

# Open Your Suitcase With a Simple Twist

By **BILL SPIGNER**

■ *I am a right-handed bowler and am having a problem with a suitcase grip. I am a full-roller who uses a suitcase grip, with my thumb at 9 o'clock and my fingers at 3:30 on the downswing. Is there any exercise I can do to stay more behind the ball?*

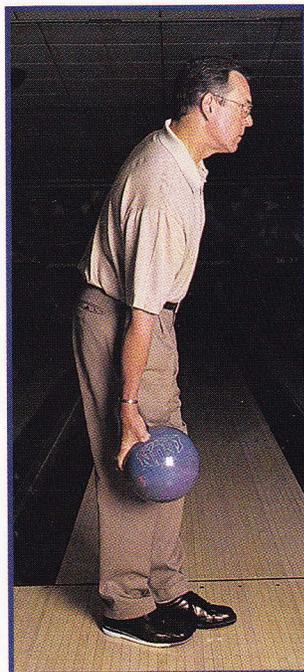
The suitcase grip is the weakest position you can have your wrist in to get a simple hook because the wrist is bent back to the point where the palm is on top of the ball. If you rotate your thumb counterclockwise during the release with this wrist and hand position, you will spin the ball. If you rotate your thumb and fingers in a clockwise direction, you will roll a full-roller.

In any event, this type of hand position is OK to get a hook *only* if you can't keep your wrist straight, with the palm of the hand behind the ball going into the release zone.

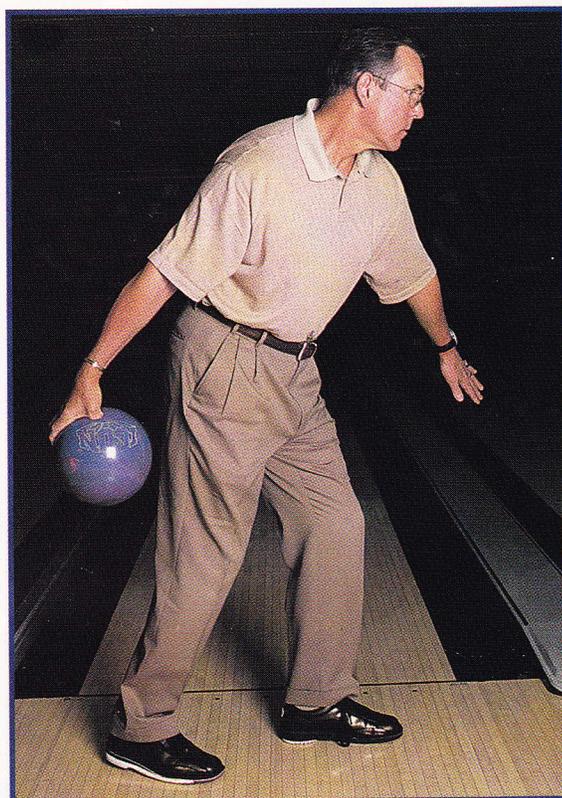
Getting the hand to be in position going into the release zone is very dependent on the body being in the right position, a loose swing, and the hand having the right motion on the backswing.

To help you understand the position the upper body needs to be in during the approach, stand in front of a mirror, hold your ball with a suitcase grip, and hang the ball down at your side. Stand with your shoulders very level and your spine angled straight up. With the suitcase grip, the upper body can be in this position

*Need some help with your game? Bill Spigner welcomes questions from readers. Send them to Bowling Clinic, Bowling Digest, 990 Grove Street, Evanston, IL 60201 or e-mail [bowl@centurysports.net](mailto:bowl@centurysports.net).*



**Forward tilt in your stance takes the stress off your back [left].**



**For best balance, on the third step of a five-step release, your shoulder should be open and your throwing leg back [middle]. Proper trunk rotation through the release point results in a well-balanced finish and proper spine angle [right].**

when you deliver the ball, and you'll still be able to have a loose swing.

Many people are taught or think they need to have the shoulders level to the floor and parallel to the foul line. This is an effective technique to be accurate and play a small hook when playing the lanes on a down-and-in line, usually playing from the first to the second arrow.

