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Develop a Shot-making Routine

GREAT BOWLERS LEARN how to repeat shots. It's not about being perfect, but rather about being able to repeat a similar motion from shot to shot. It is part of a sound mental game, and cultivating this ability begins with a good shot-making routine.

Some might refer to it as their ritual before the shot. The important thing to note is that a pre-shot routine is every bit as mental as it is physical. While you can see the physical routine, there's an "invisible" thought process that goes along with it.

If you ever watch golf on TV, you see many players go through a meticulous routine as they approach the shot. They are preparing their bodies and their minds to make the next shot. A shot-making routine is a physical ritual paired with a mental process to harness your energy — and focus — from one turn to the next. Develop yours to enhance your ability to repeat shots.

The major benefit to having a routine is that you can control your environment in three important ways to improve your shot-making ability. You:

1. shift your focus as you transition into your turn to bowl;
2. eliminate outside distractions; and
3. develop the same focus, regardless of the situation or score.

Your routine will help you make the transition from socializing to shot making when it is your turn to bowl. And if you've ever been distracted by a bowler who steps up on you (or by anything else), that's a good time to step off the approach and re-initiate your pre-shot routine. If you are nervous or need an important shot, getting absorbed in your routine will help settle you so you can focus on your performance.

PRE-SHOT ROUTINE

There are three basic stations to your pre-shot routine: initiating your turn, preparing your shot, and visualizing the outcome. As you enter the bowlers area, determine where your turn, and thus routine, begins. This is where you begin to develop your focus.

Next, prepare yourself for the shot.

SINCE YOUR VOICE WILL BE THE STRONGEST VOICE YOU HEAR WHEN YOU'RE BOWLING AND COMPETING, MAKE SURE YOUR THOUGHTS ARE ENCOURAGING RATHER THAN DISCOURAGING. TALK TO YOURSELF AS YOU WOULD ENCOURAGE A FRIEND.

This is when you pair your physical routine with mental clarity. Clarify your thoughts, whether you are to focus on a specific part of your technique or create a general thought to relax.

Finally, face the lane and visualize the outcome before you step up in the stance to go.

While your routine will be unique to your game, consider these tips to develop a sound pre-shot ritual:

1. As you approach the settee area, imagine that a curtain drops behind you to separate you from everyone else. Begin to channel your focus on the

upcoming shot.

2. Use the same ritual every time to prepare your hand and pick up the ball as you move to get set in your stance.

3. Clarify and simplify your thoughts and completely commit to your strategy.

4. Visualize the path of the ball to the pocket or spare, before you step up on the approach.

POST-SHOT ROUTINE

As part of your mental process, you should also have a post-shot routine to analyze the outcome and determine your strategy/adjustment for the next

shot. Your post-shot routine should involve your analysis of what happened, and include your upcoming strategy for the next shot, based on that analysis. It also involves refocusing if you have a second shot to make. Organize your thoughts to consider these important aspects to a post-shot routine:

1. Assess the outcome. Note ball reaction and/or any flaws in execution.
2. Immediately refocus if you left a spare to shoot.
3. Strategize your next strike shot before you leave the bowlers area, and decide what adjustments, if any, you

will make on the next shot to make it more successful. Do this before socializing again, while the shot is fresh in your mind.

You may have determined that you simply did not focus properly on the last shot, so you resolve to do so on the next one. Or you may have determined that the ball hooked too much because you drifted, and so rather than adjust where you stand, you resolve to walk straighter next time. Or you may decide that you made a good shot, but need to make an adjustment because of the lane condition.

This is the time to engineer any move you will make for the next frame and *commit* to your decision.

DEVELOP DISCIPLINE

Don't be too concerned if, at first, you realize that you just don't feel like performing your shot-making routine. I get it. This stuff takes a lot of energy to do every time. You might be too upset from your last shot, or distracted by the lucky shot your opponent got, or you might just feel lazy.

Again, working on the mental game is just as hard as working on the physical game; it just happens to be invisible.

Some of the greatest bowlers I competed against on tour stuck relentlessly to their routines. This does not mean that it was easy to do. It means that they

had trained themselves to do so, so that it had become automatic. Because of this discipline, their mental games were very strong and their shot making was superb.

There are many possible thoughts that can go through your mind at any

time. Using your pre-shot and post-shot routines to harness your energy and strengthen your focus will help you create an effective thought process for developing your strategy and repeating your motion from shot to shot.

And since thoughts are going to occupy your mind one way or another, take action and harness your thoughts to make them more productive. Let's take a closer look at how to manage your thoughts to enhance, rather than hinder, your performance.

We have already addressed focusing on performance versus outcome. Here are a few more suggestions to guide your thought process...

■ **Do vs. Don't** — When you bowl, focus on what you *do* want to do rather than what you *don't* want to do. Always focus on positives, not negatives. In other words, coach yourself in dos, not don'ts.

For example, rather than tell yourself not to pull the next shot, tell yourself to relax and just let it swing. Your brain will tend to hear and remember the verb. In the first example, the verb is "pull." In the second, it is to "relax and let it swing." You are more likely to pull the ball following the first thought.



What's Within Your Control: Liz Johnson, who in November became the second woman in PBA history to win a PBA Tour title, advises staying focused on what's within your control. "I really just focus on making good shots and making my spares each frame. That's all I can control."

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You are more likely to relax and let it swing following the second one.

I am very sensitive to this principle when I coach. I strive to ask bowlers to do what I want them to do rather than tell them what not to do. Trying to avoid doing something is to bowl defensively and is counterproductive.

■ **Specific vs. general cues** — Sometimes you need to focus on a specific skill to enhance your performance, especially if you are still working on something in your game that you cannot do naturally without thinking about it. For example, if you are late pushing the ball, focus on pushing it out sooner. In this case, focus on that specific cue. You have to spend more time practicing it so that you don't have to think about it so much when you're bowling for score.

However, when you are on top of your game, focus on a more general cue such as relaxing your arm or rolling the ball cleanly off your hand. These more general thoughts will help you maintain your performance.

■ **Positive vs. negative self-talk** — Because we tend to become the reality we create in our mind, work on keeping your thoughts more positive, rather than negative. This can be especially difficult if you tend to get frustrated with yourself. However, instead of following the downward spiral that negative thinking can create and perpetuate, lift yourself up with positive thoughts, especially when the going gets tough.

Such thoughts will help you stay on task and lead to actions that enhance your performance, such as maintaining clarity of thought and relaxing your body. Go toward what you do want. Since your voice will be the strongest voice you hear when you're bowling and competing, make sure your thoughts are encouraging rather than discouraging. Talk to yourself like you would encourage a friend. Another way to say it is: "Be careful what you ask for; you just might get it."

It can be challenging, but you must focus on what you need to do rather than on what you might not be doing so well at the moment. Slow down your thoughts, analyze what the problem

is, then focus on correcting it. You can renew your focus with every pre-shot routine.

Next time, we'll take a closer look at managing your emotions, strategy and

confidence.

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