

I. SHADING. A discussion of wind and weather conditions would not be complete unless the technique of shading or holding over were discussed. Shading is a technique of allowing for wind change by deliberately holding over or aligning the front sight toward the direction of the wind in order to compensate for the change without making a sight adjustment. Sometimes this technique can be beneficial to the very experienced shooter during a constantly changing condition and or when it is necessary to shoot a large number of shots in a relatively short period of time. This could also occur when a shooter does not have time to wait for a particular condition or can not return to the sighting target frequently. Shading may also be beneficial when the shooter senses a slight wind change and then is careful not to break the shot on the windward side of the target. In a sense he is shading or is being careful to break the shot into the wind so that any pickup or drop off in wind velocity will cause the bullet to drift into the ten-ring. Shading is not recommended because even the most experienced shooter will have difficulty judging how far to shade or hold off. Shading also increases the possibility of elevation error due to the fact that the bull's-eye is off center in the front aperture.

COACHING

A. PURPOSE. This chapter is written for the benefit of those individuals in international shooting who may find themselves facing the job of coaching an international rifle team with little or no international marksmanship background to draw upon. This chapter should also be of value to those persons who are in a position to appoint coaches. You may also be called upon to coach a champion shooter.

1. The champion shooter is the cutting instrument that penetrates through and beyond the bounds of what is presently considered the best possible shooting performance. The coach is the tool that hones this superb instrument and keeps it razor sharp. The coach can keep the champion shooter continually striving to break the existing records. The score that equals or breaks a previous record is never good enough to stand unbroken for the years to come.

2. A coach exists for the benefit of his shooters, and not the shooters for the benefit of the coach. The coach's job is to direct the shooter in his own development. His most important function is to make the shooter think.

B. PRINCIPLES OF COACHING. Coaching clinics have revealed that very few individuals are familiar with the principles involved in coaching a free-rifle shooter.

Many of the shooter's ideas must be influenced by personal and individual coaching. In general, positive influences can best be made by an individual coach in whom the shooter has a great deal of confidence.

1. First we must recognize that the basic principles and fundamentals of marksmanship do not change. However, the application of those principles and fundamentals will differ from shooter to shooter, and from one weapon to the next.

2. We must recognize also that the style and techniques of coaching will differ as we move from service rifle and pistol to the more individualistic free-rifle type of shooting. This is because the free rifle shooter is trained for individual performance; he never fires as a team member in the same sense that service rifle and pistol shooters do. Consequently, one of the foremost responsibilities as a free-rifle coach is to instill self-reliance and confidence in his shooters.

3. A difficult coaching task is to create an atmosphere in which each individual shooter can experiment with and refine his own techniques. The progress made by a shooter in advancing his score is in direct proportion to his thinking about and analyzing his own performance. He must have, as well, the desire to be a World or Olympic Champion.

4. The coach is aided in creating confidence in the team as a whole if he carefully uses the performance of his shooters for purposes of research and analysis. He should constantly watch the performance of those shooters who are "on top", and he should seek the advice and counsel of those top shooters. Then, armed with a knowledge of the techniques employed by the best shooters, he should acquaint each new shooter with these techniques. Teach him to adopt the techniques that work best for him, and to discard the methods that are unsound. The coach must be careful to prevent his shooters from using "gimmicks"--easy solutions in the form of novel equipment or trick techniques. Inevitably some shooters will begin to rely on gimmicks and fail to concentrate on basic improvement of their performance. The use of gimmicks may become the basis for the development of alibis. Excuses for poor performance will then cause confidence to dwindle away. On the other hand, if the coach keeps his shooters concentrating on performance, and aids their progress by displaying a sound knowledge of shooting techniques, then he is building confidence. A coach bears the responsibility of creating the right amount or maximum of confidence in each shooter.

5. All successful coaches, in any form of shooting, have one thing in common; they have some attributes in their personality that induces excellence of performance from those under their guidance. Minor shortcomings of personality do not negate this art. Of course, there are no perfect coaches because there are no perfect men. Because of this fact, we are accustomed to over-looking minor flaws in one who possesses true leadership qualities. A coach or a shooter is only parading his own inferiority if he scorns or refuses to cooperate with his coach or one of his teammates because of some small personality trait he dislikes.

6. If a coach is not compatible with the members of his team he may become a source of friction, no matter how much knowledge or talent he may possess. The ability to get along with people is not an inherited talent; it must be cultivated. Usually the person who fails to get along with others, fails to make an effort to get along. In each coach there must be strong traits of human understanding, tolerance and patience.

