

It's been a bit since I've written. Honestly, I didn't know what to say. Bowling was and still is operating under tight restrictions. There has been some positive movement towards reviving bowling operations in some areas, but even those movements are moving tenuously and without any real assurances of continued movement.

Where does that leave us as bowlers? Hoping? In despair? I find myself going back and forth between the two. Bouncing back and forth like that is like stretching out a rubber band. The more you rock back and forth, the more it seems to stretch. Hope runs high and then seeing backwards movement seems to be all the more devastating after getting a taste of what could be.

What happens to that rubber band though if it gets stretched too far? It breaks.

Is that the inevitable outcome for so many of us bowlers? We get stretched back and forth between what could optimistically be and the reality of what is in place, and we eventually just break, walk away from bowling. I don't want to talk about the decision-making that goes on, you can get that conversation by simply heading to any number of social platforms, I don't need to rehash that here. What I do want to discuss is keeping that rubber band from breaking. The decisions are made and out of our control and so now it is up to us as bowlers to cope with the situation with what we can control – ourselves.

So how do we cope with these emotional ups and downs, particularly with the downs that feel so much worse because of the glimmer of hope from the ups? First and foremost, we need to see the big picture. Will this situation end? Of course it will and we need to remember that. Will things be the same? Maybe, maybe not, but the point is bowling and we as bowlers will move on, really, we will.

With that in mind, it is now up to us to manage our emotions to get to that place where we will have moved on. What can we do? Coping isn't easy. It's not a skill that comes naturally to most of us. Just as in bowling, we need to practice to stay sharp with our coping skills.

So, where do we start? The first thing is to be kind to ourselves, to take care of ourselves. Get enough sleep, eat right, get whatever exercise you can get (what with crazy weather outside and social distancing restrictions this can be a challenge, but do something), and if needed, get help. Reaching out to just talk, to just connect with another person can help keep the downs from spiraling out of control that so often happens if we are left alone to overthink a situation.

From there, engage in more proactive tasks. If you're inclined to write, start a journal. The great thing about journaling is that the writing is for yourself and nobody else. It's your way to get out from inside your own head and get the demons out before they settle in. Make lists – what you want to do once

things open back up, goals for the future, that sort of thing, anything that looks forward. For those not inclined to write, try meditating. Meditation doesn't have to be a "zen" thing, it can be simply finding a quiet spot to be alone to reflect on your thoughts. These thoughts can range from, "Am I thinking too much? Am I okay? Do I need help?" to "I am doing okay today." Again, this is just a way to keep ahead of the downs so those downs do not take control and stretch that rubber band to the breaking point.

Remember, even though it may not always feel like it, each day is one step closer to bowling returning to some form of normalcy. Try to stay positive and take care of yourself. Keep the big picture in front of you.

I look forward to seeing you all on the lanes again.

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