

## OLYMPIC STAGES

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WARNING!!.... The following may be hazardous to your mental health. In it I'm going to talk about something no International skeet shooter with a positive mental attitude likes to talk about....missing targets. Yes, I know that I have always said, "only talk about the things you want to happen", but I can't find a way to avoid using the term of missing targets. (Darn, there I've said it again). Perhaps, if you focus on the positive solutions suggested, the dreaded term may not damage your mental game plan.

The inspiration for this line of thought occurred at the 1996 Olympic Games where I was a technical official at the clay target ranges at the Wolfcreek venue. As one of the people in charge of the electronic scoring of each field, my finger caused the horn to sound on each and every miss as well as to be recorded into the computers memory. Every day I sat on the trap and skeet field watching the action and talking to the best shooters in the world while experiencing first hand the excitement of the competition. And what a show it was! The Australians taking the gold medal in both trap and men's double trap; the sudden death, single shot, shootoff in trap in which the USA's Josh Lakatos prevailed over his teammate Lance Bade for the silver medal after 28 targets; sharing in 16 year old Kim Rhode's gold medal performance in woman's double trap; and watching in awe at Italy's Ennio Falco's impressive 125/125 in the qualification rounds leading to the gold medal in skeet.

Through these shooters and their coaches insight can be obtained as to what traits and skills they all have in common. In focusing on the 54 skeet shooters participating in the Games, the majority of them used a 28 inch shotgun, their ammunition was at speeds over 1325 fps., they stood in the ready position in an up-right position with the feet no wider than their shoulders, their gun mounts were quick and sure, and they displayed little or no emotion over the result of their shots, at least until the round was over. They also shared one other common trait, they all missed targets! (Yes, even Falco let one go by in the final).

By looking at the 54 elite shooters in the world we can realize that perfection is very difficult to obtain, and if this is true, when we do fail we cannot get down on ourselves because of it. We need to learn from our mistakes, and thereby improve our skills. No matter what our skill level is we all miss some targets from time to time. The question we should ask ourselves is, "are the misses coming at the right places, or are we throwing some easier targets away?" To answer that question let's first look at the Olympic results.

As a Results Operations Supervisor, it was easy to obtain copies of the field score sheets which showed each hit & missed target. By compiling this data for the 54 shooters and their 270 individual qualification rounds it was also easy to get a pretty good picture of these Olympic misses. The average score for 100 targets was just over 94, meaning that the shooters averaged 1.5 misses per round. Now where did these targets occur? I

grouped the missed targets into the following headings showing it as a percentage of all missed targets. Of the 384 missed targets low 8 and high 7 doubles was the lowest at 2 each and low 4 double was the highest at 72.

Baseline = Stations 1, 7, & 8. = 7%

Corners = Stations 2 & 6. = 19%

Outer Singles = Singles on Stations 3, 4, & 5. = 26%

Outer Doubles = Doubles on Stations 3, 4, & 5. = 49%

Translating this information back to the average shooter, it says that if you shoot a round of 94, you should expect your missed targets to fall in line with the chart below.

Average for 100 targets 98 94 90 87 84

Baseline Misses 0 0 1 1 2

Corners Misses 0 1 1 2 2

Outer Single Misses 1 2 3 4 5

Outer Doubles Misses 1 3 5 6 7

These "elite" performances can become a general goal for all levels of shooters to aspire towards. Next time you shoot 100 targets, either in practice or in a match, record the targets you do not hit. Put them into the above groups and compare how you stack up against these elite shooters. Do you have more targets in one group than your average allows? This might say that you need more work in that specific area, or, when compared with how you practice, it may indicate that you are spending too much time on one certain area when your attention needs to be focused elsewhere? Look at your training habits. Does shooting full rounds make sense instead of spending more time on station practice? If you are hitting all the targets on the Baseline, shouldn't you work more on other weaker areas? Tailor your training to best improve upon your weaknesses.

Once you identify weaknesses in your games you need to develop solutions to improve your chances of hitting more targets. The resources available to you are both physical and mental.

The four physical solutions are,

1. Gun Mount
2. Relaxed, loose muscles.
3. Vision.
4. Body Position.

The four mental solutions are,

1. Expectations.
2. Visualization
3. Directed Focus
4. Confidence

All of the physical and mental skills contribute to a good performance and every shot benefits from their inclusion, but some are more critical than others in certain situations. Lets go back to each of the target groups and determine which physical solutions are key when trying to improve your performance. Each solution is listed with the key skill first.

Baseline. - Gun Mount is the primary skill required on the baseline. Secondly, having relaxed, loose muscles to enable better control of the mount are a definite plus.

Corners - Relaxed, loose muscles. Gun Mount. Vision.

Outer Singles - Relaxed, loose muscles. Vision.

Outer Doubles. - Body Position. Vision. Relaxed, loose muscles

Practice a 100 round match by breaking the normal sequence into four stages in the following manner. Walk to the next station in each pass. Do not shoot a station four times in a row. Follow the sequence.

OS1 = Baseline. Shoot a regular station at 1, 7, and 8. Repeat four times for 28 targets.

OS2 = Corners. Shoot a regular station at 2 and 6. Repeat four times for 24 targets.

OS3 = Singles. Shoot a high and low 3, 4, and 5. Repeat four times for 24 targets.

OS4 = Doubles. Shoot a regular pair at 3, 4, and 5. Repeat four times for 24 targets.

Add up your total scores for all stations and compare it to your average. Is it close? It should be. Then compare it with the Average chart above. Are the misses in the right place? If not, now you know which stages to practice until you can move up into the next average bracket.

Good Luck!