7. A coach must be temperate in all things. He must have the will power, the intestinal fortitude and the character to deny himself those things that will compromise his standing as a leader. The members of his team will respect him as a coach only if they can respect him as a man.

8. It is not necessary for a coach himself to be a champion shooter; indeed, in many instances a champion may possess too strong a drive toward personal achievement to be able to coax achievement out of others. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. A good coach must not necessarily be the equal of a champion in his ability to shoot high scores, but he must be the equal of a champion in the depth of his shooting knowledge.

9. A coach must be dedicated to his work. He must constantly keep in mind that his job is to get the maximum performance out of his shooters, and he must be willing to make personal sacrifices to that end.

10. He must at all times and in all things exercise patience and self-control. Irreparable damage can be done if a coach allows his loss of temper to antagonize a shooter. He will erect an unbreachable wall between them, and further constructive coaching will be severely impaired or made impossible. For this reason, it is wise to have one individual in charge of the team to execute disciplinary measures, and another individual to act as coach. In this way the coach avoids friction between himself and the shooters.

11. Patience, tolerance, and self-control must extend not only to problems of discipline, but to problems of performance as well. A coach may point out to a shooter some error in his performance, only to see the shooter continue to repeat that same error again and again. To become discouraged or dismayed at this point would solve nothing; it would only destroy the shooters' confidence and desire. The coach must work patiently and display a confidence and desire. The coach must work patiently and display a confidence in the shooter's ability to overcome his problem.

12. When the problem is solved, then it is the coach's duty to give the shooter credit for his success. Unselfishness is necessary in match performance. Also, the coach must remember that even if the shooters could not have won the match without him, still it is they who should receive the credit for winning. He himself must be content to blend into the background when the laurels are passed out. If he accepts the laurels for himself, he may thereafter get only a grudging performance from his team.

13. A coach must instill in a shooter the ability to confidently analyze his own performance. He does this by showing a respect for the individual's intelligence and by paying due attention to his ideas. To do this, a coach must maintain an open and progressive mind. He must accept new ideas, and remember that most new ideas will come from the shooters themselves. Complacency with old techniques is fatal to progress. However, all new ideas are not sound ones and after due consideration, a coach must firmly reject ideas that are worthless or harmful. He must also be alert to recognize the difference between a shooter's conduct of a useful experiment and shooter's adoption of a gimmick.

14. A coach must at all times be objective and observant. Many times he will be able to detect irregularities that affect performance even before the shooter is aware of them. One of the coach's responsibilities is to establish a routine for his shooters. He must then learn how this routine can be upset by matches on unfamiliar ranges and how a change in routine upsets the individual shooters. He must consider unfavorable match conditions as a deterrent to good scores. He must then train his shooters to accept and adjust to such irregularities.

15. During practice a coach must set exacting standards for himself and for his shooters. He must demand that each individual exert as much effort in practice as he exerts in an actual match. The concentration and determination required to produce a winning score cannot be turned on and off at will; it must be developed. It can be sustained only through continuing intensive training and practice.

a. It is in this area of practice that the coach will have his greatest difficulty. Some shooters invariably feel that practice performance is not as important as match performance, and therefore does not require as much effort. They must be made to recognize that practice is not only a physical exercise, but also an exercise of the will.

b. Practice sessions are also the time to teach the shooter to rely upon himself to analyze and critique his own performance. He must learn to diagnose a symptom and prescribe a treatment. This training is necessary preparation for that time when the shooter is firing a match and must be his own coach.

16. A coach should at all times be alert for a bad rifle. He must recognize and accept that occasionally a rifle will be the cause of poor performance. Most good shooters are reluctant to blame a rifle for a poor score. The coach, however, must constantly consider this possibility and take action to see that the rifle is maintained to permit maximum performance on the part of the shooter.

Never, under any circumstance, should a man be allowed to continue to shoot a rifle that is not performing properly. A poor rifle may destroy a shooter's confidence in himself, or become an excuse for a poor performance. Detecting a bad rifle and insuring that the fault is corrected is the responsibility of the coach; otherwise, some shooters will become amateur gunsmiths and unintentionally alter the accuracy of otherwise good rifles.

