

# This Game is Easy

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This game is easy! If you have been around some of the training camps at Colorado Springs or during practice at the major matches you may have heard me say, "This game is easy." I say it a lot. If I said it to you I'm sure that you really didn't believe what I had said, although at that moment you were performing successfully. You ask how could Coach make light of a sport that is extremely difficult to master? You really knew by your experiences that this game was far from easy and you can remember too many poor performances in the past. You have been working hard all these past years to improve your scores, become more consistent, and achieve the goals that you have set for yourself. It hasn't been easy for you, and just when you start to make some headway, Coach tells you that this game is really easy. *How could this game be easy?*

The first thing you need to do to make it easy is to change your thinking. The target presentations aren't what make this game such a challenge. You have hit them all in practice. Fast ones, slow ones, irregular ones. All are breakable and you, at one time or another, have broken each of them. If you can break them once, then they can be broken again, over and over. To get better you need to focus on what is changing each time - you, or more specifically, your mental state of mind. Look at the methods you used to solve problems in the past. If you had not been successful breaking a specific target, most likely you went out to the field and practiced shooting that target over and over until you improved your ability to hit it more consistently. But while you were doing this, where was your point of focus? Was it on breaking the target? Was it on making a better mechanical movement to the target? Or was it focused on the your mental state of mind and how that was affecting the physical components of your shooting and, in turn, causing the imperfect performance. While each of the first two aspects are important and need to be addressed, most likely you are ignoring the need to focus on the inner you.

Whenever we have a poor performance we must understand that its root cause is usually the same each time and lies in our mental state. It usually manifests itself in the same one or two physical errors. Our mistake in finding a solution is to concentrate on the physical error and then direct all our efforts towards its correction, ignoring the true root cause. That's why we seem to keep making the same blunder over and over again. Why don't we naturally focus on our thinking and feelings as the root cause? Because getting at the true cause within us may be too emotionally uncomfortable for us to deal with. It requires that we delve into parts of our make-up we would rather keep shut and ignore. For example, you are having difficulty on a certain target presentation. Coach has told you that the quality of your gun mounts aren't allowing for a smooth and sure move to the target. This

lack of smooth movement may be caused by your nervousness and tightness during your performance, and is actually brought on because you are thinking about what will happen if the coach or others see you fail. The most productive way to fix this target issue may be to address the reasons why you put such a high priority on what others are saying about you. This might provide a longer lasting fix than just working on the physical movement. Do the majority of shooters approach the solution in this manner? I think not, they just keep working on the physical issues.

In the beginning of your shooting career you needed to spend large amounts of time focused on learning the correct movements and physical skills required to break targets. As your skills grow, less time is required to re-enforce the physical aspects of shooting and more time must be spent on the mental preparation for the game. This doesn't mean actual shooting should be reduced, but rather, the time spent on the mental aspects increased and woven into your training. When trying to improve your game at the intermediate or advanced level you need to spend a fair amount of time focusing on your inner self. You should be routinely examining the components that comprise your shooting and mental skills, and then in your training, address the deficiencies in those areas. Your coach will be able to help you design ways to do this. This information should be recorded and tracked in your diary or performance records. Your attitude, health, physical skills, ability to focus attention, happiness, and self-image are the elements that comprise your wellbeing and lead to your successes. Are you working on each of these?

One way to start is to make a list of what is holding you back from your chosen performance goals. Take the time and do it right as this needs to be an open and honest evaluation of your self. For example, you might have noticed that in certain situations you become nervous and therefore your movements become restricted, or, that when you are doing well you start thinking about the score rather than the next target. By first taking note of these reactions and then examining why they occur, you can begin to formulate a plan for their improvement. From this exercise highlight two or three key points and then address them in your training. Create new habits that exclude these unconstructive actions. Discuss your thoughts and feelings about your findings with your coach, sports physiologist, or loved ones to get an outside assessment. In addition to using the people around you, explore the mental subjects by reading sports performance or self-help books. As you delve into these subjects not all will immediately make sense or work for you. That's OK as this is normal. There will be some things that will be of use to you. In time, as you re-read these books, more will become relevant for you. The important thing is to begin to become aware of how things affect you and how you are presently reacting to them. Learn how your subconscious thinking can lead your actions. Learn to recognize which physical errors tie to which mental conditions. The more you understand about yourself, the more you will know about your shooting. Shooting is a sport for life. The mental and emotional skills learned while shooting transfer directly into your life skills and can improve your successes throughout your entire life. Focus your efforts on improving your mental skills.

This game is easy. Don't you get it? The challenge is *You*.