Since you are reading this article in USA Shooting News, it is safe to assume that you have an interest in the International Shotgun games. Coming from an American Trap Association (ATA) background and jumping into the International game myself many years ago, I realized what a drastic difference there is in the two games. Just to make sure everyone knows the differences between American Trap and International Trap, I will provide an explanation: An American trap field consists of a single machine 16 yards in front of the firing line. These machines oscillate on a 45 degree arc, 22.5 degrees either side of center. The targets are thrown 10 feet high at a distance of 10 yards in front of the house, and travel approximately 50 yards. The International Trap game consists of a ground level 60-foot long trench which houses 15 machines, three in front of each of the five shooting stations. These machines do not oscillate but are preset for angles up to 45 degrees left and right and heights at 10 meters in front of the trench, varying from 1.5 meters to 3.5 meters. All of these targets are set to a distance of 76 meters. Because of these variables, the target off each machine is a different speed, which drastically increases the difficulty. In the International game, competitors are allowed two shots at each target, counting the same whether the target is broken with the first shot, second shot or both.

Because of the wide angles, speed of the targets, varying heights and having two shots at each target, basic fundamentals are much more important. Gun fit, stance and balance are key aspects to these fundamentals and need to be choreographed by a qualified coach.

Once good fundamentals are established, the shooting game, like any other moving target game; i.e., baseball, tennis, is all about vision. Talk to your career .300 hitters and they will almost always tell you that they can see the stitches on the baseball as it leaves the pitcher’s hand. The big difference between baseball and shooting is that their object is coming towards them and their eyes are able to stay focused on all the way, while in shooting, the target is going up and away from us and our eyes focus very slowly in that direction. With this knowledge, the key element of the vision game is focal length, meaning how far out in front of the trench our focus is. Our focus needs to be close to the “breaking area,” which for most people is 15 to 20 meters in front of the trench. There are competitors with faster focusing eyes that are able to look closer, but there are also people with slower focusing eyes that need to look further out. Focal length is an individualistic measurement. The key to it all is we want the target clear when we pull the trigger.

Along this same train of thought there is a lot of discussion in the International world on the advantages of the “high gun” like most people shoot in American trap. The general consensus for the International games, because of the varying heights, speeds and angles of the targets is to start the gun on the house where the targets emerge. Over the past couple of years, several shooters around the world have had great success with the gun above the house when they call for the target, but in essence, the gun above the house is not an advantage. It creates a blind spot for the eye so that the shooter cannot see the targets emerge from the house. With the inherent difficulty of the game we do not need to allow the targets to get this head start. I believe that the success these high gun shooters are having is completely visual in nature. With the gun down on the house these shooters are looking at the front lip of the house allowing the target to beat them visually and they are then chasing a blur. What the high gun has done for these competitors is it has forced their eyes up and out so that the focal length is correct, allowing them to see the target clearly and able to connect visually with the target, which makes it appear larger and slower.

Since there are a multitude of competitors around the world who are physically capable of breaking any target thrown, the true success is then measured by who can visually conquer the game. Competitors that can connect visually to the target shoot what appears to be a larger, slower and therefore easier target.

In future articles we can go into more detail on other aspects of the International game. If you have questions or any suggestions what you would like to see covered, please contact USA Shooting or Bret Erickson directly at info@breterickson.com.

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