17. The coach should keep a constant check on the condition of all equipment in addition to rifles. This need not be a formal, organized inspection, but rather a continuing process during training. Setting a standard of maintenance not only helps to preserve equipment, it also gives the shooter confidence in the reliability of his equipment. Never allow a shooter to arrive at a match site with faulty equipment. Even if an excellent replacement item is available, the shooter is handicapped to a degree by entering the match with an unfamiliar item.

18. A coach must never be satisfied with an average performance from a shooter, nor should he allow the shooter to be satisfied. He should inspire the shooter to strive for perfection at all times. However, standards of performance must be flexible enough to comply with the abilities of both the novice and the expert. When each shooter has reached the level of performance set for him, the coach must convince the shooter that he must set a new, higher standard for himself. It must be remembered that behind any poor performance there must be a valid reason. Identification and correction of errors is the only solution to preventing repetition, and this must be worked out by proper rapport between the coach and shooter.

19. A training program must be designed to meet the requirements of each individual rather than the requirements of the group as a whole. Training requirements will normally vary from one individual to the next because of differences in physical condition, shooting experience, etc.

20. Training must be planned, scheduled and supervised. Simply publishing a training schedule is not enough. Supervision is necessary to insure that standards of performance are met by each individual shooter. The coach must be objective in the evaluation of his training program, and he must be prepared to modify his program if it is not achieving the desired results.

21. In order to remain objective about each shooter's performance, some sort of record must be maintained. Most coaches prefer a graph scale. Generally, an examination of such a scale will reveal things that neither the coach nor the shooter was aware of. It will serve as an indicator of progress, enabling the coach to evaluate the state of training. It will point out deficiencies in training. It is best to keep a graph of each position, and an aggregate graph. This is the best way to evaluate overall progress and to detect specific weaknesses. Neither the shooter nor the coach should rely on memory for recollection of performance statistics over an extended period of time. This would negate much of the training effort, and cause improper emphasis to be placed in certain areas.

22. Generally, a coach's duties during a match will differ greatly from his duties during practice. In training, the coach will have stressed the development of self-reliance and will power. The shooters will have learned to analyze and correct their own performances.

a. This self-reliance must continue during a match, but the coach must remember that during competition a shooter is under tremendous pressures and stress.

b. During the match, the shooter will be helped immeasurably by the knowledge that his coach is nearby to help, should help be needed. The coach's presence will exercise a profound influence on the morale, attitude, enthusiasm and confidence of a shooter. He may even help in the physical preparation for the match. This will help the shooter feel that everything possible is being done to create the best conditions for his performance.

c. During the match, the coach must be constantly alert for irregularities in procedure or match conditions that will affect the shooters. He must intercede in the interest of his shooter in any argument, and protest in his behalf when any rule infraction occurs. The shooter's only responsibility should be to perform as best he can.

23. An important phase of coaching should always occur immediately after a match. Simply telling the shooters they did not do well is not enough. The coach must make them realize that there are reasons for both good and bad performances. He must help them determine the reasons why their own performances were good or bad, as the case may be. If a shooter discovers the reasons for a poor performance, then that performance was not an entirely wasted effort. Listed below are a few of the more frequent reasons for poor performance.

a. Lack of Knowledge. The shooter with this difficulty is blindly groping for an answer to his shooting problems. He is constantly changing equipment and methods in his search for a satisfactory new technique.

b. Lack of Incentive. The individual is satisfied with his level of performance and has no desire to be a champion unless all of his competitors' performances will decline sufficiently to allow him to be a winner.

c. Lack of Team Spirit. The individual with this difficulty may not be fully in accord with the team effort because of personal differences with other team members or the coach.

d. Inability to Make Corrections. This individual cannot admit that he has committed a mistake but is always ready with an excuse for a poor performance.

e. Lack of Proper Guidance. The individual has the ability, but may be handicapped by over-confidence or pessimism. He needs more objective coaching where the emphasis is on performance rather than on probable results.

f. Lack of Ability. This reason is the most difficult for a shooter to accept.

24. We have, by design, refrained from giving specific solutions to hypothetical or actual problems. We feel that solutions will come of themselves with the development of an individual coaching style and technique. While shooters A and B have identical problems, their solutions will be approached in a different manner, by various coaches. Both coaches may obtain different results by hard work on the part of themselves and their shooter. The coach who knows as much as possible about fundamentals and basic principles, who persuades his shooters to employ these fundamentals with enthusiasm, and who does not alienate himself from his shooter--that coach has the qualifications for success.