Becoming a World-Class Player
Part 2: Improving Your Spare Shooting

There is an old adage in bowling: strike for show and spare for dough. Dough, of course, is slang for money in the United States. True, this adage has been tarnished, lately, due to high octave bowling balls and fluffy soft lane conditions. But, it still holds true at the elite world-class level. If you want to be great in the sport of tenpin bowling, then you better be a great spare shooter!

Walter Ray Williams, Jr. did not miss a single pin spare in match play during the 2005-06 PBA season producing a perfect record-setting performance of 475 conversions in 475 attempts. In addition, he finished the season with an overall spare percentage of 87.37% (including splits). With 42 titles and US$3,643,232 in lifetime earnings, he has proven that spare shooting is critically important to win at the highest level. This skill has led him to be the greatest bowler of all time.

Yet, although the evidence about world-class bowlers is clear, we live in an era where an emphasis is placed more on striking than on spare shooting. Specifically, many good bowlers remain bowling on a plateau rather than scaling the heights of greatness due to mediocre spare shooting. Please remember the simple truth that you can bowl a 190 without throwing one strike. True, world-class bowlers do strike often. To illustrate, Williams was third in strike percentage on the PBA Tour with more than 63 percent. Yet, it is the spare shooting that is the determining factor between the greatest of the greats and those who remain very good. He has won 42 times for his complete game just as Earl Anthony did in the past.

So, in an effort to help you improve in the direction of a world-class bowler, here is a list of nine tips to help you become a world-class spare shooter.

1. Use a Plastic Ball
Due to the hard cover material, using a plastic ball increases the margin of error in spare shooting since the ball will skid more and have less backtrack reaction when a release mistakes are made (e.g., rotating around the ball) leading to higher consistency because you can throw it straighter.

2. Hold the Ball Higher in the Stance
By holding the ball higher in the stance, a bowler will increase their ball speed which contributes to more skid and a straighter ball path.

3. Break the Wrist
The next tip is to break or lower your wrist downward when you set-up in the stance. This is the opposite of cupping the ball. When a bowler breaks their wrist, it reduces the amount of revolutions. This leads to a significant reduction in the backend reaction, a straighter shot and an increase in the margin of error.

4. Spread the Pinky Wide and Keep the Index Tight to the Middle Finger
When a bowler throws spares, ideally, they want to throw the ball as straight as possible. This increases the room to make a mistake leading to a higher conversion rate. Consequently, to throw straight, you want an end-over-end or forward roll. This leads to a straighter path and no backend. By spreading the pinky wide, you will promote more end-over-end roll, increasing your ability to throw the ball straighter and reduce the backend reaction.
5. Visualize a Dark Black Target Line and Roll the Ball Over the Line
I always instruct bowlers to set their body and set their mind. As an elite world class bowler, you must employ psychological strategies as well. Tiger Woods says that his dad taught him to create a putt in his mind and then putt to the picture. The same is true for spare shooting. When you visualize a dark thick line, from the contact pin to the target, you are setting your mind to throw straight on that line. Paint this line in your mind, from the arrows to the contact pin or pins. Be sure to “look” up and down the line multiple times in your mind before going. Literally “draw the line” by bringing your eyes back and forth on this straight path in order to create the line in your mind that you will throw. Now, throw to the line and roll the ball on this mental path.

6. Set Your Body Perpendicular to the Target Line
Be sure that your body is perpendicular and your arm and shoes are parallel to the target line. When you visualize the thick, dark line it is easier to line-up your body. Walk parallel to the line and push the ball toward the target. A top view of a bowler illustrates a cross-lane perpendicular (90 Degrees) body position. The shoulders and hips are 90 degrees to the target line with the arm straight to the target line.

7. Target Longer to Promote More Skid and Increase Accuracy
In addition, target longer down the lane on the target line. The longer you look down the lane, the straighter the ball will go to the target.

8. Use Your Pre-Shot Routine on Spares As Well
I am always shocked when a bowler takes time to set-up in the stance, executes their pre-shot routine, visualizes a great shot, inhales and exhales, but fails to do any of this on their spare shot. Be sure to execute a full pre-shot routine on your spares as well. You will be shocked at your spare conversion improvement and consistency.

9. Lead with your Pinky or Elbow to the Target
I teach bowlers to lead with the tip of the pinky to the target in order to promote a straight end-over-end roll. This works for most. In the event bowlers still turn their hand, I ask them to lead with the elbow to the target. This will reduce rotation of the wrist and lead to the desired end-over-end throw. The idea is that the pinky or elbow will be project over the target. Literally, you want this to be what leads everything else through the target. Imagine the tip of the pinky throwing over the target or the elbow leading the follow-through.

CONCLUSION
These nine tips will make you a more consistent spare shooter by setting the stage mentally and physically both of which will allow you to throw straighter and repeat shots with more consistency. And, always remember the old adage, strike for show and spare for dough (money). World-Class bowlers remember this every day!