

Common Mistakes of Junior Shooters

By Steve Faught, Assistant National Junior Pistol Coach

The challenges are diverse and interesting when working with junior and junior development team athletes. In this article I would like to discuss a couple of the more common errors we are finding in these young competitors.

NATURAL POINT OF AIM

By the time an athlete makes an intermediate skill level, they have a fairly well developed natural point of aim. An error we commonly see is that many developing shooters are not aligning their NPA to the target. We must use the position that our body naturally wants to move to. If we are not in our NPA during the course of a shooting session, the shots will drift in the direction of the body instead of on target. A good tool for coaches to use is the video camera. More than one junior team member has insisted that their stance did not change during a match but video has shown otherwise. Video taken directly behind the shooter showed the competitor's number was not visible. Halfway through the match, the shooter had turned enough so you could easily read the number.

A good drill to determine if the shooter is obeying his or her NPA is to have the shooter take position, sights on target – then close his or her eyes. Lower the gun to the ready position – raise it again to sights on target. Repeat this sequence two or three times before instructing the athlete to open his or her eyes. Has the gun drifted left or right? If so, maybe the first position was not the natural point of aim.

GRIP AND TRIGGER PLACEMENT

Another area where we commonly see problems is in the grip and trigger finger placement. We especially noticed issues with grip fit. The root of this issue is that kids grow and so do their

hands! I remember one individual in particular who was shooting well towards the end of the season and then took most of the summer off. When he started again that fall, he was struggling to keep his shots in the black. The groups were erratic and hard to read. Once we realized he had grown nearly two inches that summer, we took a quick look at his grip and finger placement.

The problem became obvious. Not all growth spurts are this dramatic, but it would be a good idea for a coach to do an in-depth review of a junior shooter's grip and trigger placement every couple of months. If the shooter is training regularly once or twice a week, he or she will not notice the gradual changes in grip fit.

Let's examine the palm rest of the grip rest first. Most junior shooters tend to have the palm rest too tight. Several things happen with a palm rest that is too tight—the hand cups-out losing contact with the grip; fatigue will set in early from lack of blood flow and most importantly, the slightest change in grip pressure will cause erratic shot placement. If you are working on palm rest placement, intentionally set the palm rest too tight and dry fire on a blank sheet of paper or reversed target. Also try aligning the sights and change grip pressure to see where the front sight moves. Then take the palm rest completely off and repeat the tests. Try the tests again with various amounts of support from the palm rest and go



Make sure your grip is fit correctly to your hand and be aware of maintaining proper fit as you grow.

with a setting that is comfortable and produces the least amount of front sight movement in the event of errors in triggering or change of grip pressure.

Now that the hand is properly supported in the grip, look at the placement of the finger on the trigger. As the finger gets longer, the tendency is to reach around the trigger and pull from the side of the trigger shoe. On most guns, it is quite simple to move the trigger shoe forward. It is imperative that at the point of sear release the trigger is being pulled directly to the rear. Once again, dry firing on the back of a target while focusing on the front site is a good check for proper finger placement.

If your trigger is set with very little over travel—you can do some further testing. Pull through the break until the trigger hits the stop, in the case of an air pistol pull with two or three pounds of pressure and see if this moves the front sight out of alignment. This may uncover some errors in finger placement that dry firing with a standard weight trigger may not reveal.