

Avoid headaches by understanding new specs for “no-thumb” bowlers

Non-use of thumb hole means balance hole not permitted

By **Jim Lewis**

One of the upcoming season’s new changes within equipment specifications could present some unexpected headaches. The purpose of this paper is to make bowlers aware of this change so that the situations that will arise during the season can be addressed with some knowledge. The changes will be contained in places within pages 6-9 in the *USBC Equipment Specifications and Certifications Manual*.

Another concern is that many leagues ended in May, and many bowlers will not be aware of this specification change. Serious competitive bowlers will most likely be aware of this change and how it impacts them if they are no-thumb/two-handed bowlers and also most likely to think of others who bowl in their leagues that *do* regularly or occasionally bowl no-thumb/two-handed.

The no-thumb/two-handed release is more common in bowlers newer to the sport, and often these people are not serious bowlers. This style typically results from a person wanting to palm the ball and not liking

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the tighter feel or wearing of the skin while bowling with their thumb in the ball. Hook is usually more easily generated for these persons with the plastic house balls. These are the people that will more likely be impacted without knowing the specification change.

The main thrust of the rule change is that a no-thumb/two-handed release bowler who was previously able to use balls with finger holes and a thumb hole and a balance hole, must have any ball with thumb hole and balance hole corrected so that there is one or the other but not both a thumb hole and a balance hole.

Previously there was a provision that if the bowler covered any unused thumb hole with their palm during the delivery then the existing thumb hole would not count against this specification. That provision will no longer apply.

Another impact will be a new awareness amongst the general bowling population that balls need to be weighed to verify “legal” static weights. The static weights are more of a technicality in the modern game of high-revving cores and modern, high-friction ball coverstocks, but it is a standard that USBC upholds and is most evident at the USBC Open Championships, where all balls are weighed prior to competition.

The static weights of a ball are the positive/negative side weights, finger/thumb weights, and top/bottom weights. The specification varies depending on the weight of ball—under 8 pounds, 8 to 10 pounds, and over 10 pounds have different sets of specification. The new specification change could impact some no-thumb/two-handed youth bowlers who may use balls under and over 10 pounds and many more bowlers of the same release type who will almost always use over 10 pounds.

My knowledge of the rule change is based in my understanding of it from my work perspective as a pro shop operator, a competitive bowler, and as an association director. From a pro shop perspective, when I first was made aware of this, I contacted my highest profile no-thumb/two-handed release customers, as I know these people would be observed in the upcoming season. I went to talk to some impacted customers at a center that evening, and the impacted customers were already alert to the new specification change via the *BOWL.com* news release. Someone else commented, “You know you are using an illegal ball, and we will be watching you in August to see what bowling balls you are using.” Some bowlers impacted by this change will need to plug their equipment to make adjustments to drilling layout or drill completely new balls, which in some cases could be costly.

The specification change will cause some to observe and ask whether balls being used by the no-thumb release/two-handed bowlers are legal in terms of number of drilled holes (fingers, thumb, and balance hole)

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are evident in the ball *and* question whether the ball is legal in static weights in two center of gravity locations.

The center of gravity for a bowler with a standard release would be halfway between the fingers and thumb hole. That is the only spot that needs to be considered *unless* that same bowler switches to a no-thumb/two-handed release, which would then require the ball to be weighed properly within specs in two center of gravity locations. One would be between the fingers for the no-thumb release and then also halfway between the fingers and thumb for the standard thumb-in release.

In my experience as a pro shop operator, I find in some situations, a ball drilled with finger holes and a large deep thumb hole is not always going to weigh out properly for both centers of gravity. The only way to confirm static weights is to weigh the ball on a scale that needs to be calibrated and *available*, which is not likely to be the case during bowling sessions.

As a pro shop operator and a bowler, I know that in today's bowling environment, bowlers typically only have their drilled bowling ball checked for legal static weights at the USBC nationally certified tournaments and some other select tournaments. This specification change could cause some unexpected situations where a bowler has his/her ball's legality called into question.

There are times where some that bowl with their thumb in the ball may pick up a ball and toss a shot down the lane either in disgust, practicing, or just getting finished in "fashion." These bowlers would technically be violating the specification change if they use balls that also have balance holes and will likely create situations where the opposing team or someone observing will call out the situation as a violation.

USBC suggests in its "Frequently Asked Questions" that a bowler must be given the opportunity to remove a ball in violation of the specification from competition so that it may be corrected. The penalty for using a ball knowingly in violation of the new specification is forfeiture of scores.

This is a headache that can be averted in many situations if the message is given to bowlers prior to starting their leagues.

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