

The 3 X 3 Box: A Visual Tool to Acquire an Improved Comprehension of Lane Play

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 Wednesday, 29 December 2010
 Last Updated Wednesday, 29 December 2010

In the January 2011 Slowinski at-large, I introduce the 3 by 3 box to improve your comprehension of lane play transition as well as to practice improving your ability to recognize and adjust to lane play transitions.

Slowinski at-large The 3 X 3 Box: A Visual Tool to Acquire an Improved Comprehension of Lane Play

Improving lane play remains one of the biggest challenges in our sport. To begin, lane surface materials vary widely and topographical differences lane-to-lane can make the same pattern appear to play very differently in the same bowling center. Moreover, bowling has a variety of skill challenges due to the difficulty level of unique lane patterns. Each situation impacts ball motion differently. Due to these challenges, lane play remains one of the weakest skill and knowledge sets for many bowlers. Lane play is literally a mystery for many. To excel, bowlers must be able to proactively deal with an invisible environment from the beginning of competition. As the tournament progresses and the conditions evolve, each bowler must navigate the transition, created from oil depletion, left behind by all bowlers who have bowled on the lanes prior to arrival on the pair. To be successful, players need to strive to find a location in each pattern that provides the maximum margin of error (M.o.E). Specifically, if a bowler has recovery to the outside of their line and hold inside, this will maximize their ability to score. Bowlers who can maintain this margin of error throughout a competition will perform well. But, how does a bowler maintain the largest margin of error? It begins by being able to manipulate the lane pattern in practice in an area which statistically speaking is a likely location where the margin of error exists. And, as the lane changes, each player needs to be able to observe how the ball reaction is changing to make wise and proactive moves and bowling ball changes to maintain M.o.E. In this month's issue of Slowinski at-large, I introduce readers to the 3 X 3 box, a visual training tool to improve one's lane play comprehension. The 3 X 3 box can be utilized in three important ways: (1) targeting practice; (2) a visual lane manipulation, breakdown tool; (3) a visual lane transition and transition practice process tool. The 3 X 3 box is based on the idea of using what we know about lane pattern structure with more friction to the outside and more hold inside while also lengthening a target area down the lane. *Where on the Lane: Where the Hypothetical Meets the Applied*

Bowlers should always strive to find a location in a lane pattern where recovery exists to the outside and hold to the inside. In recent months, I have begun to conceptualize a practice process which would aid bowlers in better seeing where to play the fresh while also assisting in visualizing lane breakdown better. This reflection started with the several certainties associated with the majority of lane patterns. First, it is true the end of the pattern has the least amount of oil in most patterns. Consequently, this is the area which will transition the quickest. Second, in most lane patterns, the outside has more friction. Accordingly, due to the structure of these patterns, there will be more hold in and recovery to the outside in a specific area. This is the area of the pattern where a bowler can manipulate the conditions to increase margin of error. Margin of error exists with three boards at the end of the pattern. At the Kegel Training Center, we utilize the Computer Aided Tracking System (C.A.T.S.) on a daily basis to measure a bowler's consistency and repeatability. C.A.T.S. measures ball speed consistency, launch angle consistency as well as entry angle consistency. Moreover, it measures accuracy at 15' and 39'. When developing C.A.T.S., a number of Hall of Fame bowlers were used to establish the criteria for the pro-level category. These bowlers included Norm Duke, Brian Voss, Parker Bohn, Walter Ray Williams Jr and others. From C.A.T.S. report data illustrates that PBA level players have a consistency of three boards down the lane. With these realities in mind, the construction of a target box on the lanes that is three boards wide and three feet long can help a player maximize the margin of error built-in to a pattern. I refer to this as a 3 X 3 box. The 3 X 3 box creates a visual targeting tool that can lead to significant lane play meaning and comprehension. Specifically, by constructing such a box on the lane, a bowler can develop a better understanding, visually, of how a lane transitions. *Using the 3 X 3 Box to Play Lanes and to Simulate Lane Transition*

By taping the 3 X 3 box on the lanes, individuals or team members begin to visualize an area on the lane rather than a single board or spot down the lane. This will help them to better see ball motion and the margin of error in each pattern. When using the 3 X 3 box, the goal is to go into the box from the front and exit out the back of the box.