Years ago, when there were ball tracks in the lane to play, this would have been an OK approach. But today, this style of release doesn't allow you any room for error or allow you to play different parts of the lane, especially inside lines.

In order to correct your hand position, you will have to position your shoulders and spine angle correctly. Go back to stand-

ing with your ball hanging at your side in the suitcase grip. Rotate your hand position so the wrist is straight and your fingers are at 7 o'clock and your thumb is at about 1 o'clock. Do this without moving your upper arm away from your body and keeping your shoulders level to the floor. You will notice the ball will feel a lot heavier and your arm will no longer hang perpendicularly to the floor.

We know we have to have a free swing in order for the ball to be weightless during the swing. The position you rotated your hand to from the suitcase grip prevents you from having a free swing because your arm is not hanging straight down to the floor.

Instead, bend sideways from the hips, keeping the shoulders at a right angle to the

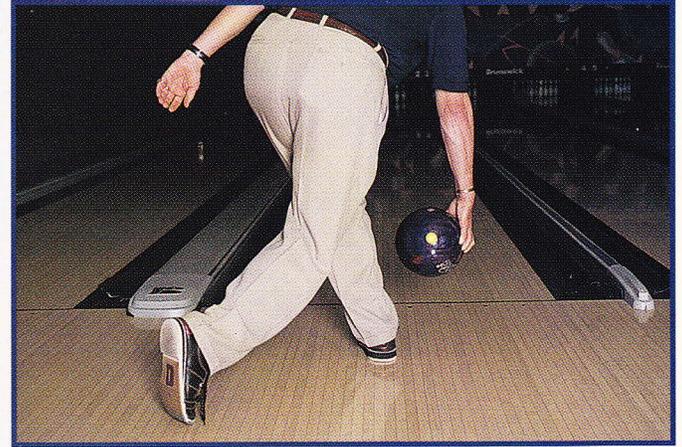
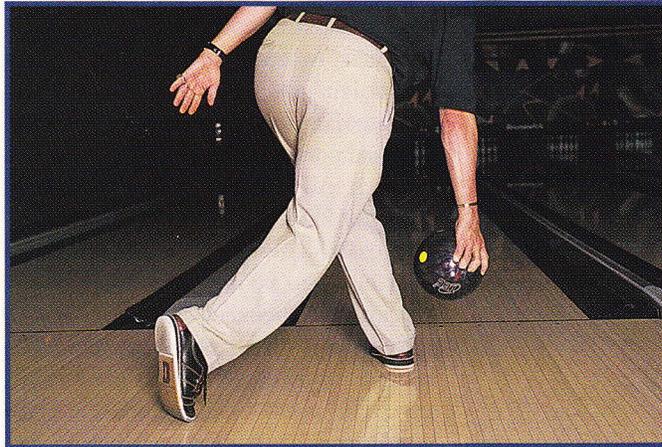
*high average of 207 a couple of seasons back, but now I am at 197 and feel some experimentation with different pitches might improve my game.*

*Should I try what Robert Smith did in going to the conventional grip in the ring finger with  $\frac{3}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> reverse pitch and leaving the middle finger a tip with zero pitch? I prefer to use 14-pound balls, and while I*

weight of the ball isn't as big a factor in leaving them as people think. They are left because the ball is hitting a little high on the headpin with more angle, giving it less chance for deflection. For some players, going to a lighter ball actually increases their number of solid nines because they can get more on the ball, increasing their angle of entry in the pocket. If you want to

the few bowlers who has that much rotation and is able to control the breakpoint. Ninety degrees of axis rotation is the maximum amount that can be effectively used. The minimum amount is approximately 30 degrees.

Lane conditions that have a lot of blend in the oil, in which the shot tends to be more inside with a lot of swing area, favor



**A minimum rotation for effective all-around play is 30 degrees off your hand [left]. A maximum is the Weberesque 90 degrees [right].**

*feel I don't lose any carry, I still leave more than my share of solid nines. Any recommendations or suggestions regarding finger pitches would be greatly appreciated. I'll try anything!*

You should experiment with reverse pitches in your finger holes and the Easter grip. However, I would recommend you do the opposite with the pitches that Smith did.

