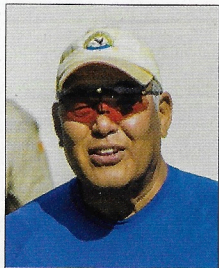


The Watching Drills

The mental game controls the visual game. You can't train one without the other and expect results.



▲ John D. Shima

Young people tend to shoot quickly: Their eyes see movement and focus on the target, and they fire. They don't analyze their shots or rely as much on precise lead pictures.

As shooters get older, they tend to shoot more visually, so they fire the gun when the lead picture looks right. Since it requires more time to allow the correct

lead picture to evolve, the eye has a tendency to focus too hard too soon, which causes a number of visual faults. I use two watching drills to emphasize the need to approach each station with a watching mindset rather than a shooting mindset.

MANAGE MINDSET

A watching mindset uses working memory to manage visual perception, which involves the transition from expanded soft focus in the acquisition zone to hard focus in the break zone. By starting with absolute focus to acquire and track the target, the transition to blended focus occurs closer to the break zone. By delaying blended focus until later in the shot sequence, it allows the shooters' procedural memory to unconsciously manage muzzle speed in response to their perception of target speed.

A shooting mindset uses working memory to manage movement of the muzzle in response to the flight of the target. The intention to break the target causes blended focus to occur just beyond the eye hold, which causes depth of focus to shift between the target and the end of muzzle between the acquisition zone and the break zone. When blended focus occurs closer to the acquisition zone, it causes most targets to appear faster and smaller. When blended focus is introduced too early, the shooter tends to use his or her working memory to consciously move the muzzle to adjust the perceived lead picture.

WATCHING DRILLS

In essence, the manner in which shooters look for the emerging target is governed by their ability to concentrate and focus. Concentration relates to the shooters' mental game and focus relates to the shoot-

ers' visual game. In other words, the mental game controls the visual game.

I modified the basic incomer and outgoer drills to create two watching drills. Since managing the watching reflex involves the conscious mind, they are also thinking drills. These drills are intended to divert the shooter's intention away from trying to break targets and toward paying attention to just looking for each target and watching it continuously until it breaks. Since it is impossible to keep the muzzle out of the picture on the baseline, the watching drills involve stations 2 through 6.

Ideally, these drills are most effective with a squad of three to five shooters of relatively equal skill level. The first drill involves all incomers: four L2, four L3, four L4, four H4, four H5, and four H6. The second drill involves all outgoers: four H2, four H3, four H4, four L4, four L5, and four L6. The option is shot after the first missed target or as a fifth target at station 6. It is important to load one shell at a time.

The purpose of the drills is to help shooters improve their mental

and visual discipline. The shooters' goal should be to improve their ability to concentrate on utilizing a specific pre-shot routine that enables them to manage the manner in which they use their eyes to focus appropriately on each target. This means the last thought before calling for each target must be related to watching the target. Therefore, it is suggested the shooter "keep score" by counting how many times they execute the process correctly rather than count the number of targets broken.

Most subtle distractions are caused by emotional attachments to random thoughts that creep into the shooter's conscious mind. Whenever a distraction enters the quiet mind, the shooter must stop and repeat the pre-shot routine. A clear mind begets clear vision. Strengthening the watching reflex will enhance the shooter's trust in his or her shooting reflex. **CTW**

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