

Chapter 1: The Morning You Couldn't Lift Your Arm

You wake up on Wednesday and the ceiling is fine, the coffee is fine, and then you reach for the cabinet where the mugs live. Somewhere between your elbow and your ear, something objects. Not a sharp pain. A deep, dull, arguing ache that runs from the top of the shoulder down into the meat of the upper arm, and it says one thing very clearly: *you threw forty-two balls last night and I would like a word.*

Most bowlers past sixty know this morning. Fewer of us will say out loud what it means. We say we're stiff. We say the lanes were dry. We say we need to get to the gym more. What we almost never say is the honest version: **my swing is costing me more than it used to, and I keep paying with my body instead of my technique.**

That morning is where this book starts, because that morning is the most useful piece of information you have.

What league night actually costs your body now

Let's price it out.

A typical three-game league set puts somewhere between thirty-six and sixty deliveries through your arm, depending on how your spares go. Each one is a house ball, fourteen or fifteen pounds, swung through an arc of roughly six feet and then decelerated by muscle rather than by gravity. Add the pick-up off the rack, which is the single most overlooked injury moment of the night. Add the bend to set it down. Add three hours of standing on a hard floor.

Sports-medicine clinics put a name to what this does over time. **Bowler's elbow**, tendon strain in the elbow and forearm caused by repetitive wrist action through the swing and release, is described as the most common bowling-related injury, with shoulder tendonitis from heavy-ball swinging close behind^{17, 18}.

Read that second half again. Not tendonitis from bowling. Tendonitis **from heavy-ball swinging**. The mechanism named in the clinic's own description is the way the ball is moved, not the fact that you play the game.

The two most common bowling injuries named by sports-medicine clinics both come from repetitive muscular work in the swing and release, not from impact or falls^{17, 18}.

Here is my own version. I spent one winter convinced my problem was conditioning. I did shoulder band work three mornings a week for two months, and my Thursday ache stayed exactly where it was. What finally moved the needle was not strength. It was that I stopped hauling the ball into the backswing and let it fall. My scores came back before my shoulder did, which told me something I should have known twenty years earlier.

Why the soreness is information, not weakness

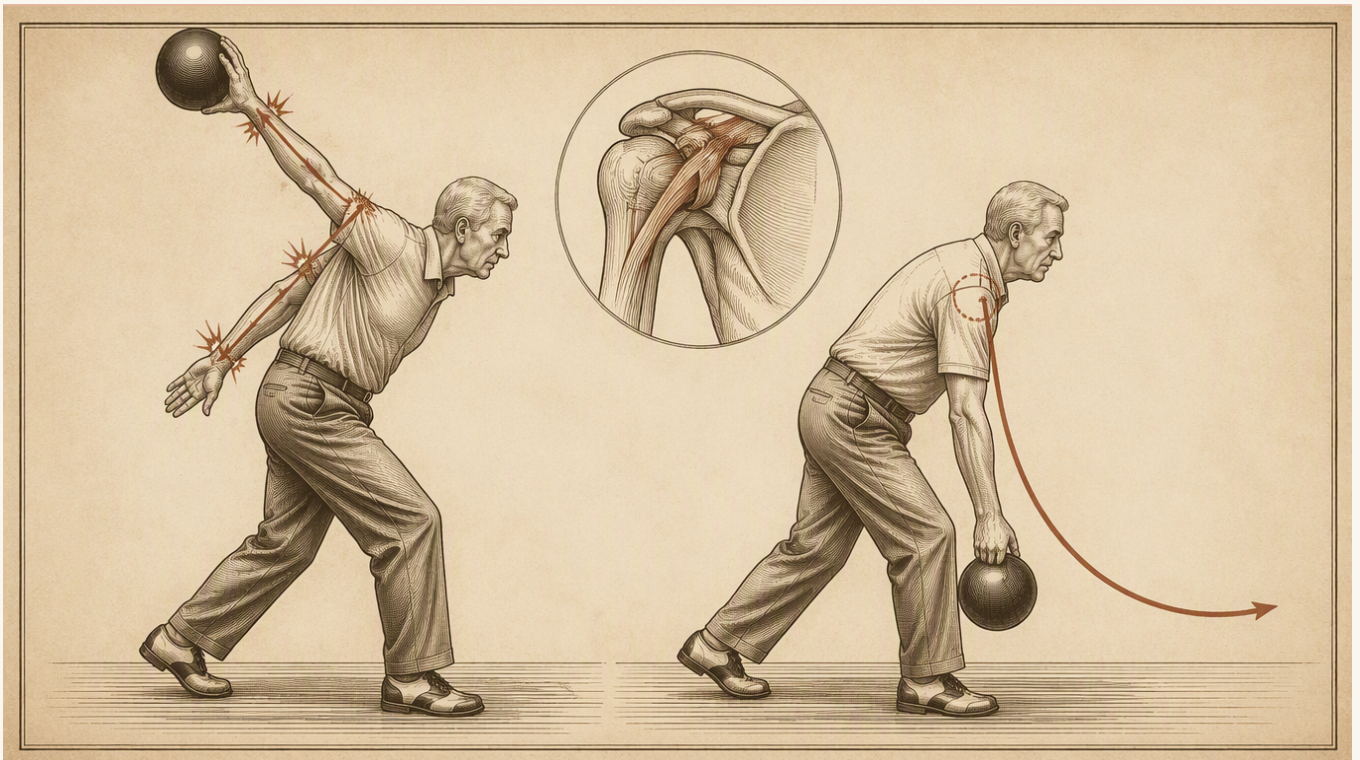
There is a whole conversation happening among older bowlers that rarely reaches the league banquet, and it is worth listening to.

