



Coaching 101 - The Mental Game

Technical skills are important but, skill alone is not sufficient for constant success at an elite level where all bowlers are highly skilled. When bowlers are closely matched on other aspects of their performance, the mental game can play an important role in your success.

The mental game is based on the 5 pillars of a strong mental game and they are:

Pillar 1 - Take responsibility for your performance

Bowlers can identify many factors that affect their performance:

- Oil on the lane
- Poor lighting
- Sticky approach
- Faulty equipment
- Other bowlers

Nevertheless, you are the one throwing the ball and you must take responsibility for this. Although some mental game techniques can help strengthen this pillar, you must recognize and accept that you must take responsibility for your performance. When you stop making excuses for your performance, you will be able to control your performance.

Pillar 2 - Control your emotions

It is important to understand that emotions are not bad. Because you are human and because you are passionate about your bowling, you will have emotional responses to what happens on the lane. You feel elated when you strike out in the 10th frame. On the other hand, you feel disappointed or even angry when you get a head pin or leave a set of aces. What you do with your emotions is the issue. You cannot let your emotions negatively affect your performance, and you cannot keep dragging them from shot to shot. A wide variety of techniques including many relaxation methods, can help you gain control over your emotions. The key to learning a range of techniques, is to try them for yourself to find what works for you and use them.

Pillar 3 - Control your thinking

Thoughts, just like emotions are not bad. In bowling you must respond to constantly changing lane conditions. You must be able to quickly analyze your situation and decide how to respond appropriately. Thinking effectively is a critical part of being an elite bowler and what you think about is very important. Your mind is active while you are competing, and your thoughts must work for you rather than against you. Just like you can control your emotions you can also control your thinking. Some of the better-known techniques include goal setting, self-talk and imagery.

Pillar 4 - Focus on the present

When on the approach, you must mentally stay in focus on the present. You cannot keep thinking about the other bad shots or games or anything else in the past. Indeed, you must learn from the past and know where you are headed but, you need to keep your focus on what is happening on the present shot.

Pillar 5 – Commit yourself to constant learning

Every competitive experience, regardless of the result, is an opportunity to learn something. It is particularly important to learn when you do not get the result you expect. You probably already engage in some form of learning without really thinking about it, but intentional and effective learning is necessary for optimal performance. Committing yourself to constant learning requires the other four pillars to learn from your experiences - you have to take responsibility for your performance, control your emotions, control your thinking, and focus on the present. It is also a circular process: constant, active learning will help you take responsibility for your performance, control your emotions, control your thinking, and focus on the present.

Negative Thinking

Walk into any bowling center during league play and you are likely to hear bowlers telling each other to “shake it off” after a bad shot. They may think that they are helping encourage their fellow bowlers (and they are to a degree) but they are also giving out some very bad mental game advice. Although you should not dwell excessively on bad shots you should not just immediately forget them either. Making bad shots is not fun either. Thinking about bad shots may not be much fun either, but it is a necessary part of a strong mental game. Remember pillar 5 “commit yourself to constant learning”. Thinking about your bad shots and losses in an analytical way in order to learn from them is not being negative. If thinking about bad shots while you are bowling gets in the way of your game, then it is a problem. The key is balance, if you shake off a bad performance without giving it a second thought, that is a lack of balance to one extreme. Analyze your bad game or shot, determine what can be learned from them, then move on, that is a balanced approach to thinking about bad performance.

How to win from losing

Sport performance has two aspects - process and outcome. The process aspect is everything you do and that you can control, either individually or as a team. For bowlers this includes your delivery. The outcome aspect can be summed up in one word “results”, whether it is cashing in at a tournament, qualifying for a team or finishing first. Most bowlers focus heavily on the outcome which is understandable because if you do not care how you did in a tournament, why would you try to compete at an elite level? Successful elite bowlers can maintain a balance between their focus on the process versus their focus on outcomes. Remember process consists of the elements you control, while outcomes are usually out of your control. Although doing all that you can with the process goes a long way to achieving your desired outcomes there are no

guarantees. In bowling, there is a lot more losing than winning over the course of your career. The most productive way to deal with the losses is to focus on learning from them. The second step cannot be overemphasized. The greatest lessons learned are useless if they are not applied to future performances. Learn what you can from your losses, apply what you have learned and just keep up the effort to improve every game. Don't let yourself down because you feel that you can't deal with losing. Improve each opportunity by practicing the lessons you learn when your game is not successful.

Let's look at the 4 "C's that can improve your mental game:

Concentration: your ability to focus on the shot

Confidence: you believe in your own ability

Control: your ability to maintain emotional control regardless of the distractions

Commitment: this is your ability to continue to work on your goals

7 Ways to improve your mental game:

Positive Thoughts: Use visualization to build confidence.

