

AN INTERNATIONAL SHOOTING COMPETITION  
AND SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT TRAINING AND MATCH PRESSURE

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This presentation was accompanied by slides. Even without, we feel the information is very valuable.

This is a photo of the Olympic gold medal. For most shooters this is the ultimate and/or the World Shooting Championships gold medal. I've earned one of these now, and that was working full time and shooting part time, so there is hope. My first shooting goal was to be the best shooter in my club, and then when I reached Fort Benning, there were so many other better shooters that my goal was just to make a WC team. I was concerned if I made the team, I was a little concerned with what I could do with it. My goal was a little shortsighted. Up until the last years, I really didn't think I could win a world medal and this was part of what was holding me back.

And here is the big four - Murdock, Writer, Bassham and Wigger - after setting five new world records at the Confederation of Americas Shooting Championships in Mexico in 1973. Notice the large crowd behind them with scopes, watching every shot. This is one of the thrills of an international match - having people watch you shoot. I talked with Gary Anderson about this the first time I made a team and he said while some people use a negative approach and try to block the crowd out of their mind, most of the crowd is with you, pulling for you, so just turn around and smile and then get on with your shooting.

If you are victorious, there are lots of newsmen waiting to interview you, another new experience that doesn't occur in the states.

This is a photo of one of the shooters I met. You'll notice on the board here is a display of the trade pins I have collected during my shooting career. The sport politics that occur so often with shooting officials are not so prevalent among competitors. Meeting other competitors, getting to know them and respect them is one of the nicest rewards of making an international team.

This is the range in Munich. You can see the netting used as baffles to help control the wind conditions. In Europe, you often shoot prone off tables instead of on the ground. Hopefully the grass hasn't been mowed so you can use it as a wind indicator as well as the flags. Here they used Gehmann boxes. In Europe you also encounter Speith targets which are a cable arrangement with electric buttons. The constant sending targets in and out can be a distraction at first, but you get used to it. One of these targets moving adjacent to you can also temporarily affect the wind conditions. The Europeans don't always use spotting scopes, so they roll the target in after each shot to take a look at it and then they send it back out again. The acoustical tiles on the range were outstanding, making it very quiet. These photos were taken on a training trip, so this shows us trying out the crossbow. The course of fire is 30 kneeling and 30 standing. No palm rests, but you may have a two-stage trigger and hook buttplate. They are heavy like 300 meter rifles, usually laminated to take the extreme pressure. The ten ring is smaller than a

nickel. It is shot at 30 meters. They use a bubble level to keep the bow absolutely level and follow through is extremely important. I think the German record kneeling is 296. Lots of fun.

This is the view of Thun, Switzerland from my hotel window. And this is the snack area at the shooting ranges. At these WC's there were about 53 countries participating. The opening ceremonies are always impressive. Here in this large soccer stadium there was standing room only. The Swiss really follow shooting.

Before you shoot, you must go through "control" like we're doing here to have equipment checked. Here they placed stickers on the guns and also on a control card that was checked on the line each time you shot a match.

The air rifle range was in a gym. The lighting proved to be bad, resulting in low scores generally. It looked okay, but was deceiving. People were sitting in the bleachers, having paid to watch air rifle. Of course, a scorekeeper sat behind each shooter.

On the official 50 meter range, the block walls you see here greatly influenced shooting performances, making conditions very unequal. If you were next to the wall you had the advantage. Here you see the boxes provided for offhand rests.

This is a range we found to train on, so that those of us who shot later could practice. You usually don't get much practice on the range where an international match is shot. You have to figure the range out quickly. One of the good things the U.S. team does when Colonel Pullum coaches the team is to share what each shooter learned so we can handle the range as a team more quickly.

This is Margaret trying to figure out which way to shoot!

MM: I was trying to figure out which way the sun would come up, if it did, because it had been overcast the whole time in practice. You see the coco matting here that was provided for kneeling.

DK: There is the autobahn. During 300 meter shooting, people parked their cars, hopped out and watched you shoot.

You see the clock here. Starting in 1971, after Margaret lost her 300 meter championship due to time confusion among the ISU officials, there has been a very visible time piece for the shooters.

