

Technical Committee Congress Report

2003

Introduction

In early 2000, a World Symposium was held in Malaysia where guest speakers addressed many perceived problems related to the "State of Bowling". In addition, an open forum was encouraged to allow voices from all areas of the world to debate issues they felt important to their region. Immediately after its conclusion the Technical Committee met for three days to address the issues illuminated in the symposium and look for possible solutions.

The three-days of the Technical Committee meeting were heated to say the least. Many years of frustration had been pent-up in many of the attendees and each was given a chance to voice their views. Eventually, the committee was able to roll their sleeves up and get down to work on addressing the issues raised.

Fairness

The most volatile discussion centered on the inequality to all styles of play seen in the present-day lane conditions. John Davis (Kegel) and Lenny Nicholson (former PBA lane man) gave council to the committee on the quest for the illusive "perfect lane condition". They concluded that it was not possible at this time to put down an oiling that would be fair to all styles of play (lefty's, righty's, spinners, straighter players, hi-rev players etc).

It directed the committee to conclude that a single condition format was unfair, since it favored a particular style of play regardless of how the lane was oiled.

The Technical Delegates decision on what pattern to put down therefore burdened him/her with deciding directly who would win the competition. It placed the TD in a lose-lose position, no matter what decision was made someone was going to be unfairly treated. Therefore the TD's integrity would always be questioned. The environment fuelled by bowler and official's frustration was often explosive and negative debate the order of the day on most concourses shortly after the conclusion of any event.

Who is the Best Bowler?

Further, many members of the committee felt this dilemma exposed the fact that tournaments were actually being won by specialists (players that bowled well on specific types of pattern, volume of oil, ratio of oil from middle to outside, etc) and that bowlers with skills to accommodate a wide range of conditions were possibly not being recognized.

The question of "who is the best bowler", needed to be examined. In looking deeper into this question the committee listed the common denominators of great players of both past and present.

Versatility
Accuracy
Power
Repeatability
Knowledge

Versatility was prominent on everyone's list, the ability to bowl over a wide range of conditions it felt elevated a player from one of quality to that of greatness. This therefore led to the conclusion that WTBA's present oiling procedures were not conducive to identifying the games great players but instead identified only the specialists.

Multi-condition Format

Evolving from the best bowler discussion, the committee debated what era of bowling produced the best players (60's, 70's, 90's etc). Each member preferred the players from their era and the playing conditions that supported their prominence. Again the committee was being forced into deciding what style of play they would promote through the adoption of a specific lane conditioning policy.

How could WTBA provide an environment that would incorporate all the best components of each era?

The answer came from a member of the committee, Craig Woodhouse who put forward the concept of multiple conditions. **Bowling on a number of different conditions could incorporate each different bowling era's style of play and more importantly identify and promote the great players while still recognizing the specialists.**

The committee decided through the help of John Davis and The Foundation Games to research this concept further. Many tournaments were conducted ranging from International Open Championships to College & Pro competitions. Many observations were made and concluded from these competitions. The final evaluation however could only be done during an official WTBA championship, so the committee asked permission from the congress in Denmark for the zones to hold a championship under a multi-condition format. The American Zone & Asian Zone accepted and held their championships in Argentina & Hong Kong respectively under the new concept.

Some of the observations identified from these many competitions included:

- *No winner of an single lane-condition won the overall title*
- *Players generally enjoyed the challenge of testing their skills against multiple conditions*
- *Vulnerabilities in the specialists games were identified*
- *The best players raised to the top of the overall standings*
- *The committee felt generally the multi-condition format was fair & provided integrity to the competition*

- *More games were needed to allow players to adjust to the changes and elevate the true champion*

Negative responses from the Zone Championships were directed towards the competition format not the multi-condition concept. To bowl 3 games on the short and then 3 on the long oiling was considered unfair relative to going from long to short. The TC agrees unanimously with this observation. This will be addressed in this document within the Technical Committee Format section.

There is a unanimous consensus within the Technical Committee that multi-condition format is the path to take for all future WTBA championships.

