

Balance Training For Bob

This month was suppose to kick off three months of injury management. Something happened over the past couple issues though. The biomechanics series written by our editor, Bob Summerville, has created an influx of interest in balance training, and we at Briggs Consulting have been flooded with requests from our readers. To meet your demands, we are moving the injury management series back one month for the more pressing balance training.

A Balancing Act

A great portion of our society reports some difficulty with maintaining balance. It's as high as 50% of the older population. Falls and stumbles are the most prominent byproduct. Poor balance is generally multifaceted involving visual, vestibular, peripheral neural, and muscular components. If you are familiar with all of those, then stop reading and turn to the next page. For the rest of us, let's trek onward.

Balance training has become a fairly common element in our medical and healthcare community. Hospitals and acute-care facilities often have a balance program of some kind. In fact, here in Greenville, there is a balance clinic in one of the hospitals. Balance training drills are a simple and easy means to improve balance. We use them daily in the medical and physical therapy settings rehabbing injuries and transitioning people back to the workforce and into their functional lifestyles.

Collegiate and professional sport athletes also use balance training to enhance coordination and athletic skill development. Ever hear of football players taking ballet and dance class? I've even seen wrestling teams use a balance beam during practice. Balance training is used in virtually dozens of sports. Ironically, it's a fairly unexplored concept to the bowling community. No surprise to me. I sifted through some 17 different bowling books from my library and balance was a foreign concept to nearly all of them. The good news is, Bob has opened the can of awareness, and I have decided to report on it, assisting him here and now.

If you really think about it, we use our balance abilities tremendously when we bowl. Weight distribution, center of gravity, coordination, momentum, natural gait, etc. are all impacted by our balancing ability. The bowler-athlete's need for greater balance should be evident. It's particularly in demand during the slide, release, and finish position at the foul line. If this is starting to become clearer to you, I encourage you to start reading Bob's Biomechanics series and see what he has to say about the value of balance to the bowler.

Balance Boosters to Bolster Our Bowling

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 readers despise exercise. Yes I know, there are those 5% of you who don't exercise - "train" is the word I like to use. Or maybe it's the other way around. Anyway, these aren't exercises, but instead training drills. Think of them as balance boosters. Yeh - balance boosters to bolster our 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. 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.

Imaginary Balance Beam

Another basic balance booster is the Imaginary Balance Beam. Walk heel to toe in a straight line forward and then backward. It will seem easy again, till you close your eyes. There's no distance or time limit on this one. Just keep on walking.

Alphabeter

Here's one we see used in the athletic training room and sporting arena. While standing still, trace each letter of the alphabet with the foot of one leg while balancing on the other. Slowly go through the entire alphabet, then switch legs and do it again. The varying movements of the leg drawing the alphabet is a difficult challenge to maintain steady balance. Conduct this drill once a day as you progress from the previous two.

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, 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.

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. Bowlers are encouraged to add these balance-training drills to their training regimen. Coaches are encouraged to 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. 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.