

Practical Application - The Finish Position

OK, here's one of my favorite to teach. If you have ever worked under my tutelage, then you know how much I love the finish position and those foul line drills. Finish what you start, that's what I always say. How often do I see that simple philosophy neglected on the lanes every day. Makes me wonder, why start something if you don't plan to finish it.

Plan to finish, that's the lead in here. What I see most often with beginner, intermediate, and many many advanced bowlers is their lack of a sound finish position at the foul line. Just pull through the ball any old way you can. Get it out onto the lane is all you need to do. I think that's just plain hogwash. I see the bowling approach from start to finish as a sport scientist. I view it through the eyes of a biomechanist, an ergonomist, and a teacher. And what I see isn't always pretty. So, let's finish off this month, no pun intended, with a look at how to improve your finish position, and how the body directly affects the finish and your overall performance.

A Defining Moment

So what exactly is the finish position? Well, I consider the finish position everything we do after the last step, through the slide, and beyond the point of release. It's all that wrapped into one. I see the finish position as the finishing touches of the approach. It is the transference from dynamic motion to static balance. From moving to stopping.

A good finish position has many items that can be explored. However, there is one item in particular I want to look at. It is your legs. That's right, your legs. Ask yourself this, "What are your legs doing in the finish position?"

The legs make up a large portion of your finish position. They are your bases of support. They are your stabilizers. They are the tools for balance, stability, and leverage, an often misconstrued thing in our sport. Without the legs, you would literally fall to the ground and crumble. In fact, I'm on one leg at the moment, having experienced a ruptured Achilles tendon and surgical repair. Needless to say, I am growing quite aware of how important both legs are to a bowler's finish as well as for everyday walking, standing, and such.

In the finish position, the legs, (Diagram I) provide a base for balance and stability, thereby allowing your upper body to project the ball. If you use your legs correctly (Diagram II), you will be able to sit down comfortably into the finish position allowing the ball to pass under the shoulder accentuating leverage at the point of release. Neglecting your legs in the finish is destructive to a good sound approach. If you do not use your legs to get down and allow the swing to pass under the shoulder, you lose leverage, power, ball motion, direction, accuracy, and I'm sure a few other things as well (Diagram III). And I know most of you are just like me.... we need every bit of leverage, power, and ball motion we can generate.

Compare diagrams IV and V and determine for yourself, which finish position used the legs to their advantage. It's obvious, Diagram V reveals the bowler using the legs in the finish position. That bowler is seated with the drag leg clearing the way for the arm swing to clear the hips. **This is only accomplished if the bowler's legs can adequately manage and balance the remainder of the body in the finish position. If your legs are weak, inflexible, or exhibiting a low level of balance, then managing to sink into a good seated finish position will be nearly impossible.** Diagram IV reveals the bowler having great difficulty managing the seated finish position, thereby losing leverage, direction and ultimately ball motion.

Lunge to Sit

One way to better train your body to sit into what I call the "seated finish position" is to exercise and coordinate them in a manner simulating the finish position. You can develop localized strength, but also flexibility, coordination, proprioception, balance, and a whole list of other things, by exercising your legs in the manner that you slide and finish at the foul line. And better yet, you only need to do one simple, yet effective, exercise. That's right, just one.

I encourage you to use an exercise called the **lunge**, which is designed to increase balance, flexibility, and strength in the upper and lower leg muscles while simultaneously teaching you the seated finish position. Diagrams VI and VII demonstrate the dumbbell lunge as the bowler simulates the finish position using resistance to enhance the muscles that are involved (upper and lower legs). The idea is to hold the resistance in the hands, and then step forward with your slide leg, sitting down into a simulated finish position. I would first try it without any resistance and merely place your arms out at your sides for balance and coordination (Diagram VIII). As you become accustomed to the movement, then you can slowly start adding resistance such as 5 or 10 pound dumbbells or even doing it at home using some of your bowling balls as shown in Diagram IX.

To perform this movement safely, stabilize yourself initially with the feet together. Slowly step forward reaching out with your leg, and plant the foot heel to toe slowly allowing the leg muscles and body to absorb and cushion the motion. Drop the hips and sit down to a point where your thigh (upper leg) is parallel to the ground and the knee joint is behind the toes (Diagram X). To finish the exercise, slowly push yourself up and back to the starting position, then switch legs and lunge again.

Perform the exercise 8-12 times per leg, alternating legs after every repetition. Work both legs to develop balance in your body. Only 1-3 sets of this exercise are needed once or twice a week. If you do them on more than one occasion, do not train back-to-back days, instead allow for a day or more of rest and recuperation. Note, if your knees are troubled by this exercise, attempt it through a partial range of motion (diagram XI). Keep the movement slow using the four-second by four second count (4x4).

Training your legs in a similar manner as the seated finish position should enable you to build confidence in your ability. The exercise called the lunge is a great way to train your legs to be stronger and flexible, and to train your body for your seated finish position. Lunge away.