


READ ANY LANE IN 7 SHOTS

By Lou Marquez, USBC Gold Coach



Lou Marquez is the director of coaching at the Turbo Tech training facility in Chesterfield, Mich. (www.turbogrips.com).



USBC Gold Coach Lou Marquez reveals his easy system

When Wes Malott steps up for a shot, he's intense. His face is a crunched-up fury of concentration.

If you're even a casual fan of the PBA, you've seen him plenty this season on TV and just as often for the past three years. He's made the TV finals 20 times since 2005, capturing four titles.

He's a big guy, 6'4", 250 pounds — known as "The Big Nasty" on tour. His herky-jerky motion on the approach, with his head and eyes staring straight down, seemingly glued to the foul line, all coalesce to make him one of the most identifiable bowlers in the land.

"Everyone always asks me what I'm looking at," says Malott. "When I start, I'm imagining my breakpoint and then I mentally draw a line back to my target. So, yeah, it's a little different because I am looking straight down at the foul line, focusing on that imaginary line I see there." Of course, says Malott, he can't even begin to draw that line until he has a good lane read.

Reading lanes is one of the most difficult things for

any bowler to master, and plenty take an almost "Zen" approach to it, just going off of gut feel and intuition. But even those bowlers derive their insights from observing how each ball plays.

And therein lies the secret to getting a good lane read: keen and consistent observation.

Reading a lane, in layman's terms, means you're deciphering the oil pattern and the quirks of the actual lane surface so that you can send your ball down in a manner that allows it to hit the pocket at a good angle as often as possible.

Since the things you're trying to "read" are invisible — the oil and the lane topography — the only way to "see" those things is to observe your ball's reaction during its journey down the lane.

I've developed a way to get a basic lane read in just seven shots. Of course, you'll want to throw more than that before beginning competition to warm up and get loose to prevent injury. Malott expands on my system with some keen insights he's garnered from his years on the PBA Tour.

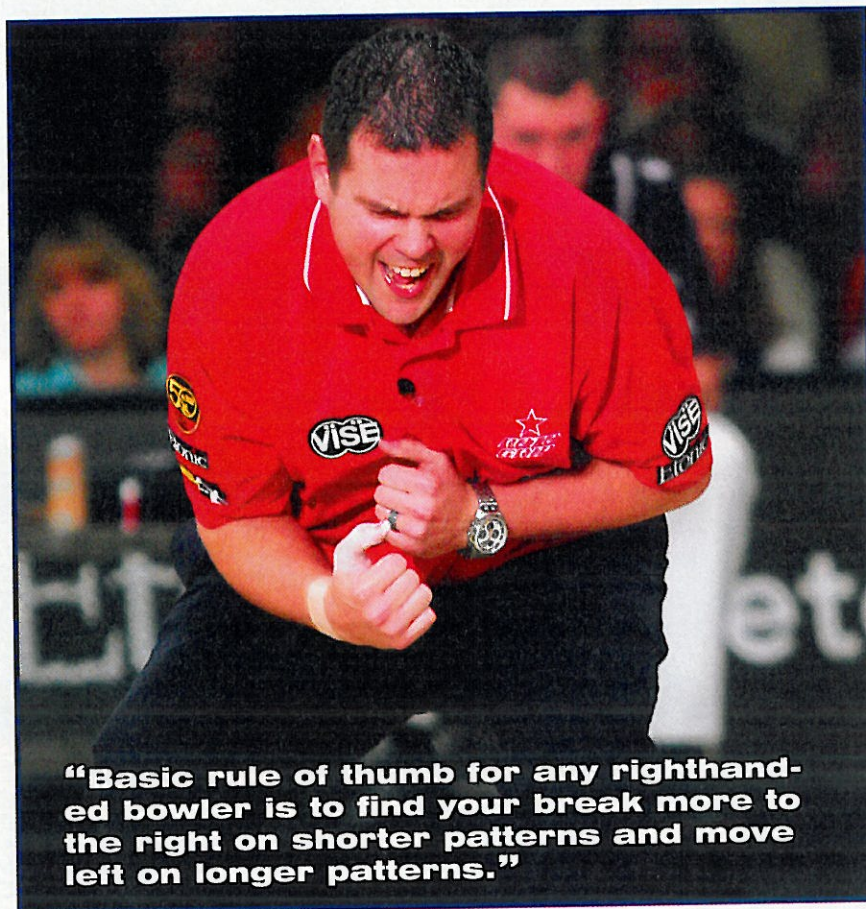
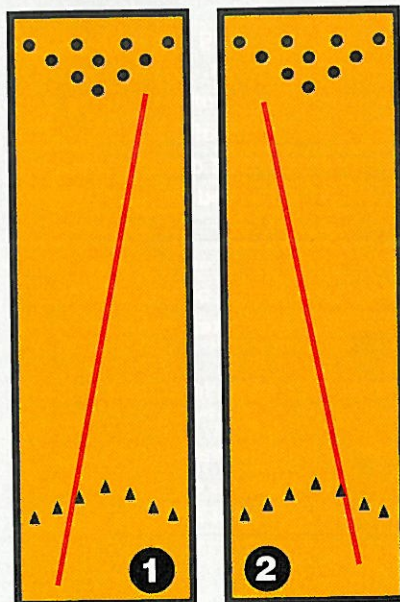
The first piece of information that you should read from the lane is the length of the pattern, looking to see if there is consistency from side to side. To understand more we will have to look at the ball reaction from a series of shots.

