

Improve your swing & release

How? Try this backup drill

At the Kegel Training Center, we are often asked how a bowler can improve his/her ball motion by achieving a stronger release. This can be a very complex question to answer. Many factors and issues can impact a bowler's ability to achieve a stronger release. When reviewing a bowler's release, and to more accurately answer their question, we first check for a proper fit as well as evaluate the bowler's physical game. Both, in isolation or in tandem, can negatively affect the bowler's swing and release.

In regard to the physical game, as I discussed in great detail in last year's July issue, elite bowlers are able to create a tight Swing Slot that helps to promote the possibility of a stronger release, due to swing direction and potential leverage with the hand and forearm position. But, a straighter swing and a tight Swing Slot is only part of creating a strong release.

One of the biggest challenges for many amateur bowlers is to learn how to change the position of the hand into the release to improve the potential for ball motion. Many of these bowl-

ers lose potential energy through the ball by rotating the hand early in the downswing, getting the hand to the outside of the ball. This normally begins at the top of the swing when the hand begins to move to the outside of the ball, well before the release. When this happens, the elbow also goes to the outside, creating a weak release. For most, it is extremely difficult to change this habit to an improved one in which the hand is in a stronger position.

To maximize leverage into the release the forearm should be forward. Think of this as a cricket batter hitting a ball. Clearly, hitting through with the wide part of the bat (forearm) will generate far more energy than hitting with the thin side (side of the hand). My colleague Del Warren discusses this with an analogy of a golf club. Your hand is similar to the club face with the forearm like the shaft of the club. If the club face is turned when striking the ball, you will lose a significant amount of energy through the ball. This is similar to throwing

the ball with the hand on the side with the elbow out.

In this month's installment of Slowinski at-large, I share with readers a relatively simple drill that will improve both the swing line as well as improve the hand and forearm position needed to create more ball motion. With a dedicated practice routine using this drill, bowlers will improve significantly.

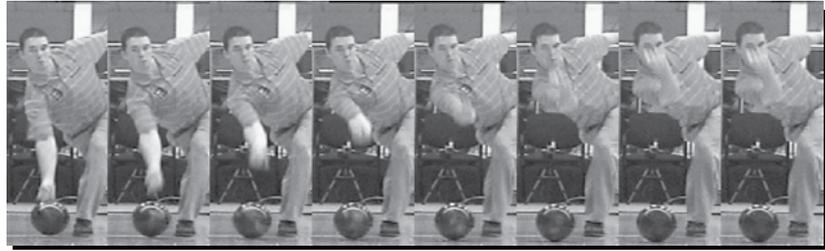
This easy-to-use drill is literally throwing a backup ball with a full approach. Some readers might see this drill as unorthodox. Indeed, it is. Yet, this is one of the most powerful drills to improve the hand and forearm position from the top of the swing. It has helped hundreds of players improve both their Swing Slot and release. And, most importantly, an elite release is dependent upon the same motion as those bowlers who throw a backup ball. The only difference is the counter clockwise motion with the hand and wrist.

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Improved hand and forearm position

As a Master Teaching Professional, I often recommend a backup drill to the bowlers I am working with to improve their game. A backup ball will promote an improved position of the hand and forearm that is consistent with how elite bowlers throw, from the top of the swing through to the follow-through. Look at the photo sequence of Sean Rash's release to follow-through. What do you notice? Doesn't this appear to be similar to a backup ball? He isn't actually throwing a backup ball. But, an elite game sports a backup ball-like motion with a counter-clockwise motion with the hand and wrist.



Sean Rash

inside of the ball, whereas amateurs play the outside of the ball.

Since an elite bowler's downswing and follow-through emulates that of a bowler throwing a backup, the backup drill promotes the necessary hand and forearm position to improve the potential for increased ball motion. This can be seen in the Sean Rash photo sequence.

