

FOUNDATION FRAME

BY MICHELLE MULLEN { yourbowlingcoach.com }

Tale of the Tape: Get a Grip

I AM REALLY LOOKING forward to this opportunity to “coach” you here in the pages of *Bowlers Journal*, because coaching is my passion. This column is inspired by my students, and it will reflect concepts and issues that we experience during lessons.

As an example, I continually am amazed by the impact that a bowler’s grip pressure has on their performance. Generally speaking, the better the bowler, the lighter the grip pressure. Relaxing your grip is the quickest way to improve your swing and release. Too many bowlers squeeze the ball, applying excessive grip pressure. Do you? You may not even be aware of it.

Excessive grip pressure simply can be due to extra (unnecessary) effort to bowl better. Or, it may be due to a poor ball fit. Typically, it is related to the latter. If your ball fits properly, you should not have to squeeze it. Other sports teach you how to hold a club, bat or racket; in bowling, you are provided a fit, with holes already in the ball that will either help or hinder performance.

Progressive fitting techniques have come a long way over the years to improve bowler performance and avoid injury. At times, I have had to reschedule a lesson due to a ball fit issue. I’ll watch one or two shots and see that the ball fit is so off that the player needs to be refit.

Other times, it might take a lesson or two for a bowler to relax more, and then their fit needs to be changed to enhance their improved skill level. Again, better bowlers



Testing: To conduct a “raw test” of the span on your ball, put your thumb all the way in and lay your fingers over the holes. The joints should land about $\frac{3}{4}$ over the holes.

bowl relaxed.

When it comes to fit, the most obvious factor is hole size, and the holes should be snug. Many bowlers want the thumbhole nice and big so they “can get out of it,” but this is the source

of many tight swings. A hole too big requires excessive grip pressure in order to hold onto the ball. A tighter hole is better, so you can relax and let the ball swing effortlessly, without fear of it coming off your hand.

Less obvious regarding ball fit is the span.

With a fingertip grip, your fingers should be seated all the way in to the first joint while the thumb easily drops in to its base, without feeling like your fingers are stretched or that the nails are hitting the back of the holes.

It should not be a challenge to relax into the fit and properly position your hand into the ball. If you have to choose between putting your thumb all the way in or feeling the pads of your fingers on the front of the holes, check your span.

A raw test: Put your thumb all the way in and lay your fingers over the holes. The joints should land about $\frac{3}{4}$ over the holes (to allow for reaching the span when they are bent inside the holes).

This leads to the least ob-



Get a Grip: To say you never need tape is to suggest that your thumb never changes, but natural fluctuations are a condition of being human. Use bowler’s tape to maintain proper grip pressure.

vious aspect of ball fit: hole pitches. The angle at which the holes are drilled profoundly affects grip pressure and the swing. Too often in a fingertip grip, we find too much forward pitch in the fingers and too much reverse in the thumbhole. These are old-fashioned fitting techniques that impair the grip, leading to a muscled swing or, in some cases, injury.

With too much forward (or not enough reverse) pitch in the fingers, you can feel your nails hitting the back of the holes, rather than feeling your pads on the front of the holes. Or, worse, you can't get your fingers to stay all the way in once you put your thumb in. This often

happens with too much forward pitch and/or too long of a span.

With a proper fit, the final adjustment to maintain proper grip pressure requires using tape in the thumbhole. So many people would bowl better simply by using bowler's tape. To have been coached by me is to presume that I have stock in a company that produces bowler's tape. I don't, but I am emphatic about its use to improve grip pressure and the swing.

It's a red flag to me when I ask an established bowler if he uses tape and he says, "No, I never need to." Why is it, then, that a professional might stop before

taking a shot to adjust tape? It's because their thumb has changed since the last shot. To say that you never need tape is to suggest that your thumb never changes, but natural fluctuations are a condition of being human.

If you think you never need tape, perhaps it's because you hold the ball so hard that you can't tell whether you need it, constantly adjusting your hand to the ball rather than the ball to your hand. It would be better to adjust the ball to be able to maintain a constant grip pressure from shot to shot.

Once you relax and improve your grip pressure, you should be able to tell

if you need a piece or more of tape in the ball. As you swell, take it out. Never give up a shot if the size of the hole is not right. Professionals will stop to change tape even when they're on TV and are on a shot clock.

Furthermore, not being proficient in using tape is *not* a reason not to use it. I see many bowlers who don't use tape because it seems intimidating at first. My advice: Jump in. Use tape. You'll become a pro at it in no time.

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HOW TO USE TAPE

PUT TAPE in the front (pad side) or back (nail side) of your thumbhole, rounded side up. Notice that your thumb goes in on an angle. Stay clear of placing tape along the sides of your thumb.

Black tape is smooth, while white tape has texture. You might like a piece of white tape in the front for feel, but make the rest of your adjustments on the backside with smooth tape to ensure a clean release, without affecting your span. When using multiple pieces, layer them down slightly to be able to wedge them out piece by piece.

Note: Using bowler's tape in the thumbhole is not to be confused with the use of gripping tape on your thumb, or interchangeable thumb devices. While using gripping

tape on the back of your thumb will initially alter the size of your thumb, you still need to keep up with subsequent changes to your thumb size with tape in the thumbhole.

And, while you may have multiple thumb inserts to use as your thumb size changes, you still have to manage all the possible fluctuations in your thumb by using tape inside these devices. The more sensitive your feel, the better you can tell when you need tape for the same feel from shot to shot, making you a better bowler.

Pay attention to your grip pressure during the swing. Does it increase? Do you squeeze the ball? If so, why? The proper use of tape can help make you a better bowler.



Thumb Thought: Using bowler's tape in the thumbhole is not to be confused with the use of gripping tape on your thumb, or interchangeable thumb devices.