

## LOOKING FORWARDS.....

In these articles we have spent most of our time focusing on what we can achieve within the limitations of tiers and lockdowns. We have used the enforced 'archery on pause' to reflect and take stock. We have considered and set goals for what we would like to achieve with our archery form, considered ways in which it can develop and looked at the theory of how to achieve maximum performance with greatest efficiency.

With the vaccination roll-out gathering pace and reports that the government is hoping to start easing the lockdown by allowing outdoor sports, there is a glimmer of hope that 2021 will see some archery taking place. All those protocols which were designed and then put into abeyance when tiers became lockdown can be dusted off, reviewed and put in place. All that work wasn't wasted: it has given us a much faster reaction speed to any lockdown easing when it happens. With that in mind, now is the time to consider how you, as an individual, is going to take that first step back after the layoff.

Having worked through the previous articles, you have hopefully acquired a clearer understanding of the basic shot you are endeavouring to perform. Your mind should be better trained with the foundations of new and better neural pathways in place. You are better able to read and understand internal feedback and your ability to focus on an internal dialogue should be developing nicely, thanks to your time spent visualising. But how does this get put in to action and what is the first step towards getting back to shooting for real?

However much you have been able to use a stretchy band to practice, or (if lucky) been able to actually draw a bow, the main difference between our lockdown archery and real/'new normal' archery is the physical activity load on your body. If, like a massive majority of the population, you have acquired a kilo or two more over the last year, regaining or improving your general level of fitness would be a good place to start.

If you think about your shooting (in what now seems like a former life), I bet it involved increased activity in addition to the actual shooting: walking to collect arrows; transferring from chair to shooting perch and back; moving on and off the line; pulling arrows, etc, not to mention the loading and unloading of kit to and from the car and setting up your bow: all using muscles which have probably had a bit of a rest for the last year! So, my message is 'TAKE IT EASY'. Getting fit is not all about massive effort, it involves a gentle increase in activity. If you have become more sedentary, begin by putting on some suitable footwear and walking for half an hour twice or three times a week (not so difficult to do now the evenings are getting lighter). If you have been walking regularly throughout lockdown, you might like to start to vary your route to include some inclines or vary the pace – part way through your walk, increase your speed for five minutes and then drop back to your normal pace or walk a steeper route once a week. Anything to give your body a slightly more demanding challenge. This, plus sensible eating, *will* result in a gradual weight loss and increased fitness.

The phrase 'No pain, no gain' is rubbish! If you feel pain - STOP. If you are breathless (but still able to continue a conversation) whilst completing your walking challenge, you have pitched it just right, you are improving your fitness gradually and it is probably more enjoyable, which means you are more likely to feel good about continuing your fitness challenge. However, you know your own body and medical history, so design yourself a challenge which gently and safely improves your fitness within your own health parameters.

Once your general fitness is improved, you are ready to address adopting and developing some archery specific fitness. As Andrew Knight has illustrated in his articles on Posture for Archers, engaging the 'core' muscles is fundamental. Over my shooting career, I have found his ideas and suggestions particularly helpful. They enabled me to develop a core foundation to my shot which allowed me to shoot strong shots over long competitive days in difficult conditions. However, if like

me, you currently have a 'couch potato core' and feel you need some additional work before being able to address his suggestions for archery posture, you might like to follow the link at the bottom of the article, where you will find some videos to help you on the road to a better everyday posture, before you approach the archery specific work.

Whichever route you choose to develop your general and core fitness, you can use it as a vehicle to develop your confidence as well. (We all know how important confidence is to underpin performance!). Do you remember that back at the beginning of these articles, we spoke about setting ourselves goals? The goal in the first article was to consider the development of our technique. I suggested a range of smaller, easier steps to take in order to work towards this and I hope that you have been successful in your considerations. (Please take a few moments to consider everything you have achieved whilst going through this process.)

What are you better at now than you were before you started the process?

Let's look at how you can use your fitness programme to grow in confidence.

- Plan your walks for the week. (say, walk for half an hour on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.)
- Do your walk on Tuesday (you might like to record the number of steps you did or the distance you walked)
- When you have completed your walk on Tuesday, smile, feel pleased with yourself, you have achieved your goal for the day and taken the first step in improving your fitness.
- Do your walk on Thursday (record number of steps or the distance you walked)
- When you have completed your walk on Thursday, smile, feel pleased with yourself, you have achieved your goal for the day and taken the *next* step in improving your fitness.

Within a short space of time, you will notice that the number of steps or distance you have walked in half an hour has increased. BIG SMILE, lots of feeling pleased with yourself. You have not only achieved your daily goals by completing each walk, but you have just realised that you have improved over time and it has all been through your own endeavour. You have taken control, made a plan, worked hard and achieved each goal along the way. Are you feeling more confident that you can continue to improve your fitness? Are you feeling more confident that you can improve at whatever you put your mind to? Hopefully you are. Just use the same process, plan, break the plan in to small achievable goals, celebrate each and every goal you have achieved, step back and review the overall picture to see the improvement over time and celebrate again. Of course, you can then start the process all over again and improve some more!

Hopefully, by the time you have achieved improved fitness, our club facilities will have started to open up again and you will be able to put some of your hard work and planning into action in the proper setting.

Although practice with a stretchy band, form master etc has been a fantastic and useful option, it is never a realistic substitute for actual shooting and muscles will operate subtly differently when you return to the 'real thing'. Take it easy. Like the gentle development of your fitness, be gentle with yourself on your return to archery. If you have lighter limbs or can wind your bow down in poundage, you may like to consider shooting a lighter bow at the outset. You are practising form; you are not shooting for score. When your shooting fitness is re-established, you can safely return to using a heavier setup. If you haven't got access to a lighter bow, limit the number of shots in early practice sessions until your shooting fitness improves. Returning too rapidly might cause injury and effect your shooting future, but whether you start back with a lighter bow or fewer shots made, please be mindful of the considerations in article 3.

In order to reinforce those new neural pathways FOCUSED PRACTICE is imperative at this stage.

DON'T be carried away by the excitement of actually being back shooting.

Before that first practice session, make a plan.

- What weight bow am I going to shoot?
- How many shots will I shoot?
- *And before you even **think** about raising the bow-*
- What is the shot I am trying to shoot?
- Visualise that shot. Only then do you.....
- Shoot the shot.
- Review the shot. (*Smile at what went well and acknowledge what needs improvement*)
- What are you going to do to make this next shot even better?
- Visualise the shot.
- Shoot the shot etc.

Don't forget to enjoy the company of shooting alongside other people and follow your plan.

Andrew Knight and I hope that these articles have helped you through the last year, giving you an opportunity to stay in touch with your archery. We hope we have helped you to reflect on the past, made suggestions for you to work constructively towards your archery form during lockdown and outlined a plan for the coming year.

We are all looking forward to returning to shooting and catching up with friends in the archery community and we look forward to meeting you on the shooting line.

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