

Road to Reading Lanes

Reading the Lanes Side to Side

Before you hit the lanes, you first need to understand the side-to-side oil pattern. Where is the least amount of oil versus the most oil?

The best way to do this is by using parallel lines. All common lane conditions – house shots and sport patterns, except the U.S. Open – have some blend in the oil side to side. You need to know how to see where the lightest oil is and how the blend in the oil progresses from one side to the other. For this evaluation, we will use the 5 board to the 20 board, referencing the right side. Left-handers have to reverse it, but it's the same both ways.

To figure out your parallel lines, you first need to look where the inside of your sliding foot ends. From there, you need to know how far the ball is from your ankle (which varies from player to player and usually is between 5 to 7 boards), so you know at what board the ball is crossing the foul line. Once you find these two points, you next need to have your target in the correct place, so the ball crosses at the arrows on the same board it crossed the foul line.

The first place to start would be parallel, 5 board at release to the 5 board at the arrows. Most bowlers will miss inside of the board they are looking at. For example, if you slide on board 11, and your ball crosses the foul line on board 5, but you look at board 5, you probably will hit about the board 7 at the arrows. You would have to look at the 3 board to hit the 5 board, so your ball travels parallel to the boards on the way down the lane.

Once you know your parallel line up to roll the ball over 5 at the foul line to 5 at the arrows, you are prepared to move across the lane to figure the blend of the oil.

For example: start at 5-5 then go 10 -10, 15-15 and 20-20. From these four points, you are strictly looking at how far the ball slides before it hooks. You need to make believe there are no pins, and you don't care where the ball ends up.

Now, let's look at the ball reaction of our test shots. Let's say the 5-5 lineup produces enough hook that the ball hits the head pin straight on (board 20). That means the ball hooked 15 boards. With the 10-10, the ball hits the head pin square again, meaning your ball only hooked 10 boards. At 15-15, the ball hits the 2 pin square in the face, which is about the 25 board. You have 10 boards of hook there also. The final test would be 20-20, and the ball hits the 4 pin. You still have about 10 boards of hook.



The information you received from your test shots tells you the oil is very light on the 5 board, heavier on the 10 board and evenly distributed on the lane from 10 to 20. This shows there is a big difference in how much the ball hooks between the 5 and 10 boards and that there is no difference in how much it hooks between 10 and 20.

Armed with this info, you know the oil is flat between 10 and 20, and there is a big difference in the amount of oil between 5 and 10. Now you know approximately where the heaviest amount of oil meets the least amount of oil. You now are prepared to fine-tune your alignment to play the lane correctly within a few shots. The more you do this and understand it, the less time it will take you to line up.

Reading the Lanes Front to Back.

Once you have figured out the oil pattern side to side, next you need to figure out the oil front to back.

Going back to our parallel alignments you next need to see how far the ball slides down the lane before it hooks. Let's say the 5 to 5 alignment hit the head pin at the 20 board, knowing how much hook your go to release produces is important. This would be 15 boards of hook and probably a medium length distance. Let's say your 5 to 5 alignment hit the 3 pin, producing about 10 boards of hook, you can assume the pattern distance was pretty long. On the opposite end if your ball hit the 7 pin on your 5 board parallel alignment and your 10 to 10 alignment hit the 4 pin you would know the oil pattern is short. But you would also know that there is a big difference in the amount of oil between 5 and 10, so that would still be the best place to start fine tuning your alignment for the pattern.

Now you need to determine the ball: it's drilling and surfaces to allow you to play that area of the lane. The other major factor is your release that also has to compliment playing that part of the lane.

For the most part when the dominate play area on a fresh condition is outside you will need balls that roll and don't change direction hard when it reaches the end of the pattern regardless of the length. This also means your release needs to provide more forward roll (less axis rotation). The outside angle will provide enough angle into the pocket without you having to have the ball and release provide more angle.

