

To Maintain Consistency, Keep A Check List—

Things You Should And Shouldn't Do *by John Towdy .*

Serious bowlers practice as often as possible. Although a practice regimen may seem beneficial, it can also be an exercise in futility if you practice the wrong things. One of my basic philosophies is...REPITITION CREATS HABIT.... habits that can either be good or bad, advantageous or detrimental. Consequently, the smartest and most successful bowlers practice proper execution and reassure their goals through the use of tapes or check lists.

Although I recommend taping, I utilize an alternate system for corrective measures in proper bowling execution, a "do and don't" checklist. In lieu of taping, I have attempted to utilize several systems for placing a bowler in the most advantageous position for releasing a quality delivery. Although every suggestion of my checklist isn't applied to every bowler, it is flexible and designed to develop precise timing and rhythm...an absolute must for delivering a shot from the strongest leverage point through minimum effort and flawless balance.

I realize tapes can be reviewed over and over. They can certainly reveal flaws in a bowler's delivery. However, tapes, per se, do not offer suggestions for correctional measures. Unless a bowler is able to recall curative measures, he/she will require outside help. Therefore, a well-chronicled checklist serves as reference for applying corrective steps.

My checklist addresses the following:

Stance...Pushaway...Armswing...Approach...Knee Bend...Release...Release Point and Follow Through.

Each of these exercises play an integral role in achieving one singular purpose... placing a bowler in a balanced position to release the ball at its greatest possible advantage for a quality shot. Nonetheless, a high percentage delivery can be accomplished, despite the absence of one or several of these prescribed exercises. The manner in which a bowler arrives at the foul line in a position to uncork a positive delivery is irrelevant. A checklist recommendation merely serves to facilitate an ideal delivery and does not necessarily imply it is the only method for releasing a ball properly.

Unfortunately, SOME instructors steadfastly "go by the book" and fail to recognize the success of bowlers who apply unusual methods of execution. Despite the fact I favor players who deliver quality shots in textbook fashion, I cannot, and will not, alter any bowler who has enjoyed success in his/her own inimitable fashion. For example, why would any instructor have attempted to alter the styles of former superstars Don Carter, Marshall Holman, Mark Roth, or Harry Smith? NONE even resembled textbook bowlers, yet all are Hall of Fame bowlers.

Carter delivered from a low crouch and literally pushed the ball down the lanes.

Holman began his approach with his heels placed at the end of the approach and raced to the foul line with five rapid steps. Oddly, Holman started his slide at least four feet from the foul line and released the ball while still sliding. This defied all logic in

releasing the ball from a strong leverage area; yet Holman uncorked one of the most potent strike balls of his era.

Roth, like Holman, raced to the foul line. At times, Roth used a five-step approach. On occasions, he took six. He utilized a tight thumbhole and released the ball with a vicious twist of the wrist... with minimum knee bend. His 34 titles attest to his incredible success. Yet, he was one of the most unconventional bowlers in history.

Harry Smith pumped the ball up and down several times in his stance before racing to the foul line in a zigzag manner. Smith had little or no slide, hopped on his last step and delivered one of the most powerful strike balls ever.

These are but a few examples of successful unconventional bowlers. Although these great players did not execute in textbook manner, they, like many athletes in other sports, achieved super status performing in unorthodox fashion. Nonetheless, bowlers who perform "according to the book" far outnumber those who perform in unconventional manner. Consequently, checklists become invaluable commodities for bowlers who invariably run into mild slumps.

Following are the first of three do's and don'ts on my checklists. The remaining recommendations will appear in future issues of BTM.

1) STANCE... This is the preparation for a comfort zone, a moment of relaxed position with respect to the placement of the ball, the alignment of the feet, shoulders and body. Here are tips for perfecting the stance.

Mistakes

- 1. Body too rigid
- 2. Knees are locked
- 3. Back is arched
- 4. Toes, shoulders, and body not aligned with target

Modifications.

- 1. Relax the body by taking deep breaths
- 2. Bend knees slightly to release tension in lower body
- 3. Do not arch back. It is unnatural and places body in awkward position.
- 4. Align toes, hips and shoulders

Do's... assume an erect position with knees slightly flexed. Keep elbows close to your hips. Keep weight of ball in non-bowling hand slightly right of center of body. (Opposite for lefthanders) Bowlers with wide hips would greatly benefit by positioning the ball in line with their hips, thus eliminating a circled backswing. Classic bowlers like Parker Bohn III, Chris Barnes, and Brian Voss hold the ball close to their body, slightly above their waist with elbows nested into their hips, permitting them to maintain consistency.

Don't... be rigid or stiff, particularly in the knees or forearms. Stiff knees and forearms eliminate relaxation and tend to prevent a free armswing. Although numerous players begin their stance from a low crouch, they do possess the fluid armswing as those who permit the ball to flow through gravity.

2) **PUSHAWAY...** Bowling instructors recommend various methods for a proper pushaway. Some suggest a shorter pushaway: others recommend a fully extended arm. In my experience, a proper pushaway is one that tends to produce a free arms-wing, one that is muscle free, whereas the movement of the arm is generated by the weight of the ball. This can be accomplished by holding the ball close to the body with the weight of the ball resting in the non-bowling palm. Initiate the pushaway in a small arc, curling the ball up and out in a soft smooth manner. This should be done with a muscle-free forearm propelling the arcing motion into a weighted swing OFF the shoulder joint.

