



THE PRO APPROACH

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And You Thought the Only Side-Armers Played Baseball

A GREAT 2009-10 SEASON and four solid seasons in the last five have separated him from the pack and established Mike Scroggins as the premier left-hander on the PBA Tour. He has become a giant killer — although you'd never know it just by watching him roll the ball.

Successful athletes come in all shapes, sizes and styles, and there are a few things that are different about Mike's style. To begin with, he uses a four-step approach — pretty rare on tour, although not unique as Sean Rash, Parker Bohn and Rhino Page also use four steps.

What *is* unique is Mike's set-up. The toe of his left foot is by the heel of his right foot, and turned out. His knees are very flexed, with his body weight toward his heels, counterbalancing his ball — which is held low, just above his left knee, with his arms fully extended.

From a rear view, his ball is right under his bowling shoulder, and you can see the back of his hand and most of the ball. His hips and shoulders are parallel to his turned-out left foot, and he is facing slightly left. He has about a 10-degree side tilt and his shoulders are perpendicular to his spine, putting his left shoulder slightly lower than the right. It's a very normal set-up except for the fully extended arms and knee flex.

The start of his approach also is different. Mike starts moving the ball and his body before he starts a step. His knees start losing some of their flex, and he lifts the ball up and out, keeping his arms straight. His upper body starts leaning forward, getting his head out in front of his right foot (in the stance, his head was right between his staggered feet).

By the time the left foot has transitioned to the toe, the heel is off the floor and the foot is ready to move forward for his first step. By the completion of his very long first step, his ball is just in front of and below the left knee, and his forward spine has increased from 10 degrees in his stance to 35 degrees. This is an early ball placement, and there's a lot of forward tilt at this point.

On Mike's second step, he increases his forward spine tilt to about 40 degrees and his swing travels about 90 degrees (a quarter of a circle), which shows he has a very loose swing.

Step three is his shortest

step (step one was his longest and two was a little shorter), and his swing reaches the top as that step is completed — just shy of 180 degrees of swing. Mike's body position from a side view at the completion of step three is perfect. He maintains the upper body position he established on step two, and has his body weight over his left leg, ready for it to push his

body forward to the release.

Mike maintains his upper body position throughout the slide and increases his tilt slightly while the ball is coming off his hand, demonstrating that he is staying down and through the shot.

I would have to classify Mike as a straight player, as he hooks the ball much less than the other lefties. He is the only exempt player who incorporates the use of an exotic wrist support, one that extends out over the fingers, covering the whole back side of the wrist and hand.

Through the years, he has



Scroggins completes the first step of his approach. He has very early ball placement.



As Scroggins begins his slide, the ball is to the right side of his head. But as he's about to release it, the ball and arm have realigned to the target line.

built his swing and release around the support. Starting with his extended arms in the set-up, he keeps his wrist flat against the support, using it to take away any movement of his hand and wrist. The fingers, wrist and arm are all one piece; he basically has removed any moving parts in his fingers and wrist.

The wrist support complements his swing, which gets blocked behind him at the top. On his downswing, when he is entering his slide, his shoulders start rotating to square up his body to his target line. This moves the arm from an inside-out path to a straight path for the release. If he were to keep the swing inside, he would have to slide right and increase his side tilt, which would not be good for him.

The realignment of the swing by the shoulder rotation sets him up for a straight trajectory of the ball down the lane. This is where the wrist support pays for itself. Because the shoulders rotate and the left shoulder drops

down for the release, to get the ball under his head at the bottom of the swing there is very little margin for error in the timing of the ball coming off the hand. His shoulder rotation moves the arm outside from under the head and at the same time rotates the hand to the side of the ball.

With the arm starting very inside-out at the top, realigning itself to straight (through shoulder rotation) for the release, his follow-through goes to the right and his hand ends up on the right side of his face. Most straight players follow through in the direction of the target and ball path, so that would classify Mike's as a side-arm swing.

The biggest issue with the side-arm swing is the effect the timing of the ball's release has on direction. Released early, the ball goes left; on time, it goes on line; and late, it goes right (the opposite for a right-hander). When Mike had some left-side spare-shooting issues on TV a couple of years ago, it was directly related to

releasing the ball late, which pulled it inside his target line.

Mike's release has his hand to the side of the ball, with his fingers about in the middle of it. This position creates a lot of clockwise axis rotation off the hand. Pete Weber has always had a lot of axis rotation (counter-clockwise) but hooks the ball a lot, whereas Mike is very straight.

Let's say Mike's ball has 90 degrees of axis rotation, is traveling 18-mph downlane, and his axis rotation is 5-mph, which is clockwise. And let's say Pete's ball also is traveling 18-mph, but because of a higher rev rate has an axis rotation speed of 10-mph. The forward speed of the ball will eventually dominate direction, and a ball with a high rev rate will delay loss of axis rotation and break on a sharper angle. For Mike, his slower rev rate is dominated by the forward speed and the ball stands up to a straighter forward roll compared to Pete's.

So why is Scroggins the dominant left-hander on tour today? His ball roll reads

the blend of the oil in the mid-lane, which gives him some room. (The most blend in the tour oil patterns is in the middle of the pattern and a little beyond that point.) Mike is able to roll the ball up into the blend — very much like Walter Ray Williams Jr. can do on the right side — so he can play well on fresh oil, while the other lefties have to wait for the condition to transition enough to provide a little area. And Mike bowls well even after transition.

Besides being pinpoint accurate, Mike has great speed control, which is incredibly important on the demanding tour conditions. In the U.S. Open, as an example, every bad shot is penalized as there is no oil pattern help to steer the ball to the pocket. In the last two U.S. Opens, Mike Scroggins has finished first and second.

Bill Spigner is a Gold-level coach and a member of the USBC Hall of Fame. View archived "Pro Approach" features at billspigner.com.



Scroggins' follow-through goes to the right side of his head, demonstrating the completion of his side-arm swing.