

PBA Lane Conditions Are Not Easy

By Billy George



Billy George, a touring pro from Citrus Heights, CA, finished ninth in the 1982 Fair Lanes Open.

In my three years of bowling in pro-am tournaments and meeting and talking to people as a professional bowler, there is one question that arises quite often. This question concerns the condition of the lanes during a PBA Tournament.

There seems to be a large degree of misunderstanding about the conditions on which pro bowlers compete. It seems many people believe we bowl every week on an easy scoring condition. Let me clear up this misconception.

It is first necessary to understand the philosophy of the PBA in regards to lane conditions. The PBA insists that the lane conditions be fair to all. This includes righthanders, lefthanders, crankers and rollers. A fair, equitable and uniform lane condition from day to day is the primary objective of the PBA lane conditioning program. The emphasis of this program is to provide a consistent, playable condition without favoring any particular bowler or group of bowlers. No effort is made to create a particular angle or shot.

To best accomplish these goals, the PBA has established a three-man maintenance crew. These men are part of the traveling staff of the PBA. Two of the men are at the tournament each week applying a lane conditioning procedure that has been recommended by the third member of the crew who travels a few weeks ahead of the tour to inspect the lanes and establish a lane conditioning procedure that best suits the characteristics of that particular bowling center and the PBA conditioning objectives.

These men have a basic procedure they follow each week, but make adjustments according to each bowling center's uniqueness.

Upon arrival, the lanes are completely stripped of old oil [conditioner] and dirt. Each day thereafter, any cleaning is done on a day-to-day basis according to certain read-

ings taken by the lane crew. The actual applying of the oil to the lanes varies each week depending on the condition of the wood and finish that is over the wood. The PBA does ask to have at least one coat of finish put on the lanes thirty days prior to the tournament.

Each morning during the tournament week, about 5:00 a.m., after all cleaning and other preparations have been finished, the oil is applied. The pattern of application is similar to this: the head area or first eight to ten feet of the lane is heavily oiled gutter to gutter, then a lighter amount is put to a distance varying 15 to 30 feet. Beyond this distance no oil is applied; the back ends are kept reasonably free of oil and dirt.

This procedure best applies itself to the way a bowling ball should react for good results. That is, sliding in the head area, then rolling (beginning to grab or hook) in the middle area of the lane and hooking in the back end. This type of procedure is not applied to make it easier to hit the pocket area; it's there for good ball reaction and puts a premium on good shot making to hit the pocket.

As a professional making a living bowling, I would like a professional condition to compete on, as does the PBA. A bowler should use all his available skill and knowledge to strike, and that includes getting the ball to the pocket area. There are no walls of China or blocks on tour. If a

bowler is bowling very well and he is using the right equipment, he will score and have a playable shot to the pocket. The skillful bowler can manufacture a two to three board area to the pocket, not because there is an oil line or whatever to control the ball to the pocket.

If a bowler is bowling medium to poor on the tour, he will very likely average 180 to 200 and be up dirt's creek when the checks are handed out.

Now, for a few of my very personal opinions about lane conditions. Across this great widespread country there are a surprising number of league bowlers averaging 220 to 230 plus. These bowlers are very good and rightly so. However, due to certain types of lane conditions that make striking easier, a large majority of these bowlers are misled.

It is unfortunate that these bowlers are misled into believing they are great. To me greatness is averaging 215 to 219 across the country on every possible lane condition year after year, à la Mr. Anthony or Mr. Roth. Believe me, anyone who is averaging over 211 on tour is a recognizable name.

I left home with a 227 average in league and now I'm beating my brains to average 208. That means I'm only breaking even money-wise. One must average at least 210 on tour to make money. This is where the unfortunate situation comes into play. The 220 plus league averager hears this and he thinks the tour is a cake walk. Well, it's not!!

I'm not saying all high average bowlers are this way, but unfortunately many just don't realize the total picture of what is involved with this game of bowling because they have been robbed of at least one complete phase of the game. That phase is shotmaking, getting the ball to the pocket. Such a phase of shotmaking is at a premium out on the professional tour.