Enhancing spin bowling consistency: the role of the hand-finger synergy in expanding the release window

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Summary

In cricket spin bowling, a release window is critical for consistent ball landings as there is inherent variability / noise in the system [1, 2]. Ball release position, linear velocity and angular velocity were calculated for two university-level male bowlers. These values were then perturbed - using 1. constant offset between hand and ball; 2. a synergy based method. For each trial / method, the release window was defined as the time period where the simulated ball trajectories met the predefined landing criteria. Ball vertical velocity at release (V_z) was found to significantly impact the release window, with a near-zero V_z maximising it. Simulations with the synergy method reduced V_z variance, widening the release window and improving consistency in ball landing.

Introduction

Release window, the temporal span during which the ball release satisfies specific landing criteria, is critical to spin bowling performance. Precise release coordination is essential to address biological variability. Existing literature identifies target distance, target size, and release velocity as primary determinants of the release window [3]. However, it is not known if there is a synergy between the hand and finger at ball release, or how motor variability influences consistency and the release window size. This study aims to address the role of motor control in achieving consistency in spin bowling and its critical relationship with the release window.

Methods

Two male finger spin bowlers were recorded, using a motion capture system with ball centre, linear velocity, and angular velocity calculated at ball release and perturbed; 1. constant offset method – constant difference between ball and hand at release; 2. synergy-based method - modelled the dynamic interaction between the bowling hand and the above offset at ball release. Flight was simulated using fluid dynamics equations with time-averaged magnus and drag coefficients determined by matching simulated and actual landing coordinates (X_L,Y_L). Release window for each trial was calculated as the period where simulated trajectories met the predefined landing criteria ($Y_L \pm 1$ m).

Results and discussion

Release height (Z) and V_z together explained 80.2% of the variance in landing location. The more consistent bowler (N = 11; $Y_L = 4.45 \pm 0.78$ m, $Z = 1.98 \pm 0.01$, $V = 21.82 \pm 0.41$ m/s, $\omega = 24.60 \pm 1.01$ rps, $V_z = 1.27 \pm 0.39$ m/s) exhibited less variability in V_z compared to the less consistent bowler (N = 10; $Y_L = 3.08 \pm 0.98$ m, $Z = 2.27 \pm 0.02$, $V = 22.47 \pm 0.92$ m/s, $\omega = 30.89 \pm 1.82$ rps, $V_z = 0.80 \pm 0.66$ m/s). The consistent bowler appears to compensate for an increased bowling hand vertical velocity with an offset (finger) vertical velocity that minimised changes in ball vertical velocity (good variability, Gv). In contrast, the less consistent bowler exhibited larger orthogonal variability (bad variability, Bv), reflecting a lack of compensation (Figure 1).

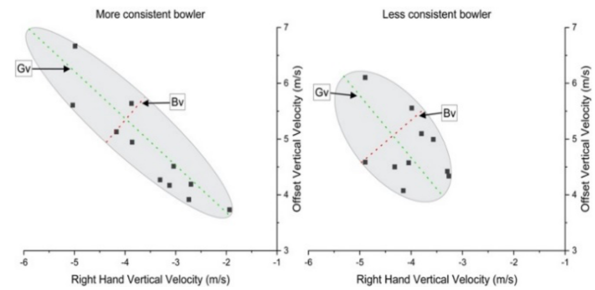

Figure 1: Variability in vertical velocity plots.

Release window size was sensitive to changes in ball vertical velocity (ΔV_z) along the perturbed release points, which explained 69.1% of the variance in the release window size ($r = -0.841$). Trials with minimal ΔV_z across perturbed release points resulted in larger release windows (Figure 2).

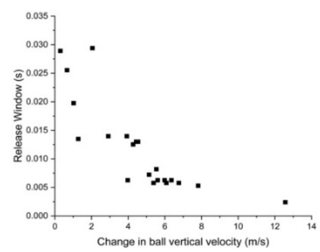

Figure 2: Release window vs. ΔV_z

Conclusions

Ball release vertical velocity and its variability are key determinants of performance, with synergy allowing for dynamic compensation and optimal release. The release window reaches a maximum when the synergy between the right hand and offset results in a flatter ball release trajectory, showing the role of motor control and coordination in achieving consistency.

References

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