

Balance: A Look At Training For Balance

A large portion of society reports difficulty maintaining balance. It is as high as 50% of the older population. Falls, spills, and stumbles are the most well known byproduct. Poor balance is generally multifaceted involving visual, vestibular, peripheral neural, and muscular components. If you are familiar with all of these, then stop reading and turn to the next page. For the rest of you, trek onward.

A Balancing Act

Balance training has become a fairly common element in our medical and healthcare community. I know only because I work in it with athletes and non-athletes daily. Hospitals and acute-care facilities often have balance programs of some kind. Many physical therapy clinics work with people and their balance deficiencies, usually after an acute injury or chronic condition they manage. Here in Greenville, for example, there is a Balance Clinic in one of the hospitals, and our physical therapy provider also implements balance-training techniques with multiple therapy protocols.

Balance training is often a combination of drills and closed-chain exercises that are designed to enhance a person's ability to balance their body while moving or stationary. They are usually drills and exercises that are a simple and easy means to improve balance. We use them daily in the medical and physical therapy setting rehabbing injuries and transitioning people back to the workforce and into their functional lifestyles. We also use them with elite and professional athletes, not only to rehab them back from injury, but also to improve their ability on the playing field.

Collegiate and professional athletes use balance training to enhance coordination and athletic skill development. Ever hear of football players taking ballet and dance class? I've seen wrestling teams use a balance beam during practice. Balance training is used in virtually dozens of sports. Nevertheless, it is a fairly unexplored topic in the bowling community. No surprise to me. I sifted through many different bowling books from my library, and balance was a foreign concept to nearly all of them. The good news is, we at Briggs Consulting decided last year not to let this one pass us by any more, and began researching it.

The Value of Balance to the Bowler

Balance and bowling. Balance is used when you bowl. Every ball you roll, every moment of every approach, and most importantly, all throughout the finish position. Balance is exercised when you distribute your weight, when you maintain your center of gravity, to maintain your coordination, as you walk using your natural gait, etc. These are all impacted by your level of balance. As bowlers, we have the greatest need for balance in the finish position of the approach.

View diagrams one (1) and two (2) and see just how important balance becomes to the bowler. In the finish position, a bowler balances his or her lower body through the legs. These two diagrams show how strength, flexibility, and coordination of the legs allow for "good" sound balance at the foul line. If you are not physically strong in your legs, or do not have greater than average flexibility in your knee and hip joint, then you probably don't have an exceptional finish position. Beyond that, balance is the culmination of proprioception and other fine motor skill factors. Not to dive into sport science too heavily, I want to provide you some simple and easy drills you can do at home, or at the bowling center, to improve your overall balance.

So, what we have in front of us are some simple balance development techniques, which have been used effectively and successfully in the medical community and many other sporting cultures. I won't call the following balance training drills "exercises," 'cause some of you may despise exercise. These aren't exercises, but instead training drills. Think of them as training drills you can do at your bowling center or at home to bolster your bowling.

Flamingo

Perhaps the simplest balance drill is the **Flamingo**. To perform this drill, stand on one leg for 30 seconds with your arms completely relaxed at your sides. Try to balance yourself on one leg. Most likely you will choose your dominant leg, so after 30 seconds alternate to the other leg. I bet your sliding leg will generally be the strongest or more coordinated of the two. Switch every 30 seconds till five minutes has passed. Diagram three (3).

Think that's easy huh? Now try it with your eyes closed and watch yourself sway in every direction. Your ultimate goal is to stand steady on each leg, separately, with your eyes closed. If you have difficulty performing this drill initially with your eyes open, lean on a chair with one finger or one hand until you develop enough confidence and balance to do so without

the aid. Conduct this drill once a day and try to slowly develop confidence in your ability to balance yourself with your eyes closed. Diagram four (4).

Dr. Jeff's Foul Line Balance Booster

This is one I created several years ago and use with my students. Kneel into your finish position, hold for 5 seconds, and then slowly lift the drag or back leg off the ground. Hold this abbreviated finish position for 30 seconds. Do so a couple different times to work on balancing yourself and developing strength and confidence in your slide leg. Diagram five (5).

According to the medical community, balance training has been shown to result in up to 50% improvement in balance among older people. In sport science, research of the concept, development, and importance of balance is present, as well as documented with some significant results. For bowlers though, it's virtually uncharted waters. I encourage bowlers to add these balance-training drills to their training regimen. I suggest bowling coaches begin teaching their students balance training drills to develop a greater appreciation for the demands of our sport as well as increasing the bowler's overall balance and coordination.

It is safe to say not all of us are born with Michael Jordan-like athletic ability and balance. Therefore, let's take what training programs are available, like *The Bowling-Specific Training Program* and the aforementioned balance training drills, and use them to develop a greater range of knowledge, skill, and ability. So, before you read the next page, close your eyes and do the Flamingo. Put these words into action.