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THE ONE-SHOT WARRIOR

How and why drills can help you become the best version of yourself from shot to shot.

by **BILL SPIGNER**

Drills are discussed often enough among bowling coaches, between coaches and students, and in bowling instruction articles such as this one — how to do them, why to do them, and when to do them. But just as important is the need to stay mindful of what makes drills uniquely important in our sport particularly.

Think about the elements that make our sport unique among athletic endeavors. Bowling is a game that we can play year-round because it is unaffected, generally, by weather. And it does not impart upon the body the kind of physical punishment many other sports entail, which requires time away for the body to heal.

It is the wise bowler who takes advantage of these factors by doing what needs to be done to stay sharp: Keep the ball in hand as often as possible to develop the touch and confidence that yields results on the lanes. This is how drills in our sport can go such a long way, as they are possible anytime and generously reward the time you invest in them.

Golden Arm
Gold coach Mike Shady uses the swinging one-step drill to help players both loosen up and straighten up their swings (with Junior Team USA's Kaitlyn Stull).

Finishing Strong

The end goal of all drills is to adopt a finishing position like this, with the baby-toe side of your foot on the floor and your toes pointing down the lane with your heel back, your balance arm out with palm facing away from the pins, and your bowling hand following the ball down the lane.

INTENTIONAL PRACTICE

Before trying your hand at a new drill or performing a routine one, it is important to create the conditions that enable a focused practice session. Without that kind of intentionality, you might not be gleaning the benefits of a particular drill so much as merely going through the motions of one. Some pointers to keep in mind as you seek to ensure that your next practice session will be a purposeful and constructive one are:

- Intentional practice should be a private act, not a social outing.
- Forget about score; focus instead on what it is that you are trying to accomplish.
- Isolate the parts of your game that you are trying to address. Is it your setup? Timing? Release? Balance? Lane play? Mental game? Make a decision and stick to it.
- Determine what drill might best meet the objective you have in mind for that practice session.

Once you have those items checked off your agenda, it then is important to ensure that you have a process in place for beginning your practice session. In my case as a coach, I often begin with new students simply by telling them to do whatever it is they typically do to get ready to bowl. I then will observe their process — everything from putting on their shoes to putting their ball on the rack — to see how they approach their first shot. I become familiar with the student's process for preparing to bowl.

You, too, should develop such a process for preparing to roll your first

shot. Doing so is itself good practice, as everything you do at that stage sets you up for what will happen next. Be conscious of the fact that everything you do, and every ball you roll, has a meaning and a plan behind it.

Only when the conditions for the kind of intentional practice session I just described are met can you be sure that a given drill will have the potential to be a game-changer for you. The fact is that doing drills is the best way to start out your practice session, as they position you to do deliberate work on aspects of your game that you are looking to improve. But drills are not necessarily only about “improvement” per se; they also can be a great way of maintaining the game you already have built.

Drills come in great variety; there are plenty of different ones from which to choose depending on your objectives. The key, once again, is intentionality: Know why you are doing a specific drill and know the proper process for doing the drill to ensure that it isolates the part of your game that demands attention.

The beauty of a drill done right is that it slows everything down, empowering you to magnify pieces of your game in a way you just can't when bowling at normal speed. The drill enables you to build on something piece by piece to cultivate a great feel for the skill you are working on.

The two drills used most commonly today are the No-Step Drill and the Foul-Line Drill. While I personally see these used a lot, one thing I see less frequently is these drills being used as effectively as they could be. Drills are about positioning yourself correctly in the setup and making your shot effortlessly. Which is to say that, if you are laboring physically to do the drill, then you will not experience the benefits that the drill is designed to deliver for you.



THE ONE-STEP DRILL

Have you really put in the time to master the Foul-Line Drill? Alright. Now it's time to dive into another drill that is widely popular among bowlers of all levels, from elite players to those just starting out. As the One-Step Drill adds a step, you now will use your normal pushaway. That will increase the length of your swing, thereby providing the momentum for your slide. USBC Hall of Fame coach Mike Shady uses this drill to help students both loosen up and straighten up their armswings. The One-Step Drill also helps Shady work with students on positioning of the arm and hand to either increase or decrease shoulder rotation. To get yourself in the right position for this drill, here are the steps to follow:

1. Walk up to the foul line and then take one-and-a-half steps back from the line. You now have established the point at which you will get into your normal, full-shot stance for this drill.
2. Now take a relaxed practice swing to get a feel for the ball. Importantly, make sure that it feels comfortable on the hand and that you don't have to grab it to hang on to it. Once those conditions are met, you are ready to start this drill. (If not, it may be wise to first visit your local pro-shop professional to have your fit checked. As the saying goes, "You can't out-bowl a bad fit.")
3. From here, make sure you take relaxed swings at half your normal ball speed or even slower. The point here is to ensure that your swing is effortless and smooth. Naturally, as you complete your pushaway and your swing is passing the bowling-side of your leg, your

- upper body's spine tilt should be increasing.
4. Bear in mind at this point one of the keys of this drill, which is that your feet do not move until your ball gets to the apex of the swing. What you really want is to pause the ball at the top of the swing initially and then, as the swing falls, your slide foot moves forward.
 5. Now, it's time to get into the finish position that you developed with the Foul-Line Drill. Post your finish until the ball hits the pins. This ensures your ability to watch the motion of the ball as it proceeds down the lane, giving you time to reflect on the way your shot felt throughout.
 6. If everything felt good, do it again. If not, think about what you felt or saw that was not right, and try to adjust accordingly.

