

Reaching New Heights

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Achieving high results in any sport requires an athlete to develop and master many skills. The foundation for success starts with building proper technique for the chosen sport. Technique in shooting consists of the set of skills necessary to execute a shot, or series of shots, with a high degree of consistency and accuracy. The process of developing technique is time-consuming and requires large amounts of patience and commitment, and if approached correctly, that process can minimize frustration. Of course, realizing that you won't become technically advanced overnight is essential. I hope the expectation of overnight success wasn't on your Christmas list—that's one thing even Santa Claus couldn't deliver! The growth process is something you control, a critical element left to no one else. I will discuss here some critical factors in developing the talent that lies within you.

First, an athlete must have a great desire to become one of the best in the sport. When you have a goal and vision for what you can become, you will quickly gain the motivation for the hard work that's required to reach your goals. An example of the necessary work is persistently seeking more knowledge by actively pursuing everything you can learn about all aspects of shooting. Reading, listening, and observing others is vitally important, especially in regards to shooting techniques. The knowledge you will gain is key to developing the technical skills required for high-level competition.

Translating that knowledge to technique can be a straightforward process. Research, learning and application are components of the simple formula for establishing your technique. Of course, you will find most success if you make a concerted effort with your coach; between the two of you, work hard to explore the techniques and skills best suited to your approach to shooting. The synergy you can develop with your coach—and other shooters—can make your technique-building efforts less stressful and more productive. But again, the key is work. Your efforts will have much better results and lead to long-term success with lots and lots of hard work.

Next, an athlete must spend a significant amount of time on the range in order to convert knowledge into skill. A well-known concept in neuroscience is that knowledge must be enacted in practice to become technique. A large number of correctly executed repetitions of the desired task will speed and solidify

your progress in developing any skill. How many repetitions does it take? Many experienced coaches will say it takes 100,000 rounds downrange to develop the muscle memory sufficient enough for well-established technique, but that number really suggests an underlying concept: It takes a tremendous amount of work on the range, and there is no good substitute for that. Undoubtedly, your strong determination to complete the task correctly in every attempt will also accelerate progress—more frequent quality shots result in faster progress, a stronger skill and better consistency of technique.

Admittedly, it's often difficult to dedicate yourself to working for hours, sometimes on the same repetitive element, but this is the surest way for your mind and body to assimilate the new skill. The patient and committed hours applied to training are what really reveals your character, and that is how you develop tenacity and perseverance in the face of challenge. This is where self-discipline comes into play; sometimes it is not only "I want," but also "I must." If we ask legendary athletes in any sport about their development, I am sure all of them will mention the tough times in their training, perhaps when it was a great challenge even to get through just one day. Yet they will recognize that it was precisely those challenging times that forged their character and made them the competitors we admire. This is the greatest reward of the journey: to see yourself at your best in the sport you love rather than dabble in it as a passing interest.

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