

## A Coach's Dilemma - Evaluation Of Talent

This issue I want to begin straying from my normal fitness & wellness information venturing into some discussion of other bowling related matters facing coaches. If this revelation saddens you, I encourage you to pick up the latest issue of **Bowling This Month (BTM)** magazine and examine the ***Physically Speaking*** section.

As wonderfully introduced last issue, I coach The Florida State University Men's Collegiate Bowling Team. For those who are Nebraska fans, be alerted, my Seminoles are preparing to do battle this collegiate season. ANYWAY, recently completing our collegiate team tryouts, it was not without a great dilemma I faced making the team selections. This very process was so thought provoking and stressful, I nearly needed a vacation day just to recover. The predicament I speak of is the complicated matter selecting a certain number of individuals to participate on our collegiate bowling team from the vast pool of talent.

Before I begin this discussion, I wish to share with you a little about our collegiate bowling selection process, termed "tryouts." Students wishing to participate on the collegiate bowling team are required to tryout. Tryouts are scheduled generally the first two or three weekends of the fall semester each academic school year. We require every student planning to participate to pay a tryout fee and bowl four (4) scheduled 8-game blocks.

Final team selection is based on a standard rule of eight (8) men and eight (8) women, while additional picks are at the discretion of the coaching staff. Designation of the standard eight men and eight women are based on rank order of the accumulated scores for 32 tryout games. Additional selection criteria include:

- **Previous collegiate experience.**
- **Analytical evaluation of the bowler's skill.**
- **Emotional management and temperament of the bowler.**
- **Level of sincerity and concentration.**

This criterion has been a norm at our University for many years and is currently under my review. In fact, the **evaluation of bowling skill** is what I want to zero in on so that we can bring our level of competence and assessment criteria to a more synonymous state of reality.

The root of this discussion rests within our ability to appraise a bowler's skill. For as long as I can recall, it has been a traditional standard in our sport to evaluate and select bowlers based on a performance score or average. Often these performance-based scores are garnered from a previous season or set of tryout games. As examples, our national team uses the U.S. Amateur Championships and many of our collegiate programs do the same through tryouts.

The question remains unanswered whether or not using an outcome score is valid. Assessing bowling ability using a normative score has, in my eyes, long since become a relative and subjective standard which multiple variables affect that are within and out of our control. In fact, with the scoring spree our sport has seen of late, the once infamous PAR score has been relegated to a mere subtle achievement. Can we then expect to use such scoring standards to evaluate our participants? Well, the system of bowling is not mine to debate in this forum; instead **the measure of a bowler's ability looms heavily on my heart.**

Many variables influence our sport, some of which are cognitive while others behavioral. We can list these variables to include weather, temperature, humidity, altitude, lane surface, type of oil, conditioning pattern, lane topography, lighting, energy level, rest, preparation, athletic ability, developed skill, equipment, equipment selection, equipment fit, decision making processes, attitude, psyche, cognitive capability, time management, emotional management, motivation, physical strength, aerobic capacity, flexibility, body composition, hydration, and even time of the month. Now these are only a few of the many variables that impact a bowler's performance on any given day. Notice athletic ability and developed skill were just two of a list of virtually hundreds. Maybe some day we can compile a more comprehensive list for coaches and administrators.

Recognizing this incomplete list of extraneous variables influences bowling performance, I ask you to contemplate the following question: **can we realistically use normative scoring to evaluate a bowler's ability?** Probably not with any great accuracy and consistency. Some will make a case for difficult scoring conditions or the use of neutral bowling equipment as more viable means to evaluate bowling skill, but these are still affected by many external forces. It is somewhat unfair that both coaches and participants are faced with this dilemma. Therefore, it is with reason we begin to investigate alternate appraisal criteria.

Take for example the sports of racquetball and tennis. Both use a subjective/objective evaluation system when rating participants. The USRA and USTA each have a clearly defined set of criteria enabling officials to rate its players.

My thoughts lean toward developing similar standards using both subjective and objective guidelines to evaluate bowlers. The rationale is to reduce the effects of extraneous variables on evaluation of skill mastery, thereby providing a more accurate appraisal. Assessing a bowler's ability is an integral part of all bowling instruction. Coaches rely heavily their competence to analyze a bowler's skill using something other than a score or average. In order to expand our ability to assess bowling skill validly and reliably, let us review some possible standards:

- **An objective analytical evaluation of a bowler's physical skill.** Using objective criteria such as **USA Bowling's** standards will help coaches determine the diversity and limitations of an individual's physical game. The extent of a bowler's skill can be determined through an analysis of that individual's biomechanics. Granted, there are exceptions to every sport, they are generally few and far between.
- **An objective evaluation of a bowler's emotional management capabilities.** Psychological profiles can deliver valuable information. How a person perceives and manages adversity such as competition, negative outcome, success, or reward can aid the coach discerning the individual inside the individual. Many valid psychological profiles exist in our society.
- **An objective assessment of a bowler's cognitive aptitude.** The knowledge base of every athlete including the bowler should be a reflection of his or her advancement in the sport. Determining a person's understanding of the fundamentals of bowling, equipment, conditioning patterns, lane surfaces, physical fitness, and the multitude of extraneous variables provides the coach an inside to a person's knowledge base.

Notice each criterion is objectively measured. Removing the subjective element from an assessment enables us to more reliably and validly appraise skill and overall ability. With many people in our sport promoting differing ways of teaching and performing, we must begin to formulate some multidimensional evaluation criteria. Whether my personal standards are appropriate or not remain to be seen. Instead, I challenge you, the coaches of our sport to assist me developing a set of appropriate evaluation standards. If you have some subjective or objective evaluation criteria you think are valid measures of bowling ability, I encourage you to contact me so we can further this discussion. Use this information to begin some exchange or discussion into a coaching issue demanding our attention.