Remember, the point with these drills is not to knock down pins or focus on score. You are practicing proper execution of the drill and that should be your sole focus.

Coach Warren, at times, goes so far as to place a mirror or screen over the lane so that the only thing his student is thinking about is form. This is not a bad idea. In fact, the hard part of getting the body in the correct position is that the athlete can't see what they are doing so, initially, it can be challenging to get in the correct body position.

While there aren't too many mirrors out there in bowling centers, most everyone has a cell phone with video capabilities and a mirror at home to see what they are doing. Starting out by polishing up your body positions is the first key to the No-Step Drill. Once you get this down and do some rehearsal swings without a ball, you can then transition to using your ball.

Screen Shot

Gold coach Del Warren places a screen over the lane so that form, not score or the pins or anything else, is his students' sole focus throughout the Foul-Line Drill.





THE FOUL-LINE DRILL

The Foul-Line Drill is not only one of the most common drills practiced in our sport, but it also is the basis for all other bowling drills and exemplifies the foundation for any player's release and finish position.

Gold coach Del Warren has introduced many students to the Foul-Line Drill over the years. Here's how he does it:

1. Begin with your feet staggered so that the bowling-side shoulder and hip are slightly behind the non-bowling side, then flex your knees slightly to eliminate any tension.
2. Now lower your bowling hand until the back of it is resting on your bowling-side knee. This puts your hand behind the ball with a straight wrist and adds some side and forward tilt. Importantly, your head now should be directly over your bowling-side foot.
3. Next, move your balance arm out with the hand about waist-high, rotating your thumb down toward the floor and your palm away from the lane. You then move your trail leg over to its finish position with the baby-toe side of your foot on the floor and your toes pointing down the lane with your heel back. All the while, your upper body is lowering, positioning the ball about mid-calf and increasing the flex in your slide leg. Notice that the ball and your arm replace the space formerly occupied by your trail leg and foot, with the ball and your arm directly under your head.

Drilling Down

For coach Warren, the Foul-Line Drill is one of a variety of challenging drills he frequently uses with his Webber International players to sharpen their versatility, their physical games, and their confidence.

4. You now are ready for action. Your pushaway should be short — only about 8 to 12 inches — and your backswing should be only as high as the natural momentum that your pushaway generates. The only movement here should be the arm that the ball swings; there should be absolutely no muscle applied aside from very light grip pressure so that you don't re-grip the ball during your very short swing.
5. Now, simply let the ball roll off of your hand. With your wrist being straight, your fingers will be low enough on the ball so that, when your thumb exits the ball, some time elapses between the fingers and thumb to provide some lift. Again, there should be no added force.

One tip Warren advises that those who try this drill bear in mind, particularly if they have an interest in understanding how rev-rate can be generated, is to bend your arm at the elbow once the ball reaches the apex of the swing. Why? Well, look at just about any bowler with a strong release and you will see a bend in their elbow. This lowers the fingers on the ball without requiring them to cup their wrist. With the ball approaching the release point, the elbow straightens out as the thumb starts to exit. And therein lies the key here: This straightening out of the elbow without grabbing the ball causes the fingers to migrate quickly from under the ball to the top of it, which increases your rev rate.

You are using the bigger muscles in your arm to get your fingers lower on the ball. As you release it, you want to think about your hand continuing forward with the bowling-side shoulder lowering and moving slightly forward. As your arm and hand extend through your finish position, your hand only will go as high as the momentum your swing provides.

HAVE A PRACTICE PLAN

Every drill should be woven into a practice plan. An individualized but consistent practice plan is ideal. In the case of coach Warren's work with his Webber International collegiate bowling squad, his practice plan always begins with a dynamic warm-up session that lasts about 11 minutes. After that, his players undergo three sets of five drills that isolate every critical aspect of the game.

A particular favorite of Warren's is a drill he developed specifically for shooting spares that takes his players through what he calls "versatility cycles" using different angles, speeds, revs, axis rotation, and tilt for each spare. He will have his players shoot the 10 pin from a few different angles and deploy a variety of releases and speeds. Warren does the same with strike shots, having his players play anywhere from lofting the gutter cap or off the gutter to deep inside. It's challenging, but it trains his athletes to be more versatile so that they can tackle many conditions from a place of confidence and experience.

Warren also incorporates lane-play drills into the practice plan his players follow. "We always start off using parallel lines," he says. "Meaning they have to roll the ball, for instance, straight up the 10 board, then cross the arrows at 10, and the ball travels that line until it hooks."

Key to this drill is knowing where you need to slide to ensure that the ball travels along this parallel line.

"From there," Warren adds, "we can open up or close down our angles to project the ball down the line for the purpose of creating different angles. So, let's say I increase my angle by laying it down on the 12 board but projecting it to 10 at the arrows. If the ball traveled a straight line from there it would end up at approximately the 4 board at 60 feet down the lane."

Warren notes that certain luxuries come with training where Webber players do — the Kegel-Training Center in Lake Wales, Florida.

"We do have the luxury of using Specto so that we can verify results. This really helps the player get a handle on where to stand and where to look to get the ball to travel down the lane in the desired direction and angle."

As Warren makes clear here, much can be accomplished with a well thought-out and organized practice plan. As you design your own plan and stick to it, remember that all drills are connected. The finish of your shot is the culmination of everything that has led to that point. The release is the moment of truth. Get your release and finish positions nailed down, and you will be well on your way to better bowling.

As coach Shady puts it in a quote that I love, "Be the best one-shot warrior that you can be." In other words, be the best version of yourself from shot to shot, a goal that the right drill done the right way definitely can deliver.