From the top of the swing, the inside of the hand travels to the inside of the ball into the release. This places the fingers in the 7 & 8 o'clock to the 8 & 9 o'clock at the bottom of the swing for a righthanded bowler. This also sees the elbow moving inside in the downswing and through the follow-through. These are the hallmarks of an elite game. With the

backup drill, you too can promote this in your game.

How to do it

The backup drill is intended to promote a position in which the elbow is inside the ball, with the hand to the inside side of the ball. Start slowly to develop the feeling of throwing a backup ball. It will take a short amount of time to commit to an actual backup drill, especially for those of you who currently start to turn outside of the ball with your hand...very early in the downswing. You must be mentally disciplined to throw the backup proficiently.

From the top of the swing, you need to be focused on throwing a

Why it works

As a student of the sport and avid reader of *Bowling This Month*, you have frequently read or heard about the importance of the hand position into the release to generate ball motion. Specifically, professionals and other elite players are able to play the



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backup shot. Focus on the position of the elbow, from the top of the swing through to the release and follow-through. Think of the elbow coming inwards as the ball is descending in the downswing. I have described this movement as “El-Booty” to some of the bowlers I have worked with on this drill. Specifically, think of your elbow going to the ball-side cheek or to the ball-side hip.

Or, you might think of your hand position or where the palm of your hand is positioned relative to your arm and body. Focus your mind on your hand and the direction the hand will travel. The palm of the hand moves toward the right wall as you throw. The elbow will move inward in the downswing. And, since the forearm is more forward, the follow-through will go through your face.

This can be seen in the photo sequence of Sean Rash. As he follows through, the elbow moves inward. Most elite bowlers have a similar follow-through with the arm through the face and the elbow continuing inward after the ball is released. This is the same as when bowlers throw a backup ball.

To develop your skill, do 50 backup shots during each practice session. This will reinforce the Swing Slot and improved forearm and hand position. Visually, you will begin to see an improved smoother ball motion as you execute it more effectively. The ball motion should become smoother and more fluid.

In addition, work to become more accurate. Actually, as you practice the drill, be sure to target from the opposite side of the lane. This will aid you in beginning to develop the backup motion and trajectory needed for accuracy. You might be surprised when this will come in to play for you.

Additional benefits

The improvement in the Swing Slot as well as forearm and hand position is the biggest benefit from working diligently and frequently with the backup drill. As I mentioned earlier, it is unorthodox. But, it is extremely effective.

With an increased proficiency in throwing a backup release, a residual benefit will occur. As a righthanded bowler, you will increasingly be able to create a lefthanded ball motion, with skill. Specifically, this will allow you to be able to shoot challenging splits such as the 2-10 and 2-8-10, as well as frequent wash-outs and splits such as the 3-10 or 1-2-4-10.

After becoming proficient, begin to practice shooting appropriate splits and wash-outs to determine which conversion strategy can work for you. Reflect on all of the possible spare attempts that would benefit from shooting it with a backup ball. Write these down and experiment with the backup to convert those that would benefit from an opposite-handed bowler due to the angles created. The more you practice with the backup, the more proficient and confident you will become.

Worth dedicating time for

The backup drill is a valuable practice tool for coaches and players to use. It will improve the Swing Slot as well as significantly promote a better hand and forearm position into the release. Over time, this will become how you throw from the top of the swing through to the follow-through.

I have outlined many reasons for this drill in this article, as well as given you a visual image of how this appears in the follow-through. But, you will better understand the value by reviewing the swing of elite players as well as the release of top professionals. Accordingly, with the goal of reinforcing a better understanding, I strongly recommend re-reading my Slowinski at-large articles, July 2008 (Swing Slot) as well as the April 2008 (increasing your rev rate). These articles are available to read at my coaching website.

With this renewed understanding of how elite bowlers create a great swing, as well as thinking about how to increase your rev rate, the purpose behind the backup drill will take on added value, and you will likely begin to appreciate the fact that this unorthodox approach will help you bowl better with your regular game. By dedicating time to the backup drill, your game will evolve tremendously. 🎯

instant gratification.

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