

IS 2020 LOOKING LIKE A TOTAL DISASTER FOR YOUR ARCHERY?

At first thought, many of us might say so. Yes, archery in the form we expect it to be is not going to be able to take place. BUT...

How many seasons do you eagerly look at the competitive calendar and plan which shoots you will attend? How many times have you been to a competition and felt that you have underperformed?

Well, 2020 could be the year that *improves* your archery performance. Let's look at the 'silver lining' of the situation. As we have fewer opportunities to shoot, so we might be able to find the time to underpin our performance with a bit of thoughtful review and action.

There are many goals we could set for ourselves at this point, but I am going to choose one: technique improvement. Ask yourself the questions: Do I shoot a perfect shot? Do I know what shot I am trying to shoot? Do I shoot that shot reliably every time?

We are at the 'chicken and the egg' stage here. If you are fairly new to archery, or have not considered shooting in any other way than you were instructed when you did your beginners course, the only shot you know will be the one you are currently shooting. If you have read around or discussed your form with others, you may want to adapt or change your shot to include something new.

The starting point for all is to write down your shot sequence, preferably on a computer document which can be edited as time goes by. The shot sequence is a full list of everything you are trying to do in your shot from the time you pick up the bow to the time the arrow hits the target. Make a list of everything you physically do, in the order you do it. (Now you can see the benefit of doing this on computer!)

This is not always as easy as it sounds and will give you an insight into the areas of your shot that you are not sure of how you perform. It might also show you that you are unclear as to the order in which you perform elements of the shot (At what point do you aim? What do you do that makes you execute the shot?)

Once this is completed and you have access to a short (10m?) boss in a safe practice area or a stretchy band indoors, talk yourself through the sequence and adjust the document to reflect the *actual* process. In itself, this comparison will tell you if there are differences between the perception of your shot and the actual shot. You will always shoot better if you know what you are trying to achieve.

You may now realise that there are elements of your shot sequence that were not in the earlier drafts, so add them in and check the process again.

Once you are sure that your shot sequence accurately reflects every part of what you are trying to do, take a couple of practice sessions to carefully follow this sequence on each shot. It does not matter if you are shooting a bow or a stretchy band to do this. You are trying to develop a conscious mental interaction with the *actual* physical action at this stage. To start with it will be slow and a lot of mental hard work, but your mind will gradually begin to 'chunk'

a series of physical actions together into one prompt for several actions. An analogy would be when you first learned to write, you learned how to form each of the letters (parallel with your learning on a beginner's course). You then learned how to put these letters into a sequence to spell certain words (parallel with your shot sequence work above). Say you wanted to spell the word 'and'. To begin with, you would concentrate on forming the letter 'a' then the letter 'n' and so on. This is the development of a conscious interaction with the word's letters and sequence as with your shot sequence exercise above. Given time and practise at school, your mind soon began to 'chunk' the letters of 'and' together, so that whenever you wanted to write 'and', you no longer thought of the letters as individual elements, but the word became a chunk of writing in itself. You soon began to move forward to thinking about a sentence you wanted to write of which 'and' was a part. Likewise, in your shot sequence, a series of actions becomes a phase in the whole process of shooting an arrow. Look at how many individual actions go into making up the phase of 'nock an arrow'. How long has it been since you thought through all these actions? How long has it been since you thought about how to write 'and'?

So, we all use 'chunking' in our everyday lives: humans have developed this ability as it would be exhausting not to. However, do we always 'chunk' correctly? How often do you spell a more complex word wrongly? It happens occasionally when we are under time pressure or drafting that incredibly important letter etc. Similarly, the 'chunks' within our shot sequence can go wrong if (a) we are not fully aware of the constituent parts and confident with the sequencing or (b) we are under pressure (fatigue, stress, time).

Being surer of your shot sequence and the 'chunks' within it has many benefits. It can help reduce the errors under pressure, so we shoot more consistently both in and out of competition. But more importantly, it enables us to develop our shot, diagnose areas with problems and speak effectively with other archers and coaches so that we can shoot to the best of our ability and gain maximum enjoyment from our archery.

Next time, I will be writing about how the shot sequence model can be developed once an archer is confident with the basic concepts mentioned above.