

# Mental Training

## INTRODUCTION

We need to produce a method of training to help us control our mental and emotional process and increase our concentration whilst under conditions of competitive stress. Mental discipline is required to control the shooters actions and reactions when under competition pressures. We need to be able to overcome all hazards which require the utmost exertion of a shooters mental capacity.

A high degree of self control, with the ability to raise ourselves above all difficulties and, at the same time, maintain presence of mind, are the qualities essential to shoot high scores in a Match. To help you do this more easily, you must of necessity have a high sense of responsibility to yourself, the Team and to your Trainer. These qualities have probably been developed throughout your shooting life, and by now should be at a peak. I am going to ask you to go one step further, and pledge complete and utter support to your Coach - confide in him in all pertinent matters - do what he asks without question and feed back to him the positive and/or negative results after participation. If you can let your problems be his, then you will have removed one more burden from your mind leaving it uncluttered and unfettered from aggravating problems, clear for one thing - 'The Match'.

## ESSENTIALS FOR THE MATCH

- 1 The shooters inherent skills and abilities.
2. His aptitude and willingness to learn and to accept training, his dedication.
3. His Physical fitness and soundness.
4. His Mental discipline and control.
5. The comprehensiveness and suitability of his equipment.

Mastery of the Physical Skills alone is not sufficient to meet the elements of technique necessary to maintain scores high enough and constant enough for competition at the highest levels. Mental discipline, producing capacity for intense concentration will provide for this essential exacting control, and only when we can co-ordinate these 5 factors, will we have everything going for the delivery of one accurate shot on the target.

It is very necessary to produce *three major forms of training* for the needs of a Match Shooter.

1. *Match specific physical fitness.*
2. *Shooting competency and training.*
3. *Mental control and discipline.*

So far, we have all indulged in Numbers 1 & 2 as separate items of training. But as far as I know, whilst mental discipline has been talked about, it has never been included in a Training programme in its own right. This then is what I intend to do, and as this is the first time I would ask you to watch the results very carefully.

At this stage, I think an explanation of the various Mental discipline control factors would not go amiss, before I enter into a training programme.

## MENTAL DISCIPLINE

Must provide the control necessary to maintain:

1. *Confidence.*
2. *Continued duplication of performance.*
3. *Positive thinking.*
4. *Avoidance of over-confidence.*
5. *Elimination of pessimism and depression.*
6. *Over-riding of any disturbing factors likely to disrupt emotional stability and tranquillity.*

## 1. CONFIDENCE

This is brought about by constantly bringing under control all the factors necessary for the repeated successful execution of conditions for firing an accurate shot. Can you always shoot a 10 on demand?— you should know that you can, and you must prove it to yourself.

In other words, the shooting fundamentals, and the learned habits - if you are convinced that you can control them correctly, you will be able to place all your shots in the 10 ring.

**If you are convinced that the fundamentals, the learned habits, are working for you and not against you, and at this stage you are completely sure of your own ability** to execute them correctly. Then your score average to date will prove that the system works and that you have confidence in it.

*Exude confidence on the firing point:*

- a. It can very easily affect the other competitors.
- b. It bolsters your team members.
- c. It can put that little smile on your face that says you know a thing or two, that you are calm and are enjoying yourself, lets face it, you should be!

A Match is usually won by a small number of confident entrants *Who Expect To Win*. There is a first time for winning, just as there is a first time for the World Champion to be beaten. **If you want to win you can, you are as qualified as anyone else.**

**Let the aggregate score look after itself.** The perfect performance on each individual shot is your aim - *Every shot a Match*.

## 2. CONTINUED DUPLICATION OF PERFORMANCE

Resist the tendency of mind drift when concentration on a specific should be at a maximum. Mental effort should be concentrated entirely on the release of the shot.

Complete exclusion of any other thought is necessary during the period for the controlled delivery of the shots. Repetitive procedure of the shot sequence enables you to sustain concentration for a longer time. Dry firing of shot sequences will build confidence in timing and sight picture – live firing at close range will serve to reinforce the confidence. If it is possible for you to shoot a 50 yard sequence clean at 25 yards it is possible for the same to happen at 50.

**Training should be the process that serves to reinforce technique, accuracy and repeatability. A record of your training is a record of your consistency.**

When co-ordination of all actions necessary to produce an accurate shot becomes reflex actions (movement without conscious thought) and when these conditions can be repeated continually in precisely the same manner for every shot delivered throughout the entire match. Then your performance index can be duplicated every time you shoot, provided you are able to maintain co-ordination and control by sufficient and frequent practice of the right type.