MM: This really saved Dave! He shot right down to the wire. On the range clock he had less than thirty seconds left when he fired his last shot to break the world record and win the match. Thanks to unofficial scorekeepers, the crowd knew he was doing well and really had a thrill that day. Both Wig and Foster had already broken the record, so it was a great day for the U.S. There were over a thousand people there, just packed in. Over fifteen hundred tickets were sold to the 300 meter range alone!

DK: It's really a thrill to win over there, especially in the big bore events. The Swiss have to shoot until they are fifty-two years old in their army reserve, so they really understand and appreciate your skill. I couldn't buy a

drink that night, people gave me gifts, people wanted autographs, and young girls would come up and have me autograph their wrists. Margaret even had one guy ask here to autograph his chest.

You see the Swiss riding their bikes out to the ranges on the weekend with their rifle slung over their shoulders. You see them on the trains with all kinds of army weapons.

This photo shows the scoreboard behind each shooter that is required for ISU matches. This way the spectators know who is shooting well. This is not an official score, but in a country like Switzerland with knowledgeable scorekeepers they are usually very close to official results.

This is Deiter Anschutz whose company makes our Anschutz rifles. These are the flags of all the countries that participated. Here is the big four again. They placed 1-2-3-4 in the three-position smallbore event, shutting out the Russians completely. The trophy they are holding is the oldest ISU shooting trophy dating back before 1900. There is a booklet inside. All the teams that have won it through the years have signed the book.

See that little kid. He's after Bassham's autograph. Even on the street in town, when you are in civilian clothing, they recognize you and want autographs. Gary Anderson came over to watch and people remembered him from the 1960's and asked for his autograph. The person who pulls your targets in the pits usually finds you later and wants your autograph. They also sometimes autograph the dinking paddle and give it to you. Shooting is really important and popular there. And having shooters help run the matches really makes them go smoothly.

This shows the closing ceremony. Often you attend a banquet on the last evening. The hospitality in Europe is outstanding. This ends the slide presentation.

RF: What goes through your mind in a big competition like that when you shoot a six?

DK: You hear a big "ah-h-h". The crowd starts to disappear. Actually, I wasn't aware of the crowd at that point. I had already shot the smallbore standard rifle event, which was the first position event I had ever shot in world competition. I had really trained for it and I wanted to do well because I was concerned how I would do under this kind of pressure, especially standing. My practice scores were high and I thought even if I didn't shoot well, it wouldn't be too low. I had good scores in practice while in Switzerland. I was on the second relay, and was not quite ready to shoot when my relay was called, which bothered me a little bit. They only gave us fifteen minutes to move onto the line before commence fire. I shot a 569 and it was won with a 574, so I was fairly satisfied with my performance. This gave me much needed confidence. Going into 300 meter Standard Rifle was a lot easier. I was relaxed, except that I had eaten beef fondue that night before which didn't agree with me. I got into the prone position and had a pulse beat! But now my trigger technique, if I have pulse beat, is to add pressure towards the bottom of the beat. I purposely group a little bit low so I can still hang a ten if the shot breaks a little early or late. I had a good score even with the pulse (198), so I started offhand. There was still tension, but not the freaked-out kind

with your pulse 160 and your legs wobbly. I knew we had a good team and that we could still have a couple of average scores and win. This helps because you don't feel everything is on your shoulders. I was shooting along pretty well and my position felt good, but it started getting darker as the sky clouded over from behind, and I needed my clear glasses which were out of reach. It's illegal to have anyone hand them, so I debated and finally decided to get out of position to get them. When I got back into position. I dry-fired many times and it felt okay. The next few shots went fairly well. When my fourth shot went off, it seemed like my position adversely affected it and it recoiled wildly. It looked like a nine, but when it went off it recoiled out the side for a scratch six. So I moved my feet - it was a learning experience for me because something is wrong with the bloody position. I dry-fired some more and shot fairly well - an 86 on that string for a 179, so with my good prone score it was still competitive. I also remembered that Lones Wigger had a six at the 1964 Olympics and still won. Writer shot a six in the 1970 WC smallbore event and still set a world record. So I figured I wasn't dead yet.

