The Grit

By Paul Giambrone III

I received a great email from a very good friend just a few days ago and the subject was “The Grit.” After reading the email, I remembered some old times that this good friend and I used to have. Nelson is like an uncle to me. He and his wife Jan opened their home to me so I could spend countless hours working with my coach in Lafayette, La. This was in my mid-teens when I was first coming on the national scene in skeet shooting. He was able to witness, first hand, the transformation in my game when I was working with Eddie Francez.

I will never forget those times. Eddie really helped me with my mental game back then (because I wanted to be the best), which has allowed me to share those same conversations and ideas with you. I am forever in debt to Eddie for sharing his beliefs with me and Nelson for opening his doors when I stayed in Lafayette.

Perseverance

Back to the email, Nelson wrote the following:

*Defined, “Grit is the passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.”*

I think that sums it up pretty well. Most shooters in our sport will hit plateaus or get bored and simply quit. This is what separates the top shooters over the long haul from the guys that show up here and there or do not show up at all on the national level. It is the “Grit” or the grind of working so hard to achieve greatness and stopping at nothing to get it.

As much as I would love to say the path to greatness is easy, it is not. When you get guidance from great coaches as I have, it steers you in the correct direction, but you still have to spend countless hours perfecting your game.

Most people, due to my age, think that I was born with this natural ability and woke up shooting 100 straights. This, as I have stated in the past, is not even close to the truth.

Steps to Greatness

One of the best shooters in Louisiana, the late Bobby Marcotte, told my father that in order to achieve AA across the board (AA back in the late 1970s was the highest class) that a shooter must shoot for at least five years. In his stipulations, he stated that the shooter must shoot registered minimums during this time span, must shoot twice as much practice as he did in tournaments (at minimum) and must have continued instruction during this time.

This was very true with me and plenty of other great shooters that I know. From years five to ten, I continued this fierce shooting schedule which allowed me to see just about every possible scenario as a competitor/shooter.

When I work with my students, we have a great time and they shoot extremely well. Some even have the attitude, “I have it now!” While it is true for that day, they also know that they need to practice what they learned and work hard on what I taught them. If they do not, they are going to end up right where they were before. As Bobby indicated, continued instruction is very important to make sure old habits do not creep back into your game.

Sacrifice

I see this in golf as well. Someone will take a lesson, hit a few range balls maybe once or twice after the lesson to work on any changes, and if it doesn’t give them the instant gratification, they are right back to old habits. That isn’t the Grit, that is a quitter. This is someone that won’t sacrifice their scores in the time necessary to improve their game. The instant gratification person will never get to the top. On the other hand, they may want to get better, but if they cannot practice the new techniques and perfect them, they will end up in the same hole.

I have had students that were swing-through shooters and I converted them to sustained leads. Did it happen overnight? No way! Sure, on the day of the lesson they were shooting sustained leads, but do you know how long it takes to fully cure that? I have had students tell me anywhere from two to six months! That is what it takes, sacrifice of score and time to achieve greatness.

Another great example is a shooter that has an eye dominance issue and has to tape their opposite shooting eye. Once again, this process takes time and patience. I have two students that took several months to get used to this conversion, but they stuck with it and have the results they wanted. These are the individuals that are going to succeed in this game and will have fun shooting this sport.

Does this mean that everyone in skeet shooting should try to be a world champion or All-American? Absolutely not! All this means is that if you want to be in these categories, you are going to have to spend a lot of time working your game and get guidance from good, qualified individuals to help you along the way. If you do not have these goals, make sure your expectations are in line. I see plenty of shooters that do not put in the proper amount of time to shoot consistently and shoot good scores, yet they get so upset about it... Yes, we all know that with the improper techniques you can get some of those good scores every so often but not on a consistent basis. The time needs to be spent in working the PROPER fundamentals even if it means sacrificing your scores in the short term. If we do not put in the proper time and work the proper techniques, how can we expect perfect scores and consistency? It is not realistic.

Tip of the month: Be realistic in your goals to help prevent you from getting burnt out in the sport. Take your time, enjoy the sport, enjoy the people and most importantly, have some fun along the way. It wasn’t always work for me, it was fun at times and still is to this day. The key is knowing when to work really hard to make your game the best it can be and knowing when to enjoy and have some fun.