## 3. POSITIVE THINKING

The direct positive approach - employing self-confidence, self sufficiency and an attacking drive.

Face facts, evaluate the hazards - you know what you want, go out and get it.

*Think positive* - I will do it, and success is yours. Do not say to yourself 'I must not do this' to correct

a fault. You must say to yourself 'I must do this in order to get a 10'.

This train of thought gives you something positive that you should do, rather than something you should not. When your mind is full of *Do's* and *Will's* and *I can's*, **there is no room for *Don'ts*, *Cant's* and *I'll Try*.**

**Make sure that you understand quite positively, that if you are on the Range and there is a Target to shoot at, you will shoot at it and will shoot a top score and enjoy doing it.**

#### **4. AVOIDANCE OF OVER CONFIDENCE**

Overconfidence diminishes your control and co-ordination, you become unaware of hazardous conditions, and the fine balance on which your performance index depends is upset. You must not relax your determination to concentrate and shoot top scores, even if the other competitors that you are shooting against you are not up to much. Do not be overconfident or 'cocky' even if you have just put up the best performance of your life - be grateful that you were confident and skilful enough to be able to meet your peak performance. Overconfidence is a conscious thought state – your shooting should be reflexive or sub-conscious.

#### **5. ELIMINATION OF PESSIMISM AND DEPRESSION**

These factors diminish your ability to concentrate - anxiety over your own possible failure of shortcomings (showing yourself up in front of your teammates or coach, for example) increases your wobble and decreases your ability to afford any control to the shot sequence. Impatience reigns, the effects are cumulative and the results worsen. This purely negative approach prevents the repetition of the uniform reflex sequence that you have been working so hard to achieve. You must know that you are shooting for the enjoyment that it brings you – for Christ's sake, if the sport makes you feel depressed then it is not a source of happiness. Depression is also a conscious, non reflexive state and is a performance inhibitor.

#### **6. DISTURBING FACTORS - EMOTIONAL STABILITY - TRANQUILLITY**

Weather can be a most disturbing factor to us when we shoot - Rain, Snow Wind and Cold. My scores are going to be low is our immediate appreciation - they will be low if you take this line of thought. I personally shoot like a Trojan in the wet – I know it, I have proven it to myself many times.

Excellent scores have and will continue to be shot under adverse conditions. If you are confident that all your concentration can be channelled toward the execution of the correct shot sequence necessary to maintain your performance index, you won't have the time or the mental capacity to 'get in a state' about the weather. Avoid known conditions that are hazards to your self-control, it is very easy to get 'angry' over minor irrelevant things - the results are disastrous to your co-ordination and control. Let's face it, nothing that you worry about is really important enough to be allowed to affect your shooting - the one thing that you do well and enjoy doing.

**Worry never produces a happy solution to any problem, and only serves to fill your head with unnecessary poisonous fuzz. It will consume you and your performance. Leave the worry to someone else.**

If in training, we are able to establish a physical and mental routine for the treatment of each individual shot as a match in its own right, we eliminate straightway any faults in preparation or techniques that will throw us off balance and produce emotional upset - we will be able to remain relaxed at all times, keep our 'cool' and shoot with the ease and grace of Champions. Don't leave preparation to the last minute and then have to rush round like a looney - your score is ruined at about the third set of red traffic lights. Take your time, make time work for you. Shooting is a sport, enjoy it. Do you lose your temper every time you have a really bad shot? Who are you mad at?

Several factors emerge from this, which ones apply to you?

- a. Do you think that you should have Worked harder in applying all the control factors.?
- b. Do you chastise yourself?
- c. Go into a state of depression?
- d. Laugh it off Ha! Ha!
- e. Write it off as just one of those things?

You must of course be possessed with the presence of mind to accept some bad with the good. But if you are relaxed enough and can be tranquil through all adversity, to forget the wayward shot and then without conscious thought, immediately produce the precise exacting conditions for the release of one good shot, you will overcome all of the negatives that can come from all of the possible reactions listed above. Clearly, this should always be the way to "recover" from a crook shot.

## **TENSION**

Is the inherent strength of any organism that concentrates very rapidly as difficult situations arise. A method of inducing relaxation is all you need to minimise tension effects.

