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The Long and the Short of It: Pattern Play and Ball Choices

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By **Ted Thompson**

At various high level events the last five years, **dual lane conditions** have become more common. These lane patterns are categorized as long and short or could also be referred to as "inside" and "outside". The long pattern normally ranges from 42 to 45 feet in length and the short pattern ranges from 32 to 35 feet in length with both of these lengths having very similar required ball motion characteristics.

Most players normally play on patterns that are 38 to 40 feet in length at their home bowling center or single condition events. These lengths of patterns are used because multiple angles come into play when the pattern is not a blocked recreational pattern.

These non-blocked 38-40 feet pattern lengths however tend to favor a certain style, breakpoint or "match up" all too often which can lead to social un-acceptance. When a blocked recreational pattern or these pattern lengths are used, high flare balls and layouts, which most ball drillers employ in their customers arsenal, normally work the best.

Unfortunately for the players, these same ball choices may not be the best choices for World Championship dual condition events.

For patterns that are shorter or longer than this 38-40 feet range, the breakpoint must be managed in a more defined and minimal manner. One must also look at the oil patterns being used and how they relate to ball motion and what motion would be most advantageous to create the greatest margin for error.

Maximizing margin for error is what all players, coaches and ball drillers should be looking for when deciding on where to play, how to play and what equipment should be used for a specific oil pattern. Not withstanding a specific lane surface characteristics and who you follow.

Let's start with the **short pattern** since it seems to be most challenging for today's modern player, available equipment choices and layouts. As stated before in John Davis's article, "[The long and the short of it](#)", the short condition will be 32 to 35 feet in length.

The high point of the short oil pattern will normally begin from the fifth board and rise to the eighth board. Inside the eighth board, the pattern is completely flat. Since the oil pattern is on the relatively short side (this used to be the normal pattern length before aggressive bowling balls) there is a lot of lane left which other than topography has no definable shape or guidance.

Therefore the player should be targeting along the oil line as long as possible to maximize their room for error. More than likely a player will need to make a few technique adjustments as well. This entails foot placement during the slide, swing direction, hand position and last but not least, correct ball motion.

If a player chooses a ball that is designed to go long and break sharp, it will not be able to read the oil line. If a player chooses a ball that is to aggressive and hooks to soon, it will force the player left and the ball will not retain energy long enough.

How should the short pattern be attacked? Here are some points and characteristics a player and coach should be looking for when playing the short pattern. Line up techniques are for a right handed player, left handers should reverse the information:

GET THE SLIDING FOOT RIGHT!

The main thing a player must do first is make sure they are lining up the correct way. Most people will release the ball about 4-8 boards right (right handed player) of their sliding foot. Since the low point of the pattern has been stated to be outside of the fifth board, if a player is sliding left of 15, most likely they are playing in the flat part of the pattern way too long which minimizes their room for error.

Depending on the player and amount of free hook to the right, the sliding foot should be somewhere as far right as the sixth board to not much left of the 15th board.

KEEP THE INSIDE-OUT SWING PATH TO A MINIMUM!

If a player's swing is coming from the inside to the outside too much, they will have a launch angle that is too high which will make it very difficult to target along the oil line early enough or long enough.

The more inside out your swing path is, the more difficult it is to go up the lane. Swing directions that are straighter down the target line will normally be more advantageous on the short patterns.

KEEP THE HAND QUIET

Historically players that excel on conditions that allow the extreme outside to play tend to be quieter in their release. It really does not matter if your axis rotation is high or low. Pete Weber is one of the best gutter players of the time and his axis rotation is almost 90 degrees.

Get with a qualified coach to experiment what works best for your game and mental mindset.

EQUIPMENT

Choose bowling balls and/or layouts that create an elongated break point! Bowling balls that have high differential RG

values or layouts that maximize the differential in a high differential ball tend to have a break point that is very short in nature. Basically the ball releases energy in a very short length wise area.

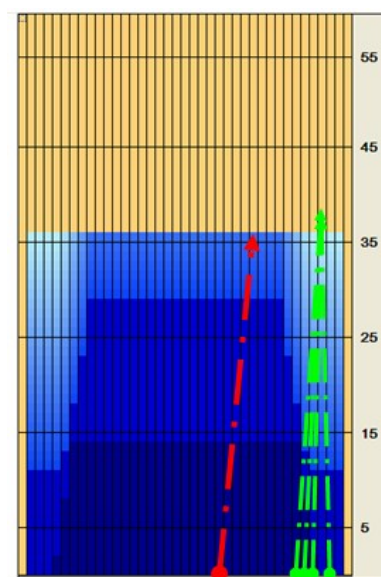
If you do not know your Positive Axis Point, find it before you layout or choose balls for the short and long patterns.