You don't use your thumb; without the thumb in the ball you put the weight of the ball more in your palm, and you need your ring finger to help balance the ball. I would use a shorter span in the ring finger, zero to a little reverse. For the middle finger, start with about  $\frac{3}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> reverse.

The other thing you need to do is concentrate on releasing the ball down into the lane. You want the wrist to release so your fingers go to the top of the ball. By doing this, you will be releasing the ball when it is traveling its fastest, which may help you get the ball down the lane easier. You need the ball to come off your hand very smoothly and fast, and if you hit up on the ball at all, you can't get the ball down the lane.

As far as solid nines are concerned, the

leave fewer nines, you will have to decrease the angle at which the ball enters the pocket.

It's very hard for someone who doesn't use his or her thumb to become a really good player who can bowl on several different conditions. Start learning to bowl with your thumb in the ball—it will make it a lot easier for you to use today's great equipment. The balls today really help create area and increase the size of the pocket.

**■ Is forward roll the best roll for the new balls? If not, how much side rotation is enough?**

All types of shots and ball rolls work today just as they did in the past. The key is matching up your ball rotation to the condition you're playing on. If you watch the pros on TV, you see all types of rolls, amounts of hook, and different areas of the lanes used by the players successfully.

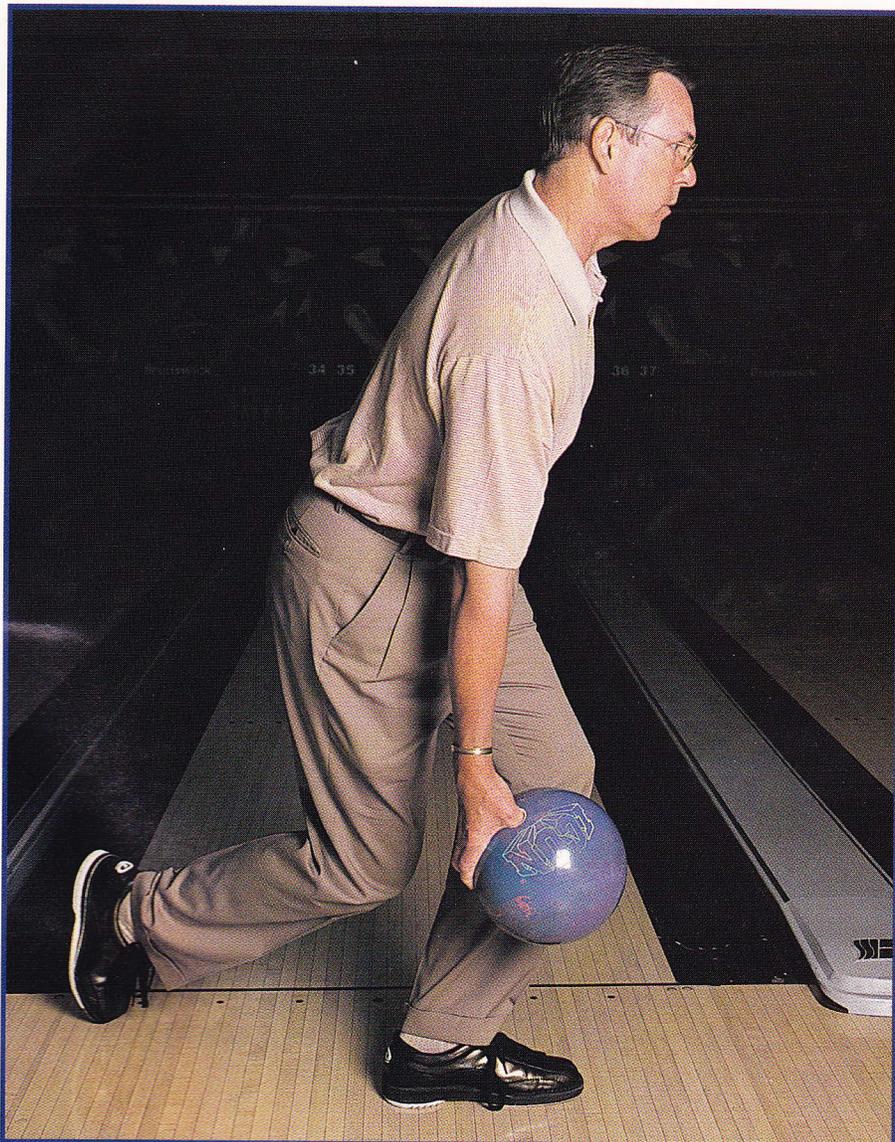
For all-around play, somewhere between 45 and 60 degrees of axis rotation is a good goal for most bowlers. Pete Weber has 90 degrees off his hand, but Weber is one of