Then came kneeling. I only had thirty minutes remaining but things went pretty well. The guy beside me was slow also and I had to time my shots between his so I wouldn't get set off. He would sometimes hold for thirty seconds trying to break a shot. I was down one after four shots and I realized I could shoot a 98 or 99 on this, but I could also shoot a 94. My eighth shot went off at the top of my pulse beat and I thought I had shot an eight. It came up a nine, almost a ten. So I decided if I could have a shot look that bad and be almost a ten, there was no reason I couldn't run the rest tens. I got down to my last few shots and the crowd was starting to build up then, and you could hear them everytime the disk came up indicating a ten, sometimes an "x". I got down to the last shot and decided, "you are not worth a pinch of you-know-what if you can't make the last shot a ten." The wind picked up a little so I came right a click and down a click. As soon as I fired the shot the crowd applauded. And when the disk came up a ten they freaked out and started whistling and cheering.

BW: It was an amazing sight. Unbelievable! Lanny Bassham said he got so nervous watching Kimes shoot the last ten shots that he said if he had to get down and shoot at the point, that he wouldn't have been able to hold on the frame.

DK: Writer told me when he tries to make a WC team, he tries to make English Match or something prior to his main event so he can be more relaxed by the time he shoots the big event (for him three-position). This helps take the tension off.

This type of "school" you kids are in is great. It took Margaret and I ten to fifteen years to learn techniques we are telling you about. You should be able to apply these in a much shorter time span. I envy you people. It took me years to get a good kneeling position and I'm still trying to find a good standing position. I think you are really fortunate.

I want to talk now about a SHOOTING NOTEBOOK or diary. Particularly on ranges, at the national internationals, you only get out here once a year and you can't remember the important detail you learned last week over a period of twelve months, so you should write it down, with a page for each range. Put down you wish you had an ice chest or a chair or salt pills or what works for you. For example, I used to drink a lot of Gatorade out here at Phoenix, four or five bottles a day, and it

affected my blood sugar count because it is high in sucrose. It made me a bit shakey and thus affected my hold. So now I sip it, and I wrote this in my notebook. It took me three or four years at Phoenix to figure this out. Have various pages to put in parallax adjustments for your scope, iron sight zeros for different rifles, clicks taken from prone to standing, standing to kneeling, sizes of apertures, position notes to aid you in assuming the correct position - like placement of the feet for standing, sling adjustments, aperture sizes. I have a page on how to adjust the Anschutz two-stage trigger - you can't remember this when you only do it maybe once a year. I make notes on tightening action screws for different rifles, how many pounds pressure, which screw you tighten first. I have a page for each gun on which I note everything that is done to the gun, like a new trigger, new glass job, and so on. Writer marks a serial number on his triggers so he can keep track of how many rounds he has shot with each. He only gets twenty to thirty thousand rounds per trigger, before it begins to affect his standing score.

I would like to cover some things I've learned in the last few years. I like to call it "You, Your Preparation, Your Training and Match Pressure Psychology". Incorporated into my talk, as well as everyone elses' that you have heard so far, are many years of hard work and experimentation. Much of this you can discover in just a few afternoons. So take advantage of it. I wish I had been so lucky.

While traveling to the range - or better yet, earlier that week - plan out your practice session. For example, maybe your standing is weak, so shoot standing first, then some kneeling, and then standing again, having let your back get rested during kneeling. But plan what you want to accomplish ahead of time, then set out to do it. But even before this, make sure that your gear is in shape.

Rifle - does it shoot well? Test it - with a scope and good ammo. It can be tuned up - tighten bedding screws, clean it and the bolt, etc.

The trigger is very important. It especially should not have any creep. If it does, get it adjusted or have someone check it for you. This is especially critical standing! It should be consistent - check it with a trigger gauge!

Sights - Take them off each time unless you have a sturdy rifle carrying case. Keep them clean - perhaps store them in a baggie. Have them checked with a dial indicator. Each click should be the same with no slack when changing directions.

Sling - Have the adjustment holes marked with numbers. Keep track of this so you can get the same adjustment each time.

Glove - should not be too thick. It should fit comfortably.

Spotting Scope - keep it clean, should be about 20 - 25 power. Support it with an adjustable mount. Always adjust it to eye level - you should not have to alter your position to spot your shots.

Sight Inserts - Have a handy container for your inserts, organized so you can find the ones you want quickly! Proper size in conjunction with an adjustment rear iris should always give you a clear distinct sight picture.

