This month, I offer readers four experimental tips designed to expand your repertoire of release and lane play tools. You will best acquire understandings of these tips through experimentation. Thus, I name these four tips experimental. And, once you experience working with the ideas outlined in each tip, over time, you will add additional releases, a new spare shooting strategy and more.

Experimentation and trying something new will keep you thinking and growing as a bowler. In my opinion, this is a requirement of becoming great in our sport. Most importantly, the more you know and are able to actually do, the better you will fare when situations emerge that present interesting dilemmas on the lanes. Try these experiments and you will provide yourself with some extra options available to you when unique situation presents itself. It can’t hurt to try....

**Experimental Tip # 1: Thumb in first to reduce grip pressure**

Sometimes, effective practice comes out of experimentation. This article has emerged from reflective trial and error through experimentation. As soon as Tommy Jones discussed placing his thumb in his thumbhole before his fingers, I was very curious. You can see him do this in his setup on his finals appearances. Hey, Jones is the fastest bowler to 10 PBA titles. Accordingly, it is worth a closer investigation to evaluate the potential advantages of the thumb-in method. So, as an inquisitive coach, I explored the differences between fingers-in first versus thumb-in first. What I found was a very effective method to reduce grip pressure and ensuring a cleaner/softer release, especially effective on the outside part of the lane for shorter patterns.

Whenever a bowler is beginning to hit up on the ball, I ask them to try this experiment. They are often shocked by how little grip pressure is present. This method can be very important on shorter patterns or longer patterns with heavier volume conditions. Each scenario represents a situation in which you do not want the ball to be jumpy. So, this experimental method is effective to reduce grip pressure.

So, give it a try. As with every experiment, be patient and watch the ball reaction as well as paying attention to the feel. You will soon realize that this is a strategy that can help you keep your hand relaxed. A relaxed hand can often lead to a cleaner release because it keeps your hand softer at the release point, allowing the ball to leave the hand easily. You want to compare the difference between fingers-in first and thumb-in first. The next time you practice give it a try. Throw some regular, fingers in first, shots initially to warm-up. Pay...
attention to the ball reaction. Then, try the following experiment:

- Put your thumb in the ball first;
- Next, place your finger into the first joint (this will feel odd initially). Try to relax as you are shifting your fingers into the holes;
- Keep your hand from shifting and moving the thumb that was set first;
- Now, completely relax your hand with the objective to reducing the finger and hand pressure as much as possible;
- Literally, say to yourself, “My hand is relaxed.” before you start.

As you begin to work with this experimental method, keep the hand relaxed through both the push and swing. Remember, this is an experiment. What I discovered was a method to keep the hand quiet on more challenging lane conditions leading to a cleaner release and more ball reaction. This will be very effective on short or longer patterns when you want to reduce the jumpiness of your reaction.

Note: If you like the feeling of reduced grip pressure from this experimental tip, consult your IBPSIA pro shop operator about any necessary pitch changes that you might need by using this method.

**Experimental Tip # 2: Fingertip pressure to adjust axis rotation**

Being able to alter the release angle and axis of rotation is a critical adjustment for all bowlers to master. As you read in my September column, a bowler can increase the amount of extra back end hook by 8 boards by accurately moving from 30 to 60 degrees of axis rotation. This is why I developed the 4-Point Release System as discussed in the November 2006 issue of BTM. It is a method to enable a bowler to repeat a specific release angle on the axis of rotation. For many, this can be accomplished almost immediately with success. Yet, some bowlers need a beginning release step before they can move directly to the 4-point system.

So, enter-in the fingertip pressure experiment. One easy way to manipulate your side rotation at the release is with fingertip pressure. The idea is to use fingertip pressure of a specific finger at the release point. This will create more or less roll, more or less axis rotation.

Literally, if you push with one fingertip, as you release the ball, you will get more of a specific ball reaction. To understand this, flip your hand over so you are looking at your palm. Now, look at each of the fingertips. Imagine your hand under a bowling ball. Notice the index finger is located more to the outside of the bowling ball. If you were to push, at release, with this fingertip, you would likely rotate more around the side of the bowling ball. Conversely, if you pushed with your ring finger, at release, you would likely roll the ball more. It is that simple. The key is to apply pressure to a specific fingertip at the release. Focus on pushing with that fingertip only. Now, go out and try the experiment.

