

## 20 QUESTIONS

# Mike Sinek

*Mike Sinek is one the area's biggest proponents of Sport Bowling—remaining so especially after experiencing some of the lane conditions offered by the new PBA Experience leagues. In fact, he will always have a local connection to Sport Bowling because on October 30, 2006 at The Lanes Fort Meade the left-hander became the first NCAUSBCA member to toss a perfect game in Sport Bowling competition.*

*Sinek, a sales associate at the Sports Plus/Carmen Don Pro Shop in Alexandria who is on the Roto Grip staff, is vice president of Relative Technologies, a computer-aided drafting firm. He recently responded to 20 questions posed by editor Bob Cosgrove.*

**Can you describe the Sport Bowling lane condition in language the average bowler would understand?**

The most simple way to explain it is that the oil is distributed more evenly across the lane than how it is done for a

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normal bowling center house condition, where there is a higher concentration of oil between the 10 boards from the left and the 10 boards from the right than they do towards the edge.

This results in lower scores, and it requires the bowler to make a much more exact shot to get their ball to consistently go to the pocket because on a normal house condition, the higher volume of oil between the 10 boards creates, as we've heard the word, a *wall* of oil, which is sort of like a bumper. If you pull the ball, it rides the oil down the lane, if you throw the ball toward the edge of the lane, the drier portion of the surface will help the ball hook back.

**What's the biggest incorrect assumption about Sport Bowling?**

That all Sport lanes are very, very wet and that it's a lot more oil. It's *not* a lot more oil; it's just more evenly distributed.

To the naked eye or the person who is not familiar or who hasn't bowled a lot on Sport Bowling, he thinks that the lane is wetter in general purely because the free hook to the right of 10 board isn't there. So it *appears* to be wetter, but it's not.

**So these bowlers are running into something they have not seen as they proceed to throw the ball out the window?**

Correct. Well, most bowlers do. If you stood behind bowlers in league and just walked into any house, any night in league, and if you're standing perpendicular to the lane, you would see the ball thrown from right-handers to the right, as much as a 10 to 15 degree angle off of their hand. A little less for the left-hand-

ers because left-handers by nature play a little bit straighter on the lane.

But for the most part, all league bowlers, since resin balls have come out, will project the ball *away* from the pins—away from the headpin—and then watch the ball hook back. On a Sport condition, that can be a problem.

**And Sport Bowling's biggest misconception?**

The misconception is that to try to bowl well on a Sport lane will mess your game up for bowling in your normal leagues. I've heard that more times than I care to count.

I disagree with that concept because the hard part is that it forces you to play the game differently than you would in your normal house. So you can't just

throw it the same way everywhere you go and expect results.

**What drew you to Sport Bowling?**

My wife was in the military, and we moved to St. Louis for one year, back in the year 2000. St. Louis was pegged as one of the initial test centers for Sport Bowling from [ABC]. At the pro shop I was working at at the time, the local director who decided he wanted to try the Sport Bowling concept was a regular at our shop and told me about the league and the format and what they were trying to do. And I embraced the concept because I liked the idea of a tougher lane condition—a certified, regulated, tougher lane condition.

**What are the benefits and drawbacks of competing in a Sport Bowling league?**

The benefit of bowling in a Sport league comes if your ego can take it—and it is a shock to every bowler's ego and to their pride, and I did the same thing.

My pride was hurt the first couple of years I bowled Sport because I tried to make Sport work *my way*—the way I threw the ball, and my average was only in the 180s.

After a couple of years of beating my head into the wall and thinking, *Well, maybe I do need to make an adjustment*, my Sport average has gone up and my average bowling in league—a general house shot league—has gone up as well. I now average on the house shot league somewhere in the 220 range where before I was only a low “two-teen” average bowler.

If you can survive the shock to your system and embrace the *challenge*, the benefits in the long run for me personally have been, my spare shooting is a thousand times better than it was before Sport Bowling.

