

## 5 Pillars of a Strong Mental Game

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 Thursday, 10 May 2007  
 Last Updated Thursday, 10 May 2007

PBA sport psychology consultant Dr. Eugenia Kolasinski presents the 5 most important mental game pillars: (1) taking responsibility for your performance; (2) controlling your emotions; (3) controlling your thinking; (4) focusing on the present; (5) committing yourself to constant learning. This article, reprinted here with permission, is an invaluable resource for the competitive bowler or coach who wants to introduce sport psychology.

**5 Pillars of a Strong Mental Game** Dr. Eugenia M. Kolasinski (\* used with permission \*) The physical aspect of your bowling game is obviously very important, and reaching and successfully performing at an elite level requires constant improvement and refinement of your physical game. You also have to successfully compete with and defeat players whose physical games are closely matched to or better than yours. When players are closely matched on physical game abilities, the mental game can play an important role in determining the champion. If you want to reach an elite level, you need a strong mental game. A variety of factors impact the mental aspect of bowling. Dr. Eugenia M. Kolasinski believes that all factors can be distilled down to 5 key elements, which she calls "Pillars." Virtually any mental game technique or method works through one or more of these Pillars. Dr. Kolasinski's 5 Pillars of a Strong Mental Game are as follows: Taking responsibility for your performance Controlling your emotions Controlling your thinking Focusing on the present Committing yourself to constant learning

**Pillar 1 – Taking responsibility for your performance** Bowlers point to many factors that affect their performance – oil pattern, oil volume, approach conditions, players they are bowling with, players they are bowling against, and equipment, just to name a few. It is true that all of these factors and more affect your performance. However, despite all such factors, you are the one who throws the ball, and you must take responsibility for this. Period. This requires honesty and careful balance because sometimes the problem really is some other factor – but, ultimately, it is your job to figure that out and determine how to respond appropriately. There is no way around this if you want to succeed. Although there are some techniques and strategies that can help you strengthen this Pillar, for the most part, you simply must recognize and accept that you have to take responsibility for your performance. It is in your best interest to do this sooner rather than later because until you quit making excuses for your performance, you will never be able to fully control your performance.

**Pillar 2 – Controlling your emotions** It is very important to realize that your emotions are not bad. Because you are human and because you are passionate about bowling, you will have emotional responses. You will feel elated when you strike out in the 10th to win, and you will feel disappointed when you leave a difficult split at a crucial point in a game. Your emotions are not the issue – what you do with your emotions is the issue. You cannot let your emotions overcome you, and you cannot keep dragging them with you from frame to frame, game to game, and tournament to tournament. Do you really believe that you can control your emotions? You can! In order to do so, however, you must first be aware of your emotions. Once you have acquired this awareness, specific techniques and strategies, including a wide variety of relaxation methods, can be used to help you control your emotions. As with all other elements of the mental game, the key is to try a variety of techniques and strategies, find ones that work for you, and then use them. Dr. K. can help you increase your awareness of your emotions and effectively control them.

**Pillar 3 – Controlling your thinking** Your thoughts, just like your emotions, are not bad. Being able to effectively analyze constantly changing lane conditions and make decisions about how to respond appropriately is a critical part of elite-level bowling – therefore, thinking is a must! What you are thinking is the important issue. Are you thinking about the easy spare you missed three frames ago? Are you thinking ahead to what it would be like to proudly lift the trophy in the winner's circle? Or maybe you are carefully watching and analyzing your ball reaction and thinking about how to move for your next shot. Your mind will be active while you are bowling, and you want your thoughts to work for you instead of against you. Do you really believe that you can control your thinking? You can! And just like with controlling your emotions, you first must be aware of your thoughts. You also have to be able to focus your thinking. You could be having difficulty controlling your thinking for any number of reasons, and a lot of factors may be impacting your thoughts. Thus, there are a lot of techniques and strategies that can be used to help you control and focus your thinking so that your thoughts become your allies rather than your enemies. Some of the better-known techniques and strategies include goal setting, self-talk, and imagery, but there are many others. Dr. K. can help you increase your awareness of your thinking and learn to focus and control it using techniques and strategies based specifically on your situation.

**Pillar 4 – Focusing on the present** As explained above, controlling your emotions and controlling your thinking both require awareness. In order to be fully aware of your emotions, your thinking, and your bowling, you must mentally stay in and focus on the present. You cannot keep thinking about previous shots, frames, games, tournaments, or anything else in the past or future. Not that the past or future is to be forgotten or ignored, mind you! Indeed, you must be able to learn from the past, and you must be mindful of where you are headed in the future. Your focus at any given moment, however, must be on what is going on right now with the present shot, frame, game, and tournament. Depending upon what is happening to you both on and off the lanes at the time, it can be very difficult to focus on the present – but you must if you want to be successful. Dr. K. can suggest a variety of techniques and strategies to help you get your focus where it needs to be.

**Pillar 5 – Committing yourself to constant learning** There are never any "throw away" shots. Each and every shot is an opportunity to learn something. This is true whether the shot is in competition, league, or practice. It is also true regardless of what the pins do – and it is especially true when the pins do not do what you expect. You probably already engage in some form of learning while you are bowling, perhaps without really thinking about it, but remember

that awareness and focus are important elements of the mental game. To learn the most from each shot, you need to learn with purposeful intention and with awareness and focus. Being committed to constant learning brings together all 5 Pillars: in order to learn from your shots, you have to take responsibility for your performance, control your emotions, control your thinking, and stay focused on the present. It is also a circular process: in addition to being better able to read and respond to lane conditions, actively engaging in constant learning will help you to take responsibility for your performance, control your emotions, control your thinking, and stay focused on the present. Dr. K. can help you set yourself up for success by teaching you how to engage in the constant learning that elite performance demands. Visit Dr. K's web site at <http://psychologyforeliteperformance.com>