

SHOOTING FUNDAMENTALS FOR BIATHLETES

by
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Good shooting requires the knowledge and practice of the basic shooting fundamentals. For success at all levels of competition these shooting principles must be reviewed constantly by summer and winter biathletes.

There are several shooting techniques that are integrated and occur almost simultaneously to produce the perfect shot. They include breathing, sighting and aiming, trigger control and follow-through. Yes, even with your lungs gasping for air, you need to aim and follow-through. In future newsletters we will review in detail these vital elements of shooting.

Start with breath control. Both the summer and winter biathlete will find that the actual process of breath control for shooting while racing does not differ much from breath control while shooting for precision practice without racing. The difference is that the breathing sequence during racing is much more rapid and the breaths are deeper. When starting the sighting process, the elements, and the timing involved in the complete respiratory cycle are the same as in slow precision shooting.

When skiing or running, the biathlete should move to the firing line while taking deeper, slower breaths to saturate the lungs with oxygen; this process will continue during loading and preparation for firing. When the feet and body have been positioned for firing in the standing position, the breathing process will be stopped for 3-4 seconds during which time the shot will be fired. During this period the Valsalva Effect, which automatically reduces the heart rate, will be present. If the biathlete holds their breath any longer the heart rate will actually increase. Between shots, the biathlete should take two to three deep breaths rapidly as if panting, then stop breathing, hold the rifle steady and squeeze the trigger for each shot.

While building the position for the perfect sighting hold, breath several times naturally, causing the front sight to go up and down through the target. When ready to begin the final hold prior to breaking the shot (squeezing the trigger,) take a slightly deeper breath, then exhale and allow the body to settle to the point where a proper sight picture is obtained.

If the front sight is not directly in line with the target, in the standing position, shift the entire body by moving the rear foot left or right until the sights are aligned through the target. In the prone position, shift the hips to align the sight with the target using the elbow as a pivot point. Never align the sights with the target by forcing the muscles. Always shift the entire body. We'll talk about the natural point of aim in a later article.

Holding the breath must never last beyond 4-6 seconds as the eyes lose their acuity because the body has begun to run out of oxygen. The greatest cause of bad shots in the standing position is holding the breath and focusing too long on the shot. If the shot does not break in the first breathing pause, take two to three deep breaths and begin again. If shooting without the exertion of running or skiing do not take really deep breaths as this can disrupt the rhythm of the heart.

Once the position is established, a consistent, even cadence in firing the shots will result in better overall scores. The cadence should be: 1) Breathe deeply, 2) Settle into position, 3)

Hold breath, 4) Adjust hold to perfect sight picture, 5) Squeeze and fire perfect shot, 6) Chamber new round and pant quickly to catch breath, 7) Settle into position and continue the sequence for each shot.

This is not difficult to learn. The secret is to practice constantly as if winning a race depended on each shot. Most important is to be confident in your ability. Perfect shooting is the easiest part of the biathlon.

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