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FOUNDATION FRAME

BY MICHELLE MULLEN { yourbowlingcoach.com }

Swing Is King: Stance and Start

LIGHTENING UP YOUR grip pressure is very important because relaxing your grip is one of the quickest ways to improve your swing. The advice to relax becomes somewhat of a redundant message, both in my books and in lessons, but relaxing is the key to repeating shots.

In the February issue, we addressed grip pressure, the importance of a good ball fit, and the use of bowler's tape in the thumbhole to keep from having to squeeze the ball. These are all key to being able to relax your hand in the ball, leading to a more relaxed swing. Always remember: "Swing is king."

Now it's time to address the stance, and how to start your swing. Professionals spend a lot of time in practice to perfect this move — to be able to create a good swing, and develop good timing.

Stance

To create a loose arm swing, it is important to develop an effective and relaxed stance position. In a good stance, your shoulders should be relaxed, with a slight dip in the swing shoulder, much like it will be at the finish (yes, your shoulder should be dropped at the finish).

In today's game, in order to get your trail leg over for leverage at delivery, your swing shoulder should dip, putting your core at an angle, allowing your leg to get into this position (more on this in future articles). Suffice to say that allowing your swing shoulder to relax and be slightly dropped in the stance is good, to preset it into position for delivery.

Too many times, bowlers try so hard that they tighten up in the stance itself. It's not about achieving a perfect motion; rather, it's about being loose to create a similar motion every time. Tension will make you erratic, while relaxing will allow you to repeat. Trying to be too perfect only hurts your performance.



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Non-Dominant Hand

To be able to fully relax your arm while holding the ball in the stance, be sure to support the weight of the ball with the other arm. If you are right-handed, support the ball with your left hand in the stance. This will enable you to keep your right arm relaxed. This is one of the biggest keys to being able to relax your swing arm in the stance. Something has to support the weight of the ball; make it your other hand so you can relax your swing.

Once you develop your stance position and begin to support the weight of the ball with the other hand, it's then time to get rid of any residual tension in the swing arm itself. In lessons, when I detect tension in the swing, I like to have the player set the ball down and work on releasing any tension in the arm. This begins by simply pointing out any tension to begin with. It's common for you to think you are relaxed, only to find out you are not. Getting to know the difference is half the battle.

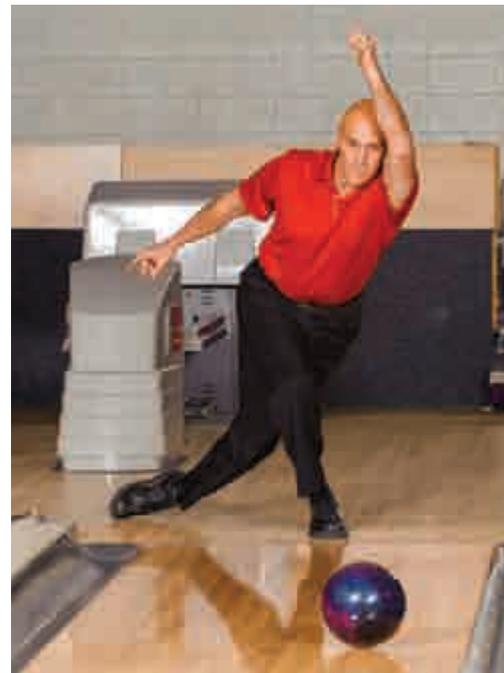
I simply ask the bowler to relax, holding the wrist of his swing arm. Once he declares being relaxed, I withdraw my support to see if his arm falls. If it does not, he obviously is not relaxed.

At this point, you have to learn how to support the weight of the ball with your other hand, relieving any tension to your swing arm. Don't worry so much about the position of your hand for release purposes, as the way you hold the ball in your stance usually is not the way it ends up at the release.

Many bowlers obsess about how they position their bowling hand in the stance, as if the way it starts is the way it will finish at release. For many reasons, this is rarely the case. I concern myself much more with how functional the non-dominant hand is because of its profound effect on timing and swing, which are the major factors in a solid approach and overall performance.

Ball Placement

Once relaxed in the stance, you need to maintain a relaxed swing arm as you begin the approach. To do this, it's important to support the weight of the ball with the other arm as you move the ball



Delivery: In today's game, in order to get your trail leg over for leverage at delivery, your swing shoulder should dip, putting your core at an angle, allowing your leg to get into this position.

into the swing. This means that your left hand becomes even more functional when you use it to actually push the ball into the swing.

Using the other hand will allow your swing arm to stay relaxed as you begin your arm swing. This is a big key to developing a loose arm swing. At this point, most bowlers shift the weight back into the swing arm itself, creating tension that we just tried to eliminate with a good ball fit and a relaxed stance. If not an intentional, conscious effort to steer the ball, shifting the weight to your swing arm can be subconscious, in an attempt to maintain control.

As you set the ball into motion using the other hand, you will be able to maintain a loose arm swing during the pushaway. With the swing arm relaxed and pushing the ball into motion with the other hand, you allow the ball to drop into the swing and back more naturally once you remove the opposite hand from the ball.

The weight of the ball will go from the opposite hand straight to the shoulder of the swing, by passing all

the muscles of the arm. This will create your most natural, loose arm swing — more of a pendulum motion. With the support and use of the left hand, your right arm can remain relaxed, or passive, to create your most natural swing.

There is a big difference between swinging the ball and letting the ball swing. Letting it swing with the use of physics will allow you to be more consistent and accurate than any swing you attempt to control from shot to shot, due to the various degrees of tension you can create in various muscles throughout various points in the swing. Developing the ability to let it swing is, indeed, a leap of faith, as you've probably heard the mantra that "trust is a must."

Developing these skills to create your best, most natural swing will allow you to develop this trust. This mindset also is the sign of a much stronger mental game.

Michelle Mullen is a Gold coach and author of two books, Bowling Fundamentals and How to Pick Up Spares.