

Viva Las Vegas
(or, How to Live with Station Four).
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Starting in January of 2005, the ISSF has changed the rules for the target sequence in International Skeet, the skeet format shot at the Olympic Games. They have deleted the low 3 and high 5 singles and added an extra pair of targets on Station 4. The new Station 4 will consist of a high house single, a low house single, a pair with the high house target shot first, and a pair with the low house target shot first. This means that 24% of all the targets will be shot at Station 4. The change was made to increase the difficulty of the skeet game and lower the number of perfect scores shot every year.

In addition to the sequence change during the qualifying rounds and finals, the shoot-off, or tie breaking, targets have been changed to get to the winner sooner. Instead of shooting pairs at Stations 3, 4, & 5 all the shooting will be done by shooting the pairs on Station 4. Everyone in the shoot-off will first shoot the high house pair. Then the surviving shooters will shoot the low house pair. Then back to the high house pair, and so forth until the winner is determined.

Analysis of Selection Match Targets. It is important to understand what these changes mean to your game and how to maximize your performance under these conditions. During the latest Spring Selection Match the opportunity to review the scores shot during the match presented itself. The highlights are shown in the sidebar below. Basically, the numbers show that the new sequence is more difficult when compared to results from previous years. It also shows that this change has upset the mental game of many shooters. This is reflected in the decline of hit targets on the other stations. The shooters at that match had not yet become comfortable with the new pair and it shows in the scores. They are letting Station 4 and its new targets undermine their overall confidence in their abilities.

Need to Develop New Strategies. These changes and initial results have given us reason to re-think the dynamics of the game and become aware that new strategies are needed in both the mechanical and mental areas. In planning your new thinking, consider the following points:

The Sequence Change. The new sequence makes the targets shot at the other stations a much more important factor leading to a good score. With so many challenging targets on Station 4, you need to pay attention and not give away targets on the other stations. Being sloppy and giving up targets on the base line or the singles at any station is inviting a low scoring round. ***Solution:*** Keep up with daily gun mount exercises and doing station training as part of your normal training sessions. Focus on exercises for beginning and ending the rounds to help minimize target losses on these stations. Make up games or challenges centered on hitting all the targets on Stations 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Position on the Station. How you stand in relation to the target flight path is critical. The most common error is turning your position on the station to ease your turning ability to one or the other of the targets in the pair. The following examples illustrate this type of

mistake. On the first pair on Station 4 you will see a right handed shooter turned too far away from the high house target so as to allow him to move more quickly to the first target of the pair. However, this prevents him from turning easily to the low target of the pair. This causes him to bind up and shoot behind the target. It also makes the gun mount more difficult. On the second pair at Station 4, you will see the same shooter turn too far towards the low house reasoning that it makes it easier to turn to reach the high house target racing towards the out of bounds. This will limit his move to the first target resulting in shooting behind it. **Solution:** Go out to your practice field and set up some markers to guide your alignment during training. On the imaginary line from the high house window, through the center stake, and on to the out of bounds place two markers. The first marker should be placed 8 ft before the center stake, and the second 30 ft before the out of bounds. The low house markers should be set up the same way, the first 8 ft before the center stake, and the second 30 ft before the out of bounds.

Set up for the high house pair. The two markers on the left side of the field indicate the *ideal* place to break each target. The high house is broken 8 ft before the center stake and the low house is broken 30 ft before the out of bounds line. Now, with the gun to your shoulder and your eyes closed, you should be able to make a 30° swing arc, oscillating back and forth, without feeling any tightness in your knees. Open your eyes and center this arc between the two markers by moving your feet a little at a time. The goal is to relocate your body on the station such that you can easily move between the two markers on the left side of the field without putting any stress on your knees. Once you locate that position, do the same for the low house pair using the markers on the right side of the field. Use these positions when you shoot the pairs.

Vision Issues. People think left or right-handers have an advantage on one or the other of the two pairs. They believe this because a “lefty” or “righty” can turn better in one direction than in the opposite direction. While this is true, it is not the most important reason that one pair seems easier than the other. Vision plays the most important role in determining which pair is more difficult. It is often overlooked when searching for a solution to enable higher scores. The key issue is related to the master eye and the gun barrel.

To understand the reasons for this, imagine the following. While shooting the high house pair, the right-handed shooter first shoots the high house target. Then, depending on how quickly he moves the gun horizontally, he sees the second target to the *left* of the barrel. He must look “through” the barrel with his master eye while the non-dominant eye has a clear view of the target. If the barrel completely blocks the master eye’s view of the target even for a moment, trouble is at hand. As the master eye is losing sight of the target when it goes behind the barrel, the other eye sees it and begins to look for the proper target/barrel relationship. When the shooter sees the proper sight picture (with the wrong eye) the gun goes off even though the barrel is really pointing ahead of the target. The shot results in a miss, but the shooter believes that he saw the proper picture.

