



Bowling ball cleaning and maintenance

Periodically, we encounter customers whose scores have slipped and they've wondered why the bowling ball that worked so well for them last season is no longer producing those big games and sets. We'll assume for the sake of this article that you maintain a good practice regimen, your ball surfaces and layouts match the conditions you play on, and your mechanics are still relatively flawless.

So, the question that begs to be answered is, *Are you making sure that your bowling balls are properly cleaned and maintained?*

Let's take some time and review ball maintenance basics.

1 There are special towels on the market that really do a good job of cleaning the excess conditioner and dirt from the surface and pores of the bowling balls.

Even with the traditional bowling towels, it is always good to wipe off the lane conditioner so the bowling ball does not become overly saturated during the course of a season.

Once a bowling ball becomes saturated with lane conditioner, your ball reaction and hit usually suffers.

Once a bowling ball becomes saturated with lane conditioner, your ball reaction and hit usually suffers. This is because the ball no longer grips the lane properly and generates the usual power on the point of impact with the pins. How often you wipe off your bowling ball is completely up to you.

Some competitors wipe their bowling balls off after every shot. This is ideal because your reaction will remain predictable and clean.

One last thing: Clean your towel regularly. Otherwise, you are just further clogging the pores on the bowling ball's surface with dirt and grime.

2 Products are available for quick particle or reactive surface restoration.

For those who have not let your equipment get too bad, there is an assortment of products designed to maintain/restore the bowling ball surface quickly and inexpensively. There are cleaners, polishers, liquid sandpaper, and other products to make the ball hook sooner or skid farther. Once purchased, you can apply these products and obtain very good results without having to visit your favorite pro shop.

3 Clean and/or polish every 12 to 15 games.

Serious competitors may find it necessary to do this more often than 12 to 15 games. I usually bring all of my equipment into the shop once a week for a thorough clean, polish, and surface touch-up. My dull pieces are usually just cleaned with a non-abrasive cleaner like "Spray Nine."

I believe in keeping my equipment in accordance with factory specs. All manufacturers tell you how the ball was finished prior to shipping. If the ball was sanded

to 600 and matted/polished, that is how I usually keep it for competition. There are times that I will tweak a surface to get something different in the reaction, but we will leave that for another article.

4 Resurface after every 100 to 120 games.

Anything that causes your bowling ball to react or not react the way you are accustomed may be a sign of surface damage or saturation. In those instances, a resurface job (by your favorite shop operator) may be just what you need to get those 200+ games rolling again out of your favorite piece.

Constantly look at your bowling ball for track area burns and any other sorts

of scars, nicks, and dings. Also, make it a point to know the lane surface type on which you regularly compete, whether it is wood or synthetic. Primarily, we bowl on synthetic lanes in this area, but knowing the difference between wood and synthetic lanes and how they track up your equipment also dictate how often you clean, polish, or resurface your bowling balls.

Many shop operators have some sort of resurface machine that can restore most bowling balls to almost-new condition. Of course, these machines are not miracle workers and can't fix everything. A good measure is if you can get a significant portion of your fingernail in the gash, we probably could not get it completely out with a resurface job.

5 Have your favorite pro shop operator use a chemical treatment to remove lane conditioner.

Most reactive and particle coverstocks are designed to soak up lane conditioner. Most pro shops have a chemical delivery system that will draw lane conditioner out of the bowling ball.

At some point, the ball will get saturated to the core and stop reacting the way it did when you first purchased it. You may also feel the moisture inside your finger and thumbholes, causing your grip to feel slightly different than your original fit.

As a player, the last thing I want happening is anything takes away from the way the ball feels in my hand. (By the way, you can prevent this from happening by using a thumb slug or insert.)

A good visual inspection after each outing should let you know if your equipment needs some attention. Bowling balls are not designed to last forever; however, you can prolong the usage and optimize your scores by properly maintaining the bowling ball's surface.

As a shop owner, I would love to sell you a bowling ball every time your scores start to slip. However, in most cases, some good bowling ball maintenance will get you back on the right path.

As always, good luck and good bowling.

Chris Ward operates the Twelve In A Row Pro Shop in Adelphi. He can be reached via E-mail at Christopherdw@earthlink.net.