



HANDS & FEET

John Dudley looks at the little things that can make a big difference to shot placement

The deeper you get into archery the more you will realise that it's the little things that matter the most. Archers spend a lot of time in the early years trying to learn the sport in their own way. Then, as they become more experienced, they start to realise that their way isn't necessarily the best way. The further they progress in the competitive game, the more they start to recognise the difference that one or two extra points can make to their overall scores. Take Vegas as an example. There are hundreds of pros there each year who would love to know how to achieve that one extra point. As I grow in the sport I have started to work my way backwards, taking the time to learn the little things that I ignored in the beginning and have since cost me valuable points. I believe that every archer can improve greatly if more attention is paid to two little things: the hands and the feet.

I'll give you a hand

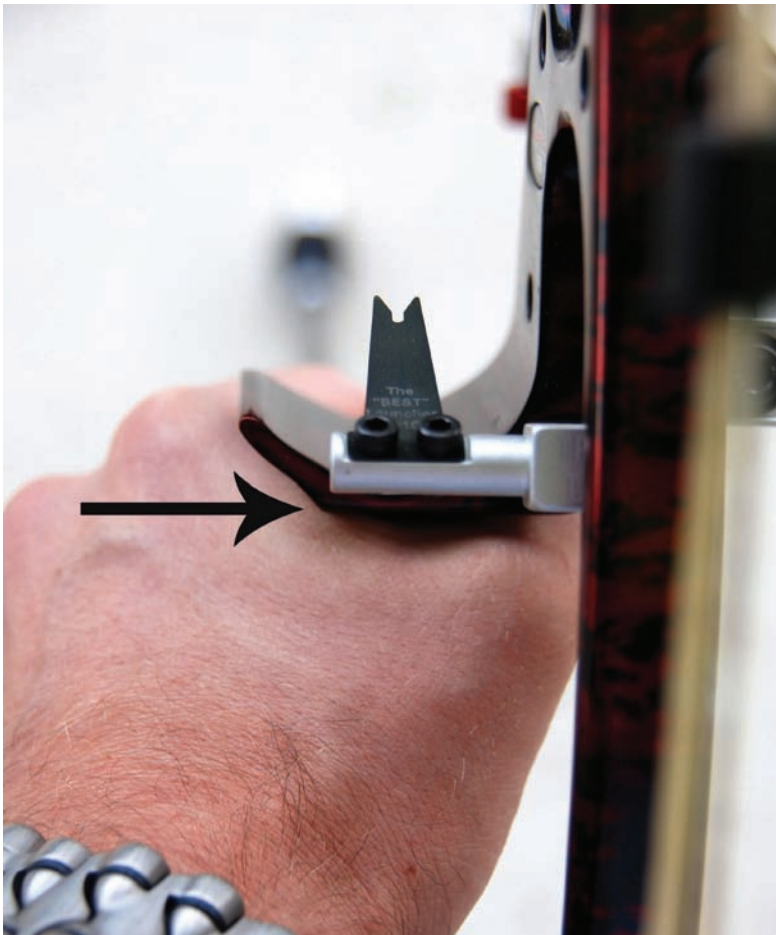
From time to time I get a book through the post from someone in the business

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who has published something and wants my opinion. To be honest, I am more of a 'doer' than a reader, but I also believe that you are never too wise or too old to learn. One such book I received was from Larry Wise. I have a great deal of respect for Larry and his teaching methods, so I thought his would be a good book to read. I came away with a different view on the smaller aspects of archery practice, and a new philosophy on the bow grip: "The shot starts and stops in the bow hand." This perfectly sums up the importance of the bow hand. Hand placement and the way in which you grip the bow will always predetermine the direction in which the arrow travels. Most of you will have been told not to torque the bow. But torque sometimes

happens for several reasons and is not always related to hand placement. Some people find that they torque the bow at full draw, or after they release the trigger. With this in mind, it's easy to see why paying strict attention to what your hand does will gain you points.

When I grip a bow I think two things: does it look right and does it feel right? To find the answers I study my hand on the bow to see if it's in the same place every time. When I place my hand on the grip I slide it up until it touches the bottom of the riser shelf. I watch to see whether the crotch of my thumb is in the same place under the riser shelf and make sure that it's centred. I believe that the grip should be placed between the lifeline on the hand and the thumb bone.



Left: The placement of the riser

This position creates the most effective bone alignment from the hand all the way through to the front shoulder. Using your natural bone alignment will help you in becoming more consistent throughout the course of a day's shooting. The picture on the left shows the placement of the riser in my palm. Once I am happy that my hand placement looks correct, I then grip the handle.

