

Thumb timing—the key to a perfect release

By Gee Lopez

There are many things that need to fall into place to have a perfect release, such as the fit of the bowling ball, a loose arm swing, and good timing. Now when I say timing, I'm referring to the ball in relation to the feet, arriving at the foul line together in an almost effortless way while maintaining balance. In short, it should almost feel like you never had a bowling ball in your hand.

But there are two different kinds of timing—timing to which I just referred and *thumb timing*. In my view, thumb timing is the most critical key to a perfect release.

What is thumb timing, you ask? It is the moment the thumb is at its most downward position and exits the thumb hole naturally. It is best executed when the swing is relaxed from front to back, allowing gravity to take over and simply wait for the thumb to exit by itself before accelerating the follow-through.

Depending on how tight or loose the thumb hole is will determine the window

of time the thumb has to exit the ball. The tighter the thumb hole, the smaller the window. The looser the thumb hole, the larger the window.

Keep in mind, these results are based on a relaxed arm swing. For instance, if the thumb hole is too loose for a bowler with a relaxed swing, the window will be too large and the thumb will fall out of the ball, well before it's supposed to. If the thumb hole is too loose for a bowler that has a very tense (muscled) swing, he will squeeze with the thumb throughout the swing and pass the point where the thumb is supposed to come out.

Now, instead of the thumb facing down, it is more likely to be facing anywhere from 15 to 45 degrees forward. This will create an undesired amount of friction on the thumb and also the feeling that the thumb is getting stuck upon release. This will trick the bowler into thinking that the thumb hole is probably too tight, and he often will have the thumb hole enlarged to compensate for the sticking.

This is the beginning of a series of

problems that should have never started. This negative impact could result in poor timing (walking too fast or too slow because of a muscled swing), poor thumb timing (lofting the ball one foot on one shot and three feet the next shot), poor balance at the foul line (pulling down on the swing to create ball speed), tendonitis, or going down in ball weight because it feels too heavy when you pull it back and forth.

I'm frequently asked this question: *When am I supposed to let go of the thumb?* I tell people that you shouldn't have to let go of the thumb, the thumb should let go of you. When it does, that will be your window where now you can accelerate through with the fingers to your desired target.

There are other factors that come in, such as thumb pitch, span, and bevel that will help you achieve a perfect release. But the number one key to achieve all this is practice. Take into consideration that it will take time for muscle memory to adapt to something different.

Below are photos from a practice drill for thumb timing that anyone can practice at home. All you need is a carpeted floor and a pillow against the wall into which to roll the ball.

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Gee Lopez demonstrates the practice drill he uses for thumb timing.