Are you 100% committed when competing?

Bowling This Month has published many articles espousing the importance of utilizing sport psychology to significantly improve one’s game. But, how important do you as a reader actually think your mental game skills are to enhancing your performance on the lanes? After reading this article, you might truly be surprised how important sport psychology can be to performing at the highest level.

In this article, I provide a brief overview of an important applied research finding on the relationship of sports psychology on elite world-class performance, as well as review two case studies illustrating the importance of mental skills, one from the PBA Tour and the other from Malaysia. After this reading, I believe you will take your mental game more seriously.

Let’s start with an interesting study. In preparation for the 1980 Winter Olympic Games, the Soviet Union engaged in an experiment to determine the impact of mental skills training on world-class performance. Four equally matched groups of Soviet athletes were subjected to four different training programs in their run-up to the Games. The training groups and their focus were as follows:

- **Group 1**: Only physical training (100%)
- **Group 2**: 75% physical training & 25% sports psychology (mental skills)
- **Group 3**: 50% physical training & 50% sports psychology (mental skills)
- **Group 4**: 25% physical training & 75% sports psychology (mental skills)
So, having read the training focus of each group above, which of these world-class groups do you believe performed the best at the Olympics? How important is the balance of physical training and mental skills building? Is physical training more important than sports psychology? Or, is the opposite true?

If you chose group 4, you would be correct. The group with three-quarters of their training focused on mental skills development outperformed all of the other groups. These were all world-class athletes. As an athlete moves to a higher level of competition, sport psychology becomes increasingly important to maximizing performance. And, this truth is supported with the findings from other studies on high-performing athletes.

**A PBA case study: The tour trials journey of Todd Book**

Before this PBA season, you might have never heard of Todd Book. To be honest, I hadn’t. He is new to the PBA, having joined in 2006. He made headlines last summer with his consistent performance at the 2007 PBA Tour Trials, winning the overall title and leading for 4 out of 5 rounds.

So, how did he stay so consistent in such a stressful competitive setting of the Tour Trials? His secret of success seems to be his strong mental game that helped him lead the PBA Tour Trials. In an effort to explore his use of sports psychology, I analyzed his quotes as recapped on the PBA.com web site. His quotes provide us with a clear example of how important the mental game is to being successful at the elite level.

**Todd Book on June 1, 2007**

“It all comes down to adjustments. And I don’t get emotional about things....I’m not leaving splits and I’m not missing spares. When I’m out on the lanes I bowl one shot at a time. I don’t get ahead and I don’t look behind.”

**Slowinski’s observation of lesson learned from quote:**

Once the ball leaves your hand, you have no control. Stay in the present and execute the best possible shot each time. You must be focused mentally. Continual observation of your ball reaction is important. Awareness enables wise and thoughtful adjustments. Most importantly, keep your emotions consistently stable.

**Todd Book June 2, 2007**

“I’ll have the same mentality going into tomorrow. I’ll take it one shot at a time, I don’t watch the scoreboard and I don’t watch other people’s scores.... I never look ahead and I never look behind. I just continue to stay focused and concentrate on the little things. If I make a bad shot, I pick up as many pins as I can and move ahead to the next frame.”

**Slowinski’s observation of lesson learned from quote:**

Focus on what you can control. Ignore, as much as possible, what you can’t. Commit to the mental game daily, whenever you take to the lanes. A bowler should stay in
the present. Pin count over time can make a huge difference. Try not to watch the scoreboard or your own scores. This can cause unneeded stress that you can’t control. Just, focus on executing the best possible shot each time.

Todd Book on May 31, 2007

“I had never seen the pattern before last night, in fact I hadn’t seen the pattern from Tuesday night either....After the one-hour practice session last night I stayed an extra two hours and practiced on it some more.”

Slowinski’s observation of lesson learned from quote:

This is Tiger Woods-like and illustrates a positive attitude and positive outlook. Individuals who have more dedication to practice will have more success. This helps being prepared for transitions as well as lining up as quickly as possible for each pattern. By taking more time on the lane condition, a bowler can develop a plan to play the pattern, beginning-middle-end.

A Malaysian case study: from 39th to 8th, the tournament journey of Ozir Zuri

In May of last year, I trained a group of elite youth bowlers, ages 14-17, for the Singapore Sports School U18 International Tournament. Ninety of the best U18 bowlers from the Asian region, from nine countries, competed. The event was held at a training center venue which has 12 total lanes, consisting of 4 different lane surfaces, 2 different wood and 2 different synthetic surfaces.

