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THE PRO APPROACH

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A Simple Approach to 'Beef Stu'

BEFORE HE LANDED

on American soil to invade the Professional Bowlers Association Tour, Stu Williams already was a bowling globetrotter, having achieved success in several countries outside the borders of his native England.

It didn't take long for the man affectionately known as "Beef Stu" to achieve success in the PBA, as he rolled to victory in the 2012 Viper Championship. Today, he's an American citizen residing in Phoenix, Ariz., a pro shop operator, a member of the Storm staff, and a fan favorite when he appears on the PBA's online bowling channel, Xtra Frame. Well rounded and possessing an accounting degree, he knows his craft well — on and off the lanes.

Stu has a very fundamentally sound five-step approach. His setup is textbook: his feet side by side and facing straight ahead, his legs straight, his hips and shoulders facing straight ahead, and his bowling-side shoulder naturally lower with a slight side tilt (about 8 degrees from a rear view).

Today, we see so many bowlers who over-exaggerate their setups with extreme side tilts and very open stances. The problem with the very open stance and extreme tilted shoulders is that the body has to move forward and in an



Williams looking down as he gets ready to finish off his shot. His hand position is a little shut at the top, which leads to his lower tilt.

opposite direction from which the feet and body are set up. Stu's setup style is timeless; it was good 40 years ago and is still good today.

He holds the ball about chest high with his right elbow just in front of his shoulder; his upper arm is not perpendicular to the floor, which is normal when a player holds the ball higher in the stance. This setup leads into his ball

placement nicely.

Stu starts moving the ball on step two. The arms unfold, the shoulders don't move, the ball is waist high at the completion of step two, and his left hand is off the ball, ready to start the swing.

From his stance through his second step, his forward spine tilt changes slightly from zero in the stance to 8 degrees on step two. This is not a lot; he is starting out by walking tall, which is a good way to initiate a long, free swing.

In Stu's third step, his spine tilt increases to about 40 degrees and his swing travels about 145 degrees, which is similar to the high-swing players like Pete Weber and Tommy Jones. The reason the swing travels a lot is because of the spine tilt. If he had less — like Chris Barnes, for instance — then the ball wouldn't travel as far back on the third step.

Stu's backswing is straight and a little outside his head, similar to Wes Malott's, as his arm is passing his body. His side spine tilt is about 20 degrees at this point — which is not a lot, so his swing can't pass under his head while passing his body on the way back.

His hand position at this point shows his wrist slightly arched back and, from a rear view, his fingers are pointing down to 5 o'clock. This hand position complements his upper body position perfectly. As the ball is passing the body, the hand position must complement the upper body side tilt so the

ball feels light and accommodates a free backswing. Stu has a good, free, straight backswing.

If he wanted to get his hand more open, he would need more side tilt on steps two and three. That would allow his hand to work more of the inside of the ball, increasing his tilt, which he says can be a little low and hurts him on some conditions because his ball rotation tends to read the lanes early.

Step four, the slide and finish position of Stu's legs and upper body are all right on the money.

Stu does have a couple of unique things about his game, the most notable being his abbreviated finish with his arm. It looks like he is cutting his follow-through short but, to me, it's just fine. The way I look at a follow-through involves the hand extending through the ball for the release, and then the hand and arm extending along the target line. The finish is what happens after the hand follows through the ball for hand action and direction.

There is nothing "up in the air" in bowling (unless you are launching the gutter cap). The lane is below the release, and the pins are on the pin deck — not up in the air. So, I like to say that the follow-through is the hand going through the ball at the release, and the finish is where the hand and arm end up. We see all types of finishes that work well, from the over-exaggerated ones like Walter Ray Williams Jr's to the no-upward-arm finish like Stu's.

I asked Stu how he developed his game with the abbreviated finish. He said that he didn't take up tenpin bowling until he was about 12. He played lawn bowls in England with his dad, and they were trying to find a replacement game to play together during the winter months; both took up tenpin bowling.

Stu was England's National Junior Lawn Bowls champion at age 13. He believes that lawn bowls set the groundwork for his tenpin bowling style because there is no upward finish after releasing the ball in lawn bowls.

Another unique thing about Stu's game is that on step three, when his spine tilts forward, his head and eyes



Williams showing off his abbreviated finish, with hand and arm going right through his target line.

appear as if he is looking down at the floor in front of his steps. He does this all the way through his release, and his forward tilt is at about 50 degrees when he releases the ball. The forward tilt and looking down also contribute to his abbreviated finish. I asked him about this and his targeting method.

"Before getting up [on the approach], I will visualize the line I want to play," he said. "Then, once I get up, I will initially line up at my breakpoint and bring that line all the way back to the foul line.

Once I have the line set, I will take my approach looking at my target at the arrows; my eyes tend to come closer to the foul line at release. This is due to trying to stay down on the shot."

That's a good way to line up and plan the direction and finish of your shot. Perhaps playing lawn bowls as a drill will help you stay down at the finish. It sure works for Stu Williams.

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