Secondly, when I go to tournaments, my tournament results for the last couple years have been much, much, much better because the Sport Bowling lanes are so tough, I'm now more open to making quicker adjustments, which even on a house shot will help you maximize your scores there.

I tell everybody that *Sport Bowling exposes every weakness in your game*.

If you're a bad spare shooter, you're going to be a worse spare shooter on the Sport condition. If your ball speed is

inconsistent, it will show up. If you can't hit the same spot on the lane twice, it will show up.

It's one of those things where you have to be prepared to accept what Sport Bowling shows you about your game, and that's where some people can't accept it and leave—quit the league. Other people have chosen to practice and get better, and the people that choose to practice, you see them, and I have a lot of respect for the people that show up on Sunday mornings and practice and stay late and practice and work on their games and want to learn more about their ball layouts and where to play.

Bowling on the Sport condition will expose everything that's wrong with your game and sometimes leaves you naked.

**And you've come across some people who have preferred not to be exposed?**

It shows up more in our summer league and in our winter league because we only run our league for 12 weeks in the summer. There are more bowlers that show up in the summer figuring they can give it a shot for 12 weeks, and it's no big deal if they do poorly. And there are some bowlers who have quit—quietly disappeared.

Very few have publicly disappeared—trashed the place and ran out the door because if you ever watch our league bowl, you'll see that everybody is really working hard at their bowling. It's very interesting. There's not much in the way of attitudes. I'm sure it's the weakest night in the house for beer sales.

The people that are bowling in this league are really trying to work on their games, and they really seem to be enjoying the challenge—even the people who are averaging 150. You can see there's a different attitude, a different feel.

For the negative side, yes, we've had bowlers who have shown up and quietly disappear, who just realize that it's not for them.

For the positive, Fort Meade puts the Sport condition down on Sunday mornings, and the number of people who have been showing up on Sundays purely to practice on Sport has gone up, year after year after year. And I'm encouraged by those people that show up and want to learn and try to practice and try different lines and go outside the box.

**What discussions went on when you learned your league could switch to the PBA Experience patterns?**

I brought it to the league's attention, and we had a meeting. It had to a 100 percent vote because it was a mid-season change for us.

The biggest issue was a lot of the bowlers wanted to have more bowlers compete; they'd like to see more bowlers bowling in the league. We thought the PBA Experience would be an easier way to get more bowlers in the center.



Secondarily, the guys seemed to like the marketing concept that we're bowling on the *same kind of conditions* that the pros are bowling on. Of the bowlers that bowl in this league, these guys are still watching TV on Sunday.

**What's it like bowling on the PBA patterns versus the Sport Bowling conditions?**

The PBA patterns are, for the most part—for the *most part*—easier than Sport conditions. You must remember that the PBA did attempt to use pure 2-to-1 Sport patterns, and it didn't last very long because of the fact that the scores were so low, and remember, the PBA is on television to entertain and draw people to watch. And no one's going to want to watch Pat Healey [Jr.] shooting

171 and missing the headpin two shots in a row, which did happen.

**So due to, shall we say, the "entertainment" factor, you found the Sport conditions more challenging?**

The Sport condition is more challenging than the PBA patterns. The PBA patterns have a different appeal in a way. The PBA patterns pretty much, I don't want to say *force* you, but if you know what you're doing, you can take advantage of the PBA patterns much more than you can take advantage of the Sport conditions.

The flatter distribution of oil on the Sport patterns will make the lane change more each evening, and you're more a ... I don't want to use the word *victim*, but you're more beholden to the other bowlers that are bowling on your pair.

The PBA pattern pretty much puts you on a specific part of the lane, and, for the most part, with minor adjustments, you can stay there all night.

The Cheetah pattern basically is designed to be played for the most part throwing the ball at the edge. Meanwhile, the Shark pattern has more benefit if a bowler plays a little further inside.

