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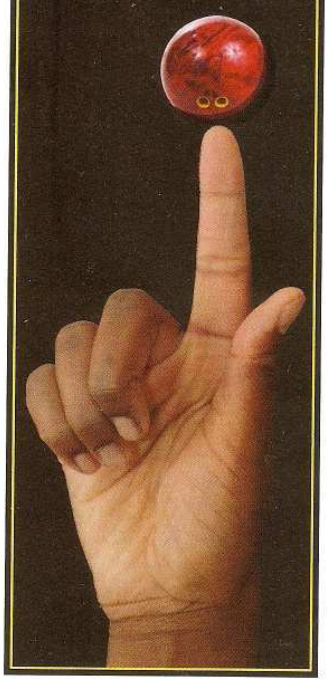

# How to coach or bowl with the two-handed thumbless delivery

## An emerging powerful style

**by Joe Slowinski**

*online video links available at www.bowlingthismonth.com/resources

I recently had an opportunity to watch two-handed thumbless bowler Jason Belmonte in action at both the Malaysian and Kuwait Opens. If you haven't had the opportunity to watch this new breed of power bowler, you will be amazed at how effortlessly they create power and a high rev rate with a clean release. Thoroughly intrigued with his power and proficiency on the lanes, I began to analyze and diagnose the innovative style. As an international bowling coach, I always want to be sure that I can understand the physical mechanics as well as teach any successful evolving styles.

The two-handed thumbless bowling style has emerged as a powerful new style that has produced amazing success for the relatively few bowlers who use it on the lanes. To illustrate, two-handed bowlers Belmonte and Osku Palermaa have dominated international competition in recent years. Belmonte, from Australia, won the High Roller in February and defeated Chris Barnes on his way to victory in this year's World Tenpin Masters, in April. In November 2006, Palermaa dominated the AMF World Cup, start to finish, to claim victory.

Photo courtesy of Osku Palermaa (clipped from his video on YouTube)

And, youth bowlers are beginning to embrace this style. In December 2006, two-handed bowler Chaz Dennis rolled a perfect game to become the youngest ever to roll a perfecto at 10 year-old, 2 months and 27 days. In fact, both of Guppy Troup's children use the two-handed thumbless delivery. And, 2003 and 2005 Junior Team USA member Brian Valenta is a two-handed bowler.

Two-handed thumbless bowling is here to stay. Are you going to be an armchair quarterback or make an effort to understand it? I was dedicated to learning more.

After returning to Malaysia, from the Kuwait Open, I was motivated to conduct a thorough analysis of this approach as well as create a coaching method for the emerging style. Incredibly, in my analysis of Belmonte and Palermaa's physical games, there was a convergence of style, from the start to finish. I present these findings in the article.

More specifically, with this article, I provide both an analysis of this emerging bowling style as well as offer some training methods to help coaches and players with developing accurately with fluidity.

### Set-up in the stance

With two-handed thumbless bowling, the setup is fundamentally important to consistency and success. Specifically, in the stance, the balance hand should support the majority of weight of the bowling ball. Instruct your bowlers to place the

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hand in the front of and underneath the ball, just above the fingers and finger holes. This position allows for the most support of the bowling ball without interfering with the fingers at release. Since the non-ball side hand remains with the ball until the point of release, be sure to instruct your bowlers to set up consistently without obstructing the fingers with the non-ball side hand. But, they need that balance hand close to the fingers for support.


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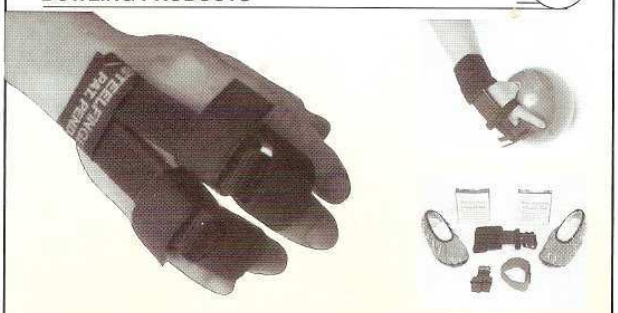

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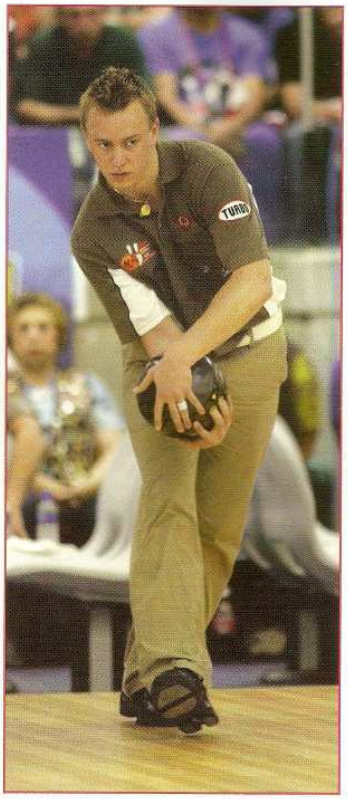
Start with the bowling ball near the center of the body, just outside of center toward the ball side. Since this is closer to the center of gravity, it allows the bowler to begin in a very stable position, supporting the entire weight of the bowling ball better. Instruct the bowler to begin with the feet placement of a normal 5-step delivery. The first step would be similar to a "normal" five-step approach. Simply take a shortened first step created by the slide foot being in front of the ball-side foot slightly. I always recommend one inch in front for consistency purposes.