Tools - always have screwdrivers that will fit your trigger, action screws, sights, fore-end stop and buttplate.

Pliers - it seems that they are always needed when you don't have them handy, e.g., when fore-end stop is too tight.

Glasses - Dark glasses for bright days cuts glare and also gives a more clear sight picture plus safety. If you are shooting big bore then use clear glasses for dark days, but always wear them. I mainly use them to support side blinders which help me to avoid distractions.

Stopwatch - Get a better one than a kitchen timer. It should be accurate within a few seconds of the range timer and fairly easy to read.

Noise Protectors - A must, even for .22. They save your hearing in the long run. Plus they allow more complete concentration while shooting.

Keep a Notebook - This is very important! Maintain separate pages for parallax adjustments for scope, iron sight zeros, etc. Write down the size aperture you use for each position and distance. Keep a page for each position. Make specific notes on placement of feet, sling adjustments, aperture sizes, and zero changes from one position to another. Keep notes on your triggers. How to adjust them - write it down when someone shows you. Action screws are important so keep notes on how to tighten them and in what order. Check them once in awhile. Ask someone who knows about the proper torque. Maybe keep a separate page for each gun.

Ranges - keep notes on prevailing winds and how you shoot in it, odd things noticed such as slope of firing points, heights of targets, directions to the range, good motel you stayed at last time. Make notes of things you need to take - chair, stand or something for standing, clips, water, food. Camp Perry is a good example - you are only there once a year, too long to really remember the conditions and extra things you needed.

Scores - Keep track of your scores, especially your position scores! If you do this you tend to work harder in practice. It's easier to note your progress and find weak spots. Throw in a notation for wind, hangovers, or gun problems.

Rules - Have a copy of the rule book in your equipment box. Know the rules. Not knowing them could cost you or your team the match.

Shooting Jacket - Check it every once in awhile. Make sure elbows are not worn or slick or that the buttons aren't about to pull off.

Sweat Shirt(s) - should not be too tight, preferably use two shirts. The total thickness of your undershirts and sweat shirt can be as thick as your jacket.

Shoes - I recommend light boots. Tennis shoes are okay if you have a good kneeling roll. They should be large enough for your feet and a thick pair of socks should be worn. Bevel the heels for more comfort in the kneeling position.

Kneeling Roll - should not be foam as this never really settles. Should not be super hard rubber as this will not contour comfortably to your ankle. I recommend a legal-sized bag packed with thin cloth. This will conform to your ankle, is comfortable, and gives steady support. (About sixty percent of your weight is placed on your ankle and kneeling roll.)

Okay, back to your practice session. Get to the range, put up your target, set up your gear, load your ammo block. Now relax a few minutes. Think again about what you plan to do in this practice session. Work on your hold? Work on a particular position? Learn to shoot in the wind better? Whatever, but be deliberate in your practice. Always try to shoot tens. If you do not shoot a ten, think about why. Discover why and then work to correct the problem. Use your head. If you cannot find out why or your solutions do not help, then ask someone. Ask me, your coach, read Bill Pullum's book on position rifle shooting, get an MTU International Manual. But get several opinions and find the one that works for you. Get to know your hold, in standing and in kneeling. Eventually your kneeling hold should be very similar to your prone hold. Work for this.

If you really get to know your hold standing, then you can easily apply more trigger pressure as it comes into or towards the ten ring, but only in a certain familiar way. Keep working on making your hold better. Jerky movements in your hold mean too much active muscle support. Keep adjusting and thinking about the position. Have someone take some pictures of you with a Polaroid camera so you can look at your position and analyze it. Compare it to the pictures of the champions. They should be similar. When you are getting into position, any of the positions, close your eyes, wiggle the rifle or position until it feels comfortable, then open your eyes. If you are not on target, then adjust your position, moving the entire position until you are settled approximately on the bull. The few seconds spent here will reward you many times over. It will get you more days when you sometimes call some shots just out but they go in the center. This is mostly a result of a good natural point of aim and good follow through.

