

MORE SHOOTING FUNDAMENTALS

By

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Consistency in building any shooting position is the key to success. Every time the biathlete shoots from either prone or standing, the position must be exactly the same. Because changes in the position affect the strike of the bullet on the target it is difficult to make meaningful sight changes unless each shot is fired from exactly the same position.

Last issue we talked about how important it is for the head to be held upright with no tilt, either right or left. Now let's add another element to holding the rifle in the standing position, that of the supporting hand and arm as well as the trigger hand.

The supporting hand should be upright with the balance point of the rifle stock seated between the thumb and forefinger. Because the rifle must be firmly supported during the rapid of manipulating of the bolt, it should not be balanced upon the top of the fist nor in the "V" formed by the forefinger and middle fingers. The rifle should be balanced over the center of the wrist across the center of the palm. Supporting the rifle out on the fingers allows the weight to stretch the tendons during firing and allows the aiming point to shift during firing.

The trigger hand should firmly grasp the pistol grip with the fingers with the thumb pointing upward toward the bolt. The three fingers and the thumb will grasp the rifle while the trigger finger is relaxed and ready to rapidly squeeze the trigger when the sights are aligned and the sight picture is perfect.

It has been shown that if the thumb is wrapped around the pistol grip the action of squeezing the trigger can cause the entire hand (and rifle) to rotate, thus disturbing the aim before the bullet has left the muzzle. A little practice with the thumb up will show that a very vigorous squeeze can still allow the bullet to hit the target. Try holding in the eight to ten o'clock area of the standing bullseye and vigorously squeezing the trigger. You should still have a hit on the three to six o'clock area. I am not advocating jerking the trigger as the sights fly past the target. You still need to learn to hold and squeeze properly.

The supporting upper arm should be placed high on the chest wall. The triceps and sling cuff will form the solid structure that holds up the rifle. The trigger arm will be relaxed and usually hanging down during the trigger squeeze.

The body should be balanced equally on both feet with the backbone held upright over the center of the hips. The hips should be thrust forward and the back arched backward enough to balance the weight of the rifle down through the chest to the hips and the legs. **DO NOT BEND SIDWAYS TRYING TO GET THE HIP UP TO THE ELBOW.** That position may seem more solid, but in the stress of the race will fall apart and not serve for five good hits.

You have often heard the saying that, "Practice makes perfect." Well this is especially true of good shooting, only the saying should be, "Perfect practice makes perfect." Every shooting practice session should focus totally in learning to shoot every shot dead center. The goal of shooting practice should be to learn to shoot every shot both prone and standing into the same hole. In biathlon the act of shooting comes during a very stressful pause in the running or skiing portion of the race when the mind is filled with many thought and stresses. In order to be successful, the perfect shooting skills must be so automatic that every facet of shooting takes place without conscious thought. Hold, sight picture, sight alignment, trigger squeeze must be perfectly performed every time. This comes only with constant, perfect practice where every shot is expected to go directly to the center.

Richard Domey, Ph.D. is a former National Guard biathlete and 16 year member of the U.S. All Guard International Shooting Team. He was a member of seven U.S. National Championship winning rifle teams and five national record setting teams. He coached biathlon at the XV Winter Olympics and was an active shooting coach at the U.S. Olympic Training Center, Colorado Springs. His book, "Mental Training for Shooting Success" is sold worldwide.