In this month’s issue, I explore the concept of a Mental Focus Intelligence Quotient (F.I.Q.) for bowlers. As an elite bowler, your F.I.Q. is a critical element to your mental strength because it illustrates at what level of commitment to excellence you are dedicated to in the sport of tenpin bowling. For those with a high F.I.Q., they take each shot with the same dedication and energy, a high mental focus. They are focused with great attention to detail on all of the bowling tasks at hand. These type of bowlers, focus on every aspect of the game and with an equally high level of energy. On the other hand, those low on F.I.Q., are bowlers who will not reach their full potential since they are inconsistent with focus, mental energy and commitment on the lanes. Are you one of these? Do you suffer with a lack of bowling focus? From my perspective, this is like an illness inflicting many bowlers game with a lackadaisical approach. Or, rather, are you mentally strong with a world-class approach to mental focus. What is your F.I.Q.?

At a recent bowling tournament, I took my hand phone out of my pocket and accessed the stop watch function. Specifically, I wanted to time the preparation time of bowlers during their first shot as well as the time of prep on the second or spare shot. What I learned concerned me greatly. But, it didn’t surprise me. In one case, a bowler had a preparation time that was 9 seconds different between first and second shot. This is not new. Unfortunately, I have witnessed this in every part of the world that I have worked. This example of a lack of mental focus creates a situation where the bowler can’t possible commit to the spare shot with the same level of dedication. What results are inconsistencies or poor shot making.

And, it can get worse unless we discuss it now. With increasingly soft lane conditions and atomic bowling balls, many bowlers have become mentally soft and possess a lack a commitment to mental focus. Consequently, I have witnessed an increase in the amount of sloppiness associated with the set-up and stance. You can visible see the difference between each shot. But, this lack of focus really shows when they make an appearance on a challenging condition. Since these bowlers have what I call focus gaps, they unravel crash and burn when conditions get difficult. Focus gaps are those areas of weakness in concentration and mental commitment that are needed to be outstanding in our sport. What focus gaps do you have?
Unfortunately, I have seen too many bowlers not reach their full potential because they lack commitment in the focus department. Their focus gaps act as barriers inhibiting their ability to reach the next level of performance. If not checked, these bowlers will suffer from performance plateau, destined to remain at the same level of performance, without a chance or getting better. Unfortunately, those suffering from a lack of focus disorder appear in every bowling center around the world. But, there is hope. Here are some ideas to help you be more focused at the center. If you want to remain a big fish in a little pond, then disregard the following.

**Pre Pre-Shot Focus**
I refer to the pre pre-shot as the time after you throw your last shot in the frame until you go up for the next. This is an area in which many bowlers are not very disciplined in regard to mental focus. As you wait for your next turn, watch your fellow competitors’ ball reactions. These reactions can help you make good decisions about what you should do in the immediate future. Specifically, this level of focus and awareness of your bowling lane surroundings helps you to be proactive in your moves as the lanes transition. Remember, with today’s bowling equipment, oil is absorbed into the cover and the lanes change quickly. So, transition happens quickly and abruptly. Know what is going on by paying attention to the playing surface.

You have heard the old adage, never move on a poor shot, but, you need to know if it was you or the reaction. This requires a keen sense of focus. In addition, this is the time to reflect on your last shot. Did you throw it well? What was the reaction? Great bowlers catalog the last series of shots, their own and those around them, to make an adjustment plan sooner rather than later. Those who lack focus simply wait until it is too late. Watching your own ball reaction is not enough. If you want to succeed, at the highest level, you must be committed to focus on all the ball reactions around you. Do you possess this level of commitment to excellence?

**Pre-Shot Routine**
How much have you read about the importance of the pre-shot routine. Research has demonstrated the impact of quality and improved performance. Yet, many bowlers simply don’t commit to a quality pre-shot process. In the pre-shot routine, have you committed to doing the same exact actions with the same level of energy for both your strike and spare efforts? An easy measure to verify this is to take a stop watch and time the amount of seconds that you actually take before each type of shot. Do you think you take the same amount of time and mental energy? Video tape won’t lie. Time yourself in your next league or tournament outing. Be sure to commit to this idea before you go to the bowling center for practice, league or a tournament. Mental focus begins before you arrive at the bowling center with your mental checklist of what you will do at the lanes.
Your dedication to details is a sign of your F.I.Q. As you step-up to the lane, check your feet to be sure that your feet are parallel with the target line. In addition, be sure that your shoulders and hips are perpendicular to the target line. Is your arm straight inline with the target line? Be sure to check that you have placed the ball in the same height position with the same hand position that you want. I am surprised at how many bowlers overlook such obvious examples of mental focus. A more obvious point is the outcome of overlooking such things. If your set-up in the stance is not consistent, then you won’t throw the exact same shot. How can you make a move with confidence with shot inconsistencies due to a lack of focus? Truth - you can’t! True, you know these things. But, a champion pays attention to the details. Greatness is in the details.