When it comes to gripping the bow I teach a method called 'leaning on the door'. This technique is great because you only need a door to demonstrate it. If you lean your hand against a door, you will naturally allow your bone structure to support you and your hand will be relaxed so that pressure and weight are distributed evenly. There are different schools of thought on hand pressure and wrist angles. I have found that consistency with compounds comes from an even distribution of pressure. High wrist positions cause inconsistency because muscles tend to tire quickly; low wrist positions can cause inconsistency if you vary the heel pressure from shot to shot. Heel pressure can also vary depending on the height of your grip. If you release one arrow with your bow hand just beneath the riser shelf, then another with your bow hand 1cm lower you will produce a poor arrow. Once your grip looks to be correct, lean your hand on the grip and make sure it feels right.

Left: Once you are happy with your hand placement make sure your grip feels right

To make sure your grip is torque-free take advantage of your long rod. If you are using a longer stabiliser, set it on the ground and let the weight of the bow rest on the stabiliser. Position your hand on the grip and make sure it looks right, and then lean on it to make sure it feels OK, too. Everyone always ask why I shoot a 34" Doinker instead of a 28". Well, that's an easy one to answer. I shoot the one that allows me to have the bow grip at the right height for me to comfortably position my hand while my stabiliser is on the ground.

If you are shooting short stabilisers, let the weight of the bow rest against your bow sling and practise the same grip action. So many archers draw their bow and then try to move their hand around at full draw. This technique is guaranteed



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to build torque and will inevitably result in a lost arrow. I believe in a relaxed bow arm from the front elbow all the way down to the finger tips. If your knuckles turn white when you shoot then you should ease up the tension. There is no need to put a death choke on the bow. Make sure you keep your hand relaxed throughout the shot and try not to grab the bow when you shoot.

Check out your feet

If you have read my article on my shot routine you will know that is of number one importance. Every good structure starts from the ground up. How you align your feet will affect your stance and how steadily you are able to hold your bow. For all you field archers who are wonder-

apart. The same width stance is fundamental in almost every sport. Your feet need to be under your hips. Your stance controls your posture and your posture controls your sight pin. There are several reasons why I choose to stand this way, but without going into lengthy detail you will just have to trust me.

It's also wise to pay attention to the type of footwear that you choose to shoot in. I prefer to have shoes that have a wide base and flat bottoms. Remember, your feet send a lot of signals to your brain. If your entire foot is making contact with the ground then the signals received by your brain will be clear. If your feet are uneven then your brain will receive signals telling you that you're unstable and your aiming pin will reflect that. To

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ing how to pick up extra points, I suggest you look at your feet. Are they evenly placed and your weight evenly distributed? If you are too lazy to correctly align your feet for every single shot, then don't be surprised by poor arrows and weak scores. Your feet are very sensitive pieces of kit and one of the most important shooting tools. Why do you think there has been so much hype over reflexology in recent years? It's because your feet can have a direct impact on your health and stability.

As with bow grip, there are many different views on where your feet should be positioned. I prefer a neutral stance, which is slightly open. When checking my stance I look down to make sure the toe of my front foot is in line with the ball of the rear foot.

I like to see compound shooters with a stance that is about shoulder-width

demonstrate, try shooting an arrow with your front foot off the ground. Next, try shooting again with the back foot off the ground. You will see that it makes shooting very difficult! Wearing unsuitable shoes and shooting on uneven ground will have the same effect on your arrows as shooting on one foot. Many European-style trainers that are designed for running have toes that curl up at the ends. These are unsuitable for archery because they will cause you to pitch forward when shooting longer distances. A lot of top US archers choose to wear skateboarding shoes when shooting, because they are designed to aid balance.

If the footing is poor on a field course then take the time to make it right, or be creative and build something to give you a secure footing using nearby objects. When I am on a field range I can always count on a few targets that

Left: Check that the toe of the front foot is in line with the ball of the rear foot

Below, top: Many top US archers choose to shoot wearing skateboarding shoes that are designed to aid the balance

Bottom: Don't wear showy shoes like these ones: archery shoes should provide a firm, flat base and good contact with the ground

have poor footing. I love it when my competitors shoot before me and carelessly take aim without making sure their footing is secure; it never fails to swing a point or so in my favour. I will always take the time to do whatever is necessary to make sure that my feet look and feel the same. Don't ever try to change your footing once you are at full draw. If you feel the urge to move your feet while you are already at full draw, then something obviously isn't right.

I think most of you out there will agree with me that reading instructions is against human nature. When I have something that needs assembling I normally try to wing it first. After I realising that the finished article looks nothing like the picture then I go back and read the instructions in detail. It should be no surprise, then, that following instructions produces better results. Archery is no different. We are only human and doing things our way is our first instinct; however, to be successful we need to pay attention to the detail. I believe that if you take note of your hands and feet on every shot then you will see more of your arrows in the gold.

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