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PRACTICE 2.0

International coaches Onder Gurkan and Juha Maha explain why everything you think you know about practice is wrong.

THE PRO APPROACH

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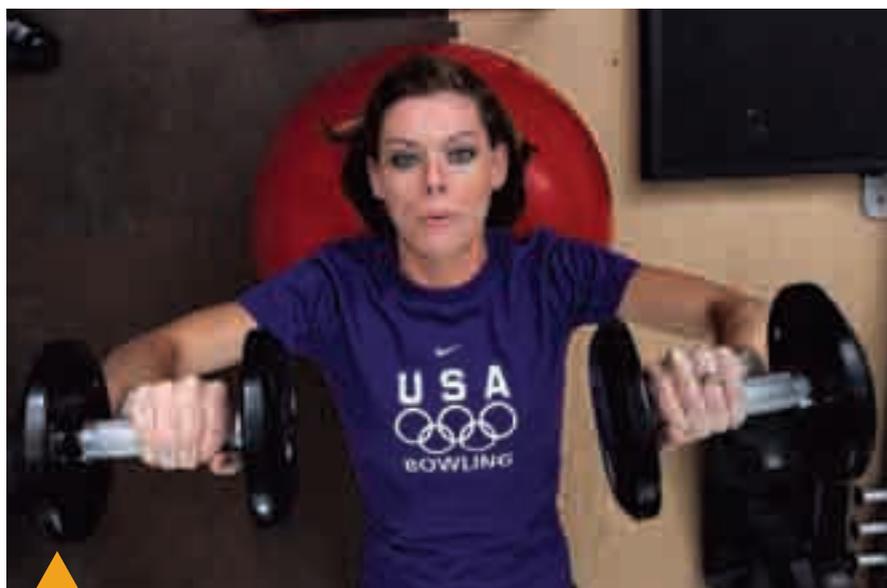
The Best Athlete in Bowling

LOOKING AT WORLD-CLASS athletes, you can't help but wonder what they do to separate themselves from the rest. In almost all cases, it takes a combination of mental and physical toughness, along with God-given talent.

Shannon O'Keefe is a world-class athlete in every sense of the term. She was a first-team All-American as a softball player, and one of the 160 finalists for the Team USA Softball team in 1996 at the age of 15 — the same age when she started to bowl. It didn't take her long to transition into our sport with the same work ethic she'd had as an elite athlete in softball.

In addition to being one of the top players on the PWBA Tour, Shannon is the women's bowling head coach at McKendree University, and she says that coaching is the best thing she has ever done. The girls inspire her, and push her daily to be the best she can be. That's why she believes coaching has had such a great impact on her as a player.

That said, the girls at McKendree are lucky to have her, not only as their coach, but as a role model. You know



Build Strength: Working out is part of what every athlete needs to do every day to have a long career. Building strength takes time, just like building a game. Putting in effort on both fronts will help you get better faster.

the old saying that those who can't do, teach? Well, Shannon puts that notion to rest. She is one of an ever-growing number of talented players who have joined the ranks of coaching, and that is great for our sport.

As for Shannon's game, it has always been about power under control. She

uses a four-step approach, and her footwork is very straight with a slightly left direction. The length of her steps is old school, with each one getting progressively longer and matching up with her timing and swing height.

Shannon has a late ball placement, as she doesn't move the ball out on step

LESSON PLAN

I ASKED Shannon O'Keefe about her longevity as one of the best bowlers in the world, and her response was, "I believe staying in shape, eating healthy and flexibility are the biggest components for my longevity and for anyone in our sport."

Those are keys that anyone looking to make a career in bowling needs to take seriously. It's important to have a regular workout regimen, to eat the right foods (and avoid the wrong

ones), and to work with training specialists on specific exercises to promote flexibility.

Over the years, Shannon has simply out-worked most of her peers, mentally and physically. In my opinion, she is the best athlete on the PWBA Tour today and a role model that anyone — female or male — could follow.