Limited Bowling Balls

Sport as a whole is being redefined by the advancements in technology. Golf, as a case in point, has been forced to lengthen courses, plant trees in strategic positions, shrink the width of fairways etc, to attempt to negate the advancement in club design and increased golf ball distances.

Bowling, following the same logic, has attempted to increase the volume of oil we distribute on the lane. This has been done to overcome the aggressive coverstocks of the modern day bowling ball. It is a competition (oil verses ball) that is still escalating as I write.

The industry marketplace dictates increased friction characteristics and while recreational bowlers continue to be seduced by the quest for more hook the manufacturers will accommodate the market's needs, rightfully so.

Sport bowling however, is now faced with a serious dilemma. The need to acquire technical skills to overcome changes in lane conditions seen in the past era's is now accommodated by a change in equipment. The committee by recognizing that versatility was the component that elevated the bowler to the status of greatness, needs to establish an environment that forces the bowler to acquire the ability to change speeds, manipulate release variations, aiming system adjustments etc. **Simply changing lane conditions doesn't guarantee that mandate if a bowler can just change balls to overcome their deficiency.**

By accepting versatility as an element of the elite player and therefore an objective of any format change adopted by the committee, multiple bowling balls must be considered in conflict with this concept.

It was suggested at the committee level that we should force the bowlers to ball with one ball. However, the committee felt that knowledge of bowling balls is now an established component of the modern day player and should not be eliminated. If you accept this premise, that knowledge should be considered a prerequisite to becoming an elite player.

The more lane-conditions bowlers have to play and the less equipment they are allowed to use the more versatility in their technical skills they require to succeed.

A compromise is necessary between the one-ball concept and the unlimited environment we presently play under. A limitation in number of bowling balls allowed to use in the championship is the obvious answer. But how many? The Technical Committee recommended 4 balls but the rule settled at 6 balls due to further discussion at the Presidium. The perfect number however will eventually emerge as competitions are conducted under these restrictions. This limitation on balls actually helps the player with superior knowledge, since he/she now has an advantage over those players that choose inappropriate equipment for the condition. Since this knowledge is considered a skill this advantage should be encouraged. With unlimited equipment, bowlers with unlimited resources can bring 20 balls regardless of excess luggage restrictions and therefore have an unfair advantage over their fellow competitors. The Technical Committee believes that this does not create a level playing field.

The Technical Committee concluded multi-conditions combined with limited bowling balls increased versatility and elevated the best players and contributed to greater fairness and integrity.

Technical Committee Format

Once these concepts were adopted the committee set about the task of producing a championship format for the Tournament Committee to consider.

One of the problems bowling has faced is our inability to market the complexities of our game. The ever-changing lane condition, the effect lane conditions have on scoring potential, why a bowler wins on one condition but finishes near the bottom on another, have rarely been explained to the sporting public. This has been due to the believe that it will confuse the public, yet sports such as American Football have complicated terminology but over time the public and media have consumed it.

Tennis has grass courts, clay and hardcourt, each discipline is recognized and rewarded. The public understands the difference and accepts the recognition. Bowling on the other hand also has different disciplines, low friction lanes (high volumes of oil), high friction (low volume) and everywhere in between. We however don't even have a system to recognize those disciplines. A simple question like "who is the best dry lane bowler in the world?" Under the present format we have no answer!! Maybe we need to look outside the box and ruffle the status quo by adopting separate events in order to recognize each discipline. The committee felt that a low (heavy oil) & high (dry lane) friction champion should be incorporated in the playing format.

Countries have lane condition bias, through no fault of their own. Proprietors control the playing conditions since the bowlers cannot dictate the oiling procedure; it is at the mercy of the proprietor. Many countries proprietors adopt a similar condition, which leads us to become *products of our environment*. Through no fault of their own bowlers

from a particular country only bowl on a specific style of conditioning e.g. dry lanes, when they arrive at the world championships they bowl on heavy oil by comparison and therefore have no sensory knowledge of how to adapt, what technical skill adjustments are necessary, what ball dynamics are required etc. This eliminates their chances before even one ball is thrown in earnest.

