

Easy Points: The Mental Game

By Sergeant George Norton

There are not many other sports where the mind is able to control the outcome of the event. That is what makes competitive shooting so much harder than many other athletic events. Not only do we need to have a strong technical game, but we must have a peak mental game as well. Anyone that has attended a United States Army Marksmanship (USAMU) clinic knows one of the classes we teach is our “Easy Points” class. This class helps beginning shooters correct mistakes and not lose easy points in competition.

Some of these include cross firing, shooting too many shots and correcting a rifle zero. Another category where many easy points are lost is from a poor mental game. It is important to remember that the mental game is not something you have to wait to acquire until you are a collegiate shooter or a member of the USA Shooting National Development Team or even the USA Shooting (USAS) National Team.

As a junior or beginning shooter, it is imperative that you start to solidify a strong mental game because it will be a tremendous asset later on in your shooting career. In this article, I will discuss three major areas of mental training to focus on. By beginning with these quick easy points you can create a strong foundation for your mental game. These areas include the match button blues where I will talk about the rush of anxiety that comes when you are done with sighters and starting a match. Next, I will discuss reaction and reset, where you might have a bad shot and need to settle back down. Finally, we will cover the use of safe words to help you concentrate.

Let's begin with the match button blues where we push the match button or move from the sighter bull to our first match target. All of a sudden something changes. We have a pulse beat, maybe our positions don't feel as solid, and we are not able to take a shot as quickly as when we were shooting sighters. Welcome to the match button blues, which is as easy to describe as just getting nervous. Sometimes this nervousness results in our first shot not being as confident; and if it was a ten, then we reluctantly call it luck.

An easy way to earn a ten on the first record shot is to treat the last couple of sighters as match shots. While finishing sighting in, but before moving to the first match bull, put yourself in the mindset that this next sighter shot is a match shot. There will probably be nerves creeping in, but that is when you will start



to control it by using safe words that we will talk about later in the article. You can calm down, settle and move confidently to your first match bull and shoot a perfect ten. Now as we continue through our match, we might have some poor shots, but we can react properly by going over the next step of react and reset.

Everyone has been there—your shooting is going great and all of a sudden there is a poor shot. Generally, you react with a big loud “darn it” in your mind, become very frustrated, slam the rifle bolt back and finish by going straight into the next shot.

This process usually results with another poor shot. Let's face it, no matter if you are a beginning shooter or nationally ranked, there will always be sub-par shots. Many things happen physically in our bodies when we overreact to a poor shot.

Once upset, it increases adrenaline output, which in turn increases the heartbeat and eventually the blood flow as well. Because of this increased blood flow our muscles are now tense,

our pulse is high and our hold is awful. This is where that second poor shot comes from. An easy point that a shooter can earn is having the ability to reset the process. A shooter can reset by dry firing one or two shots after a poor shot. An important thing to remember while taking these dry fire shots is to keep your proper execution just like there is a round in the chamber. These dry fire shots allow our bodies to relax, slow the heart beat and reset back to our competitive form. Along with resetting our body, we can also reset our mind by using safe words.

Safe words are an amazing tool for any shooter to have in their competitive toolbox. Safe words are anything that can be said to get your mind back "in the game." A great example of using a safe word is from the movie *For the Love of the Game*. Kevin Costner plays a Major League Baseball pitcher who attempts to pitch a perfect game. With everyone in the stands yelling and his mind wandering, he pauses and says, "Clear the mechanism." These safe



words silence the crowd and empty the stadium in Costner's mind.

All that is left is the catcher, himself and the silence so Costner can throw an amazing pitch. There is a lot of time in competitive shooting matches where our mind can wander and not focus on the shot at that moment. By using a safe word (or phrase), like Kevin Costner's character, we can get our mind back on track. Other examples include words and phrases such as relax, focus, take it easy, etc. Using these words (in addition to a focused mind) will help you stay on track and keep mental stability while in competition.

We have discussed three specific areas where shooters can save points in the mental game and increase their overall scores. Again these areas include preparing yourself for the first match shot after sighters, resetting after a poor shot and using safe words or phrases to stay concentrated. We could go more in depth on each of these topics, but by starting here, any beginning shooter will have a great foundation for their mental game. So keep shooting tens, keep your mind in the match and stay ARMY Strong.

Mental Training Dan Vitchoff's 33 Method

Shotgun Mental Training and Performance Coaching

- Improve Mental Toughness
- Intense Focus & Concentration
- Develop an Effective Pre-Shot Routine
- Achieve the Competitive Edge

We will design an individualized mental training program that you can use throughout the year that will address pre-competition, competition and post-competition strategies. Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Shooters Welcome

Some of Dan's clients include Josh Richmond, Glenn Eller, Vincent Hancock, Ryan Hadden and Jeff Holguin.

2 or 3 Day Mental Training Camps Available: Come to one of our pre-scheduled Mental Training Camps for 2011 or we can come to you!

Gift Certificates are perfect for Athletes, Coaches and Parents



Call 866-258-2338 for more information or visit www.33method.com