

In the execution phase, you must let go of conscious control. This will make you truly athletic. You have a plan—now go with it completely. If you don't compete with total commitment, success will feel like a trick. Failure will make you angry with yourself for holding back. Bowlers lose more sleep over not bringing their all than they do about whether or not they filled frames.

Step 3: Observation Without Judgment

One of the highest forms of bowling intelligence is the ability to observe without judging or reacting. Once you have mastered this step you'll have an essential self-improvement program, and an anti-choke mechanism built into your shot delivery cycle.

This third step is simple to understand but exceedingly difficult for most bowlers to execute. However, in my experience with some of the top bowlers in the world, this step has been among the most beneficial. This step—also called *awareness*—depends on your ability to maintain executive control over yourself.

One of the most important things you can do to consistently improve and repair your game is to keep an open mind and to nonjudgmentally pay attention after releasing the ball. As soon as the ball is off of your hand, stay awake and aware—no reaction.

Most bowlers simply cannot resist reacting to their shots as soon as the ball rolls off their hand. If you look at a bowler's face immediately after ball release, you'll generally see some form of either dismay or glee. Eyes jerk up and away from target lines; faces sometimes grimace as the ball rolls or skids.

In the briefest moment of time after you release the ball, you have maximum access to information about what just happened. There are three potential input sources:

1. The lane
2. Your body
3. Your freedom of motion (your heart)

Imagine waking up in the morning. For just a moment, if you're still, you have the best chance at remembering your last dream of the night. As soon as you do any other activity, such as brushing your teeth, there is

interference. You lose your awareness of the dream.

The same thing happens after a shot. For the briefest instant, if you can keep the interference of emotion or judgment at bay, you have the most information possible about

- the way the lanes are playing,
- the way your ball is behaving,
- what your body did,
- your timing,
- whether you maintained focus and concentration, and
- whether you were free or overcontrolling.

The more open the screen of your mind, the better you can receive this information. The more cluttered your mind with reaction or judgment, the more difficult it is to receive the data, in which case you'll likely remain exactly as smart or as confused as you were before the shot.

The only thing you should be doing for about one or two seconds after you execute the shot is to keep your mind open. There's only one question to ask here—*What am I aware of?* The only real problem when making an errant shot is not knowing what you did.

A second enormous benefit to keeping an open mind is that it serves as an anti-choke mechanism during competition. It works like this. If the most important thing after a shot is what you're aware of, then concerns about results and how you appear to spectators fade into the background. You start to play for the love of the execution of the game, instead of sweating whether everything turns out every time, or whether you look good while you're doing it.

To be a great self-correcting, improving, learning machine you have to keep your reactions at bay for a moment. Stay present and aware after each and every shot. That way you can keep the best of your game flowing. This commitment to awareness also has yet another advantage of keeping your head in the game even through long competition blocks.

Step 4: Reaction and Emotion

Step 4 is the reaction and emotion phase. Something significant has happened. You rolled a strike, made your spare, or you missed. Unless you're made of stone, you'll have an emotional response to what has