Once again, the Technical Committee felt this is not a level playing field. Through the format proposed by the Technical Committee, those bowlers in this predicament can be given an opportunity to show the world their particular talent, through the introduction of a high friction discipline (e.g. short oil all-events), and rewarding their dedication by awarding a medal for their specialty. **This would surely increase the opportunity for medals from smaller and/or less advantaged countries.**

In addition, when looking at proposing a new format the committee expressed the concerns of athlete's worldwide, namely not enough games and felt the games should be increased in each event.

The world championship format has ALWAYS been confusing to media and non-bowlers alike, due to the crowning of three singles champions, all-events, singles and masters. Even bowlers are divided over which event actually constitutes the champion. Although traditionally, we consider the masters winner the overall champion, many feel the all-events is more difficult to win and therefore the true champion. The obvious solution is to eliminate two of the events; the down side however is devastating to those countries in South America and Asia that depend on medals for government support.

The trio's competition has also been ridiculed over the years; many feel it has no status, certainly not like 5-man, doubles or individual events and should be eliminated. Although this has some merit, again losing a medal opportunity far out weights the benefit of that solution.

Taking all these things in consideration the Technical Committee submitted the following proposal to the Tournament Committee:

Doubles 8 games	Short oil pattern	Short oil discipline Doubles Champion	Medal
Doubles 8 games	Long oil pattern	Long oil discipline Doubles Champion	Medal
		Combined doubles champion (16 games)	Medal
5-man 4 games	Short oil pattern	Short oil discipline Team Champion	Medal
5-man 4 games	Long oil pattern	Long oil discipline Team Champion	Medal
		Combined Team Champion (8 games)	Medal
Short oil discipline All-events Champion (12 games, 8 doubles & 4 team)			Medal
Long oil discipline All-events Champion (12 games, 8 doubles & 4 team)			Medal
Masters 12 games	Short oil pattern		
Masters 12 games	Long oil pattern	Individual Champion (48 games)	Medal

The Masters event would qualify 24 players and be competed through 24 games of match play with pinfall carried forward from the doubles and team events (24 games). The total amount of games would therefore be 48 games and be considered by the bowlers a true champion. Thirty points bonus awarded for each victory in match play.

The committee did not include a stepladder since it felt that the champion should be over a length of games and not have world championship decided by one or two games.

This format would be finished in 12 days (practice sessions included) decrease the number of events, increase the games per event, increase the chance of success for smaller federations and most importantly increase the medals from 12 to 18.

Oiling Ratio

A parameter of not more than 2.5-1 ratios from the middle portion across the lane to the outside has been passed and adopted for all official WTBA championships. This ratio was researched over a number of competitions and was found to produce a fair scoring condition without steer-ability.

5-unit Rule

The TC decided to eliminate the 5-unit rule since it caused problems of over/under in each event's initial stages and inconsistencies during the transition phase of lane breakdown.

Compulsory Ball Weighing

The Technical Committee has recommended doing away with compulsory ball checks at official championships. It instead is recommending optional weight-in, random checks and compulsory checks on all medal winners. This should speed up the process and place the responsibility squarely on the bowler to make sure their equipment is legal.

What's in the future for the next WTBA Technical Committee?

Further research is on the cards related to the format of play. New ideas such as that given by Magnus Johnson of having the right lane with one condition and the left another will be examined. Competitions based on the short & long oil discipline will continue to find the parameters that produce a scoring equality between the two conditions. At some point the bowling fraternity will have come to a consensus that static weights are not performance enhancing and the weighting concept will be dropped altogether. It is in the opinion of some members of the committee an out-dated-concept.

In conclusion

Dr Nathan appointed a group of characters that worked because it consisted of strong willed independent mavericks that strived only for what they thought was best for the game. They did so with passion and commitment and ignored the political considerations that could have paralyzed the process. All contributed considerably and should feel immensely proud of their contribution. Craig Woodhouse, Ruben Ghiragossian, Joyce Deitch & Yap Kok Wee gave this committee guidance and unwavering integrity. Tom Kouros made us respect the history of the game and earned the respect of all that listened to him. Special thanks must go to John Davis who without his knowledge, passion and massive financial contribution, this committee would have failed in its mandate. Guys, thanks for this wonderful experience, these memories will stay with me the rest of my life.

For bowling,

Sid Allen