

Warm-Up To Bowl - Don't Bowl To Warm-Up

During most of the clinics I conduct, I generally herald the warm-up as important and necessary. In fact, I go to great lengths to impress upon people how athletes should warm-up, condition their bodies, manage their injuries appropriately, regard sport nutrition and energy management, and take their physical and physiological self seriously when considering advancing their bowling careers. Even as I personally train bowlers both in the gym and on the lanes, DIAGRAMS 1&2, I make sure to spend ample time teaching a few basic calisthenics and stretches to help the bowler as they prepare to hit the lanes.

I feel it is unfortunate that I have personally witnessed a near absence of warm-up for bowling. Usually, what I see is that the lanes will come on for 5-10 minutes of practice. Some bowlers are still tying their shoes. Others grab a cold ball out of the bag or already have it on the return awaiting their arrival. As the lights come on, bowlers leap onto the approach without a whim or thought of warming. For the record, more acute injuries occur during the warm-up or practice period of a sport, than at any other point DIAGRAM #3.

Bowl to warm-up, or warm-up to bowling????????? What a thought. In other sports, coaches will use warm-up for athletes to practice their game skills. Athletes will use it to "loosen up." Trainers will use it to prevent acute injuries. Spectators will use it as part of the show (a.k.a. Mark McGuire's batting practice). Looking over all the various reasons and meaning of warm-up, its easy to see how it has infiltrated sport as a vital component to the event and participation.

A Defining Moment

Specific warm-up patterns have been devised for various sports. Thrower, jumpers, sprinters, tennis, racquetball, football, baseball, etc. all have warm-up routines. They all tend to start with the same general components and then progress into event or sport-specific drills specially formulated to rehearse the movements unique to that sport.

Devising a user-friendly bowling-specific warm-up routine is something I have worked on for years. The warm-up is used to successfully prepare you for competition or practice. In order for the warm-up to be effective, it is necessary to set aside enough time beforehand to complete the routine without being rushed.

Attention to the following Bowling-Specific Warm-Up Routine can and should become a ritual that serves to place you in a familiar and relaxing state before competition. It takes tremendous focus for a bowler to compete at the highest possible level. The proper focus required to concentrate on the essential skills prior to competition cannot be switched on and off like a light. A proper warm-up pattern helps ease the shift of focus from daily events and stresses to the deep concentration required for successful execution.

Physically, the warm-up can benefit performance by generating an increase in body temperature. Increasing temperature of specific muscles used while bowling may be the best method of warm-up for optimal physical performance. Besides raising your body temperature, heart rate, and muscular temperatures, a proper warm-up starts the cellular chemical reactions necessary for proper workings of the various energy systems. A proper warm-up also accelerates the respiratory and cardiovascular systems while increasing hormone levels specific to peak effort.

Neurologically, the warm-up must start the careful laying down of neural patterns specific to our skill. This warming of the neural patterns must, like the physiological start with general skills and progress to more highly technical skills. The performance speed of the various warm-up drills should be increased when the bowler masters each skill. The daily rehearsal of specific motor patterns at gradually increasing speeds will train us to perform our specific technical movements automatically. This "free flow" state will help us relax during periods of extreme intensity.

The Bowling-Specific Warm-Up Routine

Stage I - Limbering

Following the work of my colleagues, I suggest two stages comprise a sound bowling-specific warm-up routine. The first stage, Limbering, is a three to five minute loosening period designed to increase body temperature and joint lubrication. A slight increase in your body temperature enables blood to flow more rapidly and your joints to become lubed.

To limber up, spend 3-5 continuous minutes engaging in very light vigorous activity. Start by either jogging in place, brisk walking, stair climbing, arm circles, and or shallow leg lunges. I personally like the arm circles followed with the leg lunges. Begin your chosen movement slowly, building the intensity gradually. After 3-5 minutes, progress to stage two. DIAGRAMS 4 & 5.

Stage II - Bowling-Specific Stretching

The second stage is a stretching phase. Bowling related stretches are performed for about 3-5 minutes in an effort to further refine the warm-up routine. These stretches address the major muscle groups activated while bowling. Perform each stretch using the static stretching principle. Slowly take the stretch to your farthest pain-free range of motion, hold for 15-30 seconds, then slowly relax to your original position. Add these two to your routine: Shoulder/Rotator Cuff - move one arm at a time across the front of the chest cavity. Use the opposite hand and press on the triceps muscle behind the elbow joint stretching the rear head of the shoulder. DIAGRAM 6

Wrists/Forearm - stretching the flexor first, extend the arm fully in front of the body. Using the opposite hand apply pressure to the palm stretching the wrist into the relaxed extended position. Once the stretch is completed, immediately turn the palms down and stretch the forearm extensors by placing pressure onto the top of the hand. DIAGRAM 7

There you have it. A little shorter than the last one I designed. This is the updated modified version. A unique Bowling-Specific Warm-Up Routine. The only one of its kind. See to it that all or part of it finds way into your pre-participation preparation package.