

# STAYING LINED UP, PART 2

## The surprising challenge of house shots

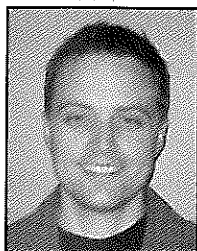
**L**ast month, I introduced a decision-making framework (see Decision Flow Chart) to help bowlers deal with changing ball reaction as lanes transition. This month, we will be applying that framework to ‘house shots’. They come in all shapes and lengths and, while they are generally high scoring, they can’t all be attacked the same way. Even more importantly, they don’t all break down the same way.

I mentioned at the end of the last article that house shots can be challenging despite the general assumption that they are easy. I’ll explain that statement a little later, but first I want to touch on two key elements of the decision-making process: what happened (ball reaction) and the adjustment decision.

### The adjustment

We’ll start at the end of the decision-making process since that deals with your equipment and physical abilities. According to the framework, you will make your adjustment decision by selecting from your own preferred adjustments and physical tools. Those tools are your bowling balls.

Last month, I gave a brief overview of the variety of balls necessary to give different reaction shapes and maximize your options. I wanted to go into a few more specifics this month as this will relate to selecting equipment. Let us suppose, for example, that your analysis leads you to the conclusion you



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need to create more length and sharper backend. A ball change is a possibility but only if you’ve got the equipment to do so.

Let’s put it this way. I usually use a sanded ball on the fresh house shot in my local league and move to pearlized balls that have a sharper breakpoint shape as the lanes break down. Notice that I did not refer to how much each ball hooks. Like most bowlers, I will usually move left as the lanes break down and create more axis rotation as I do so but at a certain point it is simply more effective to change balls. By going beyond that point, I’m forced to not only go past my own physical comfort zone but also beyond the sanded ball’s effectiveness.

I mentioned in the last article that a variety of balls is necessary to best cope with changing lane conditions. Refer to the ‘House Shot Arsenal’ for my suggestions on building an arsenal for typical



### HOUSE SHOT ARSENAL

Aggressive Arc	Columbia Full Swing Ebonite Mission
Aggressive Skid-Flip	Brunswick Zone Classic Ebonite Mission 2.0
Medium Arc	Ebonite V2 Sweet Ebonite Striking Motion Brunswick Python
Medium/Weak Skid-Flip	Ebonite Blue Ice Columbia Freeze Plastic T Zone Maxim White Dot

house shots and some of the balls I've used in the past. Keep in mind that these are suggested reaction shapes, not balls and layouts. The exact ball and layouts will differ for each bowler.

#### What happened?

Moving back to the third step in the decision-making framework, figuring out what happened correctly will often make the actual adjustment very easy to figure out. So, how do we go about figuring out what happened on the last shot? First, watch the ball go down the lane. Second, watch it roll off the pin deck. These two things seem so simple I shouldn't even bring them up but one or the other is often overlooked.

Many bowlers seem to watch the ball roll over the target (either the dots or arrows) and then look up to see the ball hit the pins. By not watching how the ball is reacting for the last 40 feet of the lane, bowlers are depriving themselves of valuable information. By only watching the ball hit the pins, you'll miss the shape the ball is making. That shape is your adjustment criteria and not watching it will result in the wrong adjustment or none at all.

One of the first things I learned when becoming a 'good' bowler was that you need to watch the ball roll off the pin deck. This gives you information about the angle of entry and how much energy the ball had when it entered the pocket.

By not paying attention, you miss clues about what the next adjustment will be.

When it comes right down to it, there are really only a few things that can happen when the ball hits the lane. It will skid, then enter the hook and roll phases too early or too late (creating the wrong shape), or the ball will hook too little or too much while making the correct shape. The tough part is figuring out which one (or ones) is happening.

It is not enough to say, "I threw it well and left a 4 pin," or, "I threw it badly and left a Greek Church." When answering the "what happened" question, you need to define the answer in terms of ball reaction.

By acquainting yourself with your ball reaction and watching the ball roll down the lane and off the pin deck, you will be able to make clear statements that lead to good decisions. "I threw it well and left a 4 pin" will turn into, "I threw it well but it skidded too far and came in too much at the back, for a 4 pin." The Greek Church will become, "I missed too far right and the ball grabbed early and rolled out on the nose for a split." This kind of information is REALLY what you need in order to make good decisions and proper adjustments.

#### Dealing with house shots as they transition

House shots are, by and large, easy. Despite this, you still see bowlers who average 230 shooting low or sub-600s from time to time and bowlers averaging 200 shoot low 500s. So what has gone wrong? Some will blame it on an 'off night' when technique has left them. Others will blame lane conditions and the influence of other bowlers. Often both items come into play. The beauty of having a decision-making process that takes into account how you're throwing the ball as well as how it's reacting, is that you can make decisions based on these factors, not in spite of them.

So, let's get down to basic house shot characteristics. Typically they are of medium length,

between 37 and 41 feet long. There is always dry to the outside. There is usually a puddle of oil in the middle. None of this is news. What's important here is the dry on the outside and the length of the pattern. One of the reasons house shots are easier is that they cater to all styles of play. By doing so, they create a defined target window down the lane that is usually pretty large.

