

# USBC ANNOUNCES NEW NATIONAL TOURNAMENT RULES REGARDING SLOW OIL-ABSORBING HIGH-PERFORMANCE BALL USE

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## KEY MATERIALS

- [FAQ](#)
- [Research Report](#)
- [National Tournament Ineligible Ball Lists](#)
- [Video](#)

**ARLINGTON, Texas** – The United States Bowling Congress will adopt new tournament rules at nationally conducted events. These rules will either eliminate the use of slow oil-absorbing high-performance (urethane) bowling balls or require them to be manufactured at a minimum 78D hardness.

USBC has updated the Equipment Specifications Manual to define slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls subject to the 78D rule, and a complete list of ineligible balls for national tournaments is available on BOWL.com. The removal includes all slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls manufactured before Aug. 1, 2022, which will be ineligible for national tournament use regardless of their manufactured hardness.

Effective Dec. 31, 2025, slow oil-absorbing high-performance bowling balls with oil absorption times over 90 minutes must be at least 78D hardness to be USBC approved for sale in the United States. Bowling balls with an oil absorption time greater than 90 minutes and featuring high-performance cores will be subject to the new approval specification. Entry level reactive balls and balls with non-high-performance cores will not be subject to the specification.

Previously approved slow oil-absorbing high-performance bowling balls under 78D will remain on the USBC approved ball list. These models, while limited in USBC national events, can still be manufactured for use in certified leagues and tournaments that choose to allow them.

**Beginning Jan. 1, 2026, the following restrictions will apply to the use of slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls at USBC national tournaments:**

### Not allowed (regardless of hardness):

- U.S. Open
- USBC Masters
- PWBA Tour (national events including the U.S. Women's Open and USBC Queens and all PWBA Regional events)
- U22 Masters and Queens
- USBC Intercollegiate Team and Singles Championships (Nationals)
- USA Bowling National Championships

### Allowed if 78D Hardness:

- USBC Open Championships
- USBC Women's Championships
- Bowlers Journal Championships
- USBC Senior Masters
- USBC Super Senior Classic
- USBC Senior Queens
- Youth Open Championships

### Restricted Use (Qualifying only):

- Junior Gold Championships: 78D slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls will be allowed for qualifying only. Beginning with match play and through the finals, no slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls (regardless of hardness) will be allowed.

### No Change:

- Team USA Trials
- USBC Collegiate sectional and regular season USBC Collegiate events
- Junior Gold qualifiers
- USA Bowling Regionals
- USBC Senior Championships
- USBC Youth Scratch Championships
- The Forty Frame Game
- Survivor Tournament

The rule changes come following a formal comment period from bowling ball manufacturers and a public survey about proposed rule changes to better govern slow oil-absorbing high-performance ball technology.

The following unsolicited comment from a top-level bowler perhaps best summarizes the need for USBC to take action regarding the matter of slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls:

"Whatever you (USBC Executive Director Chad Murphy) and the Congress (USBC) can do to ensure more bowlers are playing the same game is good for the sport."

USBC sought to address some key issues:

- **Lane pattern integrity** – Slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls can alter lane patterns more quickly, disrupting the intended lane pattern design and creating imbalances between different styles of players.
- **Competitive fairness** – When slow oil-absorbing high-performance and reactive equipment are both used in the same competitive environment, it causes competitive imbalances between different styles of bowlers.
- **Player development concerns** – Increasing reliance on slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls may reduce player versatility and hinder long-term skill development, particularly among younger and developing athletes.
- **Governance and integrity challenges** – Slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls can measure softer over time, making it difficult to distinguish between natural aging and tampering. These issues have contributed to protests and confusion at events, creating enforcement challenges and questions around competitive integrity.

The approach to national youth and collegiate events allows slow oil-absorbing high-performance balls to remain part of the competition at early stages while addressing the issues above for the match-play and finals rounds of the events when champions are determined.

"These changes take positive steps toward addressing the issues related to athlete development, lane pattern integrity and competition equity," USBC Executive Director Chad Murphy said. "We know there will not be universal agreement, but this direction makes meaningful improvements to our competitions."

Additionally, USBC will take immediate steps to add hardness spot-check testing at national tournaments. These checks will be used primarily for research and data collection while also serving as a tool to identify bowling balls suspected of tampering. Hardness testing reinforces enforcement efforts and helps protect the integrity of competition.

A comprehensive research report, video summary detailing these changes and a "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) document can be found on BOWL.com by **CLICKING HERE**.