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Dual Oil Patterns are here! What's next?

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The European Bowling Tour has recently announced it will have two tournaments in the 2009 schedule where players will compete on dual oil patterns. Following the lead of Ronald Dol and Luc Jensen, organizers of the EBT Hammer Bronzen Schietspoel Tournament which will use dual oil patterns for the third year in a row, the Brunswick Aalborg International will also be contested on dual oil patterns for the second straight year.

Although dual oil patterns have been a mainstay of international championship competition for the last several years, most other high level singles events still use a single oil pattern, but times are changing.

Even the 2008-09 PBA Tour season is testing the waters with an event that utilizes six different oil patterns and another event will employ dual oil patterns on each pair during the PBA Match Play Championship in Norwich, CT.

The format of the recently concluded PBA National Bowling Stadium Championship followed past Foundation Games, the WTBA World Ranking Masters, the EBT Masters and the ETBF European Champions Cup.

In all those events, one qualifying block is played on a short oil pattern and the other qualifying block is played on a long oil pattern. During the match play rounds, all games are played on pairs where every left lane is conditioned with the long oil pattern and every right lane conditioned with the short oil pattern.

How did this all come about?

There are two major reasons why dual oil patterns came into existence. One seemingly clear but not so obvious reason is the technological advancement of the modern lane machine. In the not so distant past, conditioning bowling lanes was done by hand or by machines that could only condition the lane. The challenge however was the time consuming cleaning of bowling lanes. Today's combination lane machines can consistently condition and clean a bowling lane in less than two minutes making it possible for dual oil pattern events to become a reality.

The other and most significant reason is a group of people came together with a vision and were not afraid to depart from status quo. In the year 2000, then WTBA President PS Nathan called for a World Symposium in Malaysia to address many of the perceived problems related to the sport of bowling.

Out of that symposium, which included the likes of Sid Allen, Tom Kouros, John Davis, Len Nicholson, the late Bill Wasserberger along with other highly respected people in bowling, the WTBA Technical Committee concluded "that a single oil pattern format was unfair, since it overly favored a particular style of play regardless of how the lane was oiled."

During that same symposium, the WTBA Technical Committee also felt the question of "who is the best bowler" needed to be examined further. Through much discussion and digging deeper into the question, the WTBA defined what they feel are the most important traits that should make up a World Class bowler.

The committee agreed to and created the synonym V-PARK which stands for; Versatility, Power, Accuracy, Repeatability and Knowledge. There was one trait however that was at the very top of every members list, Versatility.

The Technical Committee felt that "the ability to bowl over a wide range of conditions elevated a player from one of quality to that of greatness" and therefore led to the conclusion "that WTBA's present oiling procedures were not conducive to identifying and rewarding great players, but instead only identified specialists."

Then committee member Craig Woodhouse suggested the concept of multiple oil patterns and it was unanimously agreed that this would be the standard for all future World Championships.

From where does it go from here?

There is no question that every winner of a dual oil pattern event has garnered the respect of their peers for that week's competition. It would be reaching pretty far for anybody to say "so-and-so" only won because "they matched up" to both oil patterns. In that regard, the WTBA Technical Committee's vision about versatility held true but that doesn't mean dual oil patterns doesn't have it detractors.

There is no debating the fact that airlines have decreased the allowable weight limits and travel by way of air has been a challenge for the modern bowler. Automobile travel has even been impacted by the modern game and the number of bowling balls competitors need, or feel like they need, to travel to any one tournament even in single oil pattern events.

So one can only imagine that one of the more common negatives of these dual oil pattern events is the perception that the players need to travel to tournaments with an increased amount of equipment to combat this extra oil pattern.

Although dual oil pattern events solely utilizing very long and very short oil patterns actually limit the number of ball choices because optimal ball motions are very similar and the best line is normally very defined, as

tournaments move towards dual oil patterns in the medium distance range, that perceived issue will most likely become more reality than perception. When competitive oil patterns are in the medium distance range, all the other variables that make up the playing field come into play more and optimum ball motion becomes an unknown until a player is onsite.

Another remarkable trend in the competitive bowling world the last few years is tournaments being organized and played with severely limited equipment rules or utilizing less frictional bowling balls. The 2005-2007 Dutch DVA Open, the 2006 WTBA World Challenge, the 1997 Scandinavian Plastic Only tournament and multiple Foundation Game events have been held with strict equipment limitations. Some events allowed only one ball while others allowed only one type of ball.

In the Scandinavian Plastic Only event, organizer Ulf Hämånas stated that "many players in the region had the perception that the higher level players were the best because of their unlimited access to high tech equipment."

Once the results were tallied however, those same high level players not only still finished at the top of the leader board, they far outpaced the field. Hämånas said "the equipment advantage perception was replaced with the surprise that the amount of time spent on the lanes practicing actually made the difference, not just getting new balls."

Hämånas further stated, "I think this was the time when a lot of bowlers actually understood the greatness of bowlers like Tomas Leandersson."

So did the winner "match up" best in these events? Much like the 1997 Scandinavian Plastic ball event, according to the other organizers the winners of their events received the same accolades from the competitors as the dual oil pattern event winners, respect from their peers for a job well done. The overall feelings were it was not that the winner matched up the best; it was that the winner bowled the best.

Now in the year 2009, even the PBA Tour is going to hold an event using only one type of bowling ball, the 50th Anniversary PBA plastic ball. In this historic PBA Tour event, all competitors will be limited to two of the special 50th Anniversary plastic balls for the entire event. The main idea is to level the playing field by taking the perceptual equipment advantage, or disadvantage, away so success is determined solely by a player's physical and mental skill.

In other words, the event goal is to "ensure that the abilities of the athlete, first and foremost, will determine the outcome of the competition."

Sound familiar?

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