



By Jonathan Carlock, MS, CSCS*D, USOC Strength and Conditioning Coach

THE LATERAL DUMBBELL RAISE FOR IMPROVING THE PISTOL HOLD

Competitive pistol shooting is a sport that requires a tremendous amount of skill in order to be successful. This is an obvious statement for those who compete in pistol competitions. An often overlooked skill in the shooting sports is that of strength. Strength has been defined as the skill or ability to overcome a resistance. Strength training has been shown to improve and stabilize skills in a myriad of sports. In this regard, technique in pistol sports is no different. The proper application of a well designed strength training program can improve the performance of an athlete in a shooting sport through more consistent technique.

Imagine an athlete that was so weak it took every bit of strength one could muster in order to lift her pistol one time. How many times would she be able to lift the pistol? This is not a trick question. The answer is one time. How steady will that athlete's hold be? It won't be very stable will it? Now imagine a very strong athlete who can raise a 100 pound dumbbell to shoulder height. How easy will it be for that athlete to lift a 2.5 pound pistol to her shooting position? Pretty easy right? With practice and increased strength it makes sense that an athlete will be able to hold her pistol more steady as well.

This may seem like an extreme example, but I believe it makes the point well. In pistol shooting, the resistance that must be overcome for a successful hold is the resistance of the shooting limb, the pistol and the round. This may not seem to be a tremendous amount of resistance in any single shot. However, by simply taking the weight of the pistol into account, the volume of weight lifted in a 40 shot match can exceed 100lbs or more than 150 lbs in a 60 shot match. Going back to the previous examples, I would argue the stronger athlete will have more consistent technique throughout a match than the weaker athlete. Clearly, this is all a moot point without ample practice shooting.

I suggest incorporating the dumbbell lateral raise into your training program. For the first month, I recommend adding this exercise to your training program three days a week with at least one day between workouts. For example, on Monday, choose a dumbbell that will allow you to complete three sets of 10 repetitions. The weight

you choose should leave you feeling like you can complete another two or three repetitions at the end of each set. On Wednesday, I suggest doing four sets of 10 -15 second isometric hold with the dumbbell in a similar position as your shooting hold. For Friday's workout do three sets of 10 repetitions, but select a weight that is 10 to 15 percent lighter than Monday's workout.

To perform the dumbbell lateral raise, begin by grasping a dumbbell in each hand. Your feet should be placed slightly wider than hip width with the toes pointing forward. You should maintain a slight bend in your knees as well. For this variation of the dumbbell lateral raise, keep your palms facing forward throughout the lift (Figure 1).

Begin the movement by taking a big breath of air. This breath should be held while lifting the dumbbells to shoulder height. It will be beneficial if you imagine the dumbbells to simply be heavy pistols. Lift the dumbbells the same way you would your pistol. If you tend to raise your pistol with your arm slightly forward of your center line, do the same with the dumbbell. If you tend to raise your pistol more perpendicular to your body, then that is how you should raise the dumbbell. Pause briefly when your thumbs are level with your forehead. Count to three as you return dumbbells to the starting position. You should gradually release your breath while lowering the dumbbells. Repeat for the designated number of repetitions with 60 to 90 seconds rest between sets (Figures 2 & 3).

The dumbbell lateral raise can also be performed by doing isometric holds in your shooting position (Figure 4). The movement will be performed in a similar fashion as was described above. However, this time instead of pausing when your thumbs are at forehead level, you should begin to lower the dumbbells immediately to your pistol hold position. Pause in your shooting position for the designated amount of time. Then slowly lower the dumbbell to your side. Rest for 60 to 90 seconds and repeat. Be sure to do the exercise using both arms.

Incorporate this exercise into your training program, practice shooting diligently and I believe you will see improvements in your performance.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4