win another one for eight years. Pete Weber didn't win his first major until his eighth year on tour. So, Andrew Anderson is ahead of both of those players.

With his early success, Andrew's personal bar is set as high as it can get, and it's hard to think about anything except reaching for that high bar, which all the greats do.

I asked him how he became successful so quickly. He said it wasn't as fast as it seemed. When he was younger, he didn't have a lot of patience when he wasn't bowling well, and he'd get very mad and complain about it. When he learned to have more patience regardless of performance, figure out why he didn't perform well, and have a short memory, that became better.

"If I had I learned to do that earlier, I would have been better sooner," Andrew said.

That's good advice for anyone. Patience and that type of attitude will serve any bowler well. Anytime you make a bad shot, think about it, learn from it, and then forget it.

— Bill Spigner