

# Should Bowlers Consider Sport Medicine?

That's the big question. I'm sure many of you haven't even considered the thought. And many of you probably react with something like, "Sport medicine, that's ABSURD." Believe me, I know it sounds somewhat peculiar, but that's largely because our sport and our industry haven't done a very good job looking into it. Quite possibly, until I came along, I doubt they gave it much thought at all.

So where does that leave us today...searching for something, the practical application of the matter. If anything, you should be searching for the correlation. How it applies and how it will influence you. The real question should probably read, **how does sport medicine help me become a better bowler?**

There are many reasons bowlers should consider adding sport medicine to their preparation techniques. You see, sport medicine is like sport psychology in that you must use it to prepare you for training, learning, competition, and athletic performance. Neither will deliver you during an event unless they are a part of you and your game. If it isn't present, you won't be able to call upon it.

Here's a true story. Just last month I took a group of my students to another bowling center several hours away to work with another coach and his students. We designed a group training session combining our coaching expertise and some of our students. The day went along fine and after all was said and done, the students bowled about 4-5 hours totaling around 20 games each. On our way home, my students were utterly exhausted. We talked, and it was quite obvious to me they were fatigued and completely physically drained. Some slept on the way home not able to maintain a conversation due to exhaustion.

We discussed how their learning and overall performance had been hindered in the latter half of the training session due to fatigue and exhaustion. Many of them had never experienced an intense training session for that length of time and were more respectful of professional bowlers who face those sorts of training, competition, and instructional sessions more frequently. It was obvious to me these students experienced a higher level of training and intensity than what they had previously experienced or even associated with bowling.

So how did they handle it? Quite frankly, not all that well. One student couldn't continue due to exhaustion. Another was psychologically drained to the point of silliness. Several others noted fatigue was affecting their ability to execute and such. All were hampered by their lack of functional fitness. Had they been in better bowling shape, using sport medicine to elevate their functional fitness, their learning may have doubled or even tripled.

So, do bowlers like yourselves really need sport medicine. The answer is "YES." In fact, I'd venture to say many of you are also under-conditioned and could stand a little more sport-specific training. So, let's stick to the subject matter and try these on for starters. Here are some of my most specific and clear reasons for bowlers to consider advocating and practicing sport medicine techniques.

## Dr. Jeff's Top 10 Reasons for Bowling-Specific Sport Medicine

- 1. A healthier bowler can withstand greater amounts of stress.**
  - A healthier person in general has increased his or her capability to withstand and resist stress. Obviously, the definition of "healthy" has and will be discussed and debated for years to come. Anyway, it is safe to infer if you condition your body, you will be able to withstand and resist the stress of our sport easier than if you didn't condition.
- 2. The conditioned bowler recovers quicker from injury.**
  - An athlete in good physical condition will always recover quicker from an injury than an athlete who lacks good physical conditioning or is not in what society calls "good shape." Enhanced physical fitness through physical conditioning enables the body's many systems to function more efficiently including during times of repair (injury maintenance). Therefore, it is safe to infer a well-conditioned bowler would recover from injury more efficiently and probably more quickly than a de-conditioned bowler.
- 3. The healthier bowler reduces his/her risk of injury.**
  - Not only does a better-conditioned athlete recover from injury quicker, but probably more importantly on this matter, he or she minimizes the risk of sustaining an injury. Physical conditioning strengthens the musculoskeletal system enabling it to withstand more stress and pressure than a normal sedentary or even active person. Healthier well-conditioned bowlers reduce the risk of cumulative trauma disorders such as bowler's tendonitis.
- 4. A stronger bowler can use a flexed wrist position more efficiently.**

- In today's reactive resin environment, we are seeing many bowlers attempting to turn the ball more so than ever before. Kids today are learning, at alarming rates, to hook the ball with enormous revolution rates and launch angles. Our game has become more physical and the flexed or most notably known "cupped" wrist position has become the choice of the advancing bowler. The flexed wrist position places enormous stress on the wrist joint and supporting tissues of the forearm and hand. A well-conditioned bowler will be able to utilize the flexed wrist position more effectively and longer, delaying fatigue and avoiding injury. Forearm and wrist strength are a must.
5. **A flexible bowler can more effectively use today's varying wrist positions.**
    - Not only is strength required to use the flexed wrist position effectively, but flexibility is also a major accompanying factor. A stiff or inflexible wrist joint will simply not allow you to learn and use too many releases. Quite frankly, your release capabilities will be limited.
  6. **The stronger bowler can increase ball speed with greater ease.**
    - Ball speed in our environment is a must. As these reactive and proactive coverstocks soak up the lane oils, ball speed is being recognized as an asset combating the deteriorating "burnt" heads. Ball speed is being recognized by the coaching community as an asset to the competitive tournament bowler. Quite simply, ball speed is generated through a combination of increased swing length and physical strength. Though traditional coaches like to teach increasing swing length (freely) will increase ball speed, it can be seen throughout the competitive bowling environment that bowlers are using more physical strength and force to drive into the slide and pull through the ball creating necessary speed. We are simply talking leg and shoulder strength. You won't be able to use it if you don't have it. Want to increase ball speed - increase your shoulder and leg strength.
  7. **The flexible bowler eases into the finish position effortlessly.**
    - Leg flexibility is pertinent to developing the "proper" or required safe and effective knee bend in the finish position. In fact, it's not so much knee bend as it is a combination of knee and hip flexion. The hips and knee joint must flex or bend together in order to properly lower oneself into the seated finish position. If your legs are stiff and inflexible, you simply won't develop much of a seated finish position.
  8. **A well-trained bowler can maintain better balance.**
    - This goes back to the previous reason. Balance and coordination go hand in hand with strength and flexibility. You can have one without the other, but your effective or functional use is limited. Conditioning your body, particularly your trunk and legs, will enhance balance throughout your approach.
  9. **The integrity of our sport depends on us - presenting ourselves as athletes.**
  10. **Perception - society must know the rigors of our sport and the intense training we undergo to become the ultimate bowler.**

These two go together. If you want society and the rest of the sporting community to accept you as a bowler-athlete and bowling as a sport, then present yourself as such and your sport as physically demanding and difficult requiring physical training and conditioning. Our society, at least here in North America, measures the difficulty and athletic requirements of a sport or activity often by the presentation of its participants. If we present ourselves as out of shape, de-conditioned, "I don't care about sport medicine" bowlers, then they will view us in that light. They will view us as a recreational or leisure activity and not a true athletic sport. If you want to change the perception of our so-called "recreational activity," then be the spokesperson and the sounding board for the bowler-athlete. Let your training methods do the talking. Don't tell me you think bowling is a sport. Show me you think it is.

Next month, does what you eat and when you eat it affect your bowling?