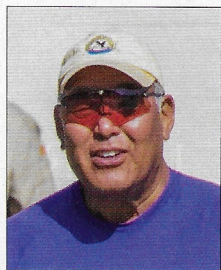


The 25-Straight Drill

This drill will help train your brain to forgive and forget each shot with a “been there, done that” approach.



▲ John D. Shima

San Francisco Warriors guard Stephen Curry has a free throw average of 90.4% — the highest percentage in NBA history. Yet, he misses almost one of every 10 free throws during a game. The thing that prevents highly talented professional basketball players from shooting “perfect straights” from the free throw line is the same thing that prevents shooters from shooting 25 straight during a round of skeet.

THE LAW OF OCCUPIED SPACE

Nicole Detling is a mental performance coach and owner of HeadStrong Consulting. Detling stated that the body of every basketball player knows how to make a free throw shot; it’s the player’s mind that gets in the way. Athletes might not be able to control their emotions during the moment of truth, but they can strive to control the thoughts to which random emotions become attached.

Bob Tewksbury, a major league pitcher, said in his book, *Ninety Percent Mental*, that the key to athletic success is quieting “the little man.” Tewksbury’s little man is that voice in your head that distracts you when you need to concentrate on the task at hand.

Spencer Wood, founder of the mental skills company Icebox, acknowledged that it is very difficult for an athlete to completely clear his or her mind. “There is a great battle in your mind between your best friend and worst enemy,” Wood says. “And to win that battle, you’ve got to establish great mental habits.”

DEVELOP GREAT PRACTICE HABITS

Wood went on to explain that great mental habits go hand in hand with great practice habits. According to Wood, great practice habits simulate game situations. Shooting 100 consecutive free throws after a rigorous practice session will not be as effective at strengthening the player’s mental habits as sprinting full court, then stopping to shoot two free throws, with the threat of running sprints for every missed shot. The ultimate purpose of simulation is to train the mind to approach stressful circumstances in competition with the comfortable thought, “Been there, done that.”

My 25-straight drill evolved from my basic incomer drill. Whereas the incomer drill can be used to improve specific elements of a shooter’s mechanical, visual and mental games, the 25-straight drill is intended to help a skeet shooter establish great

mental habits while simulating a competitive mindset during practice.

25-STRAIGHT DRILL

The purpose of the 25-straight drill is to train the clay target shooter to eliminate emotional attachment to the outcome of each shot by implementing a “forgive and forget” approach to shooting a round of skeet. This drill involves shooting a regular round of skeet in the following way:

Step 1: Approach the practice session with a mindset that each station is unique. The pre-station routine is directed toward visualizing the flight of each target, and the pre-shot routine is directed toward quieting the mind of all but one thought: Watch the target continuously.

Step 2: Call for each target and execute each shot correctly by firing at the appropriate break point. If a target is lost, just progress to the next target as if it broke. Do not shoot an option shot. The point is to train the mind to accept a miss and move on to the next task. This trains the mind to remain in the present at each station.

Step 3: Complete the eight stations. Shoot your option shot as the second target at low 8, just as if you completed a 25-straight. The purpose of shooting two low 8 targets every time is to train the mind to think, “Been there, done that.”

EMOTIONAL FREEDOM

Many great athletes have learned the hard way that they must learn to control their emotions during competition or their emotions will control them. The most effective techniques for controlling emotions involve using rational thinking to detach emotions from the outcome of the task at hand.

I’ve explained in my books and numerous articles that the shooter’s Ego Self employs the “relevance strategy” to insert itself into the game. When the Ego Self becomes involved in the shooting game, the outcome is the most relevant!

The shooter’s Conscious Self knows that each target is just a target. Expanding soft focus at the eye hold prior to calling for each target is the most effective technique for quieting the inner voice of “the little man,” so the shooting eye can efficiently detect and acquire each target. Hence, visual discipline allows the shooter’s pre-planned move to automatically track and engage each target in the break zone in a state of emotional freedom. **CTN**

► John Shima is a five-time World Skeet Champion. To view previous articles or order John’s books, go to www.johnshima.com.