When Chris Barnes won his first PBA Title in Portland Oregon on a 32 foot oil pattern on freshly resurface wood lanes, he used an Navy Quantum with the pin located in his track (about 6 ¾ from his PAP). This helped him keep the ball in play because the weight block was already in a very stable position and therefore flare was virtually eliminated.

When you eliminate flare, you minimize backend reaction. Most players on the PBA Tour will use layouts that place the pin farther from their PAP rather than closer to their PAP. Another option is to use a ball that already has a low flare core, preferably less than .026 differential.

However, the best option for most players is probably a low differential urethane or even a polyester ball. These ball types will allow you target along the oil line for an extended period of time because they release energy in a more continual manner which will maximize your room for error.

At the 2006 World Youth Championships, the players that excelled on the short pattern used low flare weak reactive, urethane or polyester cover stock bowling balls.



Keys to play SHORT patterns!!!

- Move your **feet RIGHT!**
 - Lay down area of the ball to the right
 - More **forward roll** on the fresh
 - Close the hand
 - Break the wrist back - **Less rotation** off the hand
 - **Less change of direction** at the end

Ball Choices

- **Lower differential layouts**
 - **High Rg pins** (5-6 ¾") or **Low Rg pins** (0-2")
- Medium to **Lower differential cores**
- Symmetrical cores
- Don't overlook Urethane or Plastic

On the **long patterns**, the same type of ball motion philosophy should be used. The only difference is within the aggressiveness of the cover stock and how aggressive a player can go with the layout or ball core.

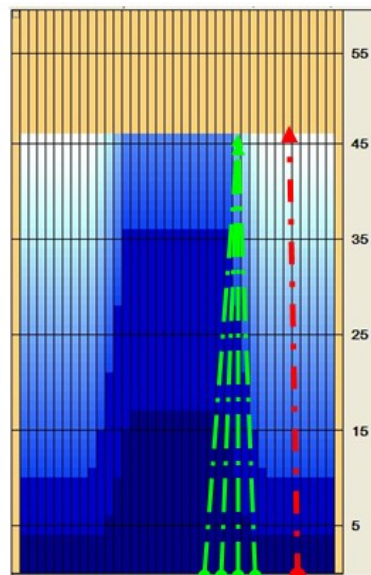
While I was Player Services Director for the PBA Tour, a.k.a. the PBA Ball Drilling Truck, when the players bowled on longer patterns, their ball layout choices were in the 4 ¾" to 6 ¼" layout spectrum from their PAP.

The reason for this is they are trying to control the breakpoint and minimize the backend change of direction, much like the short pattern philosophy. To refer again to John Davis' article again, "the long pattern dictates the ball will hook a minimal amount; a player's break point will usually need to be closer to the pocket." Since the breakpoint needs to be closer to the pocket, backend change of direction must be minimized while at the same time retaining energy.

Many high level players will strategically place an extra hole or the mass bias in a position to enhance these characteristics.

The long oil pattern slope will usually begin at the 10 board and increase to its peak at the 15th board. If your dominant ball path is either outside the 10 board or inside the 15th board, you will be playing in the flattest area of the pattern.

To maximize your margin for error, much like the short pattern, you should be targeting along the slope of the oil pattern.



Keys to play LONG patterns!!!

- Move your **feet LEFT!**
 - Lay down area just inside the "high point"
 - Minimal head belly = **straighter line to breakpoint**
 - **Less change of direction** at the end
 - Keep the ball "in the pocket"
- **More revolutions** off the hand
 - Cleaner release
- Possibly **Slower Ball Speed**

Ball Choices

- Medium to low differential layouts
 - Medium High to High Rg pins (4 1/4" - 5 1/2")
- Medium to high differential cores
- Symmetrical or weak asymmetrical cores
- **Long extended breakpoints**

The dual patterns used at the World Championship level are more defined than most of the patterns used in single condition events and therefore should actually be simpler to figure out. As a player and coach, it is up to you to figure out exactly how to attack a specific oil pattern and lane surface characteristic for your particular style of play.

The spectrum of available equipment is very wide these days so don't be so close minded you don't use it. There is definitely not a rule that says you must use the strongest ball in your bag so don't be afraid to try the weakest ball in your arsenal if the environment warrants it.

One last thought everyone should remember about today's bowling environment. The group of players as a whole can and will make a pattern develop more predictable, more unpredictable, easier or tougher. This unknown will ultimately determine what happens to the development of the oil pattern and what the resulting scoring pace will be.

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