

Fitness For All?

This month I pose you with a question. Is fitness intended for everyone? Is it really advantageous to bowlers? In order to facilitate a fabulous year ahead of us, we must get started on the correct foot. For me, a five-step left-handed yet a right-handed bowler, it is the left foot. Soooooo, let us explore the idea of *Fitness for all*.

Originally I wanted to formulate some sort of acronym using the title, *Fitness for all*, but I vaguely remember in high school FFA symbolized Future Farmers of America. I can't very well use that one. OK, how about a strenuous detailed look at fitness concepts and their applications and measurements of human physiology and microbiology. No thanks, I don't think it can be written and I doubt it would maintain your interest. **So, I have decided to share some exciting yet startling information concerning the sport and fitness revolution in our society; and to what extent the bowling community has acknowledged physical fitness as a prime component of sport performance.**

My very first **BTM** article (June 1995) addressed the legitimacy issue of bowling as a sport. Once I felt to have established validity, I began writing about direct relationships between bowling, its participants (bowlers), and physical fitness. Now, some articles may seem redundant at times, hey I know, but not a day goes by that I don't think about ways we can gain credibility in society as a bonafide sport. **My belief is the inclusion of fitness and wellness concepts in the bowling community will greatly enhance our efforts to establish higher standards of credibility promoting justifiable legitimacy.** Some just say "this or that" is "credible or legitimate," but we are justifying our statements with attitude and action.

The Myth

A fallacy has existed for quite some time in our sport. Such a myth involves the physical fitness of bowlers and whether it improves sport performance. Is there a positive correlation between physical fitness and sport performance?

The past several decades, society has been conditioned to the notion that exercise training was only useful to the elite athlete or the obese individual. Due to this archaic misconception, the principle use of exercise to improve physical fitness and sport performance was nearly nonexistent, except those willing to experiment. Olympic athletes, collegiate football players, and bodybuilders were some who engaged in exercise training early on. Though, few if any other male-dominated sports relied on exercise training as a performance enhancer. Unfortunately, at that time a lack of male participation and experimentation with exercise was not the complete problem. For many years society had believed that women were the weaker sex and could not develop more strength and stamina. Women were thought to be

"physically straining themselves rather than physically training"

As stated by Mrs. Herbert Hoover in 1923 when the Anti-Varsity Sport Movement denounced female competitive sport participation and training. For nearly 50 years {1910's - 1960's} the thought was exercise would hamper a woman's childbearing capabilities. Therefore, exercise was viewed as medically and socially improper for women. Anything beyond a fashionable game of tennis, round of golf, or a bicycle ride in the park was believed to be detrimental to their young frail bodies.

Thank goodness for research and advancement. **Only as recent as the 1960's has our extensive research in human physiology and responses to exercise encouraged both men and women to exercise improving health and sport performance.** Fortunately, with our many medical and scientific discoveries, we know this former line of thinking concerning exercise and sport performance being medically and socially improper to be untrue. In fact, according to renown exercise researcher Wayne Westcott, "Today we know that the most important physical activity for women in their 40's and up is sensible strength-training."

There is much to be said and learned about the advances of women in sport. In 1904 women were first permitted to compete in the Olympic Games, participating in the archery event. By the 1920's women and girls were participating in multiple events in the Olympics and promoting a newly improved image to society. They began forming their own sporting organizations such as the Women's International Bowling Congress (**WIBC**) in 1917, the All American Girls Baseball League (**AAGBL**) in 1943, and eventually the **LPBT**, to name a few of my favorites.

Today we view the combination of women and physical activity in a much brighter fashion than years past. Women are now executing their right to attain equal employment opportunities and are therefore competing on the same professional fields and courts as men in the sports arena. Examples include the combined U.S. Open and the Merit Mixed

Doubles Classic. Also, the development of the Women's Sports Foundation and the advancement of women's intercollegiate athletics demonstrate women taking action to become more physically and administratively active in society.

Physical fitness, the myth or misconception?