**Pushaway (Step 2)**



Palermaa- courtesy of *Asian Bowling Digest*

An analysis of the world class two-handed thumbless bowlers revealed a slight rotation of the hand to a stronger position in the pushaway. In essence, the bowler begins close to the 6 o'clock start position and rotates to a stronger placement.

As you see in the image of Osku Palermaa, his fingers have rotated to a stronger position with a 7 and 8 o'clock finger position, as he pushes the ball away. This strong hand position will be maintained until the release point.

As you take the second step, move the ball out and down while supporting the weight with the balance hand. As you move, rotate the hand to a strong finger position (7 and 8 o'clock for righthanded bowlers; 4 and 5 o'clock for lefthanded bowlers). Make an effort to maintain this finger position until the point of release.

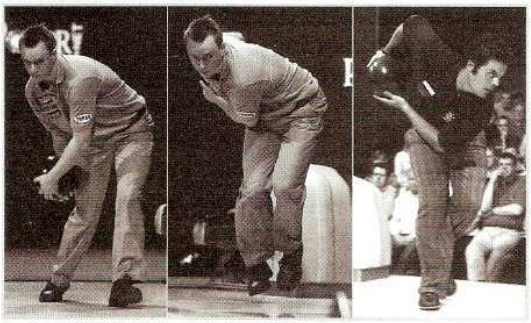
Notice Palermaa's balance hand position. He is using this hand to support much of the weight of the bowling ball. This is an important component of the pushaway.

## Skip-steps (3rd and 4th Step)

Two-handed thumbless bowlers utilize skip-steps in steps 3 and 4. These two steps are literally skip steps, like a gallop, that are very rapid and quick. Yet, it is these quick rapid steps that are both a natural timing element as well as a mechanism to generate tremendous power built in to the two-handed thumbless style. It is best to watch one of the videos* to see this in action. In short, the last three steps create a unique skip-skip-slide cadence.

The two-handed bowler is much like a high jumper or long jumper. Jumpers generate power in the short-long step sequence leading to the launch at the end of their run to generate power. The ball transitions to the height of the "backswing" between steps 3 and 4. It will be held at the top until the end of the 4th step. Due to the quickness of the two skip steps, the ball achieves a delay in the downswing to slide transition, generating a tremendous amount of power.

As the bowler lands into the 4th step, the ball has made it to the maximum height in the backswing. Yes, I did say land. Due to the skip steps, the bowler is off of the ground for a brief period of time. The balance arm is just above perpendicular with the lane.

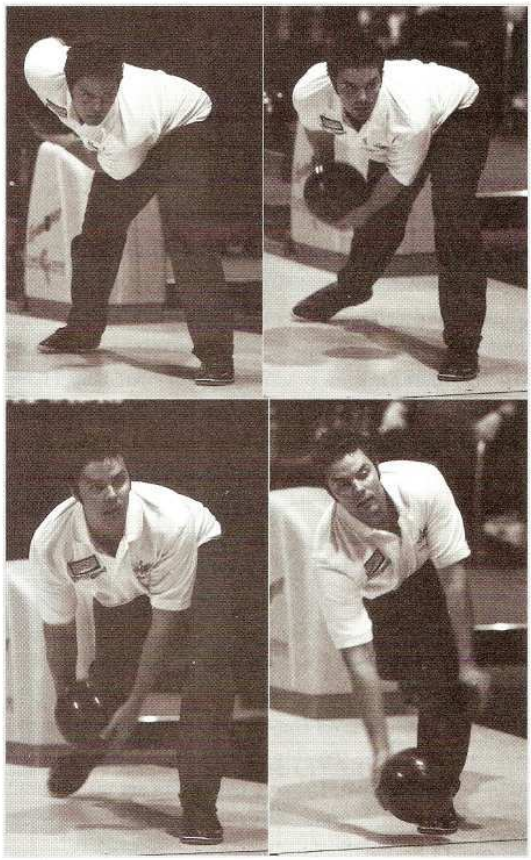


Palermaa just before skip-steps and in the air. Belmonte generating power. Photos courtesy of Lawrence Lustig / Matchroom Sport

In the backswing, the balance hand is a critical component of supporting the ball and enabling the bowler to obtain a height. In addition, this is one of the benefits of the two-handed delivery. The bowler is supporting much of the weight with the non-ball side hand. This reduces fatigue over time relative to a traditional style.

