

Practical Application - The Delivery - Part II

The release. I hear so much about it these days. Bowlers want more releases. They want different releases. They want to control their release, improve their release, and even perfect a "NEW" release. How many times have I heard that one before? Hey, how many releases can there be. Well, if you factor the varying degrees of axis tilt, axis rotation, ball speed, revolution rate, launch angle, loft, da da da da da da, then there could conceptually be several gazillion. Can there ever be a new release? Most of the time I see bowlers failing to do what they think they are doing. So why should we be worried about new releases when we generally haven't perfected the one we got.

The most common release I see these days is the one that collapses at the point of release. I'm not kidding. That's not good. That's right, a poorly executed, collapsed release. Turn the ball too early, swing is away from the ankle, hand is on the side and top of the ball. Walla, a collapsed poorly executed release.

For starters, I see way too many bowlers trying to do too much to the ball. I can't figure out why either. Don't we have the most powerful equipment ever made in our sport? If so, then why are we trying to do more and more to the ball? Well, for whatever reason, I want to add to the release dilemma, so lets carry on the release discussion for one more month and look at what you can do to increase your release capabilities.

Creating More Ball Motion

Today, we seem to hear an awful lot about axis tilt and axis rotation. Turn those tires in different directions and they will enable the ball to do many things. Tilt it for skid and rotate it for skid and flip. So how does one do that exactly? Well, it is really a matter of properly using the hand and wrist during the release.

John Fantini advocates turning those tires. I've heard his thoughts on the matter, spoken with him at lengths, and even worked with him on the lanes. I concur with his article last month, staying behind the ball is only advantageous in certain situations. So, let me help you turn those tires.

Last month we looked at cupping the wrist. A cupped wrist applies a tremendous amount of force above and beyond that of the straight wrist position. Cupping the wrist causes stress to your hand, wrist, and forearm. If you are unable to handle or withstand the stress, you will most likely either breakdown (become injured) or give out attempting to do so (collapsed wrist at the point of release). If you want to cup the wrist and maintain that cup throughout the swing, you need to have wrist strength and flexibility, otherwise it just isn't gonna happen.

Beyond the cupped wrist position, many bowlers want to create ball motion by generating more axis tilt and axis rotation. One way to do so is by using a "cocked wrist" position (Diagram 1). However, to use this wrist position effectively, you must maintain it throughout the swing to the point of release (Diagram 2). This can be very difficult and strenuous if your wrist joint is not exceptionally flexible and you don't have strong forearms. I find bowlers who attempt this new release wrist position most often are not strong enough or flexible enough to maintain it (the desired wrist cock) throughout the armswing. If you don't maintain that pre-set wrist position throughout the swing, then your attempt was thwarted by your inability.

The wrist is lean, brittle, and complex, containing eight bones, a couple dozen ligaments, three major nerves, and a network of tendons and muscles. The wrist moves primarily in four different directions, flexion, extension, ulnar deviation, and radial deviation. Regardless of the sport, the wrist and the surrounding areas are highly susceptible to injury, requiring care and attention by the athlete.

Tilting the ball in the stance and then maintaining it throughout the swing is tremendously stressful to the forearm and wrist joint, particular those muscles and tendons on the ulnar or underside of the forearm. By cocking the wrist inward, or what is known as ulnar flexion, the ulnar flexors of the forearm are thereby asked to do the work to maintain this position throughout the armswing. Most often they are not solely strong enough to do so, thereby relaxing during the swing returning the wrist joint to a more conventional and comfortable position at the point of release.

So, let me help you strengthen your forearms and stretch them out so you can begin practicing and perfecting this and other releases. By last month's account, my favorite wrist exercise is the wrist curl, which was diagrammed for you. you can also find detailed training specifics for the forearm in a copy of The Bowling-Specific Training Manual. Beyond the wrist curls though, there are a few other things you can do.

Stretching is something a lot of bowling coaches advocate. Just so you know, stretching only really increases the flexibility of a joint and does little in the area of strengthening. If you have not done much sport-specific training, then stretching is a good start. Try this great forearm stretch for starters.

Wrists/Forearm - stretching the flexors first, extend the arm in front of the body palm facing upward. Using the opposite hand apply pressure to the palm stretching the wrist into the relaxed extended position (Diagram 3). Hold for 30 seconds, and then relax. Once the stretch is completed, immediately turn the palm down and stretch the forearm extensors by placing pressure onto the top of the hand (Diagram 4). Hold for 30 seconds in the stretched position.

The Wrist Roll - for the wrist roll, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Extend your arms and hold a bar that has a light weight suspended at the bottom of a 3-5 foot cord. Alternately rotate your hands so that the weight moves up toward the bar, and then reverse the hand action to allow the weight to slowly return to the starting position (Diagram 5).

Whether you want to cup the ball more and snap your wrist during the release or you want to cock your wrist to create more axis tilt and axis rotation, both require wrist flexibility and forearm strength. Begin training your forearms and wrist muscles to enable them to give you an advantage over your opponents. Don't limit yourself by being physically incapable. You now have a few tools to expand your release potential, so get to work.