



Reading lanes

I am frequently asked about reading lanes. This is a difficult topic to cover because we all see and process information differently. In addition, there are no real formulas to reading lanes.

Let's discuss some ideas that may help you read those lanes a little bit better.

Always assess the lane conditions starting in practice.

Your practice shots must tell you what the lane conditions are like. Are you on a heavy pattern or is the ball going to hook at your ankles all night?

Roll some shots over the 5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th boards, and try to hit the pocket on each shot. Determine where and how aggressively your ball hooks. This should also give you a feel for the highest and lowest concentrations of conditioner and how far down it is applied. Your success on the lanes hinges upon knowing where and how much your ball will hook.

Determine your best angle to the pocket.

This may not be too difficult on familiar lane conditions. Most centers do a good job offering fairly consistent lane conditions from week to week. On those occasions when you are bowling on unfamiliar lanes/conditions, your practice shots become even more crucial in determining where you play. In this instance, you must do more critical analysis of your ball reaction, ball speed, ball surface, and where you are playing on the lanes.

Determine the "out of bounds" area.

Prior to the start of competition, you may want to establish where the out of bounds or "OB" is. This is a PBA Tour term meaning that a certain area of the lane is not negotiable. The ball will either instantly hook out of your hand or it will go absolutely straight for 60 feet. You don't want to get caught snoozing and let a shot leak out to the OB, resulting in a short count on a spare or strike: There is no better way to ruin a game than by taking three off the corner when you're on a string.

One other point on the OB is that we all must shoot spares. You want to stay away

from the OB unless you know how use it to your advantage. Knowing where the OB is and how your ball reacts to it can help keep those frames closed on a tough condition.

Know where you can miss and not pay a penalty.

Let's face it, everybody likes to put up big numbers. You can only post big digits if you can miss your target and still put X's across the screen. You always need to know if you miss inside of target that the ball will hold the line or if you miss outside of target the ball will get back and have enough to carry the corner pin.

We also have tendencies that crop up when we need to make a good shot. It is good to know if you can lean on it a bit and get away with one when you need it.

Understand that your lanes will change during competition.

We refer to lane conditioner or "pattern" changes as "transition." This occurs when balls travel down the lane, moving the lane conditioner around.

Your ball does the same thing that a tire does when you drive through a puddle. The tire pushes water to the left and right of where it is in contact with the road, and just as the tire transports some of the puddle further down the road, your ball does this to the lane conditioner. This is referred to as "carrydown."

Most often, carrydown cuts down on your reaction (hook) on the back-end. This tends to lessen the impact at the pins on your strike ball, causing you to leave that flat corner pin or, in extreme cases, the dreaded "washout."

Lane transition starts in practice and continues throughout competition.

Every lane goes through a transition. This is an absolute, and it only sneaks up on those who do not pay attention. Transitions are compounded by the number and caliber of bowlers.

Today's high tech bowling balls greatly alter lane conditions because of the friction they generate. Many times, what the ball doesn't burn up, it absorbs into its cover. So

lane conditions can change quickly and sometimes in a big way.

Reading and understanding transitions only comes through experience, repetition, and retention.

Here are the best tips I can offer for reading lanes and making the right moves:

- ✓ Always trust your eyes and your shot execution.
- ✓ If you are not striking, continue to adjust until you do strike.
- ✓ Look for changes in your reaction at all times, even when you are striking.
- ✓ Analyze what you see. Use all at your disposal to interpret what the lane is telling you.
- ✓ Major lane changes require major adjustments from you.

Consider developing a few different releases. Decorated amateur and PBA player Chris Barnes once noted, "You should have roughly six different releases for the varying lane conditions." For the recreational bowler, this may be a bit much. Serious players, however, should give this serious consideration. You always want to have more than just your "A" game.

Some lane changes can be overcome just by moving your eyes and/or feet by a board or two left or right of your original target. Remember that a good guide is for every two-board move with your feet, move your eyes one board in the same direction. You can create length by moving your eyes further down the lane, or if you need earlier reaction, look at your intended target nearer to the foul line.

For the intermediate players and beginners, if you miss the pocket to the left, move your eyes and feet to the left. If you miss to the right, move your eyes and feet to the right. The bigger the miss, the bigger the move required.

Please feel free to discuss these ideas or concepts with your favorite shop operator. I recommend individual instruction to assist in conquering lane transition and carrydown. I also would suggest videotaping these sessions. Most area pro shops offer on-lane sessions at very reasonable rates. Plus, it is always good to see yourself on the lanes and have a permanent record to revisit periodically.

Until next time, good luck, good bowling, and high scores.

Chris Ward operates the 12 In A Row Pro Shop in Hyattsville. He can be reached via E-mail at Christopherdw@Prodigy.Net.