

## **Playing To Your Potential**

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Most bowlers, young and old, professional and amateur are always looking for ways to enhance the mental processes of their game to correspond with higher performances and higher scores.

Bowling is a sport of individuals and everyone has their own ideology and approach to the game, even though physical and mental skills are being taught and have been taught over the years. There is no doubt that sound physical skills only enhance individual performances during competition. And, there is no doubt that repetition of those physical skills, also contributes. But what allows those physical skills to be fluid and productive for long periods of time -- nothing but "trust." And what is trust, a belief originating from within, that the player has what it takes to act in a proper, effective and successful manner. It is nothing but one of the many mental processes necessary to become a world class player.

"Trust" having faith; being self-reliant, having confidence; having hope or just giving yourself credit in your abilities to perform the art of bowling without any conscious mental disruptions, disturbances or distractions. Having faith in what, you ask? How about yourself! It's the result of countless hours of study, training and practice to obtain and hone the physical skills of the game to their highest levels, which now must be set free. And how do we do that, you ask? By "Trust." It's the common ingredient of great players. It's the final realization that you must stop obsessing about the mechanical elements of the game; the setup; the ball position, the approach, the position of your shoulders, the swing, the release, the finishing position, the follow through, the ball roll, the line your playing and the list goes on and on. It's today's player realizing the importance of "playing with or by feel," since the conscious mind has already developed the physical skills and the subconscious mind how to play the game, mentally.

Trusting one's ability to maintain their focus, concentration, rhythm and tempo though the turmoil's of the game (anger, fear, frustration, disappointment and whining or just making excuses for this or that) allows players to additionally maintain an air of relaxation that aids them in playing to their potential by maintaining the small mental checklist before they arrive or convert into the "panic syndrome" and lose their sense of good judgment. For lack of a better term, I call it "RAP-M" (Recognize, Analyze, Process and Materialize).

- Recognize - The player using their powers of observation to feel or see what is going on with or within themselves, seeing how the lane surface is interacting with their style of play and their bowling ball. Recognizing what is out of the norm, physically or mentally.
- Analyze - The player using their mental capabilities/capacities to consciously and subconsciously provide themselves with the appropriate data for adjustments, or the correction necessary to make the next shot, whether it be change in style, hand positions, bowling balls, etc. Keeping their mind open and use of their imagination, if necessary to get the job done.
- Process - Again, using their mental capacities/capabilities to accept the analyzed data and put it into their next shot, without reservation (no fear, no questions).

- Materialize - The output once they set up on the approach. Letting it happen, Just doing it. Allowing themselves to do. Concentration, focus and execution, and according to Dr. Hintz, "You trained it, now trust it."

Players today are finally realizing they can't deliver a perfect shot each and every time and are learning to accept that one single fact. Those that have employed this acceptance are now taking and accepting the heat of poor shot making off themselves and are able to maintain their focus and relaxed concentration to the next shot at hand. Thus, bowling on a tough lane condition, or an easy one for that matter, and keeping the ball in play now becomes part of the routine of successful play and maintaining a tournament mind. Knowing they can't use their favorite ball, or their favorite alignment, they develop and accept a strategy and lane general ship, hence not making absolutely perfect shots has a lot to do with their overall success. Thus, a determination if the shot was performed in an excellent acceptable manner prevails.

When players begin cutting off their follow through or start thinking and analyzing every shot they deliver, they stop performing proficiently, stop cashing and stop winning tournaments.

Players that become purely mental and have mental toughness generally are different from their peers. They are steel minded and refuse to be distracted by the lanes, ball reactions, their peers, and develop an inner strength to pursue their dreams through many years of failure and disappointment. The great players reemphasize the importance of the right mental approach to the game. We have heard it in past writings as "Competence = Confidence." It's a type of confidence one has in oneself. They are great strategist and thinkers on the lanes. They know that confidence should not be confused with vanity or pride, remembering that vanity is telling other how good you are; confidence is telling yourself how good you are. They understand and use the principles of visualizing the shot they desire before they step up on the approach. They insist on waiting until their mind was relaxed, clear and focused before they delivered the shot.

Bowling psychology has continued to progress, and the teachers say that a player has to pass through numerous stages: unconsciously incompetent, consciously competent, and unconsciously competent. Today's best players strive to stay on the third level. They only want to see the target and let it go. They realize how much better their swings are and the more sharply they focus on their target. They try to have no thoughts about mechanics at all. A player knowing what it takes to win has probably the most important factor in alleviating the fear of failure and maintaining an upbeat, positive attitude throughout the competition. The new breed of bowling winners has to have a tougher approach to the game than their predecessors did. Nowadays, winning scores are high and players have to be free and confident from the first frame, through the first game, the entire block and tournament.