After looking at the above photo, follow the chart at the bottom of the page to help you. Experiment by throwing 10 shots with each specific fingertip leading the way to the target. Literally push with the specific fingertip as you throw the ball. This will create a different pressure point and create a slightly different ball reaction. The higher the angle of side rotation, the more skid and back end you will achieve. Remember, sometimes, higher axis rotation can be too much for the lane condition in play. Once you become confident doing this experiment and can achieve very different releases, revisit the 4-point release system for more accurate axis rotation adjustments.

**Experimental Tip # 3: Using only two fingers to throw straight**

Using two fingers is not new. At the turn of the 20th century, tenpin bowlers used 2 fingers to throw a bowling ball. And, in fact, some bowlers were still using this method into the 1950s. Have you ever attempted to throw the bowling ball with just the middle finger and the thumb? Or,
have you tried bowling with just using the ring finger and thumb? If not, it is time to experiment with this method for throwing the ball straighter when the lanes are burnt in the heads or just dry front to back.

Specifically, I have taught this two-finger method to help bowlers convert spares on very dry conditions or as a strategy to reduce ball reaction when the lanes are burnt. And, I have used this myself at the Petersen Classic to shoot a 10 pin with a pole on the approach. It works well to keep your ball in play when the lanes are difficult due to excessive friction. When the lanes are tough, you can score well by thinking outside of the box. The 2-finger method will provide an option.

When the lanes are bone dry or you are having difficulty converting the corner pins, try the following experiment:

- Experiment with putting just the middle finger and the thumb in the ball. Throw the ball and observe the ball reaction.
- Experiment with putting just the ring finger and the thumb in the ball. Throw the ball and observe the ball reaction.
- What do you notice about the ball reaction?

Sometimes, you will find yourself on a very difficult condition or you need some help to just be able to throw the ball straight. You will soon realize that you can throw any ball straight. You will soon realize this myself at the Petersen Classic to help bowlers convert spares on very dry conditions or as a strategy to reduce ball reaction when the lanes are burnt. And, I have used this myself at the Petersen Classic to shoot a 10 pin with a pole on the approach. It works well to keep your ball in play when the lanes are difficult due to excessive friction. When the lanes are tough, you can score well by thinking outside of the box. The 2-finger method will provide an option.

In this experimental tip, I explore a method for increasing your margin of error in spare shooting and increasing your ability to throw the ball straighter. The result is an increased conversion rate in spare shooting for many bowlers. I call this the Intersection Spare Method, since the target is at a visual point on the spare target line, down the lane.

Follow these directions to try the experimental spare shooting method:

- First, draw an imaginary target line, in your mind, cross-lane, to the intended contact pin or pins. Try to make this a thick black line, about 1-inch wide. Paint the line back and forth, up and down. This will “burn” the imagined image in your mind.
- Now, imagine an intersection point, across the lane, at a distance 40 to 50 feet down the lane.
- These two imaginary lines create an intersection point in which you will target, at that distance, on the intersection board. Thus, you know and understand the name of this experiment, the intersection spare method.
- The distance promotes a straighter trajectory while the distance promotes an increased margin of error.
- With all spare methods, the basics are what counts. So, with this experimental method, don’t forget about the fundamental basics of great spare shooting: (A) set the body perpendicular to the target (B) break the wrist down to promote roll (C) use a plastic ball to increase skid and reduce hook (D) spread the pinky while keeping the index in to promote roll (E) hold the ball higher in the stance to increase ball speed, which promotes skid and reduces hook.

**Multiple-pin conversions**

1. First, draw an imaginary target line, in your mind, cross-lane, to the intended contact pin or pins. This should be the best contact to convert. In the case of the 3-6-10, this is the 3-6.

2. Second, imagine an intersection point, across the lane, at a distance 40 to 50 feet down the lane.

3. Now, the two imaginary lines create an intersection point in which you will target, at that distance, at that board.

To test the effectiveness of this method, compare the spare shooting percentages, overall, single pin and multiple pin spares, of your current method with the intersection spare method. Take data during one practice session using your own. On your next practice day, take your conversion rate with this method. Watch the ball reaction as well. Does it go straighter than your current method? I think you will find this spare shooting system very effective.

**Start experimenting**

These experimental tips should provide you with some additional skills for your lane play kit. But, as with everything, it takes practice to master each of the four tips. Initially, these experimental tips will feel odd to you. But, with a little time, you will master each of the four.

First, you need the knowledge of what it will do when you use these tips. This requires experimentation. Then, you must practice these tips. Once you practice, then you will have skill. Knowledge + practice = skill. Skill leads to confidence. So, what are you waiting for? It is time to build more confidence with these experimentations!