Try to practice at the same time of day as your matches are held. Shoot at least the same number of shots in a position as you shoot in your matches. I try to shoot more. It gives me stamina and confidence that I can endure any match delays or problems. Time yourself as if in a match. If you are doing extra well, then keep shooting! Don't stop at the end of the string. Do this to reinforce in your mind and body the feeling of how to shoot well so you can more easily remember next time. It helps build your confidence. Or conversely, if you are shooting poorly, try to find out why. Try slowing down and work especially hard on your last few shots. Try to finish up with a ten. Spend at least two-thirds of your practice time shooting standing. Standing is probably where the most number of points can be gained per hour of practice. But don't just shoot, also work on making your hold better. Follow through for a few seconds after each shot. Maybe dry-fire every other shot if you are having problems.

Set some goals. How far do you want to go in shooting? Twenty years ago I never would have dreamed that shooting would get me Collegiate All-American, the World Championships, Hemisphere Games, Europe five times (including Russia), and two world records. Not until a year or two ago did I really start to discover or realize what had been holding me back. My mental attitudes and goals - they had not really been well thought out. Sure I wanted to make the U.S. Team to the World Shooting Championships, but I had not really set up an actual training program with that in mind. I always thought that to shoot better I would have to make my hold better, and I had not really thought enough about match pressure.

Let me cover these three areas. I found that to be assured of shooting a good score in the big matches you should get your practice and smaller match average up

there about a year before the event. This is to build up confidence and allow you to work out any other problems such as work on your rifle, selecting the good lots of ammunition, learning more about shooting in the wind or whatever. So you should formulate some goals. Try to win in your class or even overall at some of the matches at your club. Keep correcting your mistakes. Pretty soon you will be winning. Start working on matches at other clubs, including regionals and registered matches, etc. As you do better, you are building self-confidence. Always keep working on making your hold better, but don't expect a bad score if your hold is not as good on a particular day. Work on shooting well anyway. The day I set the World Record at the World Championships my prone hold at first check was only nine ring with a pulse beat. But I didn't let that bother me. I rechecked my position and my natural point of aim. Settle your position so that when your hold settles or stops at the bottom of the beat, it is in the ten ring. Now just apply more pressure to the trigger as your hold moves into or towards the ten ring to stop. As it moves away from the ten ring, hold most of the pressure, as it moves back into or near the ten ring, add more pressure. This takes a lot of practice, but it works. Concentrate on shooting that ten! This saved me in the kneeling position that day (198).

Think about match pressure and think about how to handle your reactions or unexpected reactions when they occur in a match. Try to be ready for them. So many shooters spend hundreds of hours practicing but almost no time thinking about pressure or nervousness. When it hits them, they may blow the match or drop down from their average, but when the match is over they think, well maybe next time and that is it. I used to do this also.

Look! Almost everyone else is also experiencing match pressure, but some can put this pressure to their advantage. It makes them more alert and they try harder. You can think or say, "Well, I'm one of the best here and if I feel pressure, think what everyone else must be feeling". Don't think about what the other guy might shoot - or if you shoot a bad shot, what you have to shoot to catch up. The most important score at the match is your score. Don't worry about anyone else's score. Try to think of the match as many one-shot matches. If you shoot a bad shot, then think, well okay some people beat me on that one, but I can beat them on this next one. Try to make every thought and action a positive one. Don't worry about shooting a bad shot or sure enough you will. No matter what happens, keep trying to shoot tens. Think center as you shoot each shot. You will be surprised how much this helps. Watch the best shooters. Talk to the best shooters. Ask them what they do about match pressure. But don't be afraid of match pressure. As you progress into the expert and master class, up to ninety percent of your thoughts about shooting should be spent on this mental training.

Now enjoy a match. This is your opportunity to try out what you have been practicing and see if it works in a match. Get to the match early enough to be able to set up without having to rush. Maybe think about the type of performance you would like to turn out as you are setting up your gear. This is your opportunity to see how high you can shoot in a match. Don't give up. Work hard through the very last shot. After the match, take a few minutes to think about your performance. Jot down a few notes or ideas for next time. But learn from your experience and you will get better and better. Never give up. Sometimes it will seem like the lyrics to that song, "work your fingers to the bone and what do you get - bony fingers". But, Willie Mays didn't get a hit his first twenty-six times at bat in the major leagues. His first hit was a home run off of Warren Spahn.