Above and beyond the physical game is the process of visualization used with each shot. I strongly recommend using visualization as well as breathing in and out just before you begin the approach. Elite bowlers use visualization to differentiate themselves from those who don’t do it. Are you ready to commit to improving? Visualization makes you better but you need a high-level of mental focus to dedicate to this process during each shot. Do you commit to visualizing a successful shot before you actually initiate the approach? These mental focus actions will help you with executing a more consistent and quality shot.

**Finish and Beyond**

I always ask bowlers what their balance arm is used for in the finish. All too often I see it down at the side or bouncing around like a Mexican jumping bean. Nearly 100 percent of these folks can tell me an adequate response. With these bowlers, with a low F.I.Q., it appears that the balance arm doesn’t serve a purpose to them. So, they don’t use it. I then ask them if they used the balance arm on the last shot. Some can answer. Many can not. This is one area of a very serious lack of focus disorder. Unfortunately, many bowlers are not committed to executing a quality shot at the foul line. From a lack of balance arm dedication to staying down at the line, many bowlers possess a lack of commitment to excellence. But, how can you simply take for granted your balance arm or not commit to leverage at the line? Well, simply put, it is a lack of mental focus. These bowlers don’t use the balance arm effectively because there is a lack of focus on using it. Be sure to use your balance arm in the finish. Don’t let this arm be lackadaisical. And, remain in a solid finish position until the ball has traveled well past the halfway point. How dedicated to excellence are you? Take a video and watch the balance arm? Are you using it? Or, do you need to be more focused?

In addition to the balance arm, I am often shocked by bowlers who lack a deep awareness on each shot. To illustrate, as a bowler, do you recall where you
threw the last ball, exactly? Be sure you have the mental focus and observation to answer two important questions: (1) How far did the ball skid? and (2) How strong was the backend reaction? These questions should match what you are trying to do with your lane play and release selections. But, in order to answer, you must know where the ball went past the arrows as well as in the mid-lane and at the end of the pattern. Be focused on your ball reaction always. And, equally important is watching other bowlers and their ball reaction as the lane changes. Be sure to watch others to enable you to move proactively. How is their ball reaction changing? This is the level of focus you need to step-up your game to a high F.I.Q. Obviously, with this information, you will make decisions on hand positions, angle of play and ball choice with more confidence.

**Conclusion**
For the advanced bowler, the above areas and actions are those that can differentiate you from those who have a lower F.I.Q. By improving your mental focus you will increase your bowling F.I.Q. And, this attention to detail will pay-off with more consistency and higher scores. Take the F.I.Q. test below and see what your current F.I.Q. score is as a bowler. This score will also illustrate what areas that you need to focus on to improve. Mental focus is critical to becoming the best bowler you can be. Are you ready to commit to more focus or do you want to remain angry due to a lack of consistency and mental errors? It is up to you. Do you want to be great in this sport or do you want to maintain a plateau performance bowler?
# BOWLING FOCUS I.Q. ASSESSMENT

1) You perform the same routine before each strike shot?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

2) In preparation for a spare, you take the same amount of time and do the same exact pre-shot routine as with your strike ball? (Be sure to time yourself before you answer)  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

3) As you step onto the lane, you look down at your feet to ensure that your feet are parallel with the target line?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

4) As you step onto the lane, you check your arm to ensure that it is parallel with the target line as well as at the appropriate height in the stance? Shoulders perpendicular?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

5) Before you go, you use visualization to “see” the shot you want before it happens?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

6) On your last shot, you are aware of what target you hit on the lane? Front and back?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

7) On the last shot, you are aware if you used your balance arm in the finish?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

8) About your last shot, you can answer these questions about your last shot: (1) How far did the ball skid? (2) How strong was the backend?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

9) You watch other bowlers’ ball reaction in an effort to act proactively?  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

10) Are you aware of how focused on focus you are? Meta-aware of your mental game  
☐ Always  ☐ Most of the time  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ Never

## SCORING

Give yourself 5 points for each Always response, 3 points for each Most of the Time, 1 point for each Sometimes answer and 0 for each Never checked.

1_____  2_____  3_____  4_____  5_____  
6_____  7_____  8_____  9_____  10_____

TOTAL POINTS =

- 40 – 50, Strong Focus, High F.I.Q.  
- 30 – 39, Good Focus, Medium F.I.Q.
- 20 – 29, Needs Improvement, Low F.I.Q.
- 10 – 19, Poor, Very Low F.I.Q.
- < 10, Very Poor, Ultra-Low F.I.Q.

Keep working toward perfection  
Need to improve in several areas of weakness  
Focus on improving your overall focus  
Are you satisfied with this level of focus?  
Time to look in the mirror and ask yourself about how serious you are about bowling