

The Best Bowling Tip I Ever Received

By Waver “Pop” Sneed



The best bowling tip I ever received came from reading a book and from personal observation. The book I read was *Focused for Bowling* by Dean Hinitz, and the personal observation occurred when I participated in a Senior PBA Regional Tournament in Little River, S.C. At this tournament, I was amazed as PBA Hall of Famer George Pappas executed shot

after shot with remarkable machine-like precision and accuracy. The most noticeable aspect of Pappas's game was the consistency of his approach and his stability at the foul line. Each shot looked like an instant replay of the previous shot in every detail.

I left the tournament wondering how could I possibly emulate the apparent discipline and consistency that he displayed. By the way, he won that tournament, hands down.

Shortly thereafter, while reading the aforementioned book, I came upon a chapter devoted to the merits of establishing a pre-shot routine. That's when it hit me! Mr. Pappas was so consistent and machine-like because he

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was repeatedly executing a *set routine*—a routine he had executed for years. His entire approach was now like a well-oiled machine.

I later discovered that not only Mr. Pappas but many other professional bowlers use a specific routine each and every time they step on the approach. If you timed most successful professional bowlers, you would find that the elapsed time between their stepping on the approach and releasing the ball is virtually the same for each shot.

If you ever watch professional basketball, you will also notice that most players have a unique routine that they execute each time they are at the foul line. Similarly, “The Best Bowling Tip I Ever Received” is: *Develop a pre-shot routine.*

A pre-shot routine is a specific set of physical actions

and mental thoughts that are performed each and every time the bowler steps on the approach. The purpose of the pre-shot routine is to give structure and consistency to your approach to the foul line.

To create this consistency, physically the exact same steps are executed precisely, every time the bowler steps on the approach. In addition to the physical steps, an effective routine also contains mental keys to relax and focus the bowler. The pre-shot routine serves to stabilize the most variable and unpredictable factor in your approach: YOU!

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By definition, a routine is a set of steps to completing a task; these steps are done over and over until they become so second nature that a lot of thought becomes unnecessary. The pre-shot routine serves well in easing the effects of pressure situations and distractions. The effects of pressure situations and other distractions are significantly eased because whatever the circumstances, the bowler's total responsibility is simple: *Step on the approach and execute the routine.* Once you get your routine down to a science, it will give your game a solid foundation and keep you well-grounded regardless of the situation.

Now I'm going to let you in on a little secret by giving you my pre-shot routine. Then we will discuss factors contained within it that should be incorporated into your routine (if you decide to take advantage of this tip).

As previously stated, a quality pre-shot routine contains both physical and mental keys designed to both synchronize your physical approach to the foul line and also to calm, relax, and keep you mentally focused. To give you the best understanding of a quality pre-shot routine, I list below only the physical aspects of my pre-shot routine. I am a right-hander, and these are the physical aspects of my routine when using a five-step approach:

- At the ball return, I pick up and wipe the oil off my ball, and I take a deep breath.
- I step on the approach first with my right foot, then the left foot goes directly on my starting board.
- I bring the ball up slowly into my starting position and glue my eyes on my mark, and I take a deep breath.
- When I inhale, I start my five-step approach to the foul line.

These are the physical steps to my routine, and they are executed every time I step on the approach. Prior to getting on the approach, you should have already decided how you are going to shoot the shot, i.e., the board on which you are going to stand, the mark you are going to use, the speed you are going to throw the ball, how you are going to release the ball, etc.

Now I'm going to augment the physical steps listed

above with the inseparable mental aspects of my routine (in italics).

At the ball return, I pick up and wipe the oil off my ball, and I take a deep breath. I deeply inhale and exhale slowly while thinking *smooth*.

I step on the approach first with my right foot, then the left foot goes directly on my starting board. Straight to business.

I bring the ball up slowly into my starting position and glue my eyes on my mark, and I take a deep breath. As I inhale, I'm thinking, *relax*. As I exhale, I visualize the ball's path across my mark and into the pocket.

I inhale and start my five-step approach to the foul line, simultaneously taking my first step. On the exhale, I take my second step, pushing the ball out and letting it drop while thinking *down*. The next inhale on the third step is very deep (lasting all the way through the fourth step and the top of my backswing). This exhale starts the downswing and my fifth and final power step. It's exaggerated and culminates in releasing the ball onto the lane. Just before getting to the line, I think *solid*.

During this final power step, I also use visualization, hearing and feeling the air gust from my lungs while imagining it's so powerful that it's actually forcing the ball along its path to destroy the pocket.

As you can see, I use my breathing to dictate the pace and timing of each aspect of my approach. But this technique is of my own design. Your routine should be designed to complement your personal bowling style. Your routine should not be designed to change your approach but to fine tune it. So, incorporate cue words and mental pictures that best provide consistency and strength to your particular style.

Using my routine as an example, notice the cue words used—*smooth, relax, down, solid*. Your pre-shot routine should make use of similar suggestive words. The words you use should be meaningful and strategically placed in your approach. They should be placed where most needed to keep you consistent and focused.

The *smooth* when I first pick up the ball reminds me to be smooth throughout the entire approach (normally I am very herky-jerky). The *relax* as I inhale is accompanied with the mental suggestion to physically relax my body. The *down* suggestion is two-fold; first, it tells me to let go and let the ball do the work, and second, it tells me to go down in my stance. The *solid* tell me to be solid at the line.

Other examples of cue words and the thoughts they might suggest: *pose* (stay down at the line); *focus* (concentrate on the mark), etc. Other cue words could be *strong, speed, trust, slow, lift*, etc. These cue words act as silent verbal signals that will keep you consistent and focused.

My personal routine gives me a feeling of being well equipped to shoot a good shot no matter what the situ-

ation. And on nights when I am really absorbed into my routine, everything becomes strictly by the numbers. My routine becomes a kind of cookie-cutter for stamping out good shot after good shot.

So what should you consider when creating your routine? First, take a critical look at the weaknesses and strengths in your approach. After determining the things that are inconsistent or needed in your physical approach, consider what weakness you have in your mental game.

Once you have determined the weaknesses in both your physical approach and your mental game, you now

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have the basics for developing an effective pre-shot routine to best eliminate or strengthen those areas. The proper placement of cue words, phrases, ideas, and thoughts within your approach are the keys to developing an effective routine.

For example, if sometimes you get to the line too quickly, you might use *slow* as a cue word. Or, if you are unstable at the line, you might strategically place the cue word *solid* just before you get to the line.

Once you develop a pre-shot routine and gain confidence in it, you will have an invaluable asset that will serve you well in any situation throughout your bowling career. To get the most benefit out of your routine, you must be dedicated to executing the routine each and every time you step on the approach.

Whether the upcoming shot is a possible tournament winner or just a practice shot, mentally realize that your responsibility is always the same: *Step on the approach and execute your routine*. To reiterate, regardless of the importance of the shot, your only concern is to execute the pre-shot routine. Once you get your routine down to a science, it will give your game a solid foundation and keep you well-grounded.

Good Bowling.

Pop Sneed won three titles in the recent NCAUSBCA Senior Tournament.

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