

VIRTUAL SHOOTING

With the COVID alert rating being elevated to Level 4, one wonders if we shall return to actually shooting the bow any time soon. However, on a more positive note, we have been working together on developing our awareness and understanding of our own shot performance and this will be concluded today with a constructive way of maintaining our shot development even if we are unable to actually shoot at the moment.

All our work to date has laid the foundations to enable you to successfully develop the visualisation of your shot, which means that you can 'experience' your shot sequence in a meaningful way from the comfort of your armchair. I had a medically enforced layoff from shooting some years ago and was able to review, redesign and assimilate a revised shot sequence through visualisation. It only took me about 6 actual shots with the bow in my hand when I returned to shooting before I felt fully comfortable with the new process.

So, where to start?

I would suggest starting with a short session, just 1-2 mins. (or whatever you find easy to manage).

Visualise a familiar process. For example: going from your car into your house.

Now run through that process again, seeing how much you can notice.

- What did the car door sound like when it closed?
- Is it day or night?
- Is the backdoor outside light on?
- Did you leave the hall light on for when you got home?
- What is the weather doing?
- Can you smell anything like a bonfire/freshly cut grass/someone's cooking?
- Are you carrying anything?
- Where is your house key?
- What does it feel like when you pick it up?
- Do you manage to put the key cleanly into the lock?
- What does the lock feel like when you turn it?
- How heavy is the door to push open?
- How many steps do you take into the house?
- Etc

Out of interest - did you experience this from inside looking out, or were you seeing yourself as in a film?

It can be useful to be able to 'see' yourself performing part or all of a shot if this is needed to reinforce body shape or confidence. Seeing yourself confident and performing well in your 'mind's eye' will undoubtedly make you feel more confident and believe in your ability. However, developing the skill of *experiencing* your archery through visualisation (experiencing 'from the inside-out') will greatly help in reinforcing points of technique and the continued development of the neural pathways we have spoken about in previous sessions. So, when you get good at experiencing all there is to experience with a familiar everyday scenario like going from the car to the house, then try applying the same in depth approach to your archery.

We have spent the last three sessions thinking about our existing shot sequence and learning to recognise the available feedback during the actual performance of the sequence, so now you can sit comfortably and think through the whole process of making a shot, noting all the physical movements and 'feel' the feedback responses that you noted in column 2 of your shot sequence.

Once you have managed to visualise the shot sequence in full, you can add to it by embellishing the detail. For example, imagine yourself in a familiar venue getting ready to shoot, getting onto the line, shooting the perfect shot, 'seeing' them land in the gold and then collecting the arrows. It can also be useful in preparation for a major competition, where you can imagine yourself shooting confidently alongside other competitors and learn to feel familiar with your surroundings before you actually shoot at the event. With the sort of background images and details available on the internet, it is possible to 'experience' shooting in more or less any location in the world.

When you are feeling confident with using visualisation as a training technique, then you can start to use it to delve a bit deeper into any one bit of the routine, experiencing the feeling of balance and neutrality of posture, force of driving your elbow backwards, and pressure on the hand as you settle into your aim etc. These individual sensations can be recognised and explored and help you become aware of what feedback your body is wanting to experience to judge if your performance is replicated on every shot. If on any occasion, you experience difficulty with an element of your shot, or you just want to reinforce your confidence in a good shot, you can run through your mental process of shooting that perfect shot and seeing it end up in the centre of the target. Confidence will be lifted, and your brain's understanding of the process required will be reinforced.

Now, having spent the last four sessions asking you to look inside your *existing* shot, I am handing you over to Andrew Knight who is going to move you on to considering the efficiency of your existing shot sequence. Having become more aware of the feedback your existing shot has given you and started experiencing virtual shooting, you are now ideally placed to efficiently alter your technique and recognition of new feedback should you want to follow any of Andrew's suggestions.

Visualisation can now be used as a tool to help you incorporate any changes you choose to make to your technique even in these strange times when we are unable to shoot as often as we would like, or at all. By incorporating the new element into your visualised routine, it can be experienced lots of times without the bow in your hand until it becomes a more accepted part of your routine with familiar and positive feedback.

I hope to see you on the shooting line in the not too distant future!