Again, this is the simplest method for a proper pushaway. However, it is NOT the only successful method. As previously mentioned, bowlers prefer different styles of execution. Players like Norm Duke and Danny Wiseman resort to shorter pushaways. Others use the full extension of the arm and higher backswings with great success. This group includes Jason Couch, Amletto Monacelli, and Dave D-Entremont. They are power bowlers and deliver explosive strike balls. This doesn't imply that extended armswings add additional revolutions to the ball. It merely indicates a bowler's preferred method of execution.

Although pushaways can be altered to simplify execution, pushaways that are successful for some can be harmful for others. For example, an early pushaway, that is, placing the ball prior to taking the first step, will result in an early swing. This will generally place the release point beyond the strongest leverage area. Conversely, a pushaway that is delayed will invariably result in a very late swing that induces a pull in the forward swing.

Here are tips for perfecting the pushaway:

Mistakes	Correction
1. Pushaway is too muscled, vigorous and too far out	1. Relax the forearm. Place the weight of the ball in the non-bowling hand
2. It is shorter than the first step	2. Place the ball beyond the first step to create greater weight in the swing
3. It is shorter than the first step	3. Push the ball in an upward motion, about four to six inches, to create gravity in the downswing all the way through the backswing.
4. The ball is pushed right or left of the body.	4. Disengage all muscles and let the ball fall into the backswing from its own weight.
5. The ball is tilted on the pushaway.	5. Do not tilt until the ball enters the backswing and forces a natural tilt.

3) **ARMSWING...** Armswings can be classified in three different categories... free, semi-controlled and controlled.

A free armswing is the core of a pendulum swing. Consider the pendulum on a clock. The pendulum swings right, then swings an equal distance to the left, EVERY TIME. It is a matter of physics. The centrifugal force, the weight of the ball, the height of

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the backswing, and the decent of the forward swing remain constant, that is, until the release point. At this juncture, the ball is driven outward into the lane. The pendulum effect, through centrifugal force, plays a fundamental role for consistency.

And why do I consider a free armswing to be the cornerstone of ideal execution? Simply check records of top athletes, other than those who rely on brute strength. The most successful are those who perform in a relaxed manner, void of any muscle application. For example, basketball is replete with seven-footers who specialize in dunking and blocking shots but the most exciting players in the NBA are muscle-free superstars like Kobe Bryant, Allen Iverson, Vince Carter, and other players who demonstrate muscle-free agility.

The top pitchers in baseball exemplify the advantages of muscle-free execution. Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez and Billy Wagner deliver fastballs at speeds of 95 miles or more per hour via unrestricted arms. Johnson is six-feet, 10 inches tall. Martinez, 10 inches shorter is loose as a goose. Wagner is small and wiry, yet blazes fastballs past National Leaguers at speeds up to 100 miles per hour.

And how does this relate to bowlers? Simply put, a free swing permits a player to release a ball more consistently at the power point than a muscled swing, but equally important, a free swing is far less exhausting and places less strain on the shoulder than one controlled through the forearm.

A true pendulum swing is the movement of the arm generated by the weight of the ball determining the peak of the backswing and the ensuing forward swing until the magic moment...the release point!

A perfect analogy for a free swing would be to detach the arm at the shoulder, drill a hole in the arm, place ball bearings in the socket, grease it well, reattach the arm to the shoulder with a bolt, then swing all weight from this area.

A semi-controlled armswing is executed with minimum muscle application. Although I favor a free swing, it is important to present other methods of execution because many bowlers have succeeded with semi-controlled armswings, including such all-time greats as Don Carter and Earl Anthony.

A semi-controlled armswing is one initiated downward or slightly up and controlled by a muscled forearm. Muscle is applied to pull the ball into the backswing. At the beginning of the forward swing, all muscles are disengaged and the ball descends on its own weight.

Controlled armswing. Few bowlers have achieved success with fully controlled armswings. This type swing is entirely controlled and is seemingly robotic. One of the very few successful players to bowl with a controlled swing was Jim Godman, a top bowler in the 70's. He won 10 titles, including the 1973 Firestone Tournament of Champions and the 1971 ABC Masters crown. Godman was as strong as an ox and possessed forearms like a blacksmith. His technique was the epitome of a controlled armswing. Pete Couture enjoyed mild success on the PBA tour with a controlled swing and currently rates among the elite group of senior players.

The greatest disadvantage of a controlled armswing is the physical strain involved. Controlling the ball back and forth requires inordinate strength and places extreme strain on the hand, arm, and shoulder. It is far more difficult to generate speed without sacrificing accuracy. An armswing propelled by force cannot match the consistency of a muscle-free swing.

Perfecting The Armswing

Mistakes

1. Forearm muscles are flexed
2. Backswing is muscle-pulled
3. Swing bumps out (moves right of hips in backswing)
4. Swing wraps around (moves to the left of hips in backswing)
5. Downswing is forced

Corrections

1. Relax the arm
2. Use a soft upward pushaway to create a free-fall of the ball.
3. Realign bump out swing by pushing ball slightly to the left.
4. Realign wraparound by pushing ball away slightly to the left
5. Permit the ball to descend on its own weight through gravity.

This is the first in a three part series of a checklist.

Contributed by John Towdy - coach to leading players on the US Pro Tour.

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