— Bill Spigner

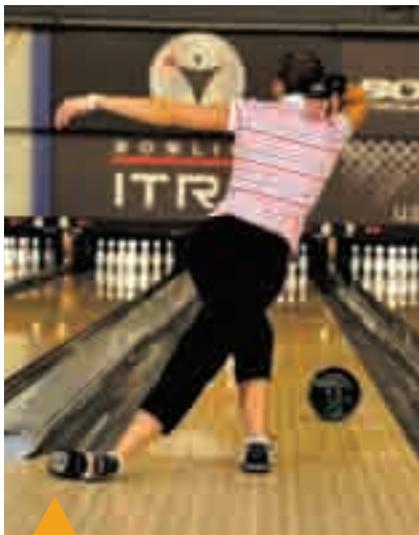
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one. Then on step two, she unfolds her arms to place the ball down into her swing. At the end of step two, the ball is even with her left knee, both arms are pointed down to the floor, and the left hand leaves the ball at this time to start her swing.

She also has her wrist cupped at this time, which works well with this type of ball placement. If she were to try to have a traditional pushaway with the cup in her wrist and the late ball movement, the ball would feel very heavy and be difficult to manage. With her steps getting progressively longer, she has time for her ball to reach the apex of the swing at the right moment for her head-high backswing.

Shannon's ball gets to the top after her last step starts, but the ball starts down just as her left knee is passing her right, which is right on time for everything to move forward entering her slide.

Her spine angles to the line from the start are very upright — between 5 to 10 degrees, both side and back. She walks tall and lets the ball swing freely once she gets it into the swing. She uses less



Scratching the Itch: Shannon's finish features this back-scratching pose after the release. It takes a lot of flexibility and being very loose to do this. Her hand doesn't stay there; only her legs stay put until the ball goes through the pins.

forward and side tilt going into the release zone than most, but does increase her forward tilt to about 30 degrees and her side tilt to about 20 degrees as she releases the ball.

With that degree of side tilt, Shannon really has to use her legs to get low, and the legs are where much of her power comes from. She incorporates more knee bend than most at the release and finish, with her knee flexed almost 90 degrees — which is a lot.

Her knee continuation forward to her finish position is one of the most I have seen, as the knee ends up a good 6-7 inches in front of her toe (looking at it from a side view). With this much knee bend, she is able to release the ball very low to the floor without a lot of forward spine tilt. This great knee bend gives her one of the longest flat spots to release the ball on tour today, providing a long time to release the ball in the correct direction and to be able to turn through it without hitting up on it.

Shannon's finish position is one of the strongest and most solid in the sport today. Her trail leg clears out, and the foot of that leg rolls over to the outside, ending with the toe facing down the lane and the knee very close to the calf of the left leg. During her follow-through, her hand almost touches her shoulder blade, as if she were trying to throw something backwards over her shoulder. Her hand goes that far back fast and loose. It's a continuation of her very free and fast release: The arm and hand go up and come back down quickly.

During Shannon's finish, her spine arches back, which gives the appearance

that she's rearing up. But that motion occurs long after the ball is gone. As her back is arching, her slide knee continues forward, exhibiting the great leg strength she has — something that would benefit any bowler.

Shannon posts her finish with her legs, and watches the ball all the way down the lane and through the pins. That would be a good drill for anyone



Finisher: The ball is through the pins, and yet Shannon is still in her finish position with her legs. This would be good for anyone to work on doing in practice. It would help you see the complete reaction of the ball and increase the feel of your shot.

to practice and incorporate into their game: Stay rock-solid until the ball goes through the pins. Doing that will help you see the ball reaction and "feel" the shot better.

Like some other top women players, Shannon uses a long, adjustable wrist device for support. With her speed, power and body positions, the ball becomes very heavy at release, and the wrist device enables her to use her power without having to worry about holding the wrist in position for a good release.

Bill Spigner is a three-time PBA Tour champion and a USBC-certified Gold level coach. View archived "Pro Approach" features at billspigner.com.

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