



5 more steps to better service from your pro shop

The second of my three installments will focus on the "intermediate" bowler. Let's define the intermediate bowler as someone having completed one or more bowling seasons but who is not yet competitive at the scratch level.

Again, my goal is to help you improve as a player by creating a greater exchange of information between you and your local pro shop operator. The steps outlined below should make you more aware of what you do physically and the type of conditions on which you compete.

Before I go any further, I would like to address a commonly asked question: *What's the best ball on the market?* There is no one such ball! The question should be, *Which bowling ball best suits my game and will maximize pinfall on the conditions I regularly compete?*

Many extremely popular bowling balls are just not suited for every bowler. However, there is a bowling ball that should maximize your ability to knock down pins. With some forethought, your next bowling ball purchase could be the centerpiece of your bowling arsenal.

Since it is still quite early in this bowling season, consider using the following five tips not only for getting better service from your shop operator but also to improve your game.

1. Become more aware of the characteristics of your own game.

After a complete season of competition, you should be able to tell the shop operator some of the characteristics of your game. Let the shop operator know if your ball speed is fast, moderate, or slow and also the type of hooking reaction you normally generate.

Some of the local bowling centers have the software and graphics that provide your ball speed, pocket angle of entry, and an assortment of other information. Be prepared to draw diagrams showing how and where you normally play on the lanes in case you cannot put this information into words.

This type of information is of huge

benefit to the shop operator who has not seen you bowl. Thus, he is better able to determine a suitable bowling ball with the right surface and the best layout to maximize your on-lane performance.

2. Consider switching to a fingertip grip.

Most people start out with the conventional grip, where the edge of the finger holes is near the second joint, and they feel really comfortable with this grip. When fitted properly, this grip provides maximum comfort, but it usually does not allow an individual to reach his full potential as a player because it does not maximize the lift and revolutions imparted to the bowling ball.

The fingertip grip is recommended for most bowlers.

The fingertip grip places the edge of the finger holes near the first joint. This allows more of the ball to rest in the palm of your hand in a more natural position.

The fingertip grip is recommended for most bowlers because this fit allows for greater flexibility and increased control. The fingertip grip also allows the shop operator greater flexibility in drill patterns; he can manipulate ball reaction to better suit an individual player's skill level and physical game characteristics.

3. Assess the type(s) of conditions you compete on most.

As you bowl during the course of the season, trends in the lane conditions will develop. Determine if the conditions are regularly a heavy oil pattern, a moderate condition, or one that hooks at the foul line.

If the shop operator is not familiar with the center where you bowl, this information will help him determine the types of bowling balls, surfaces, and layouts that might work best for you.

Again, always bring your current bowling equipment to the shop with you. This could let the shop operator know if you need a major upgrade in

bowling equipment or if a subtle tweaking is in order.

4. Take notes periodically on your lane performance.

Good bowling comes through mental and physical repetition. Taking notes on your performances and reviewing them periodically help keep you mentally and physically focused.

One tool that I do not see being used very often is the personal bowling record book. All pro shops carry them, and they can be used to write down notes on your performance on any given league outing. You can record strikes, spare breaks, and game/set totals. This type of detailed information can be used to determine which spares need additional work. The shop operator may spot trends as they develop.

Example: You consistently score below average in your third game. The cause may be fatigue, and you may want to consider using a lighter-weight ball.

5. Get yourself on videotape.

I recommend every bowler see themselves on tape at least once. For those really serious about improving, get videotaped twice a year. Talk to your shop operator about formal lessons and taping. Most shops are fairly inexpensive and usually have the equipment on hand.

This is also something you can do without the formal instruction, but do consider looking at the end result with your shop operator. However, the combination of personal instruction and videotaping serves two purposes: You have the one-on-one instruction that you need and a permanent recording to review at any time.

In addition to expert drilling, many pro shops have certified instructors on hand, and some feature our local PBA players and representatives. From my own experiences in the game, many of the local professionals and scratch players are willing to help others and promote the game we all love. So do not hesitate to ask questions, not only of the shop operators but also of the really good bowlers you may see in your weekly league competition.

As always, good luck, good bowling, and high scores.

Chris Ward operates the Twelve in a Row Pro Shop, which now is located at 5412 Queens Chapel Road in Hyattsville.