

Chapter 8: Equipment Specifications

Bowling Balls

1. **Approved.** Bowling balls must be identifiable as a ball listed on the [Approved Ball List](#). Since all bowling balls manufactured prior to January 1991 have been previously approved, their acceptance is at the discretion of the tournament or league official.
2. **House Balls.** As a courtesy to league and tournament participants, House Balls may be used even though they are not specifically posted on the [Approved Ball List](#). Please see the [USBC Equipment Specifications Manual](#) for House Ball specifics.
3. **Identification.** Each ball must have the original brand name/logo, original ball name and some form of serial number (the serial number may be re-engraved).
4. **Bowling Ball Surface.**
 - a. Shall be free of all depressions or grooves of specific pattern, except for holes or indentations used for gripping the ball, identification lettering and numbers, and incidental chipping or marking caused by wear.
 - b. No foreign material may be placed on the outer surface of the ball including but not limited to powder, rosin, marker or paint.
 - c. If a crack is located within the bowler's track area, or if a fissure is present anywhere, the ball is not permitted for use during USBC certified competition. A crack is defined as a partial break or split that appears on the surface of the ball, which is no more than 3" long and no more than 1/8" wide. A fissure is defined as a break or split 3" long or greater and/or 1/8" wide or greater, usually occurring from some breaking or parting.
5. **Ball Plugs, Inserts and Slugs.**
 - a. Removable devices must be approved and on the [Approved Removable Bowling Ball Devices list](#).
 - b. Ball plug or slugs may be used for the purpose of re-drilling a ball. When a slug is used, there must be a hole drilled completely through the slug leaving no void at the base.
 - c. Plugs, inserts, tape and slugs may not extend beyond the surface of the ball.
6. **Weight.** The weight of the ball shall not exceed 16.00 pounds. There is no minimum weight.
7. **Drilling Requirements.** All balls used in USBC certified competition must meet the following requirements:
 - 1) **Holes.**
 - a) Holes or indentations for gripping purposes
 - i) Shall not exceed five and shall be limited to one for each finger and one for the thumb, all for the same hand.
 - ii) Shall not exceed 1-9/16" diameter and 4-1/2" deep, including holes required to install removeable devices.
 - iii) Must be used on every delivery.
 - b) Any secondary hole drilled inside of a gripping hole that is not intended for gripping purpose is considered a void and not allowed.
 - c) **No balance holes are allowed.**
 - d) Balls without a thumbhole must have a scribed or engraved cross-hair lines ("+") near the center of the palm to indicate the grip orientation. The ball must be delivered in the marked orientation (i.e. palm must cover the "+").
 - e) One vent hole for each finger and/or thumb hole, not to exceed 1/4 inch in diameter is permitted.
 - f) One mill hole for inspection purposes not to exceed 5/8 inch in diameter and 1/8 inch in depth is permitted.
 - 2) **Balance.** For balls weighing more than 10.00 pounds (all measurements are to be taken with respect to the center of grip):
 - a) No more than 3 ounces of top/bottom weight, left/right weight and finger/thumb weight.
 - b) A ball used without any holes or indentations may not have more than three-ounce difference between any two halves of the ball.

For center of grip determination and balls weighing 10.00 pounds or less see the [USBC Equipment Specifications Manual](#).

Commonly Asked Questions – Bowling Ball – Holes

Is a bowling ball with a thumb hole thrown by a no-thumb or two-handed bowler legal?

A bowler who doesn't use the thumb during a delivery cannot have a thumb or a balance hole. If the ball does, it is illegal and games are subject to forfeiture. All holes drilled must be used for gripping purposes on every delivery.



What if a bowler does not use their thumb for a strike ball but does use their thumb for a spare shot?

A bowler who doesn't use the thumb during a delivery cannot have a thumb or a balance hole. If the ball does, it is illegal and games are subject to forfeiture. All holes drilled must be used for gripping purposes on every delivery.

If the bowler covers the thumb hole with their palm, would that count as gripping?

No, the bowler is not gripping the ball if they are just covering the hole with their palm.

8. **House Balls.** Balls are exempt from item 7. House balls are defined as:
- Being supplied by the center in which the certified competition is being used.
 - Having a polyester or basic urethane coverstock.
 - Having a differential RG less than 0.025 inches.
 - The ball is not drilled to fit the bowler specifically.

NOTE: A ball left in a bowling center by a bowler to be used as a house ball is not considered a house ball.

9. **Out of Specification.** If it is found that a bowling ball is or is suspected of being out of specification, the bowler must be told by the tournament or league official to remove the ball from competition until it can be measured. If the ball is not removed or the bowler had prior knowledge of such, games are subject to forfeiture or disqualification. If the bowler had no prior knowledge, the games would not be subject to forfeiture, but the ball would not be able to be used until it meets specifications.

Commonly Asked Question – Bowling Ball - Out of Specification

How is this rule enforceable and what is the penalty for those who don't comply?

Once it is discovered that a bowler is using equipment which is not within specifications, the ball must be removed from competition and corrected before it can be used during certified competition. If the bowler uses a ball that is non-conforming with knowledge that it is out of specification, the scores are subject to forfeiture.

