

A Bit More on Practice & Trust

Going the extra step to improve your game does require more than a few practices intermittently stuck in when feeling the edge slip or a tournament near. Also, of note some of us may rely too much on our muscle memory OR on developing a reliance simply on muscle memory and self-discipline. All are important commodities but singularly not as potent as if put as part of a practice plan

From my view the best most productive practice is planned but also has a certain sense of flux to it. There are no rigid set in stone 'musts' about practice. However, planning and organization will give an individual the opportunity to be more tuned into their game, which in turn allows for the solid maintenance and/or development of your game.

THREE BELIEFS ABOUT PRACTICE

Practice needs to be regular and frequent

This does not mean you won't at some point skip a practice here or there. Most certainly there will come occasions where you need to skip a practice. Being prepared to commit to a minimum of 2 practices/week will help provide the building blocks to a strong game. Those building blocks ultimately influence your consistency and confidence. I believe showing up for 3 or 4 practices prior to an event has little value. The downside of a strategy of simply showing up for 3-4 practices prior to an event is the building of a false sense of confidence in a skill set. Once in the tournament your skills will regress to former standards once a sense of pressure, or struggle is felt by the player. THEN one comes crashing down, sometimes worse than they were before because they're undermining the confidence they once had.

To Score or Not to Score

A 60/40 or 70/30 split works for me. In other words, I do not simply show up and bowl games. Yuck, that in and of itself is a recipe for disaster. Why...because it does not provide the time or structure to isolate skills (physical and mental) to work on.

Most of the practices need to focus on maintenance and/or skill development. To that end setting up matches, and/or just playing games is not the most productive use of your time at the lanes. **Most of my practices** do not involve score keeping, or competition with others.

Make it Real

The mental side of practice is greatly enhanced when the foundation of your practice goal is to make it as real as the 'real thing'. The goal of a practice is to narrow the gap between practice and play (tournament, league). The goal of each practice is to be focused on the intent of your practice as if it were the championship you are indeed preparing for.

THE STRUCTURE OF A PRACTICE

I won't over do this area, because I think IF you are reading this you are most likely skilled in organizing what you do with your practice. Be that as it may, here is what I value in the structure of my practices.

Warm up – self-explanatory right

For me this includes a few stretches, and deliveries to kind of get the cobwebs out of my body and mind so that I can be ready to commit to my practice time.

Skills Focus (Execution & Mind Set)

Certainly, in most exercises or drills there is an overlap however separating skills into two primary areas seems to help simplify the process of development. Given whatever my particular needs are it is good to shape the direction of your drills to meet those needs. For example; do you need to focus on improving specific physical skills of (follow thru, speed of approach, lift, rotation, pace) or are you thinking your time needs to be spent more on the Mental aspect of your play, such as: (patience, concentration to the task, "sticktoitness", frustration or anger management, perspective taking, focusing on what you control, self-talk, resiliency)

Notice how the list for execution was shorter than the mental aspect. I wonder what that says? Don't let that reality deter you from understanding and accepting the importance of your physical skill development.

Games Focus

The games focus is essentially the introduction of competition or drill for the benefit of assessing your progress.

The games focus is not necessarily keeping score. It is not difficult to invent games, drills or activities that can

introduce self competitively driven opportunities.

Favorite drills

Variety is nice. It can help with keeping one's interest into what they are doing. The following are some of the key drills I do. In many respects the practice as a physical and mental value.

Journaling

End each practice with a reflection. I have a habit of writing my reflections down. Both from practice, league and tournament play. Reflecting can give you direction for the next practice. BUT as importantly within these notes can be jewels that become like trigger points (think of it and... presto you can refocus and/or redirect your energies). I have found that the clarity of my reflection has a definite spinoff in terms of giving me the tools to quickly scan my notes for redirection on something important to me. For example, within my notes from my 1983 season I can find key words that when I recall it and dwell briefly on it the lessons of that day come back to me as if I were right there. Sometimes it is the simple act of reviewing my notes that can save my day. I believe this is one area that is sore fully lacking within the 5 Pin community.

A Couple of Drills

A couple of drills that I find helpful are provided below. I developed these drills over the course of the past 10 years and find them very helpful and regaining confidence and developing an awareness of my consistency.

Drill - Close Approximations

Purpose

- to engage your mind into process thinking
- to become sensitized to the feel of your approach and delivery and thus discern your best ball from lesser quality deliveries.

Procedure

1. Always throwing at a full set of pins
2. Bowl until the ball you just threw FEELS LIKE your very best.
3. This attempt becomes your **benchmark** (award it a 10)
4. Next, throw 5 individual balls each at a full set of pins
5. Record a number for how well you threw each ball (in comparison to your benchmark)
6. Record beside your number any instructional comment you want to make
7. LOOK for any patterns – In terms of things to correct – the sample provided the pattern appears to be speed.
8. Repeat this process 2 or 3 times.

