Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.

- Confucius

Before everything else, getting ready is the secret to success.

- Henry Ford

Six steps to success

Understanding lane play requires frequent observation, reflection and action based upon knowledge. A bowler who wants to succeed in the modern game must be willing to move and move often. Staying in the same area is a scoring death sentence. To be successful, a disciplined approach is required, training one's self to truly observe ball motion and make solid, knowledge-based decisions on how to adjust.

But, where should a bowler start and how should a bowler move? With this in mind, I present some reflections on lane play. This continues to build on a system that has been constantly evolving since 2006. In this article you will develop a “personal target line shift number” as well as reflect upon arsenal sequencing and surface change to deal with transitions more effectively.

Step #1: Find the base target line for the pattern

As I have discussed since May 2006 in a presentation in Malaysia and formally written about begin-

Joe Slowinski, ABD, M.Ed. is a full-time coach at the Kegel Training Center, in Lake Wales, Florida, and former Director of Coaching and Coach Certification for the National Sports Council of Malaysia. Joe was named a Top 100 Coach for 2005, 2006, & 2007 by BJI. He can be reached at joe.slowinski@kegel.net Visit his coaching site at www.bowlingknowledge.info
ning in my June 2007 BTM article, 3-Point Targeting for advanced lane play, begin by finding the exit point for the pattern. In an effort to refresh your memory, the exit point is where the oil ends and the dry back end begins, and is the board at the end of the pattern that gives the greatest margin of error (M.O.E.) built-in to the pattern.

To find the exit point of any pattern, simply subtract 31 from the length of the pattern. To complete the base target line, draw a straight line from the exit point through to the pin deck to find a focal point. Then, draw a line back to the foul line to find the visual target. This creates a straight line on the pattern. This will serve as a baseline. In step #2, you will make a shift based on your own individual release characteristics.

To illustrate this idea, a 40-foot pattern would have a baseline of 9-9-9. This includes a visual target of 9, the exit point of 9 at 40 feet (40 – 31) and a focal point of 9. Now, include a slide point. For a right-handed bowler, this would be approximately 7 boards left of this baseline. In this case, the slide point would be 9 + 7 = 16. This creates a slide of 16, looking at 9 with an exit and focal of 9.

Based on much feedback received from bowlers, for some, the exit point can be difficult to visualize and therefore use. Consequently, if the exit point distance is difficult for you to use as a target, I recommend using only the focal point and the visual target when you make your individual shift off of the base. This will now yield a new 3-point reference of the slide-point, visual and focal of the baseline. In this case of the 40 foot pattern example, the starting reference would be 16-9-9. In this case, you would be sliding on 16, with a visual target of 9 and a focal point of 9.

**Step #2: Finding your “Personal Shift Number” and starting line**

As I teach the 3-point targeting system to more and more people, I continue to learn how to make it more and more effective for elite bowlers. As a result, the system is becoming more clearly refined and subsequently successful in assisting bowlers to more effectively line up on any pattern. From this implementation, I have seen the success of a systematic shift off of the base lead to more consistency on the fresh. This was discovered through much trial and error to make it work quickly and efficiently.

When teaching the 3-point targeting system, I always assist bowlers in lining up off of the baseline to better understand how to implement it accurately. When bowlers lined up and moved off of the base to hit the pocket, most found that a simple shift from the baseline led to hitting the pocket. As they began training more on multiple patterns, the shift was the same for many bowlers, providing them an easy-to-use process to line up immediately on any pattern. Imagine the confidence and efficient use of time to be in the pocket or extremely close with only one shot.

What these bowlers discovered was that, based on their release, ball speed and rev rate, they would be able to move 2 and 1, 4 and 2, 6 and 3, or 8 and 4 from the base and be in the pocket immediately and consistently on many different patterns. This represents a move inside with the feet and a move inside with your visual target. For some, they use the same shift move on any pattern length, while others will use a different shift based on the length. For these bowlers, they will have a smaller shift on short and a bigger
move on medium and longer patterns. But, these bowlers also know which shift to use on a particular pattern.

With a little experimentation, you can determine your shift. Experiment with multiple moves to determine your personal shift number. Start with a 2 and 1 off of the base while keeping the focal point the same. This 2 board shift inside with your feet and 1 with your visual will help you keep a tighter line on sport patterns.