In tension, adrenaline bleeds into the bloodstream, the liver steps up its sugar release to the muscular system and all your senses go into A1 readiness. Digestion slows down, breathing becomes shallower and blood pressure increases. We all experience tension, and when the problem that has caused it is solved, everything returns to normal - although slowly in some cases. Stressors produce stress more readily when the stressor is recurrent. Conscious thought gives an opportunity for stressors to become burnt into surroundings.

## **TENSION REDUCTION**

- a. Literally take a breather - breath deeply, three or four repetitions should be sufficient, and when you have finished, you should feel much more relaxed. By breathing deeply, you break the tension of your voluntary breathing tract causing the lungs and heart to relax as well. I find that counting to 8 or 10 while inhaling and 8 or 10 while exhaling will actually build a nice relaxed rhythm.
- b. Sit down and concentrate on relaxing your muscular system, stay like this for quite a few minutes. Separate your mind from your body, and from any tension hazards. Make your feet relax first, then our legs, then your stomach, then your shoulders and neck and finally your arms and hands. Feel your body loosen and relax. I try to feel what my skin is feeling, it totally consumes the mind and body.
- c. Stop, sit down and think. Think of anything but the reason for your tension - this is harder to do than you realise, but once you have mastered it you will find that your tension will drop away quite easily. When you tense to a situation, your mind almost automatically exaggerates the importance of the situation, thought and reason can quickly change this mental state. Try to imagine yourself in a location that you look forward to – your favourite location where you feel really relaxed and comfortable. This will be your "quiet place", somewhere that is totally devoid of stress and tension and where you feel good about yourself.
- d. Take a break! Get away from it all for 10 minutes, this change of 'state' may be the answer to ease you out of tension easily and quickly. There is no need to look at targets – use the scoring and patching time to "step back" from the situation. I refer to this as stepping out of the now.
- e. If you are the type of person that works at top capacity - you will find that after work stimulation you will need something to slow you down, something that is absorbing but demands nothing from you intellectually. Simple handicrafts and hobbies are ideal, as they appear to have a tapering effect toward relaxation.

## **MATCH PRESSURE**

*You are not alone* - even the Range Officer has it. Some competitors can put it to their advantage, whilst to others it is their greatest enemy. Why is it so ? The answer is obvious, some have learned to control their emotions and anxieties and can perform within their performance index. Others, even though they may have many years of shooting experience behind them, pressure themselves out of contention every time they enter a match. Naturally enough the answer is Mental Discipline.

Match tension or "match pressure" is a condition created by uncertainty and suspense with their accompanying anxieties.

ie. Building a good high score during a match! Knowing you can win as you near the end of a match! Unless you can learn to control this type of tension, you will kill your scores stone dead EVERY TIME!

### **Match experience is a great leveller of Match Pressures.**

Match pressure differs in every shooter, both in its type and amount. However, much the control and match experience you have, you are bound to feel a certain small amount of nervousness in competition. The better and the more often you have trained under Match conditions, the less nervous you will become.

Resist becoming a victim of match nerves, but by the same token if this nervousness is unknown to you, you are showing indifference to the strongest natural excitement that is present in us.

### **Match pressure can be controlled, and can be made to work for you.**

Many people have been able to control their shooting to such an extent that at matches they are able to produce the same score index that they shoot in practice. There are some shooters though that can go one better and can produce an increase in Match scores way above their practice scores, these are the people that I think are making this excitement - this tension - this match pressure works for them and give them just that little bit of added sharpness to their co-ordination, concentration and control. I believe that they are experiencing a mechanical enjoyment growing from technical excellence in their match. Rather than competing for a score, they are focused on producing a technically perfect performance and leaving the scoring to the scorer.

## **CONCLUSION**

Don't expect unrealistic results when you exercise Mental Discipline – that is a conscious expectation, you should be shooting on autopilot or in the subconscious state. However I think I am safe in saying that it will be the same as for any other form of training - The more you put into it, the more you will get out.

Confidence stiffens the will to win and not give up against adversity, and, as you are now very well aware, to be confident you must have full knowledge of the complete methods of control and co-ordination of the shooting fundamentals (the learned habits). Know that you are prepared and you will reduce the ability of doubt to surface.

Be physically fit enough to shoot the match.

Have a good class of equipment and know that it is good – this includes ammunition.

Know what you want and go out and get it.

**If you practice what you know, and at the same time are completely confident, then you are capable of a performance exceeding any previous level personal accomplishment.**

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