On BowlingBoards.com, in a thread titled for senior bowlers, a 73-year-old described hand pain and shoulder soreness and asked what to do about it. The advice came back quickly: drop your ball weight. He hesitated. Not because he doubted the advice, but because he was afraid of losing carry. In the same conversation, a bowler in their mid-fifties explained dropping from fifteen pounds to fourteen after three surgeries, a detached bicep tendon, a rotator cuff repair and carpal tunnel, specifically to cut down the wear on the arm (BowlingBoards.com forum thread).

Case: On BowlingChat.net, a senior league bowler described keeping twelve-pound balls on hand for nights when the shoulder cannot handle the fourteen-pound equipment. He still reports averaging in the high 180s to low 200s. In a parallel thread, another bowler who owns three twelve-pound balls pushed back hard on the idea that lighter equipment automatically means weak pin action.

High 180s. On twelve pounds. On the nights his shoulder says no.

That is not a man who surrendered. That is a man who read the signal his body sent him and adjusted the machine instead of grinding the operator.



So let's be precise about what the ache tells you. Soreness after exercise is normal. Soreness that is **localized to a joint, arrives the morning after, and lands in the same spot every week** is different. It is a repeated report from a repeated motion. Your body is describing your swing to you with more accuracy than any camera on the concourse.

Do this tonight, before you read another page.

- ✓ Write down exactly where it hurts after league. Front of shoulder? Outer elbow? Base of the thumb? Be specific to within two inches.
- ✓ Write down **when** it started hurting: after game one, during game three, or only the next morning.
- ✓ Write down your score in each of the three games, side by side with that note.

Keep that page. In Chapter 3 you will turn it into a proper inventory. For now, one column of pain and one column of pins is enough to reveal something most bowlers have never seen written down: the games where you hurt most are usually not the games where you scored most.

The one assumption this book removes

Here is the assumption. You have carried it since you were nineteen and somebody in a bowling shirt told you to *put something on it*.

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More effort produces more ball. Therefore, less ball means I am not trying hard enough.

That belief is the single most expensive thing in your bag, and this book removes it in one piece.

Start with the physics you can check yourself. Recreational-to-competitive ball speed sits around 17 to 18 mph with a rev rate near 300 to 350 rpm, and coaches commonly cite a speed-to-rev ratio around 3.5:1 as the balanced target on medium lanes (bowlingball.com BowlVersity, 2024; MOTIV Bowling, 2023; BOWL.com, 2024). Notice that the target is a **ratio**, not a maximum. Speed alone is not on the scoreboard. Speed matched to revolutions is. When you add speed by muscling, you add it to only one side of that ratio and the balance breaks.

Now the mechanism. Coaches identify poor thumb fit as a primary cause of muscling: a hole that is too tight or too loose triggers unconscious gripping, and a correct fit lets the ball hang at your side with almost no grip pressure and swing on gravity alone^{15, 9}. On the Maverick forum, experienced bowlers put a testable standard on it: with a genuinely correct fit, you should be able to let the ball hang at your side with zero grip pressure, and swing it with only slight pressure at the base of the thumb. Anything beyond that is muscling.

The Falling Arm Principle: the arm that falls produces a faster, straighter, more repeatable ball than the arm that pushes. Your job on the approach is to get out of gravity's way.

There is a drill that proves it, and we will build the whole swing chapter around it later. A coach stands in front of the bowler, holds the ball at the top of the backswing, tells the bowler to relax the arm completely, and lets go. Bowlers who finally feel the arm fall rather than push have reported moving up to regular 600 series (BowlingChat.net coaching thread; Maverick Bowling Forum, 2015).

I want you to notice what is missing from that story. No new ball. No lesson package. No strength work. A man let go of his own arm and found sixty pins.

Your average slid from the 180s to the 140s. You have been told the answer is more. The answer is less, applied in the right three places, in the right order, on one league night. We will get there in Chapter 25.

But before we take anything away from your swing, we have to name it exactly. Because "muscling" is a word everyone in the house uses and almost nobody can point to on a video. What does it actually look like, in your shot, tonight, from the seats behind you?