To continue with our 40-foot pattern length example, if you have a 2-1 shift, it is a 2-1 shift from 16-9-9. So, the new starting line with a shift would be 18-10-9. This would be sliding 18, visually targeting 10 with a focal point of 9 at the pins. As you are experimenting and developing an understanding of your personal shift number, make 2-1 moves to get variations of 4-2, 6-3, 8-4, etc.

Step #3: Consider the surface and conduct a bump test

My Kegel colleague, John Janawicz, often uses a term called the “bump test.” This is simply testing the lane for friction to the outside. As a righthanded bowler, move your focal point right to throw the ball right of the baseline. If you have friction to the outside, you can use this to your advantage. In essence, you will play the pattern like it is shorter. For a righthanded bowler, start by adjusting one board right of your shift line, including your feet, visual and focal.

Conversely, if the base shift plays tighter than normal, the same righthanded bowler could move everything one board left of the shift line. This will allow you to play the lane as a longer pattern.

Consider the likelihood of outside friction or the lane playing tighter by reflecting on the lane surface that you are bowling on at that time. Wooden lanes have a high amount of friction built in. These are very likely to have a bump built in. On the other side, a lane surface such as Pro Anvilane is likely to play tighter.

Step #4: Maintaining scoring by dealing with transitions

In the October 2008 issue, I illustrated that transition in the modern game requires the understanding and acceptance that oil depletion is the cause of ball motion change over time. With this in mind, bowlers need to remain focused on their ball reaction throughout their bowling.

After throwing the ball, focus on observing the ball in a minimum of three locations on the lane: (1) the end of the pattern; (2) the ball as it is entering the pins, and (3) where the ball leaves the end of the pin deck.

As we stated, as oil is depleted, traction and friction will be increased. This will cause the ball to hook earlier. Visually, the bowling ball will potentially check-up earlier and hook left near the end of the pattern, or it will...
travel down the lane and begin to deflect more at the end of pin deck.

Train yourself to observe ball reaction. Remember the three phases of ball motion: skid, hook and roll. As the ball begins to check-up, make moves of 2-1. And, you need not wait for the lane to prove it to you. Watch those on your pair to make your moves. If the ball goes high, move 2 and 1. If the ball goes Brooklyn, move 4 and 2. And, if a big change happens, be ready to change bowling balls to the next ball in the sequence.

**Step # 5: Arsenal sequencing**

As you prepare for an event, focus on a thorough understanding of your equipment. Specifically, build a sequence plan. In essence, bowling balls that tend to arc more would be used earlier in the sequence, such as on a fresh pattern, while skid-flip oriented equipment would be used later when a bowler needs more length and a stronger ball reaction. For example, as oil is depleted, more friction will be present earlier on the lane. The bowling ball that would be too strong in the back end in the beginning would now be an option. Sequence your bowling balls in this manner. In short, think about length and strength in order of when they would best be used.

It is important to think about where each of your bowling balls would be placed in the sequence for a specific pattern. Before you go to a tournament, make a list placing the bowling balls in order by length and back end strength. This will help you know which balls to move to as the pattern transitions.

**Step # 6: Surface change**

To get further differentiation out of your equipment, you can alter the surface to get more length or to get the ball to start up sooner. As the grit number increases, the smoother the surface and less traction your equipment will have. This will give it more length and allow axis rotation and ball speed to be sustained longer. Conversely, the lower the grit number, the more traction your cover will have, leading to the axis rotation to be burned off sooner and ball speed to be reduced more quickly, creating earlier hook and earlier roll.

Limit your surface preparation to 500, 1000, 2000, 2000 with polish and 4000 with polish. Recent research conducted at the United States Bowling Congress found that balls polished at grits of 1000 or less have less consistent ball motion from surface change to surface change. Polish should only be used on balls with 2000 and 4000. These two combinations of surface grit and polish led to more consistency, surface change to surface change.

Most bowlers make the mistake of not using enough surface on the ball when bowling on the fresh. Err on the side of caution. Use more surface on the fresh more of the time. An ideal motion requires the bowling ball to roll into the pocket. Strive to have a smoother motion on fresh patterns. This will create an earlier hook and roll, smoothing out the back end reaction. To do this, start with more surface on fresh patterns.