SHOT 1 Release from the foul line with a medium strength ball using your normal revolutions but very little speed. No foot-work or a forced swing is required. The intent of this shot is to find the distance of where the ball encounters friction and changes direction in motion. The ball will skid and hook in the presence of oil and then change direction while rolling when it encounters friction. The shot should be rolled from the right side across the center of the lane toward the opposite side near the 6-10.

SHOT 2 Exact same as shot number one, except roll it from the left side toward the opposite side near the 4-7 pins.

You should be able to get a sense of the approximate distance to the end of the pattern to where you see the ball change in direction. Ask yourself: Were the two distances of where the ball changed direction similar in length or different? If the change in direction happens at the same location evenly on each side then the pattern has some symmetry to its crosswise shape, possibly indicating a fresh pattern. If the ball hooks at different locations, then it may be that the lane was bowled on and has been changed due to transition (normal wear) creating subtle differences in the mid-lane.

"If the ball isn't slowing down or picking up speed in the mid-lane," says Malott,



"Basic rule of thumb for any righthanded bowler is to find your break more to the right on shorter patterns and move left on longer patterns."

"then you need to go to a stronger ball or put surface on the ball so it doesn't jerk off the pattern and tick left (for a righthander). A stronger ball or one with more surface will smooth that transition."

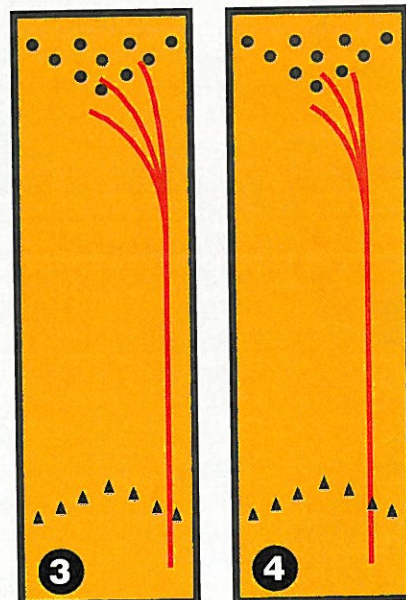
Understanding that is what helped Malott win the CLR Carmen Salvino Scorpion Championship in Vernon Hills, Ill., last November. "I used a medium-aggressive ball all week," Malott recalls. "But as the week went on, the lanes got tighter and tighter as the pattern got truer. So in the last block of qualifying, I went to a stronger ball, which worked and sent me to the TV show. But on TV, the heat of the lights changed the pattern again. So after a quick read of the lanes, I went back to the weaker ball."

Shots three, four and five should be rolled with your normal physical technique using medium speed and a normal release down specific zones on the lane. Use a medium strength coverstock ball if you have one. The goal is to find out how many total boards of movement the ball has after rolling down a specific area.