Power Words: Make positive self-statements continually and beware of these thoughts. Don't fight them, acknowledge their presence and substitute positive words.

Present focus: Practice being in the present moment, don't keep replaying the past mistakes. Learn from them but do not keep replaying them in your head. Stay in the present.

Chunking goals: Break your game into manageable sections, stance, delivery and follow through.

Body scan: Play close attention to your tension level. Stay relaxed.

Detach from the outcome: Look at what you need right now in this frame not what the final score can be.

Focused attention: Be aware of distractions. Focus your attention on what is important right now NOT what is important later.

Mental Imagery

Mental imagery is described as the bowler imagining themselves in an environment performing a specific skill using all their senses (sight, sound, touch and smell). The image should have the bowler performing successfully and feel satisfied with their performance. In bowling, mental imagery allows you to deal with a shot in your head before actually performing it on the lane. Visualize the perfect proper shot. Watch the ball roll over your spot and hitting the side of the head pin. Now that you have visualized the shot in your head, go ahead and make the shot.

Two bad habits that will hurt your confidence

1. Setting unrealistic goals.
2. Letting self-doubt run wild.

Doubt kills confidence

Why is doubt the number one killer to confidence? Pessimistic or perfectionist bowlers tend to hold on tight to doubts. Which, left to run wild, can and will derail performance. Some bowlers start doubting themselves before they get to the lanes. How can I win today against that individual or team? Most bowlers struggle with doubt after making a mistake or a bad outing.

Strict or high expectations can undermine confidence

Why do expectations limit your performance? Expectations are demands you place on your performance. You either achieve them, or you fail to achieve them. When you don't achieve your high expectations, you tend to question your ability. High expectations set you up for failure before the game begins.

Don't let doubt take over

When you let doubt run rampant and unchecked, it beats down confidence. Bowlers who can recognize doubt and turn it into a positive statement of confidence, can counter negative doubt they may have, which should be your goal.

Ways to reduce stress

Being able to recognize your inner state, knowing when you need to calm yourself down or pump yourself up is an important part of being an elite bowler. Awareness is the critical first step. If you are aware that you are stressed out, congratulate yourself that you have the first step down. Then give some of the following techniques a try.

Mindfully focus on the present moment 'now'

Stopping both physically and mentally, just for a few minutes can help calm you down, quiet your mind and focus on the present. Try also to mindfully focus on your present task. Focus on every step of your approach, the ball return. Look at the ball, feel the ball as you pick it up and your feet as you start your approach. Breathe in, exhale and go. The point is not to overthink - the point is to focus on the present.

Take one or more breaths

Focusing on your breathing will help you focus on the present moment. It also helps to control the rapid shallow breathing that often accompanies stress.

Manually scan your body for areas of tension

Focus on your jaw, your neck, your shoulders, your stomach and any other places you know you store tension. If you are locked with a white-knuckle grip, relax your hand, stretch your fingers and then take a more controlled grip.

Imagine a calming or relaxing place

You can block out distractions by closing your eyes or listening to music. Be careful that the music is not pumping you up and inadvertently increasing your stress.

Examine your thinking

Are you working yourself up by imagining the worst possible outcome in a mental snowball of "WHAT IF THIS HAPPENS"? Bowlers often intently busy themselves with astounding mathematical feats (if I bowl X in this game then I need Y to make the cut and the other bowlers will need???) Such calculations usually create stress and take the focus away from the present shot. Forget the imagining and concentrate on your game.

Talk to yourself

Tell yourself to relax, breathe and focus on the task at hand. If you are stressed out by something that you can't do anything about now, promise yourself you will take care of the issue after the game.

Like most aspects of the mental game, managing stress is something only you can do. Unless you are so stressed out that you are having a heart attack, your competitors are not likely to help you de-stress, especially in the middle of a game or tournament. In fact, they will probably relish your stressed-out state because of the potential benefit to them. Do you really want to hand them a victory because you can't manage stress? Learn a variety of stress management techniques and practice them.

TIP OF THE DAY IS TO LET GO OF OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS AS YOUR MAIN OBJECTIVE AND FOCUS ON THE PROCESS

Books that will help you with your mental game

- Mental Game by Dr Patrick Cohen
- Mental Game 5 Pillars by Dr. Kolasisinski
- Coaching the Mental Game by H.A Dorfman
- Mental Toughness by Daniel Gucciardi

QUIZ

1 What are the 5 pillars of a strong mental games?

2 What are the 4 "C's that can help you improve your metals game?

3 What are the 7 ways to improve your mental game

4 What are the two bad habits that will hurt your confidence?

5 Name 3 ways to reduce stress