**What difference would there be if you changed lanes after each game in your PBA Experience league instead of remaining on the same pair for all four games or did not roll three consecutive weeks on a particular pattern?**

If we didn't bowl three weeks on the same pattern, the scores would definitely be lower. The bowlers who seem to have a clue will adjust quicker to the lane conditioning, and if you give a bowler who has a good bit of knowledge a chance—give him one week to get settled—he will do rather well the next two weeks.

Moving after every game or every two games would bring the scores down as well, purely because the pair-to-pair moves always create a unique situation for a bowler.

**Do you desire either of these changes?**

We actually will be talking to the league. We have four weeks left in our league, and I'm actually preparing a questionnaire for the bowlers to determine what they want to do for next year

and also for the summer because we do have a group that wants to go back to the Sport shot.

It's a *small* group, but we still have a group.

**So has the Sport Bowling experience made you a better or smarter bowler?**

Both. As I said earlier, Sport Bowling helps me make better spares and faster adjustments, and I've also bowled more honor scores in the last four years than I had in the previous 20.

**Including the first Sport 300 in the area?**

Including the first Sport 300 in the area.

**What was that experience like?**

That was crazy. We have a four-game league; I'd only shot 512 for the first three games. But the pattern ... I was kind of lost in the first game, made an adjustment in the second, got a little better,

made another adjustment in the third game, found something and settled on it and was lucky enough to make enough good shots that I carry 12 in-a-row.

I have to say that the crystal pin is the nicest award I've seen in bowling.

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**Was it like it used to be and very quiet when you prepared to roll the final frame?**

As far as I remember and from what I was told, nobody else was bowling. I don't know; there was a buzz in my ears after the ninth ball. But when I threw the twelfth one, it looked like to me that almost everybody was standing back there and watching.

The other thing I have to say about our Sport league is if somebody gets a string going, a lot of bowlers will stop and watch the other bowlers, and that is like the old days.

**Does the Sport Bowling condition stay constant from week to week or are there variations?**

That is up to each league to determine. In our league at Meade the first half of the season, we went five weeks for each Sport condition pattern, then we would change the pattern. In the Sport context, we get the same pattern for five weeks straight.

Most Sport leagues, at least the ones that I've seen, rotate the patterns much more frequently. I think that's a disadvantage because with the limited amount of practice time that bowlers get on the Sport condition, if they see a pattern for a longer period of time, they get a chance to learn a little more, bring in a different ball, try a different line the next week if they can't make practice all the time.

**Do you deal with a set group of Sport patterns?**

There are set PBA patterns; there are no set Sport conditions. The only rule in regards to Sport Bowling now as of the PBA trends taking over is the ratio of oil

across any seven-board area—that's the only rule that must be made.

So in regards to regular Sport Bowling, no, there is no specific set number of patterns you have to try, although USBC will provide pattern programs if you not want to have to work so hard at

programming your machine. If your lane man wants a little bit of an easier job, USBC provides programs that are lane machine specific. And that helps.

**What PBA pattern is the easiest/most difficult for you?**

Shark is the most difficult for me personally because I'm left-handed. If you review the PBA Experience materials in regards to the video they have online, they don't even discuss the left side of the lane in the Shark pattern.

We haven't bowled Cheetah at Meade yet. I bowled Cheetah—there's a Sport league in Baltimore at Normandy—and I've bowled there. Cheetah is supposed to be the easiest, but I also found that Viper and Scorpion were very high-scoring.

**So you would recommend the PBA Experience to all bowlers or just a certain level of bowler?**

I think all bowlers would be interested in trying the PBA patterns—absolutely. The one thing that I found when we first switched over [from Sport Bowling conditions]—and if you ever go to a Tour stop, you'll see the same thing—the patterns, with the exception of Shark, and Chelmelon a little bit, force most right-handed bowlers to play further right and straighter through the front part of the lane than they're used to in their general house league. It's a little bit of a hard adjustment in that regard.