Visualize Playing the Fresh

One of the secrets of great bowling is lane pattern manipulation. Many individuals and teams have worked diligently to

acquire the skill of collaborating to create a friction zone at the end of the pattern. Yet, some bowlers still resist this reality and just randomly do whatever they want to do without great reflection or thought. Such a philosophy often leads to scoring inconsistencies. From a team perspective, coaches can train their team to work as a collective cohesive unit as well as foster a lane manipulation skills set for your team. From an individual perspective, a bowler can train himself to better see the lane as well as where he can break it down best. The 3 X 3 box literally shows the end of the pattern and exit point area more clearly and provides a visual learning tool for a player. Consequently, a bowler practicing with the 3 X 3 box will begin to acquire a better understanding of pattern lengths as well as launch angles through the box. In addition, bowlers using the 3 X 3 box in training will learn that this area of the lane will lead to more margin of error. Hitting the pocket more frequently normally acts as a catalyst to work to hit these lines better. Setting-up and Simulating Transition

In addition to developing an individual or team lane play manipulation skill set, this process will help bowlers work with a well-developed lane under transition. With the 3 X 3 box, a bowler will set-up a lane pattern breakdown visually. With the addition of the 3 X 3 box, taped on the lane, bowlers will also roll to the same area more frequently and accurately. This reality will help to simulate lane pattern breakdown with better bowlers or a better team. Pattern breakdown in the same area will also create increased margin of error for a team or individual. And, this actual visual practice can help a player develop the skill of seeing ball motion better. The 3 X 3 box will foster bowlers to pay more attention to mid-lane reactions and how the bowling ball migrates through the skid, hook and roll phases. With a well-defined pattern breakdown, and an objective to get the ball through the box, bowlers and team members will begin to acquire a much better ball motion observation skill set. When a breakdown is so well-defined, there will be no guesses. Bowlers will begin to more accurately determine what moves are needed to get to and through the box and to the pocket, during the evolving transitions. As with all great teams, moves will be determined after a team member has thrown. Constructing the 3 X 3 Box

The box should be set-up before practice begins. Pattern length information is needed. The goal is to construct a box that is three boards wide and three feet long. Find the Exit Point. Use PL-31 to find the end of the pattern distance. Use the Exit Point board at that distance as well as two boards to the outside to construct the top of the box. At the end of the pattern, place one piece of tape on the board inside the exit point board. In addition, at the end of the pattern, place one piece of tape on the board three boards to the outside of the exit point board. The length of the box will be three feet. Place two pieces of tape on the bottom edge of the box (one board to the right and one to the left). To illustrate, let's consider a 40 foot pattern. I have included an image of the 2010 USBC Open pattern with a darkened area to illustrate the 3 X 3 box area. Specifically, this gives us an exit point of board 9 at 40 feet. Accordingly, we should have a piece of tape on board 6 and 10 at 40 feet to construct the top of the box. On the bottom, we would have a piece of tape at board 6 and 10 at 37 feet. This constructs a box on boards 7, 8 and 9. In addition, I have provided a lane pattern image from the 2007 WTBA World Championships. This pattern is 45 feet. This gives an exit point of 14. Accordingly, we will place a tape on board 15 and 11 at 45 feet. On the bottom, we would place a piece of tape at board 11 and 15 at 42 feet. This constructs a box on 12, 13 and 14. Conclusion and Caveat

The topic discussed in the article is intended to be a guideline. The 3 X 3 Box will assist you in having more margin of error on most patterns. In addition, the 3 X 3 will help you practice lane play transition by more accurately defining an area on the lane through the end of the pattern. Due to the plethora of variables in bowling, this is not an absolute. Rather, due to surface differences on lanes or topographical issues with lanes, some variation will exist center to center and lane to lane. As I always inform bowlers I work with, begin with research and then use common sense based on what you are seeing in the invisible environment of bowling.