

## Balance: Another Look At Training For Balance

Last year we briefly looked at balance and some things you can do to increase you balance. How many of you actually saw the article is unclear. How many of you implemented the material is also unclear. So, this month we revisit the balance issue for any new subscribers, and somewhat expand on it for those who saw this material last year.

We started performing some research on balance for bowlers and hope to follow up on it this coming fall as well. For now, take this introductory information and commit it to memory beginning to implement some simple balance training drills.

### To Balancing or Not to Balance

Balance training has become a fairly common element in our medical and healthcare and sport medicine community. Hospitals and acute-care facilities often have balance programs of some kind. Many physical therapy clinics work with people and their balance deficiencies, usually after an acute injury or during the treatment of a chronic condition. What we know in sport science is that a large portion of our society has difficulty-maintaining balance. It can be as high as 50% of the older population.

Balance training is often a combination of drills and closed-chain exercises that are designed to enhance a person's ability to balance their body while moving or standing still. Balance drills and exercises are a simple and easy means to improve balance, and should be viewed as something more than a rehabilitation technique.

Balance training is used daily in the medical and physical therapy setting rehabbing injuries and transitioning people back to the workforce and into their functional lifestyles. Beyond that, you can find many good examples of balance training with elite and professional athletes, designed to improve an athlete's ability to learn new skills and master current skills, ultimately improving overall performance on the playing field.

Collegiate and professional athletes use balance training to enhance coordination and athletic skill development. Ever hear of football players taking ballet and dance class? I have personally witnessed wrestling programs use balance drills during practice. Balance training is used in virtually dozens of sports and once again to be reviewed for bowling.

### The Value of Balance to the Bowler

Balance is used when you bowl, every ball you roll, every moment of the approach, and most importantly, throughout the finish position. Balance is exercised when you as you distribute weight, maintain a center of gravity, maintain coordination, and as you walk up the approach. These are all impacted by your balance or lack thereof. As bowlers, we have the greatest need for balance in the finish position of the approach.

View diagrams one (1) and two (2) and see just how important balance becomes to the bowler. In the finish position, a bowler balances his or her lower body through the legs. These two diagrams show how strength, flexibility, and coordination of the legs allow for "good" sound balance at the foul line. If you are not physically strong in your legs, or do not have greater than average flexibility in your knee and hip joint, then you probably don't have an exceptional finish position. In fact, we looked at that last month as we determined the lunge was a valuable exercise to learn the seated-finish position and to coordinate the legs for their role in the approach and finish.

Beyond that, balance is the culmination of proprioception and other fine motor skill factors. Not to dive into sport science too heavily, I want to provide you some simple and easy drills you can do at home, or at the bowling center, to improve your overall balance.

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 may despise exercise. These aren't exercises, but instead training drills. Think of them as training drills you can do at your bowling center or at home to bolster your 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.

### **Dr. 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, and 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. I encourage bowlers to add these balance-training drills to their training regimen. I suggest bowling coaches 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 and balance. 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.

Look for more on balance for the bowler-athlete as we unveil some of our research and finding in the fall of 2000.

See you next month.