

Off the Top of My Head: Bowling This Month (May 2007)

Contributed by Joe Slowinski
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Here is my opinion piece for the latest Bowling This Month magazine. I talk about the important of treating bowling as a sport. Please read this and pass it on to others. We need to spread the word and promote bowling as a sport!

Off the Top of My Head, Bowling This Month, May 2007, Joe Slowinski As the Director of Coaching and Coach Certification for Tenpin Bowling at the National Sports Council of Malaysia, I have the opportunity to collaborate with sports scientists in the scholarly study of bowling as a sport. This includes the analysis of tenpin bowling from a biomechanical, physiological, psychological, fitness and nutrition perspective. This experience and opportunity has opened my eyes to why bowling remains viewed by the general population as a non-sport, especially in the United States. Collectively, the global bowling community has very little research on bowling from a sport science perspective. For example, few have developed specific training methods, derived from research, that have proven to improve performance. Without having a scientific understanding of bowling as a sport, we will continue to be viewed more as a recreation rather than a sport. In Asia, bowling is treated as an elite sport. In preparation for events such as the world championships or Asian Games, bowlers train daily for four to eight hours in preparation to be competitive for a medal (on-lane, fitness, psychology, biomechanics, etc.). And, bowling is funded on equal footing as Olympic sports through the national sports councils. With this level of commitment, the quality of Asian bowling has evolved tremendously in the past 20 years to become consistently competitive on the international stage. To illustrate, Malaysia earned 8 medals in last year's World Youth Champions in Germany, including 4 gold. Youth development and treating bowling as a sport is showing results. And, it is likely to continue on this continent. But, as you know, the general public still perceives bowling as a parlor game. Well, do you really blame them? They think anyone can learn to bowl well or anyone can coach our sport. Some professional bowlers actually fit the stereotype of being unfit. In the newspaper, the general public reads in the newspaper of 17 year-olds rolling 900 series. Moreover, they read of 300 games being rolled as frequently as you blink your eyes. They begin to think that you don't need any knowledge or skill to throw a bowling ball competitively. And, the fact that we can't officially claim bowling is a sport is killing us. The perception of bowling as a non-sport killed the Olympic effort and it is currently preventing qualified coaches from securing NCAA coaching jobs. If you visit many of the NCAA athletic programs you will see coaches of other sports on dual appointment assuming the post of coaching bowling. What an embarrassment to our sport! Sure, baseball and tennis coaches are qualified to coach bowling. So, universities are adding bowling with a hidden Title IX compliance agenda and a hidden belief that anyone can coach bowling. If the leading administrator on college campuses can't treat bowling as a sport, how can we be treated seriously? Frankly, it is the culture of sport. The professional journals read by college administrators never publish scientific articles on bowling. But, if we can get sport science articles on bowling in journals read by administrators, they might begin to perceive bowling as a sport. The scientific study of bowling is needed to enlighten the university administrators, Olympic committee as well as those who view bowling as a sport. Consequently, I have launched a global initiative, The Science of Tenpin Bowling. In my work, at the National Sports Council, I will research bowling as a sport and share this knowledge, for free, to the world. And, I call on others around the globe who care about our sport to study bowling. With the knowledge that emerges from this project, we will acquire a working understanding of the facts of the sport, from physiology to nutrition. With this knowledge, we can provide elite bowlers such as PBA members and those bowling on national teams with solid training advice that will significantly improve performance. And, this research-based knowledge will help anyone who is interested in training to become an elite player. It is now time that we really understand bowling as a sport. Frankly, there is more to becoming recognized as a sport than increasing the difficulty of lane condition and minimizing the dynamic reaction of a bowling ball.