

Golden Rules

You know you're capable of shooting a ten, but doing it repeatedly in a pressured environment can be difficult. **John Dudley** advises keeping things simple

I had the pleasure of attending the Nîmes tournament live in France. This was my first time of being there and not competing, so I was able to watch the tournament for the first time, and catch up with friends. I think I am unlike many people in that I do find archery exciting to watch, because I am not only watching to see where the arrow lands, I like watching each shooter make their shots and see how they may or may not change as the tournament goes on. What I saw at that tournament gave me the idea for this article – three ways to stay dead centre. These are things that would have helped almost every archer stay on their best when they needed it the most.

Stick to your system

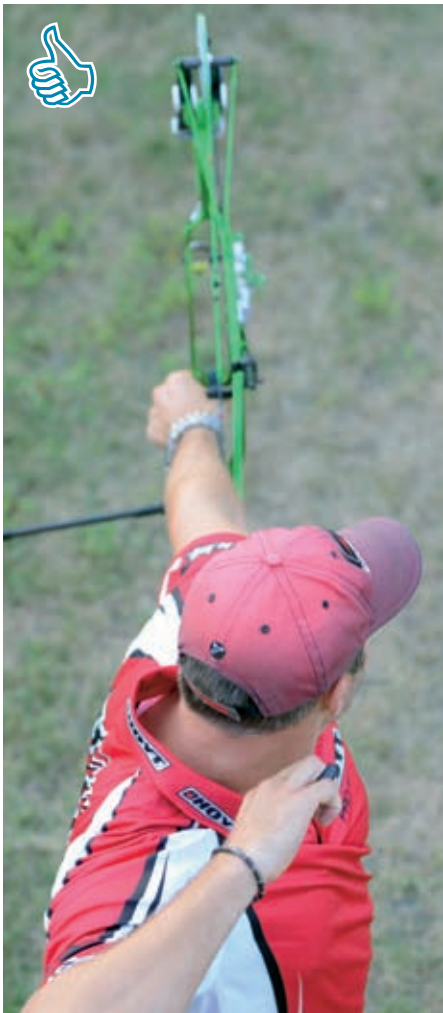
For a long time I have preached about having a system that you follow on every shot. As simple as this sounds, it is one of the most important aspects to any sport. There are two reasons why these routines are so important. First off it lays the foundation for your form and should keep you in a repetitive flow that checks every step of your style. Shot routines do vary depending on the coach, but I have always elected to teach ones that are simple and focus on the basics. My routine has always been Stance, Grip, Shoulder, Anchor and Peep. This routine brings my attention to areas that are essential to me shooting a ten.

As I watched some of the best archers

in the world during that tournament I could pick up on their routines. This is especially noticeable during the qualification round. Shooters get in their flow of their routine and go through their steps, and usually this is where you see shooters at their best. I could see some people focusing on stance, and some on grips, but they had their steps they were following. Some shooters also had small quirks in their routine, like spinning their arrow or twirling their release around their finger. To me, these things were all very noticeable.

Once the elimination rounds started though, one by one these things started to falter. Shooters felt the pressure and forgot the steps they should have been taking.





As the routines broke down, so would their form and ultimately they were knocked out. Sticking to your system is critical because it keeps your focus on the foundation. That focus is what makes the routine important for the second reason. Psychology tells us that keeping your conscious thoughts on one specific thing can prevent it from deviating to other topics.

It is proven that getting nervous is a reaction to a conscious thought. Something as little as one negative thought can trigger your nerves in a bad way. A shot routine can dramatically help anyone in preventing thoughts like this by occupying the conscious mind with the steps of the routine. Shooters that have an undistracted focus on their routines get less nervous and perform better. Next time you watch a great shooter and they seem calm as a cucumber on the line, pay attention to their focus on their routine. Chances are they are 100% focused on their system and not the situation.

Go with the flow

The second mistake archers commonly make is trying too hard to steady the sight picture. I would be lying if I told you that my sight pin is always perfectly still on the target – the reality is that it is rarely perfectly still, but I am ok with that. I have had tournaments where I've shot and people would come up to me and say, "I watched the end of your stabilizer and it never moves". My reply is "I wish my stabilizer would tell that to my sight pin". This is something that I had to learn many years ago and quite frankly something that I really didn't believe was true. However, it is totally true if you're shooting the right way.

This theory really boils down to the importance of being dynamic in your shot. You need to be a puller, and not a puncher. If you are a trigger puncher then this may not apply to you, but if you are a recurve or compound shooter that activates their shot using "back tension" then this is a very important point. If you use back tension then your sight picture will rarely be perfectly still. This is a simple cause and effect principle. Physics tells us that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. So if your rear arm and shoulder is in motion during your pull then expect the front arm to have some motion as well.

During practice or totally comfortable times, this motion is less noticeable because our shots are often faster and smoother. If you are like me, you focus more on the pull than on the score during practice. Practice is normally easy and scores are where we expect them to be. However, once the

tournament comes around we tend to slow down a little bit with the pull so the front arm will appear to have more movement. You must learn to trust this movement, and not try to change it during the tournament. This is a huge mistake for shooters during tournaments and usually ends in costing them points.

