do it right

By Todd Bender

In any shotgun sport, the ability to analyze shots is as much an art as it is a skill. It requires experience, a developed eye, and most importantly, an intimate understanding of the game. All of these combined convert what one sees and or feels into what is actually happening. Good coaching requires this ability. Understandably so, every shooter craves the skill set to analyze shots correctly, make accurate assessments and then make the proper corrective action.

This subject came up with a student of mine in California earlier this year. She is a very good shooter, one of the best in the country, and very intelligent. Yet her inability to successfully analyze shots had become very frustrating for her. I insisted that she not be so hard on herself. The ability to analyze and assess shots correctly is not easy. It takes years of experience to understand, and then even more time to successfully implement. Unfortunately, few instructors, much less shooters, have the ability to specifically assess problems and make the necessary corrections.

Even then, what the shooter sees or feels may not be the actual core problem that exists. Many times we will only remember the last thing that happened during a shot. Generally, what is perceived as happening last, is not reality. There was a chain reaction of events that caused the final result...i.e., lifting the head, misleading the target either in front or behind, etc. These issues are mostly caused by other factors. One needs knowledge to identify these factors and the scenarios or sequence of events that lead to these final actions. Only then, can the true problem be solved, as opposed to applying a Band-Aid® to a peripheral, secondary issue, while the primary fault still exists.

Analyzing Misses

Typically, the problems that cause misses can be factored into one of three distinct areas—set-up, form or body mechanics, and vision. The first—set-up—involves foot position, hold point, eye position and can even include mental focus or lack thereof.

The second—form—is concerned with one’s ability to move the gun in “empathy” with the target, getting the gun to do what the target is doing. Form and body mechanics control the ability of the gun to “mirror” target movement. Consistent and successful shots require this “mirroring” of movement for a sustained period of time. Many times we refer to this as “matching gun speed with target speed.” Poor form seriously hampers, and/or makes this necessary component of any shot, nearly impossible.

Last is vision, which is the ability to acquire focus on the target and maintain that focus until the shot is completed. With few deviations, problems encountered when attempting a successful shot will most likely occur in at least one these areas, with vision dominating most of these mistakes. All of the above issues have been discussed at length in my previous articles; however, vision should get the lion’s share of attention. With that in mind, a majority of my future writing will, excuse the pun, focus on what the eyes are doing in the sport.

I told my friend that she should not be worried about her inability to analyze shots. Granted, that skill would put her head and shoulders above her competition, because few possess such insight. In fact, if everybody had the ability to analyze shots correctly and make the necessary adjustments, I’d be out of a job.

I stressed to her that you do not need the ability to analyze shots in order to move forward as a shooter. What is critical is this. It is not important to know what you’ve done wrong, it is more important to know how to do it right. No matter what mistake you have made on a preceding shot, what’s vital at that point in time is to know how to execute that shot correctly in the upcoming and subsequent shots.

Your Technique

So how do you know what’s right? First you need to find a trusted method and approach that works. Not one that your buddy uses but a proven technique that is based on sound fundamentals. Then you must practice that technique diligently over a period of time. This technique is your primary approach. Your primary approach is how you execute a particular shot... every time. This includes but is not limited to foot position, hold point, eye placement, cadence of the shot (shot placement), sight picture (perceived lead), body mechanics, etc. Anything that is critical to your shot that you do is your primary approach.

The greatest mistake made by most competitors in any sport, is that they are too willing to change their primary approach after a poor performance, a bad shot, or even by some random comment from an outside observer. In fact, most competitors are so busy constantly changing their primary approach, that they never fully gain control and confidence in that approach. They never achieve “mastery” over their primary approach.

Research has shown that it takes time to master a primary approach—doing something over and over again until it becomes second nature. Constant repetition, until it truly becomes your primary approach, typically takes six months. Yet no one actually spends that amount of time trying to “master” any approach. They are too busy changing their game at the drop of a hat in hopes of grasping something magical that will stop their performance slide and catapult them to greatness.

But if you were diligent in applying a proven technique with proven results over time, then you would be able to master that primary approach. Once mastery is achieved, then you can start to trust that approach and have the confidence that when that approach is applied, the outcome will be favorable.

Since the late 1970’s, my mantra has been “Head on the gun, eye on the target.” I learned these fundamentals early in my career from my coach, Col. Thomas C. Hanzel during my years at Trinity University. They were instilled in me. I *know* that if I execute these most basic of fundamentals, along with having the correct lead, I will be successful. The laws of physics guarantee it. This primary approach trumps all else. Even in the darkest times, I know that these fundamentals, this primary approach, will work every time.

Trust leads to confidence. When you have a system, a primary approach that is fundamentally sound and can be trusted, you will have confidence in that approach. You will know what to do, and be assured that it is right. Then, even when a mistake is made, whatever the mistake, it is really of no consequence. The result is to fall back on your primary approach, what you know and trust is right, and then execute that at the next opportunity. That’s what’s important, that’s how to “do it right.”

*For information about Todd Bender Performance Systems International and for Todd’s 2014 Clinic Schedule, go to the Clinic Schedule Page at toddbenderintl.com or contact Todd Bender at bendershima@aol.com. For Todd’s newest videos on skeet shooting, contact Sunrise Productions at 800.862.6399.*