a release with a lot of axis rotation (side roll). This oiling pattern has a lot of area built into it, and a ball with a lot of side roll can take advantage of that area because of the ball rotation. On the flip side, flat oil patterns with no swing area, with the best playing area outside the second arrow, favor less axis rotation (a forward rolling ball). On these conditions, control is important, and a ball that has less potential for a big change of direction down the lane provides this control.

So if you're on a heavy blend, playing inside, there's more side roll. On a tough flat-oil condition, playing outside, there's more forward roll. It's up to the bowler to match his or her ball rotation to the condition.

You don't need to try to crank the ball more to get side roll; have your fingers release the ball from the side of the ball more. For more forward roll, your fingers need to be behind the ball.

All bowlers have their limitations. Be willing to experiment to learn what you can do to expand your game and play on more conditions. ●



spine (don't just lower the shoulder) until your arm is hanging straight down to the floor. The ball feels lighter, doesn't it? You now have established the side tilt and the angle that the shoulders have to be at so the arm can swing under the shoulder, back and through.

But we aren't done yet. When you bend to the side, you transfer the weight of the ball to the lower back. Now you have to bend forward from the hips to get your forward tilt correct and flex your knees slightly to support the upper body.

The shoulders cannot be level and parallel to the foul line throughout the approach; if so, the spin angle (forward and side tilt)

stays in a constant position once the ball is placed into the swing. The spin angle needs to be established by the time the ball passes the leg of the hand you throw the ball with (right leg for a righty, left for lefties) on the backswing. Once the proper spine angle is established, it doesn't change until you stand up from your finished position and walk back to the settee area.

What does happen is the upper body rotates around a fixed spine angle. The rotation of the upper body around the spine produces a lot of power and allows the hand to rotate freely.

Most crankers rotate their shoulders open, which helps rotate the hand open. On

the downswing, the shoulders square up to the target line, which helps rotate the hand and speeds up the swing. When your swing speeds up, your hand speeds up, and that helps put the turn and revolutions on the ball without muscling and hitting up on it.

Now you need to see how the forward tilt of the spine looks. Holding a light weight, stand sideways in front of the mirror. Put your left foot about 12 inches in front of your right (lefthanders, do the opposite). Now bend forward until your left shoulder is directly above the knee and foot of your left leg. Hold the light object in your right hand and position the hand just behind your right leg. All your weight should now be over your left leg, and you should feel balanced. This is the forward tilt the upper body needs to be in at this point, and it remains there throughout the shot.

Notice that the shoulders also are rotating open at this time. This is the forward spine tilt, and it's the position the body should be in if you get your ball in this position on the second step of a four-step approach or the third step of a five-step approach. The position of the ball at this time of the approach is the best timing position to be in.

This is a great exercise to go through to show you the position the upper body should be in so you can deliver the ball with minimal effort. Use this as guide when trying to get your body in the right position; that, in turn, will help you work on your hand position.

To sum up, you need to get your upper body in position so the arm can swing freely under the shoulder on the back and forward swing. Once you can do this, you can work on rotating your hand slightly clockwise on the backswing. You also have to allow the upper body to naturally rotate open with the hand, which will help you get your hand in the right position.

■ *I am a no-thumb bowler who normally uses plastic, rubber, and urethane balls, as they tend to hook less than resin equipment. It has been suggested to me that changing my finger pitch from one inch forward to zero or reverse would help me tone down the reaction of the ball. I had a*