The Quest to Perfection

By Paul Giambrone III

Perfection. That’s what this sport is all about, right? I mean, if a shooter does not post a perfect score, make perfect shots and do everything perfectly, he can’t win—right? Those guys at the top of the sport *never* make mistakes! Isn’t this the case? Far from it. However, these guys do tend to make fewer mistakes than the rest of the field, which is why they are at the top of the sport, but that does not make them perfect.

Look at Michael Jordan in his many years of prime. He still made mistakes during his career. I bet he fouled out a few times or missed an important free-throw at a crucial moment in the game or even missed a lay-up. But did he let those things keep him down or did he learn from those mistakes to prepare him for the next time around? I am pretty sure he learned, made his adjustments, *PRACTICED* those adjustments, *STUCK WITH* those adjustments, and made better decisions for the next game.

It is the same thing that top shooters have done in skeet and that is why they are in that position today. However, when the top shooters make mistakes, they don’t necessarily need to change something right away; it could have been something as simple as a bad move or a mental mistake. Does this warrant changing a hold point or a look point when they weren’t mentally prepared for the shot? I don’t think so.

The only thing to change would be better mental preparation for the next shot! Why is that? If a shooter wasn’t mentally ready, it really doesn’t matter which hold point they used. If thoughts wandered to work problems instead of High 2, maybe the shooter could change their approach and focus to the target rather than work. In the case where a shooter is continuously struggling with High 2, then they may need to change something in their fundamentals, which is where a good coach comes into the equation.

The top shooters don’t automatically know how to fix any mistakes because they were born with a shotgun in their hand. They had to work extremely hard to get to where they are today. In addition to very hard work, success in this game requires dedication, time, patience, and most importantly, the ability to learn from mistakes.

Early on in my career, I made plenty of mistakes and still make mistakes to this day, but I have a much easier time correcting mistakes because I have so much experience in the game. The experience helps me recognize the mistakes before they become serious problems. Having a solid coach along the way will also help you stay on track if you do not have the experience necessary to diagnose the problem(s) you are having. Luckily, my father shot with me and was very familiar with the mechanics of the game. He was able to correct my mistakes and keep me in tune.

Having a very good coach is extremely important because the slightest blemish can turn into a serious problem if it is not caught fairly early. The longer a shooter makes the mistake, the longer it will take them to break the habit and re-learn the correct way. Even professional golfers have swing coaches, so why should shooters be any different? Those of you who know the game inside and out could still benefit from a coach that knows the same things you do, but maybe they put it in a different language or have a different analogy and it helps you understand something better… That is priceless.

Lastly, I have heard far too many times of shooters wanting to “improve” their game before finding a coach and taking lessons. Remember, the longer a shooter makes the mistake, the harder it is to break the habit and fix the problem. Waiting to take a lesson is one of the worst things a shooter can do because they will more than likely form bad habits that will be harder to break. For the shooters who occasionally post perfect scores, that doesn’t necessarily mean there is no room for improvement.

Wait a minute, am I telling you that someone can post a perfect score but not be perfect? Can a quarterback have a perfect rating but still not complete all of his passes? The answer to both questions is yes. There are actually very few 100s that are shot that are actually perfect. The 12 gauge event at a top shoot might produce 30–40 100-straights, but I would say maybe one to three might actually be perfect. What I mean by perfect is complete mental preparation and execution of each shot. The shooter never had to make any kind of a recovery shot, never got beat, never had to bleed off any lead—everything was perfect! There is always a target or two (sometimes more) when the 100-straight shooter didn’t make a good move to the target or had to make some kind of a recovery shot, but was still able to break it!

This is important because all too often, shooters put too much emphasis on their scores rather than how well they actually shot that day. If you do everything that you wanted to do for the shot—meaning you executed your correct foot position, hold point, set your eyes, gave the target a good hard look, but the target didn’t break—how can you be mad? You gave it your best shot and that is all anyone can ever ask for!

The ones that we learn from are the targets where we weren’t set or mentally ready because of some kind of a conscious distraction, those are the shots that we can improve on. So do not beat yourself up over the shots that looked and felt good but didn’t break… Get better on the shots where you could have prepared and executed better.

Tip of the month: Focus on preparing and executing each shot individually rather than focusing on the outcome (your final score). Realize that we will never be perfect each and every time we step on the skeet field so keep working hard and never get discouraged because of a score. Put your focus on yourself instead of the score.

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