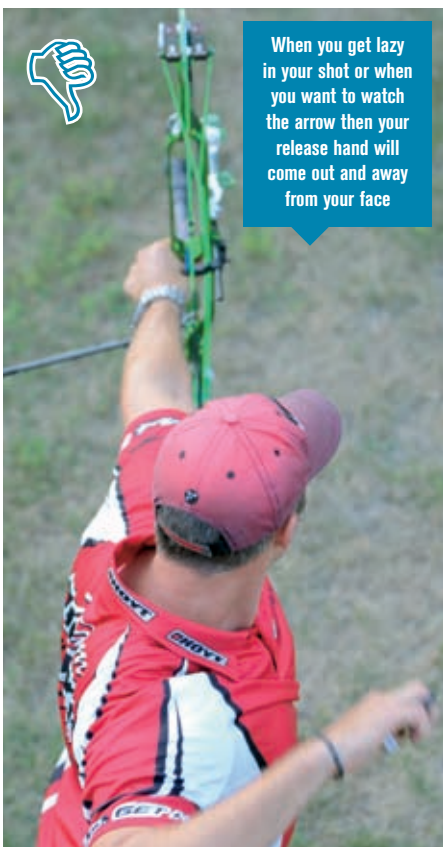
The reason is because in order to steady the front sight, you will naturally compress the front shoulder back against the spine. This simple change in form has an immediate affect on your shot, because a compressed front shoulder restricts the movement capabilities of the rear shoulder. I can't go into much more detail about this here, but I am sure if you are a back tension shooter you understand how this works. You need a front shoulder that is forward to have the range in the back shoulder for pulling. If you compress the front shoulder then back tension is near impossible.

I was coached to think about the sight pin on the target face being like driving a car. Although you drive straight down a road you are often let the steering wheel float to the left and right. However, as you do this, you also return the wheel back to the centre, and the same is true for the sight pin on the target. Although your sight pin floats around, you are also naturally returning it back to center, and the arrow will follow as long as you are dynamically pulling through the shot. As I watched the Nîmes tournament I would constantly see shooters compress the front shoulder, and I am 99% sure that it was because they weren't seeing a consistent sight picture and wanted to steady it down.

The year that I shot against Chris White for the Gold at the World Field Champs I had this same problem. On the first target I was a little loose on my first few shots. Both shots were in the gold but still I wasn't happy with my movement since we were shooting the small face. On my next arrow I compressed my front shoulder in order to steady up and ended up taking twice as long to make my shot and ended up creeping forward and missing the gold. Stupid mistake! I should've just gone with the flow, because to this day that is the only time I've ever missed at that range in competition. Thanks for the lesson Chris!

Always Follow through

The last way to make sure you stay golden is to really be aware of your follow through. This article follows on from one several issues ago, that really went into detail about the follow through. If you keep you back issues, it would be great for you to go back and read that article again in detail. The follow



When you get lazy in your shot or when you want to watch the arrow then your release hand will come out and away from your face

Technique



through is such an important part of the shot sequence, although technically the shot has already happened. A very common mistake for archers is to bring the release hand out and away from the face as they get weaker in their shots. For a recurve shooter it is a lot like plucking the string. Naturally the arrow goes in the direction that the release hand has told it to go, so even if your sight pin is in the middle of the target, if your follow through is going in the wrong direction then so will the arrow.

In Nîmes I stood behind a top-level shooter that was once a student of mine. I asked them how they were shooting and the response was "not good". I stood back on watched them shoot for a few ends and it was really obvious to me what was happening. The shooter had good form, and was solid for 98% of the shot. Everything looked really good up until the click of the release. Then it was like everything stopped. And immediately they would look at the target to see if they had shot a ten.

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The archer had zero follow through, and had totally neglected to do anything after the shot except look to see what they scored. Their release hand was coming out away from the face so that they could peek around the string to see the target.

Arrows were spraying left and right nearly every shot.

I went up to them and let them know that they should start focusing on the follow through and properly pulling the release hand back around their face and over the rear shoulder. "Focus on your finish" I said to them. Immediately it was like watching a whole new shooter. Arrows were going back in the ten rings and their shooting was back on track. This is a very common mistake for outdoor shooters to make as well. It is especially true for people who have a spotting scope close to them on the shooting line. All too often I see people rush their shots and quickly duck their heads into the spotting scope to see what they scored. This is a poor choice. Always focus on your follow

through and you will be so much happier with the results.

If you take note of this and watch some of the best shooters in the world you will notice that many of them have a very dynamic and often dramatized follow through. This is not because they are pulling that hard against the wall of the cam when the release fires – it is because they have been coached on the importance of really making sure they finish the shot correctly and execute their follow through. Don't put in a lot of work to then just quit at the very end. They last few thousands of a second could be the most important ones!

As a competitor I have made some of the stupidest mistakes, and I can honestly say that I blew it many times when my shooting was at its best. However, that is what competing is all about. Doing everything right when it matters the most and focusing on all the details during the tournament, even when you often don't think about them during your practice. Winning boils down to who made the least amount of mistakes. My advice is to stick to your system, go with the flow and follow through until the very end. Do that and I promise you that your time to shine will come! ☺

www.dudleyarchery.info
www.nockonarchery.eu