During the centralized training, held over 8 days, we had prepared release work on the tournament pattern, completing daily lane play planning and revision, fitness work, team building as well as daily mental skills training. The bowlers were ready to compete at their best. And, the final results illustrate this. They finished in 8th, 17th, 18th, 28th, 33rd and 40th. But, the bowler who ended in 8th is the story. He literally went from 39th after two rounds to 8th overall.

Ozir Zuri, was sitting in 39th position after Round 2, or twelve total games. He had prepared for this challenging tournament, but his performance was up and down. Overall, he had underperformed significantly and was averaging 180 for the first two rounds.

When asked by the coaching staff, he admitted only committing to his pre-shot routine for approximately 70 percent of his shots. In the previous week, we had spent hours and hours practicing and preparing to use the pre-shot routine. But, like you, it is always up to the bowler to execute. You have to be disciplined in order to be successful and consistent. His game plan was working. But, since he was inconsistent with the pre-shot routine, his performance was inconsistent. And, the quality of the competition didn’t allow him to be inconsistent and still perform near the top.

After a lengthy discussion with the coaching team, prior to Round 3, he committed to a 100 percent pre-shot routine execution on every frame. Our coaching staff continued to emphasize what we had worked on all week (i.e., stick to your plan, observe, adjust and dedicate yourself to the pre-shot routine, 100 percent). Ozir had a lane play plan, but he was not executing consistently. But, now, he was ready to give 100 percent. He knew he wouldn’t stand a chance otherwise. So, beginning in Round 3, he started with 100 percent commitment to the pre-shot routine and continued throughout, 100 percent. The results made a statement. He shot 1246 for 6 games on the challenging conditions, moving from 39th to 17th in the final round of qualifying.

He was rewarded for his mental discipline. And, he carried this forward into the 12 games of the Masters finals finishing in 8th position overall (198 average for 12 straight games on the four lane surfaces). How well would he have bowled if he had begun with the pre-shot routine 100 percent in Rounds 1 & 2?

That was 100 percent focus, every shot, proceeding through each of the 7-steps of our pre-shot routine. And, this continued after this event. Just weeks later, Ozir went on to earn a spot to represent Malaysia in the prestigious Asian Schools tournament in Hong Kong. He is an inspiration for all of us. His story illustrates as the competition and performance level increases, you can’t afford a 90 percent focus. You must commit to 100 percent commitment to a pre-shot routine or risk missing the cut.

DID YOU KNOW?

For the whole story, visit www.bowlingthismonth.com/didyouknow

that a woman once carried a 200 or more average in seven different leagues in the same season?
Some simple recommendations to improve your mental game

- Use a pre-shot routine on every single shot to help you focus on the present while reducing emotional ups and downs. This prepares you to execute more consistent shots.
- Focus on identifying how you respond to stress by recognizing your physical, emotional, behavioral and cognitive reaction to a stressful situation. If you begin to feel stress, do three things: 1. Sit down. 2. Close your eyes. 3. Breathe in, hold, and breathe out.
- Be sure to complete positive self-talk statements. When doubt creeps in, be sure to state your positive self-talk statements to help move away from negativity.

7-Step pre-shot routine

Here is the 7-Step pre-shot routine that I teach to my coaches and students. It has been successful in helping bowlers focus on the now, each single shot, as well as facilitate the reduction of emotional ups and downs.

1. **Habit ritual.** Be sure to do the same routine, the same way, before each shot. From drying your hand, wiping the ball, using rosin on your hand, etc. By doing the same routine, exactly, you are setting your unconscious mind to repeat a good shot. Commit the same level of energy to every single shot, including spares.

2. **Release rehearsal.** Before stepping on the lane, complete release rehearsal follow-throughs. Place your hand down at your side. Take three deliberate rehearsals with the specific release you will use. This sets-up your body to more accurately achieve the release you want.

3. **Music archive.** As you step-up onto the approach, recall a favorite song. This aids in activating the whole brain.

4. **Check your feet, check your body.** As you set-up in the stance, be sure to check both your feet and your body. This creates body position consistency. If you are not purposeful here, then your swing and alignment with your target line can be inconsistent. By taking a few seconds to set up, exactly the same each time, you will enable yourself to repeat better shots.

5. **Target lock.** After setting up in the stance, lock onto your target(s). Now, draw a dark black trajectory line. As Tiger Woods says, putt to the picture you create. In our case, we will roll to the picture we create. Be sure to draw the thick black line that you have created with your ball path trajectory.

6. **Visualize.** Visualize yourself throwing a successful shot over the trajectory line created in your mind with the ball reaction that you intend.

7. **Breathe.** Breathe in, breathe out, go

References