This target window is the key to making your adjustments. Rather than simply making adjustments based on lateral motion (left to right), it's important to watch ball reaction based on the lengthwise motion: skid, hook, and roll, the three phases of ball motion. The ball has to be in the target window and in the correct roll phase for optimum carry.

Based on how you are throwing it and how you are getting to the target window, you can manipulate the three phases through the various adjustment possibilities. When you are lined up on a house shot, it won't last forever and the ball reaction gives clues about what to change and how much to change it. Defining what happened based on the ball motion and not total hook will almost always result in better adjustments.

For example, it's a common misconception that leaving a 9 pin is a bad break or conversely, a sign the ball is hooking too much. I've often heard people say "too much ball!" Most people believe this because the entry angle is high. From a 'hook' point of view, that makes sense. But let's define what just happened based on ball motion. "I threw it well and the ball went a little long then came in too sharply to leave a 9 pin." Looking at the reaction, the ball simply did not hit its roll phase soon enough. With that knowledge in hand, you can proceed to the next step and figure out what would be a solution to that problem.

In my case, I'd usually manipulate hand position to get more forward roll on the ball but if I'm already doing that, I need to go to a STRONGER bowling ball. Sounds ridiculous, right? I just went high flush and left a 9 pin and now I want to go to something stronger. Why? Because a stronger ball will lose energy faster and get into the roll

state faster. I might need to make a move left as well to compensate for the total hook but the goal is getting the ball to create the right angle entering the pins. Hook comes second.

Now let's take the same example, add a 4 pin to the mix, and make it a not so good shot.

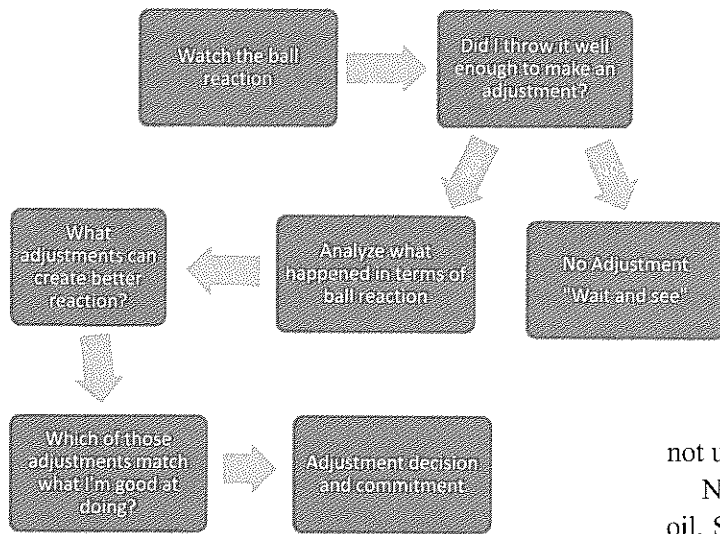
- a) Watch the ball reaction – Just because you didn't throw it great doesn't mean you can't learn something. Pay attention to what the ball does.
- b) Did I throw it well enough? – It was a 6/10. I came around it too much. Normally good enough for a nine count but that wasn't even close.
- c) What happened? – The ball skidded too far and the change of direction was too violent. I went high with too much angle and left a 4-9.
- d) What adjustments correct what just happened? – The ball needs to roll sooner and I know I'll throw it better next time and be more 'up the back'. I need to move left as well or go with a weaker ball.
- e) What is my preferred adjustment? – For me, it's line adjustments and hand changes over ball changes. Your adjustment preferences may be different.
- f) Conclusion – Move a little left and throw a better shot (personal based on #5).

What's important to note here is that there is no time to waste in making adjustments on house shots. One of the reasons they can be challenging is because of their higher scoring pace. Wasting another frame because of a shot that wasn't perfect only keeps you behind pace even longer. It's why a good decision-making process will take into consideration how good the last shot was and if you really deserved what you left.

Easy conditions offer a different kind of challenge from sport and PBA patterns. One of those is dealing with the higher scoring pace and being forced to make quicker decisions to maximize carry, rather than simply hitting the pocket. Having a process in place helps you be a step ahead of other bowlers. The other challenge is a mental hurdle when you start to struggle. We've




### DECISION FLOW CHART



all thought, "This is so easy. I should be doing better!" Those thoughts are counter-productive and should be replaced by a decision-making process that will actually help you find a way to succeed.

When bowling on house shots, the value of accuracy and shot-making are discounted thanks to the built-in margin for error. It's a reality of the game and not something to complain about. Merely accept it as the scoring environment for today's league or tournament and then execute as you normally would. Don't try to be perfect, make good decisions quickly, and you'll generally be rewarded more often than the bowler trying to out-execute everyone while

not using the resource between his ears.

Next month we'll talk about bowling on short oil. Short oil is probably the easiest of the different sport shot lengths when it is played correctly. Get lined up on short oil, make smart adjustments, and you'll find it can be like playing a house shot! More on how to do that next month. 

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