

## The Psychology of Shooting

This month we'll examine the psychology of shooting. There are some serious contradictions in the messages we get whenever the subjects of "How to acquire shooting skills", "How to perform at matches", and "What were the results of your last match performance" are discussed. These contradictions occur at all levels of the game, from the guys at the club to the National Team. Almost everybody that has been shooting for any length of time and not living on a desert island has heard "don't think about your score ..." when shooting in a match. Right, sure. Unless you are brain dead, *of course* you think about your score! We used to joke that the Russians (who were whuppin' us) all had received pre frontal lobotomies because they seemed so stoic in victory or defeat - no expressions of anxiety or joy. This was not true, of course, but we speculated that this procedure would probably improve your match performance, but you wouldn't care! The principal expressed in "don't think about your score while shooting ..." is sound enough. Actually, the whole idea is "To acquire great skills, one MUST think about every aspect of execution, and do so all of the time. But to achieve great PERFORMANCE, one must *not* "think" at all!!" What this means is that you must be extremely analytical and cognitive in the effort of learning and perfecting the skill of shooting in order to come up with a good technique. But, when actually performing, you must let the mind/body combination operate on the subconscious level, and so do what it was trained to do **without** the interference of the conscious mind. And, all effort and focus is to be on execution of the act of firing a shot or a series in perfect conformance with the model you derived from all that cognition and rehearsal - not what the results of this execution might yield.

O.K. So you do this, or try to at least. What is the first thing the guys (or the National Coach) asks when you come off of the line? DO they ask, "How many times did you correctly execute your model technique?" Most likely not. Surely they say, "What score did you get?" And, they haven't yet put on a match where the medals are awarded on a percentage of perfect executions, nor do they publish the names of the shooters and the number of excellent executions in the match bulletin. No-sir-ee, they publish the *scores*. So live with it. Forget the silliness of "Don't think about your scores" but DO realize how one accomplishes skill versus how one achieves high performance (which of course equals high scores). Also recognize that *everyone* at every level experiences increased "arousal" (a word much preferred over fear, anxiety, dread, etc.) when in a serious competition. What most of the top performers have is the confidence that the work they did in learning the skill of shooting will carry them through in spite of (or even *because* of) this extra arousal. And, because the same adrenalin rush that makes your mouth dry and your palms sweaty also increases your visual acuity, tactile sense, and cognition speed - darned if you might not just end up with a personal best!

Having a **plan**, i.e. "I am going to execute correctly as much as possible" and *knowing* what that *is* will put you ahead of 90% of the pack before the first shot is fired!

*Don*

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