## Slide and finish

The two-handed thumbless delivery has many release benefits. First and foremost, since the non-ball side balance hand supports the ball until the release point, the bowler achieves a very clean release consistently. As the bowler enters his very short slide, the bowler has created a very long separation, between entering the slide and the ball position. This long separation creates power at the release allowing the bowler to generate speed and revolutions. In addition, since the balance hand remains with the ball until the release, the bowler generates additional speed and power with the second hand. As the ball leaves the hand, the balance arm makes a quick procession for balance.



Sequence shows Belmonte's technique for powerful, smooth release. Photos courtesy of Lawrence Lustig/Matchroom Sport.

**Overview: reflections of the two-handed thumbless style**

• By maintaining the balance hand, under the ball, the bowler can generate additional power and speed at the release point, when this is finally moved away to become a balance arm.

• The balance (arm) hand is critical for success in two-handed bowling, due to its role in supporting the ball, from stance to release.

• In the pushaway, the successful two-handed bowler rotates the hand into a stronger position with the fingers in

the 7 or 8 o'clock position or 4 & 5 for the lefty. Like other elite bowlers, this strong position is held into the release.

• Timing steps, steps 3 & 4, are skip steps in two-handed bowling. Much like a jumper, this short-long sequence, creates power into the slide. These steps are very quick and lead to acceleration into the slide. The 4th step skips into the slide.

• In addition, the skip steps lead to a delay in the swing, at the top of the 2-handed swing. This also delays the release causing more separation into the slide. Separation leads to potential power and speed.

## Teaching the style

You know the old adage, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. This style is best taught to youth bowlers. As we get older, it becomes more and more difficult to acquire the natural rhythm of a different technique. I saw a video of a 7-year-old in Japan. He demonstrated much of the same technique as Belmonte and Palermaa. Our bodies will strive for balance. And this style demands balance. But, if you want to learn it or teach it, then here are a few practice drills that will help. I have developed these drills based on the analysis of the two greatest two-handed bowlers in the world. They developed their style on different continents. So, I am confident that in both cases, their bodies were seeking balance and leverage naturally.

## Introducing the natural feeling of the two-handed cadence

Begin by having your bowlers watch a video* of Belmonte or Palermaa a minimum of three times. The video will help them see this cadence. As they watch, remind them of the natural cadence, step-step-skip-skip-slide. Say this out-loud together before starting. Have your bowlers set up, without a bowling ball. Rather, they can use a soccer ball or a bouncy ball about the size of a bowling ball to simulate. Say this cadence out loud again together before starting. Be sure to begin to say the skip-skip-slide sequence more quickly. Slow-slow-quick-quick-slide. As the coach, watch for the proper technique, especially as the bowler moves through steps, 2 through 4. Have the bowlers do this three times. Watch the video of the bowlers and start again.

## Mastering the skip-skip-slide

This drill will emulate the transition into steps 3 through to the finish. The goal is to establish the natural cadence of the skip-skip-slide sequence. Begin by taking three steps from the foul line. Go to the foul line, turn around, and take 3 normal walking steps while looking at the wall. Be sure to look at the wall. If you look down, you will take shorter steps.

After turning around, back to the foul line, have the bowler set up with the slide foot back and the trail leg forward about six inches. The bowler will begin by having the ball at the side in front of the knee (see photo). Be sure the bowler has strong balance before initiating the drill. This position should feel very good for the bowler in regard to balance and leverage.

As the bowler steps forward with the slide foot, bring the ball backwards. Then enter into the skip-skip-slide sequence and have the ball travel naturally. It would be best to model this for the bowler as you are coaching. And, you may have to help the bowler by supporting the ball moving backward.

## Move to the full two-handed approach

Now, the bowler is ready to try the full approach with the bowling ball. Be sure that they begin with a lighter bowling ball to move through the sequence and establish a natural feeling of the steps.

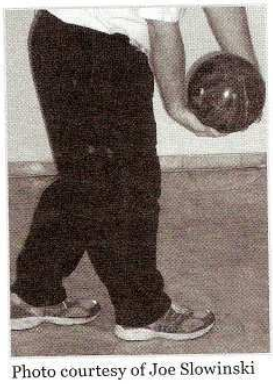


Photo courtesy of Joe Slowinski

## It's here to stay

I must admit. Initially, I saw two-handed thumbless bowling as a fluke where a few individuals had developed a unique style. But, the amazing success convinced me to look more closely. After conducting a thorough analysis of this approach and delivery, many consistencies were present from individuals who developed this unique but effective style. They literally developed this style independently living continents apart from each other. Indeed, there is a future for two-handed thumbless bowling. No need to worry about a clean release. It is built in.

The two-handed thumbless delivery is definitely here to stay. I am already developing a plan to have an experimental group of a dozen boys and girls, who want to learn how to bowl this way.

Coaches and bowlers, before it is too late, take time to understand the components of this physical game and learn how to teach it. Specifically, the next time someone wants to learn how-to throw with a two-handed thumbless delivery don't shake your head in disbelief. Rather, say, okay, let's get started by watching some video clips of Jason Belmonte and Osku Palermaa. See that step-step-skip-skip-slide sequence.... How cool is that.