

WHAT LIES BENEATH? LANE SURFACES AFFECT PLAY

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Our sport is dynamic. There are variables in every aspect of the game. Bowlers have different styles, balls have different reactions and lane conditions have different characteristics. In order to score your best, it is important to manipulate your attack plan and adjust to the environment. But do you really have all the information we need to make those adjustments?

Think about your last league session or tournament. Try to remember some of the conversations you heard or took part in. You probably heard bowlers talk about their physical game, equipment and oil patterns. Did anyone mention the lane surface? Probably not.

Lane surface is one of the most overlooked and misunderstood factors in our sport. Just like the foundation of your house supports the walls and the roof, lane surface supports the condition your center applies for leagues and tournaments.

Different surfaces will have a dramatic effect on the way a pattern is played and the equipment used to play it. The three major surfaces are synthetic, wood, and overlay. Each has unique characteristics that must be considered in developing a lane play strategy.

Synthetic Lanes

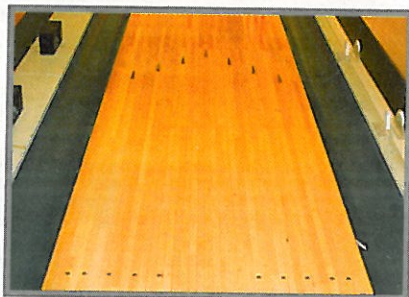
Many bowling centers have converted to synthetic lanes. They are much more durable and consistent from one lane to the next. That is achieved by using very hard man-made materials which has a profound effect on lane conditioning.

Most synthetic lanes are up to three times harder than a wood surface, which reduces the surface contact between the ball and the lane. As a result, bowling balls will hook much less than on other lane surfaces when using the same oil pattern. **To combat the lower friction of a synthetic lane, try one or more of the following adjustments:**

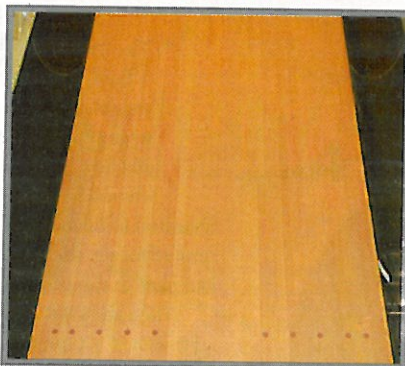
- Play a straighter line to the pocket.
- Move your target closer to the foul line.
- Reduce your ball speed.
- Switch to an earlier reacting ball.
- Increase your rev rate.



SYNTHETIC: Synthetic lanes are harder and your ball will hook less than on other surfaces.



WOOD: There is more friction between the ball and the lane on wood lanes, resulting in earlier ball reaction and more overall hook.



OVERLAY: An overlay gives even more friction than wood since it is softer. You'll want to use a later-reacting ball.

Wood Lanes

While the number of centers with wood lanes is shrinking every day, it is still very easy to find centers with this surface. A wood lane is constructed of maple and pine. The harder maple wood is found in the front or head section of the lane, which takes the most punishment from bowling balls. The middle and back section of a wood lane is made of pine, which is softer and less durable than the maple. Wood lanes are coated with a urethane finish, which protects the wood from

the oil and cleaner.

The increased surface contact between the ball and the lane creates much more friction than a synthetic surface, which creates earlier ball reaction and more overall hook. The increased friction can make it difficult for some bowlers to score with today's highly aggressive equipment. **Adjustments for wood surfaces include:**

- Playing more diagonal lines to the pocket.
- Move starting position and target toward the middle of the lane.
- Move your target closer to the pins.
- Switch to a later and smooth reacting ball.

Overlays

Many centers with wood lanes use flexible overlays to prolong the life of the wood. Those overlays create a barrier between the wood and lane oil. Some overlays have an adhesive backing that allows them to be applied to the lane similar to a large piece of tape. Others are a floating surface that is attached to the lane at the foul line. These surfaces use static electricity to help them adhere to the wood surface. The material used for overlays must be flexible enough to take on the shape of the wood surface below it. To do so, the overlay material is softer than wood. The result is more friction than wood and synthetic lane surfaces.

While overlays protect the lane surface and create a more consistent ball reaction, the lane play strategy and the equipment used will be very different than wood or synthetic surfaces. **Competing on overlays will require:**

- Weaker and later reacting equipment.
- Targeting further down lane.
- Higher ball speeds.
- Lower rev rates.

It is important to remember there are no absolutes when it comes to lane play strategy. Every bowling center, lane condition and surface should be approached without bias. Understanding all the factors that make up the bowling environment simply provides the basic guidelines to develop an attack plan. Build a stronger foundation for your lane play strategy by understanding lane surface characteristics.