

# A MENTAL GUIDE.

This is the first of a number of articles for bowlers to refer back to - building a guide of the different mental disciplines needed to become the all round bowler.

One fact to take on board is, when starting any new sport it's never as simple as it looks. All the different basic physical techniques will take time to learn, and some will be easier to master than others.

Just as important is having some basic mental skills which will help to build the physical skills. To have understanding of how you may react to different situations while learning can increase your ability to stay focussed and remain calm, that's the challenge and will continue as you build your own unique game.

We are all basically built and look the same, one head, with two eyes, ears, a mouth and a nose, one body, two arms, hands, along with two legs and feet. Oh yes, and a brain. But that's where the comparison ends. No two people male or female ever use them the same, let alone think the same. So there are no hard and fast rules. I hope to give you the bowler, the building blocks to add to your skill level no matter how much knowledge and experience you think you have gained.

It's for each bowler to take what they think will help them most in the challenge of building their unique method of tenpin bowling.

For everything needed in bowling there are two extremes, a higher and lower level, and it's up to you to find the optimum level to obtain the best results in each discipline required. Let's start with:

**Attention** I know having good solid attention skills is not something we are all blessed with, but they can be learnt. It takes time and practice to build the ability to stay focused on what you are doing.

Your attention is controlled mainly by your eyes and ears, all too often a bowler's attention is diverted by what is going on around them, either by noise or by watching what someone else is doing.

How often do you see a bowler step on the approach and starting their set-up, can't resist looking up at the scoreboard, or turning round to finish chatting to a mate. These are just examples of what are external distractions. What about internal ones? The sudden thought of failure, am I using the right ball, it's the tenth frame, I need a strike there are thousand and one internal distractions. Ring any bells?

Being able to keep your attention on what you are doing is vital. In golf, a player in four rounds of golf at a tournament is only addressing and playing their ball for about sixteen minutes, in bowling in three games, total time on the approach in setting up and playing the shot is around ten minutes, depending on whether it is singles, doubles or team play, the time waiting will be different.

It could be that your are moving lanes in tournament play, or a lane breakdown, there is nothing wrong in having a chat in between each frame or game, or looking around, as humans it's what we do!

But having the ability to narrow the focus and resisting the urge to look about for the short time you are preparing to take your shot is vital.

Giving your full attention to the pre-performance ritual of the set-up is an important learning cycle that must be carefully practiced. Take a moment to think about what it is that you do each and every time you bowl a ball. Simply, it's what you do on the approach, using the knowledge and experience you have gained.

Being able to shut out any noise, or allowing your eyes to wander from the task in hand is something that you will have learn to control. Yes in the early stages of building your own game it's not always easy, not everyone is blessed with the same ability to maintain their attention totally on the job in hand. So it's up to you to work on building attention skills in your own way.

One point to remember is that by not paying attention to what you are doing will only lead to reducing your ability to perform.

Your attention can also be diverted by internal thoughts of what may have happened recently in a frame, or even how the ball reacted, as well as about a recent event you played in. Experience will teach you that it's about the *now moment* that is important.

What happened is history and can't be changed, but again you will always get these thoughts and situations arising, and it's how you attend to them that is important. Being able to push any negative thoughts to the back of your mind *can be learnt!*

Learning to cope with these thoughts is a vital part of building your ability to bowl your own unique game. There will be days when it seems much harder to cope than others, and we all have to accept the fact that we are human.

But to reach the top you must find your own way of dealing with these thoughts. If you allow any doubts to creep into your mind about facing up to the challenge, or keeping your attention to detail, then this negative thinking will cause tension to creep into your body, and reduce your ability to allow the one thing you have been practicing - your trust! Without trust in your ability you are lost!

So in conclusion what are the facts to remember?

1. Everyone will learn differently in the way they focus their attention to any challenge they face. You must decide what works best for you.
2. Your ability to pay attention each day will be different, no matter what level of ability you have reached.
3. There will always be distractions in a bowling centre, you have to learn to ignore them.
4. It's important to how you cope, by keeping your attention on the balls path to the pins, every shot gives you valuable feedback.
5. Write down in a book any points you think are important to look at whenever you feel the need.
6. Remember you are on your own out there on the approach, only you can keep control of your eyes, ears and your thoughts.

So there you have it, an idea of how your attention can be trained and how it can also be distracted. Now it's up to you to find your own unique method and game plan to become the best you want to be. Did you manage to read this article to this point, or were you distracted?