

PAR BOWLING

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The Upside of Getting Your Downswing Down

PROFESSIONAL BOWLERS AND TOP COACHES long have disagreed over the many subtle manifestations that can take place in the downswing. It is understandable why this aspect of the game provokes such controversy, because it is the backswing that's often modified to accommodate the specific physiology of the bowler.

Some modifications work well; some do not. The downswing is more stringent in keeping with fundamental technique; a complicated process, it affords little deviation.

Consider: In the downswing, your arms, shoulders, legs and hips all move at the same time, with varying speed and directions in order to set the ball down on a specific board on the lane. Is it any wonder many beginners frequently roll gutter balls?

The key to a successful downswing is found primarily in the transition point between the end of the backswing and the beginning of the downswing. Concentrate on letting the weight of the ball initiate the downswing. If this is done, it affords the best opportunity for the arms, hips and legs to coordinate so as to provide an ideal swing speed, leverage and the correct swing direction. If all the parts move in correct sequence, you will be more consistent.

The downswing movement starts from the ideal position at the top of the backswing. Your best preparation is to

create a strong coil with the upper body so there is tension between it and your lower body. This tension allows the weight of the ball to easily drop into the ideal swing on the way down.

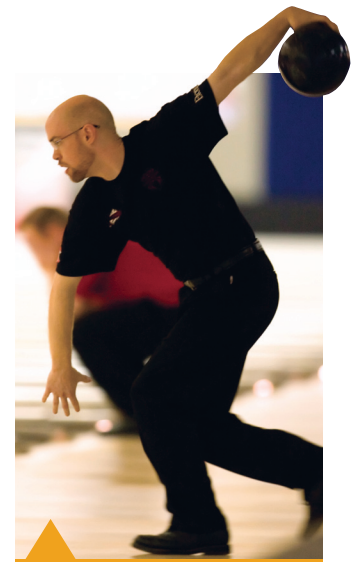
Having made a strong coil, you then check out the position of the ball at the top of the swing. The ideal backswing height is determined by the number of steps taken, the spacing of those steps and personal physiology. With these factors in mind, experiment to determine which backswing height best suits your swing, then achieve that height shot after shot. If you find this is a problem, then choose a more appropriate height for your game. Consistency with the height of the backswing is a must.

Another factor to address at the top of the backswing is the ball's side-to-side location. Ideally, the ball should be behind the elbow of the bowling arm, perhaps even tucked a "dab" behind the body. Also, at this point, the bowling arm is tucked in close to the body. That's what helps keep your swing on plane. Otherwise,

your arm will tend to work away from your body, which often causes your swing to come inside in the delivery, while also causing your hand to "top" the ball.

The challenging part of the initial downward movement is getting the proper sequence of motion between the arms and body. Aside from an ideal swing plane, this leads to good swing leverage. I believe this is made easier if you pause an instant at the top of the backswing to give yourself time to instinctively assemble the many movements that follow. This process should be deliberate and uncontrolled without conscious effort (which takes practice, practice, practice).

Ever notice how your best shots often feel they were made with little effort, while your more aggressive efforts went awry? The problem doesn't necessarily stem from adding force; it's a question of where the force was applied. If it is applied at the beginning of the downswing, you'll likely lack leverage in the delivery. The key to good leverage is to let the swing's



Exemptee Jason Lundquist perfectly plants his 2nd-to-last step as he transitions to his downswing.

speed build slowly until the point of release, at which time you pour on the power.

Finally, what works for some doesn't work for all. There are many theories on how the downswing starts. Nelson Burton Jr. often likened it to the "moment of truth" where the second-to-last step shifts into the sliding step. Paul Krumske suggested that everything (arms, legs, hips, feet) start down together. And the great Earl Anthony was very meticulous about having his second-to-last step planted at the exact time the backswing reached its ultimate and ideal height.