SHOT 3 This ball is rolled down the outside region or zone around boards 4, 5, 6 straight up the lane. Watch where it enters the pins at impact and take note of its movement in strength (arc or flip). Use the

total amount of boards in the hook as a benchmark for your next two shots. "This shot is key," says Malott. "If you can play that zone, your strike percentage is going to go up. It creates the best angles to the pocket for optimal pin carry."

SHOT 4 Roll this ball along the region of boards 9, 10, 11, which in most centers is the "track area," the region most widely



used, and its force can influence the direction of the ball prematurely. In most centers more oil is applied to that area to offset the wear and tear on the lane bed. Your goal is to see if the ball's strength in reaction has changed in this zone or if the oil compensates for that. Again the strength of the movement should be measured and compared against the outside zone.

SHOT 5 This ball is also rolled straight, but now throw it along boards 14, 15, and 16. This area is the most heavily oiled in most centers but your goal is to measure the strength of this region by measuring the total amount of boards covered on the lane. Comparisons against the other two zones should be made and evaluated. "I'll play this zone on longer patterns," says Malott. "Basic rule of thumb for any righthanded bowler is to find your break more to the right on shorter patterns and move left on longer patterns."

After reviewing the shots three, four and five, and evaluating the total coverage of boards on the lane, you can determine a crosswise pattern or shape. Your goal is to see if there is more or less oil or an even distribution of oil on the lane by the numbers. A higher number of boards in a region means more possible friction, a lower value number means that there is more oil in that region. Numbers that are the same next to each other will indicate that the value or oil amount is similar from zone to zone or flat. At this time you can adjust your speed or ball if need be to suit the volume of oil.

With the first five shots, you've discovered the length of the pattern, the crosswise shape of the pattern and you have a feel for the

most worn part of the lane.

"I once heard a coach talk about a formula for playing the right zone," says Malott. "The idea is that if you take the length of the pattern and subtract 31, it'll tell you which board your breakpoint needs to be. For example, if the length of the pattern is 44 feet, you subtract 31 and get board 13. That's where you want to play. There are still so many variables, but for the average bowler, it's a



great rule of thumb and gets you close to the zone you need to be in."

Shots six and seven are for bowlers whose physical game, equipment or other lane forces require a more diagonal shot.

SHOT 6 This ball is a diagonal shot rolled from the track or middle zone on boards 9-11 and angled toward the 4-6 boards. This angle should also reference the distance of the pattern at its exit point. For example, if the pattern length is 38 feet, then the ball should be angled toward the 4-6 boards at a distance of 38 feet.

SHOT 7 This shot is the same as shot six, but is rolled from 14-16 angled to the end of the pattern toward boards 9-11.

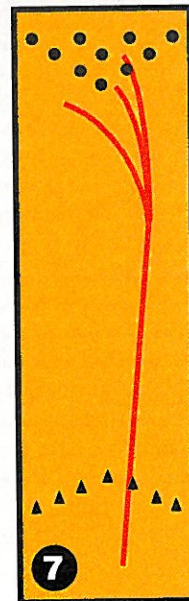
What we are looking for is the strength of the motion in total boards of coverage — just like the straight shots three, four and five — and the comparison of those two diagonal regions.

The goal of the seven shots is to create a visual image of the invisible forces on the lane. During the probing of the lane via the seven shots you will find that some shots are more conducive to better striking potential and will allow for some comfort in your physical game.

Additional shots after the first seven will help you to define if the environment will aid in adjustments and/or if ball changes are needed to facilitate the natural forces of tran-

sition. It is always good to know where we can move to when a change is needed during the game.

"Lanes change so much all the time," says Malott. "You can go to league one week, shoot 750 and think you've got that house all figured out. But the next week you shoot 500 and say, 'Well, they must have changed the lanes.' You don't know how many house balls hit that pattern during open play all day before you got there. It could be a fresh pattern or play beforehand could have pushed a lot of oil down the lane. That's why you need a new read every time."



"Lanes change so much all the time ... that's why you need a new read every time."