ATTEMPT	SCORE (1-10)	COMMENT
1	7	GOOD FOCUS BUT...RUSHED LAST STEP
2	4	TOO FAST, UNABLE TO HOLD FLW THRU,
3	8	GOOD PACE, SPEED, LIFT AND ROTATION. BALL MISSED JUST TO RIGHT
4	9	EXCELLENT! GOOD PACE, HIT TARGET, LIFT AND ROTATION FINE. IT FELT
5	8	BIT FAST, LACKED SOME LIFT

Drill – P.B.'s (personal bests)

Knowing what your personal bests are helps push you to new standards and makes that push a more comfortable experience when in a competitive environment. Timothy Gallway has said that IF we let go of our expectations, we free ourselves. He also believes (as do I) that our ego likes to limit what we think we can do and also fears any contradiction to what we think we are capable of. So... if we practice knocking down those personal bests, we can extend the P.B.'s to new heights. P.B.'s can be process related as well as results related some samples follow;

PROCESS RELATED

Frequency (in succession) holding follow through

Lifting ball over a towel target (12 or more inches past foul line)

Hitting Point of Aim (arrow, board)

Taking your time (not feeling rushed) OR...not speeding so much that you lose your balance at release

RESULTS RELATED**Proficiency at pin and pin combination hits;**

- Picking corners - Left corner & right corner
- Chops (Left 2-3 & Right 2-3)
- Chops (left) & 5-3-2
- Chops (right) & 5-3-2
- Hitting 3 or more pins down
- Strikes in succession
- Right pocket
- Left pocket

Proficiency of 10th frame performance

- Counts of 20 or more in the 10th frame
- Counts of 30 or more in the 10th frame

Strike Proficiency**Proficiency at Center Hits**

- Give yourself 5-10 balls
- Each ball thrown at a full set of pins
- Track how many pins you knock over with X number of balls, then try and improve that mark

Gap Proficiency - A Measure of Consistency

For this task – decide on how you will measure your proficiency (i.e.) hitting 3 or more pins over, Strikes, Hitting the center pin, even use this drill for spare shots

For the purposes of example; Lets work with 2 or more STRIKES. Now record how many successive STRIKES you have as well as the gap between your successive hits. See scoring sheet. On the score sheet the bolded and larger print represents the number of consecutive unsuccessful attempts.

Strikes & Gap

2, **4**, 3, **2**, 2, **6**, 1, **4**, 6, This record indicates 4 gaps of 4, 2, 6, 4.

The next goal may be;

- Reducing the average of gap duration of 4
- Reducing the length of a gap to 4

TRUST DRILL

This drill is a mental exercise. Maximizing your performance is all about trust. When one trusts in their skill they let go and simply do as Nike suggests and 'Just Do It'

Here is the plan;

Everyone has an image in their head of what bowling well feels like, there are really two parts to this feeling. ONE confidence within the event, and TWO confidence or feel of your execution when executing a great shot. In both cases there is an emotional attachment.

Drill One – Pencil Throw or Golf

The goal of this exercise is hugely important for helping identify what trust feels like. IF you are a golfer Remember when you take those swings before you set up to actually hit the ball. Typically, those shots are done seamlessly. Always smooth and effortless. No awareness of thought other than to simply swing. We are patient and calm, and confident. That is Trust. Trust is the feeling of an absence of thought because you are 'in the moment' this feel of trust is huge. When you transfer the feel of trust to anything you set in motion your best opportunity to succeed.

Beyond the golf example

- Use any object you like, one that is easy to pick up and throw and won't damage anything when thrown.
- Pick a target.
- Stand inches from the target
- Toss your object to the target
- Take a step back and repeat the process
- Again, step one more step back further from the target

- Repeat the process

STOP...WHEN YOU BEGIN TO FEEL a tension, anxiety, or awareness of what you are trying to achieve. WHEN you have begun to think about 'how to' do it you have left trust. The goal is simply to be aware of the feeling of trust. And then on the broader scale bring that to the lanes. The next two drills will help you bring that trust to the lanes.

Drill Two – Narrow the Gap – Between Practice & Play

Prior to a practice (day or more before)

Re live the feeling of yourself in a successful tournament. Recreate as best you can the feel of that success. In all its nuances.

This allows you to begin your practice with the productive mind set you carry forward into a successful tournament.

The actual practice is one of a set number of games 5 or more. Decide this before the practice. Once at the lanes, give yourself the typical time to warm up and ready yourself for play. Then simply begin your 5-game block with the interest, enjoyment, and intensity you bring to your successful tournaments.

IF the practice starts off not going to well; STOP, reassess and begin again. What can you do differently? Treat it like an experiment. Then restart the process.

Drill Three – Execution by Feel

For this drill you may not even throw a ball. AND this practice can be built into an existing practice as a lead in.

Some background

The pre-shot routine are those habits you typically carry out from the time you touch the ball (picking it up off

the ball rack) to the time you take your first step out of the stance position)

The Drill – Ready – Set – Go

The purpose of this drill is to rehearse the quality of your Pre-shot routine, and become very familiar with the

feel (emotional and physical) associated with it.

Sit down – imagine the feel for throwing well. Envisage the tempo/pace, the calmness, focus, the smoothness and effortless nature of your approach. A smooth release and extending the ball out onto the lane with a follow through reaching towards the target. Holding your follow through position solidly well balanced.

Now...in leaving your seat, pick up the ball. Stand at the end of the approach and begin to narrow your focus down to one or two things you want to do with your execution. For example; (lift, hold

your follow thru). Now...move into your stance. Get set...and take your first step when ready. No need to go further. You are done, Return the ball to the ball rack & Now repeat the process. Sit down....