Solution: Use the following drill to determine if this is occurring. Block or cover the non-master eye to determine if the barrel is blocking its view of the target. Try dry firing on several pair of targets using only the master eye to find the target. Pay attention to see if the second target disappears behind the barrel. If it does, you will need to learn how to make the transition from the first to the second target and keep the gun out of the way.

Now look at the pair with the low house being shot first. Our right-handed shooter breaks the first target then slows or stops the gun and begins to look for the second target to the *right* of the barrel. Unless he jerks the gun ahead of the second target, he does not need to look “through” the barrel to see the target with his master eye. The barrel will not block the sight of the target unless the target dives below the barrel. Even the non-dominant eye will continue to have an un-obscured view of the target during the key moments prior to firing.

This is why one pair seems less difficult than the other. In all cases, be aware that jumping from the first target to a point ahead of the second target will result in disaster from either the barrel blocking the view of the target or from having the gun stop to wait for the target to catch up. **Solution:** Before it’s your turn, become aware of the unpredictability of the target paths. Be on guard for low and/or fast targets. Don’t simply react to the target as quickly as you do when they are high and visible. Take a little time to see the shot develop before pulling the trigger. It is necessary to *first* clearly see the second target *before* you commit the barrel to it. If you know that the second target has a good chance of being lower than normal, try to get the barrel below its flight line and come up to the target. It is easier to come up than it is to go down.

That Vegas Luck. You may have heard someone in the past say something like “this game is 80-90% mental, 8 – 18% physical, and 2% luck”. Well, that is most likely true, except that with the new sequence the “luck” portion may have grown. Whoa, I’m *not* saying that skill is not important and isn’t needed to succeed. It is! The luck portion I am referring to is how the second target is flying during the doubles on Station 4. If you are fortunate, the second target will stay high in the air where it is very visible and the vision issues outlined above are minimized. It will not be driven by the wind at breakneck speeds. It will be consistent from shooter to shooter and offer no surprises as to where it will be during your turn.

On the other hand, we have all seen targets that are never in the same place twice. Whether diving, floating, or hopping across the sky, their unpredictability causes us to test the limits of our skills and patience. We are asked to react, adjust, and to compensate for these conditions in a blink of the eye. If we are unfortunate enough to get some of these targets on our turn, our scores may suffer. **Solution:** Think of it as the “luck of the draw”. Don’t blame your abilities. You should not put a lot of emotion on the misses by complaining about your performance. You should put your energy and emotion in applauding yourself when you hit them under those conditions. Focus only on what you want to happen the next time you shoot that station. Start by having a personal goal for Station 4. First, start easy - it could be to hit all the singles. Then increase it to add one of the second targets of the doubles for a total of five. Then, can you clean the station more times than not during the day’s shooting? Start with easy goals and work up to perfect.

The second part of *Vegas Luck* is the phrase, “*What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas*”. After you step off Station 4 you will still have 10 more targets to hit. Clearly, if you are carrying the weight of a poor performance with you to the remaining stations, you will diminish your chances of a successful finish. Everyone can see your attitude by looking at your body language. **Solution:** Drop the thought of those missed targets like it was a

hot potato. As you throw the empty hulls to the ground, throw the bad feelings along with them. Change your thinking! Find a way to look at your performance with a positive spin. Start Station 5 with a fresh attitude.

Conclusion: To be successful in today's skeet game we need to develop new strategies in our physical and mental games. Work on hitting each of the single targets during the round. Spend time in practice to make sure that you will be in the right position to shoot the pairs. While shooting, pay attention to the targets beforehand to see the worst-case target presentation, and then plan your attack accordingly. Keep the gun out of the way during the mount and swing so that you can see the targets. Accept difficult targets as conditions beyond your control and focus on what you *can* control – your actions. Leave the “baggage” of missed targets where they lie, at the last station. You may want to think of the round as really three separate matches. First, the nine targets on stations 1, 2, & 3. Next, Station 4's six targets. And finally, group the 10 targets of stations 5, 6, 7, & 8. During training, set up exercises using these three groups of targets. Don't let the pairs on 4 become the nemesis that influences your performance on the other targets. Make Station 4 your favorite station and you will become a better skeet shooter.

Station 4 Numbers

*Which Station Groups had the
Lowest Hit Rates?*

Baseline (1, 7, & 8)
88.5% Hit

The Corners (2 & 6)
80.8% Hit

Stations 1, 2, & 3
75.1% Hit

Station 3 & 5
71.6% Hit

Stations 5, 6, 7, & 8
65.8% Hit

Station 4
59.1% Hit

*Which Individual Targets had
the Lowest Hit Rates?*

Low Five Single
80.6% Hit

High Four Single
79.5% Hit

High Five Double
70.3% Hit

High Four Double, Low Target
63.0% Hit

Low Four Double, High Target
41.7% Hit