

BowlersJournal

DECEMBER 2011 • \$3.95 • www.bowlersjournal.com

INTERNATIONAL



THE BIG STORIES OF 2011

The Biggest Bowling Venue of the Past Year... or Ever... Was Cowboys Stadium.

ALSO INSIDE:

- BJI's 2011 Person of the Year
- Interview: The PBA's New CEO
- 2012 Tournament Preview

Posted with permission from *BowlersJournal International*.

THE PRO APPROACH

BY BILL SPIGNER { bills@bowlersjournal.com }

Comparing Osku and Belmo

BOWLING HAS ALWAYS HAD ROOM for unusual styles. Think back to the beginning of the TV era and the great Don Carter with his bent elbow and approach that looked as if he were stalking the pins. Then move on to Mark Roth with his twisting/lofting power game, and the no-thumb delivery of Mike Miller. And today, we have the two-handed no-thumbers.

Osku Palermaa and Jason Belmonte, the two best at this style, were born the same year: 1983. They lived some 10,000 miles apart, yet developed eerily similar styles of bowling from early childhood with no role models to follow. It's amazing that they were not talked out of bowling the way they did.

Many successful styles have looked different, but the basics of all styles are similar in many ways. It's just that the better players have more of the correct things in their approaches and mental abilities than those who are not as good. The great players are the ones who can get the job done more consistently and make it look easy, even though it's not.

The two-handed style looks like a lot of work. But to the players who have used it for many years, it's just as effortless as our perceived "normal" style. Looking at Osku and Jason, the core components of their games are the same, but they also have some differences.

Starting in his set-up, Osku has his feet staggered, with the right foot ahead of the left (most right-handers would have their left foot slightly forward), and his feet pointed straight ahead. Osku starts his approach by moving his left foot back a few inches, then takes his first step with the right foot — very similar to Norm Duke's shuffle start. He uses a six-step approach, and starts

his ball placement with step three.

Jason's set-up is a little more mainstream. His feet are parallel to each other, pointed straight ahead. He uses a five-step approach and starts his ball placement on step two.

The unusual thing about both of their set-ups is the positioning of the non-



At the completion of his fourth step, Jason Belmonte is on his toes with both feet, his hips are more open than the feet, his shoulders are sideways, and both arms are fully loaded to 90% bends. His upper body tilt and openness provide clearance for the ball to swing under the body to the release.

bowling hand, which is placed more to the front and top of the ball, with the palms of both hands on the ball. Jason holds the ball close to his body, waist high. His elbows are at his sides, and the right shoulder is slightly lower than the left. Osku also has his right elbow at his side, but his left elbow is away from his body, similar to Sean Rash.

Osku's left hand also is in a different spot than Jason's. He has the pinky finger of his left hand almost touching the index finger of the right hand. Jason's pinky finger is more in line with his middle fingers and a few inches away from them. For Osku, this positioning of his left arm and hand lowers the right shoulder in his stance, and cocks his wrist more than Belmo's.

The core similarities in their games are their walk, spacing of steps, armswing, body rotation during the approach, and upper body angles. Both players walk left — out of the way of their swing — and start turning sideways on the third-to-last step. This step

is their longest, and goes the farthest to the left; they are clearing out their lower body to make room for both of their arms to swing the ball back in a straight line. On this step, both players also start opening up their hips and shoulders.

Their next-to-last step is very short, and their feet, hips and shoulders are open — practically sideways. This step is interesting because neither bowler gets his weight transferred onto the right foot to help push off into the last step.

Osku's step is parallel to his left foot; it never passes it. He is on the toes of both feet at this point, and the right foot never lands flat. He is actually airborne, as his left foot is passing his right going into the slide. It's as if he hopped on his tip-toes into the last step.

Jason is a little more grounded at this point, as his step is longer and could be considered a short power step. But he is on his toes when his left foot is passing his right, so he also does not have firm contact with the floor when pushing off into his slide.

On this second-to-last step is when the arm bends at the elbow to 90 degrees. As with most power players, Osku and Jason bend the elbow and cup the wrist. But they do so significantly more, and with less effort, because they are supporting the ball with the opposite hand on the backswing and in the downswing. Both lift the ball to the top of the swing.

When they are lifting the ball up, they also are turning sideways and getting the swing inside at the top, so it descends in an inside-out path. This lifting and turning shortens the second-to-last step, and causes the feet to face sideways. That, coupled with their very short and fast step, allows them to get ahead of their swing so it starts the downswing after the left leg has passed the right going into the slide.

On the downswing, the right arm starts to straighten, which helps to further delay the short swing. The unbending of the arm on the downswing speeds up the arm, hand and



At the point of release, Osku Palermaa (left) has more spine tilt and keeps his right shoulder lower than Jason Belmonte, but both straighten their slide leg, which adds speed to the releases and keeps them balanced.

ball. With the palm under the ball as the left hand leaves the ball, they can unload the fingers to the top of the ball, again speeding up the hand — which already was getting a lot of speed from the arm unloading on the downswing with gravity and the fast approach.

This produces incredible revs, yet without the strain that most would presume they'd be putting on their bodies.

The two-handers also have more spine tilt than traditional-style bowlers. At the release of the ball, Belmonte has about 55% of side tilt and 75% of forward tilt. Osku has more tilt than Jason, almost 90% of forward tilt.

With this degree of upper body tilt entering the release zone, both bowlers rely on their legs to support the release — but differently than most coaches would suggest. They have sufficient knee bend, but both straighten their slide leg during the release. This again adds speed to the release, provided they let the fingers get to the top of the ball without resisting the weight of the ball, which both do. They also have to straighten the sliding leg to maintain balance because of the severe spine angles.

It would be tough to say which player has the “better” game. Jason has been working on developing a more conventional finish position, with the slide leg staying flexed and the trail foot remaining in contact with the floor. It would look prettier, but I'm not so sure it would make him better.

The one thing I like about Osku over Belmo is that he keeps his right shoulder lower than Jason's through the release and follow-through. This enables him to swing more inside-out through the release zone, which keeps his fingers inside longer and enables him to lift and turn through the ball with more extension. The release position helps him tilt his axis more and get more side roll when needed; Jason lifts his shoulder, which detracts from getting extension through the ball to tilt the axis.

Jason has better footwork and a more refined approach to the line, making his game a little simpler.

Both players have incredible ranges

of how they can play the game — way beyond the no-thumbers and most “normal” bowlers. It will be interesting to follow them in the future, and to find out which one ultimately is the “best.” It

also will be interesting to see how many players follow in their footsteps.

For archived “Pro Approach” features, visit billspigner.com.