In the 1940's and 1950's a tremendous amount of research was performed by European and Communist block nations developing elite athletes. One can view their dominance of the Olympic Games in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's accrediting such success to the advanced training methods practiced by their athletes, both male and female. A look back into their archives reveals exercise techniques being manipulated and tested, promoting and defining their advancement into the international sporting scene. **For years, these countries experimented with strength and endurance training protocols combined with stretching and nutritional supplementation techniques.** They were driven to find the appropriate training combinations, eventually perfecting them attributed by their Olympic dominance. Here's the catch. **Their tremendously exhaustive efforts into the science of exercise and nutrition spawned not only multiple Olympic and world championships, but other sporting bodies and national governments to review and extend the research pertaining to the athlete and general public.**

Science has opened the door for society to believe in the fitness lifestyle previously developed by those international sport federations. In America, such belief is easily identified as exemplified by the running and jogging boom of the 1970's, aerobic-dance boom of the 1980's, and so far the strength training boom of the 1990's. **Ironically enough, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports, still only 10% of all Americans are exercising enough to attain the valuable rewards.** Does the public need convincing that exercise and fitness enhance a total quality of life while improving sport performance? Probably not. The issue dwells within the hearts and minds of the people. You and I my friend. Exercise has long been viewed as a valuable training tool for elite athletes, which will not change. **Nevertheless, what is changing is the invaluable empirical evidence that exists pertaining to the physiological and lifestyle benefits exercise offers the non-elite sport enthusiast (see Table I).**

- Increases bone density fighting off osteoporosis.
- Reduces the risk of diabetes.
- Reduces the risk of coronary heart disease.
- Enables weight control.
- Lowers resting heart rate and blood pressure.
- Reduces cholesterol levels and body fat stores.

Bowling's Involvement

Often, I hear people in general degrade certain aspects of our sport. They make statements concerning its tarnished image, lack of Olympic status, membership declines, and uncleanly atmospheres. Though I feverishly debate some of these with passion, nothing disturbs me more than to hear of bowlers compared to couch potatoes. "An insult" I call it. **My pride rests in the understanding that each of us, as bowlers, is a talented individual.** For years, the sport of bowling has predominantly received a bad rap when it comes to its participants and their representation. Hey, I don't deny the fact our image has been tarnished over the years, but tarnished no more. **Nevertheless, a new horizon is coming about and the traditional view of the bowler is being reformed.** Out with the old and in with the new. **Thus the word "ATHLETE" ascends onto the scene.** That is right folks, ATHLETE. **The competitive bowler is in fact the competitive athlete.** The serious bowler has earned the right to be catalogued and categorized with the rest of competitive sports participants. Athletes we are.

Today's competitive bowler, more serious by nature, is now accepting the conventional wisdom of its counterparts some 30-40 years later. **The competitive bowler practices his/her talent daily, maintains a sport specific exercise program, adheres to a nutritionally sound diet plan, reads BTM, induces sport psychology techniques, seeks professional guidance from certified coach instructors, and has their equipment manipulated and fashioned by equipment experts.** Well, this may be a little far fetched, but it's a more proactive and positive image of the bowler / athlete. Are bowling's governing bodies listening? I believe so, and many are acting fast with innovative and creative new programs and techniques to promote a healthier enhanced image. See for yourself.

- **The Dick Ritger Bowling Camps** promote stretching and nutrition during their student and instructor camps. I spoke with Dick himself and can confirm he is an advocate of physical education and stretching training for bowlers.
- **USA Bowling** advocates stretching techniques that can be found in their materials. They are also looking into the development of furthering their training efforts in areas of fitness, nutrition, and injury prevention/safety. This excites me.
- **Team USA** currently takes the athletes each year to the USOC training center in Colorado Springs for some heavily sophisticated physical training and education. In fact, they are also currently investigating ways that its athletes can be more closely monitored, measured, and trained in exercise, nutrition, and lifestyle patterns. Look for future TEAM USA participants to be specifically coached and instructed using state of the art fitness and performance technology and nutritional engineering.

Even the amazing **Super School '97 that is to be held this June** is gearing for group sessions on fitness and performance, as well as individual consultation with the participants. You won't want to miss it. I want to work with each of you personally. As our sport leaders begin to accept the value of fitness as a viable tool improving performance and enhancing the sport's image, it is ultimately up to us, the athletes, to accept the challenge. We must act upon what we know and have learned from history and **BTM**. For years it has been clearly proven physical fitness impacts sport performance. Nevertheless, physical fitness is indeed neither gender nor sport specific, but instead intended for everyone.

Therefore, I Conclude The Competitive Bowler Should Be Considered The Competitive Athlete.