

10,000 Bowl Journey Of Discovery

100 bowls a day for 100 days (actually 107 days)

By Terry O'Neil (2020)

Just finished a mind-blowing experience in my bowls' journey as both coach and player, which I would like to share with the pBus squad.

While many bowlers worldwide have been banned from the greens for practice and competition, I fortunately have a three-rink green in my backyard, literally.

I took on this challenge in search of answers as to what is the best delivery method for me and what will work best for aspiring elite players.

I had a lot of questions as I attempted to break down the myriad of elements which constitute the "perfect" delivery.

The conclusion, there is no one "perfect" delivery, but many accommodating deliveries for all ages, level of fitness, skill, size and styles.

What follows are some of the essential elements everybody needs to come to grips with, pun intended. I share my examination of some of these methods and appreciate your responses and ideas.

Many coaches will agree that the **Pre-delivery** routine is the most abused, least practiced, yet essential ritual a bowler can adopt. I am first to admit I was a sinner as I usually jumped the mat in a rush to get my bowls down. This crowding robbed me, at times, of good alignment and the opportunity to straighten the mat, invariably twisted by the previous player.

So, in pre-delivery, take up a spot behind the mat to accept instruction from the head on what shot to play. Set your bowl bias, eyeball the path you plan for your bowl, noting a specific target (The Spot) to roll over and judge the force necessary to get it there. This answers what the plan is, leaving solely the execution.

Now you can step on the mat and assume your chosen stance.

I have tried stances with feet together, feet apart, feet staggered, feet pointed in all directions, but it never is comfortable, not reliable for physical accuracy.

What I have found most effective in practice is Nev Rodda's "Shooter or Rifleman's Stance." Well, half of it anyway.

Nev explains it well on Youtube, but essentially (for a right-hander) the right foot is open to 2 o'clock for a strong foundation, good balance and to be used as an accelerator, to push off. The angle of the right-foot moves the hip out of the bowler's swing path. The left foot is pointed down the line at one o'clock.

Slightly different from Nev's plan on the backhand, my right foot points down the line at 11 o'clock, clearing the right hip in the opposite direction. My left foot is at 10 o'clock, so my swing plain does not run narrow. The left stepping-foot travels forward maintaining the initial angle. It is important not to cross the left foot in front in stepping or you will block your swing plain and the bowl will run narrow.

During every one of these 10,000 deliveries I could hear the encouraging voices of Coaches Tighe and Milner, "How ya looking?" and "Eyes down, head down, stay down."

One of the biggest changes I have adopted is my **grip**.

I used to place my thumb on top of the bowl with the fingers aligned straight on the bowl's running surface. I found this grip required a good amount of thumb pressure to control the bowl. Releasing the thumb at the right instant was problematic. A shortened thumb ligament from a friendly teenage knife fight also restricts movement slightly.

\ This pressure was also affected by the angle of my wrist (cocked, neutral or trailing). At times, keeping the palm up caused tension in the forearm and elbow. When you add an incessantly interfering baby finger for wobbles, the results are more luck than good management.

Here is where the recently deceased bowls' legend David Bryant influenced my changes most.

My interpretation of Bryant's grip, although it varied slightly from what he espoused, both in video and his 1985 book, is the most comfortable and controllable I have experienced. I have the sense Bryant felt he caressed the bowl rather than gripped it.

Bryant placed his thumb on or beside the rings, his index finger on the rings below forming a C (Nev loves this too), his middle finger on the running surface as the last point of release, his ring finger on the opposite grip and baby finger off the bowl out of play. This is a modified Claw grip, as opposed to a palm buried Cradle Grip or Finger Grip, but much more like a handshake to the side of the bowl.

From here you can use the Fixed, Partially Fixed or Full-step delivery motion according to the speed of green and the amount of force needed to carry the bowl to its target. Fixed is no step, all power from the swing. Partially Fixed is a staggered foot placement with a small step on delivery, popular in South Africa. Full-step is delivery with a larger step. How much body weight propels you propels the bowl.

Other contributing propellents of your bowls are the length and speed of the shoulder pendulum. A long backswing tends to be matched by a long fore-swing (if there is such a word) and a short backswing matched by a short fore-swing. Holding the bowl high, medium or low initiates the length of swing.

Then there is the most obvious propellant, speed. Slow fingertip-controlled deliveries are for 13 second and up greens. Long controlled swings are needed on 12 and below second surfaces. Shield the children drives are as fast as can be accurate.

The later part of the delivery has some incredibly important facets. Hitting your line by rolling the bowl over THE SPOT is key. To do this repeatedly you must stay down and through the release until the bowl is at least two metres out of hand. This was Bryant's mantra. "Don't take your eye off The Spot."

Another secret I uncovered from "Bryant On Bowls" during my discovery was about his brilliant driving ability. He drove from a standing position as opposed to his normal crouch for all other deliveries, but the secret appears in a photo of him about to drive where his baby finger is clearly off the bowl. I have employed his grip, minus the little finger, both in the discovery and in competition and have found it most reliable, even at top speed.

During this challenge I have enjoyed some uplifting success with 60 to 70 per cent mat length deliveries. One amazing six out of 10 connect the jack ends.

Caterpillars were regularly 33 to 50 per cent.

I was vastly improved on forehand from 40 to 50 per cent and backhand 50 to 60 per cent.

We are talking controlled circumstances with 10 bowls an end. I now fear no shot, but embrace the impossible. Can't wait to display my changes in competition.

Backing up a bit, just before the spot and follow through take place is when the real magic happens. We have all experienced these magical moments when in form.

That feeling of a peaceful, yet almost imperceptible pause from lead foot planting to the bowl moving forward.

The other is when the delivery meets all its marks of timing and angles and just whispers on the surface, no thud, bounce, wobble or venture. Practice pays.

NOTE: *Used two Redlines, four Aces and four Aero Grooves per end. Green paced 12 to 14 seconds depending on cut and dampness. 5,000 forehand, 5,000 backhand. Purposes varied from Caterpillar, two and one metre on, Connect The Jack, Drives, Push Follow, Blockers etc.*

ATTACHMENTS: Recent Fall photo of The Rinks at Puddle Bay, My adapted Bryant grip, Bryant's grip video capture, Bryant to drive (1985 Bryant On Bowls), Overhead drone shot.