How Important Is Cover Preparation in Tournament Play?

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How important is cover preparation to success? I present a brief case study of a recent elite youth event which will illustrate to you how much cover preparation can make in scoring. I present data from 2 of the best youth bowlers, in the country, who altered their covers in a major tournament after an opening round that is best exemplified as an under-scoring performance. From this case study, you will see how much cover stock preparation matters. As you will see, altering the cover can be a key to scoring higher in a tournament. As a tournament bowler, it can mean between 10 and 20 pins per game. Will that matter? Certainly, if you want to make a cut or earn a check. The bowlers in the case study possess both the knowledge and skill to manipulate ball reaction. But, they were fighting a poor reaction. Do not let this happen to you. Read on....

How Does Cover Stock Preparation Matter? A Case Study of Malaysian Youth Bowlers in Competition

Bowlers with release skills can do only so much when they are realizing a poor ball reaction in tournament play. If the scoring pace is high, then it is nearly impossible to compete no matter how good you are with altering ball motion. The following case study will illustrate how much preparing the cover in an event makes to success or failure.

WHO ARE THESE BOWLERS? The case study represents two of the most promising youth bowlers in Malaysia, aged 15 & 16, who struggled in the opening qualifying round of the open division. These are bowlers who have a great deal of potential. The first bowler has defeated bowlers on the national team and finished in or near the top 10 in several U23 and U18 international events in 2007. The other bowler was a top 3 qualifier and finalist in several recent circuit legs. These bowlers have the knowledge to alter axis rotation, ball speed and rev rate. They are very knowledgeable about out the ball manipulation system that I teach. So, they can alter ball motion competently and confidently. I oversee one bowler's training program and have trained the for 8 straight days in preparation for an international event in the past. Both have attended my 7-day Super Camp as well in which they learned how-to alter ball motion through changing axis rotation, axis tilt, ball speed and rev rate as well as the advanced lane play system. TOURNAメント OVERVIEW

In Malaysia, bowlers cut their teeth on the junior circuit. All major international stars, coming out of Malaysia, have all been successful winning titles on the youth circuit. The culmination is an annual grand final. After earning points in 10 circuit legs, the Sportexcel-NSC-Milo-MTBC Junior Circuit 2007 comes down to the Grand Prix finals. The top 16 point earners from around the country gather head-to-head to crown a grand champion. These bowlers are the elite youth bowlers, 18 and younger, of the country and will certainly represent the country in the future as members of the national team. The bowlers come to the center of bowling in Malaysia, Pyramid Sunway. Pyramid Sunway is a bowling center that is well known in international bowling circles. It was the host of the 2003 World Championships as well as the 1998 Commonwealth Games. The center includes stadium seating. This is serious business in Malaysia. And, the bowlers all want to earn a sport in the finals. Then, they want to win. The official practice is not informal. But, it is not like an international championship or PBA event. The lane condition controls in such events are very high. But, with the GP Finals, it is a bit more informal. The official practice was held on Friday night. So, when you are attempting to make equipment and cover choices, the decisions are more likely to hold true. Unfortunately, I was not able to help the bowlers prepare the cover material prior to the event. Bowlers are coming to KL from all around the country with some arriving just before the event. It makes it difficult to assist in the capacity you want. The lanes were oiled 2.5 hours in advance of the opening squad. The pattern was a 38 foot pattern. So, the oil had a chance to settle as well as absorb into the heads. As soon as the practice began, the bowlers soon realized that the condition would be challenging. Mostly, their weak equipment was hooking early. If they attempted to increase the launch angle or ball speed too much, the ball would finish late and light. This also caused them to be uncomfortable from the start. In many cases, they were forcing the follow-through due to the increased ball speed needed to keep the ball right and the ball hooking early. Weak covers were also hooking more than expected due to medium speed and medium revs. The higher speed and higher speed players were loving this condition as well as those bowlers who liked to roll it. HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE CAN ALTERING THE SURFACE MAKE?

Begin on-site, I was able to assist the bowlers after the opening squad of the event. I knew each needed additional length, both to store energy and create entry angle. At the break, I altered 2 bowler's bowling equipment pushing it up to 3500 grit. The lanes were re-oiled immediately after the completion of the first round and sat for 1.5 hours. In the second round, both had immediate success achieving much more length due to the change in the cover. And, most importantly, each bowled better in the second 6 game block. So, how much does surface preparation impact scoring? You be the judge?

BOWLER 1 - Qualifying Average

BOWLER 2 - Qualifying Average

1st Block of qualifying

Average for 6 games

NO COVER PREPARATION

192186

2nd Block of qualifying

Average for 6 games

AFTER COVER CHANGE

192203

206

IMPROVEMENT

11 pins per game

20 pins per game

Unfortunately, both missed the cut due to the lower scoring first block. The cut was 206. Realistically, both could have made the cut starting with the cover preparation we had done for the second round. But, this is how you improve as a bowler. Specifically, both learned a valuable lesson about preparing your equipment for the condition. My goal with any bowler I work with is to create independent bowlers. WHAT DOES RESEARCH STATE ABOUT ALTERING THE COVER SURFACE? As a bowler or coach, it is important to understand how much extra length you can achieve by altering the cover. Would you believe 2.5 extra feet? Take a peek Ebonite has completed research on surface preparation. Here is the data from the information...
collected on a shorter house pattern, heavy volume, 34 feet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ball (finish) LengthBreakpoint</th>
<th>BoardTotal Boards Covered Backend Hook (inches) Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angle 360 39.23 6.03 19.92 8.06 6.10 500 40.13 5.43 20.00 7.49 6.12 1000 40.81 6.01 6.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4000 41.82 4.09 19.83 6.01 6.21</td>
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As you can see from the data, preparing a cover with a 4000 grit surface, when needed, will allow you to get the ball down the lane more as well as further away from the head pin, more easily. This allowed an increased entry angle with more backend hook. Translation...... Higher scores and a better ball reaction.

**PRACTICE WITH DIFFERENT SURFACE ALTERATIONS TO LEARN** From the data, you can see how important altering the cover is to best match-up to lane conditions. Taken one step further, you should have a plan to make equipment and release changes as you move through your games of qualifying. In your practice sessions, prior to a tournament, you need to observe your ball reaction closely. Is the ball hooking too soon? Think about altering the cover with a 2000 to 4000 pad. Conversely, if you are not able to get the ball to react soon enough, then consider a 360 or 500 pad. In addition, you can experiment with your equipment in training. Be sure to stay with the same release so you can see a relative and comparable ball reaction with the cover changes. Start with 4000 grit. Throw 10 shots and watch the ball reaction carefully. Then, change the cover to 2000. What do you notice? Go to 1000 next. Or, start low, and go higher. If it is a longer pattern, start higher and go lower. If the pattern is short, start low and go higher. Watch closely to identify the difference in length, break point location, angle into the pocket. In essence, by going through this process with your equipment, you will gain a thorough in-depth understanding of your equipment and being prepared to alter the cover to best match-up with a tournament condition.

**CONCLUSION** Even for the elite bowler with many releases, surface preparation can make the difference between scoring well and remaining in contention or a frustrating day of over-under and inconsistent scoring. Invest in a kit of Abralon Pads or Scotch Bright pads.