

SUPPLEMENTAL TRAINING

Lanny Bassham

My topic is going to include a number of things that you can do when you're not holding a rifle to improve your shooting. To me this includes physical training, air rifle, and keeping a shooting diary.

One of the most important areas of supplemental training, I feel, is the need to expand your mental ability to shoot. It's presumptuous of me to try to give you a class on mental training in this short time. I would like to mention those things that you might consider doing to improve your mental game. What it really boils down to is taking advantage of opportunities. You're all out here taking advantage of the best opportunity I've ever seen, which is to take a course like this which has never been given before.

A lot of times you go to matches and you observe people doing things. Be more observant at matches of the people who are beating you. That's a real good way to learn. I shot for a long time there at Benning and I really didn't look at Wigger. I sometimes watched him for a few shots, but I didn't study him. Just once go to a match in which the top shooters are competing, don't enter it, just watch them. Watch them shoot the whole match. Take a notebook and write down what you observe.

This brings me to the first point I want to make about mental training. You don't remember things you don't write down. It's called original awareness. What somebody tells you or what you observe, you need some way to reinforce in order to remember. When you see or hear something that you think will help, as soon as you can, repeat it to yourself, and then write it down. This brings me to your diary.

Don't do like I did for the first three years of my shooting. I used my diary for a score book. There's a difference between a diary and a score book. If you keep a good shooting diary, you won't need a score book. What is a shooter's diary? It's a reflection, a permanent record of everything you do in your training session. Its purpose is to keep you from repeating the same mistakes you made today and to reinforce the things you did well today. I have all my diary's cataloged at home, and when I went back to read '71 and '72, I had written things like, "Today I shot kneeling. I had a 96, 97, 92, 98. The wind was blowing from the right." Now how is this going to help me in the future? It's not. You should see the diaries I keep now. Write down before you start training each day what you want to accomplish. Write something like, "Today I want to work on kneeling. I want to make my hold better. I want to improve my position," or "Today I want to work on my ability to concentrate. I want to be able to sit down and shoot forty shots kneeling without getting up." Writing it down will force you to answer that question at the end of the day when you finish. You'll have to tell yourself whether you did or did not accomplish your training aim. Otherwise you can have a training session and not do anything. If all you're doing is getting your shooting muscles in shape, you're only using about 10 percent of your training time. Your diary will make you think before you act.

All right, we haven't picked up a rifle yet, but we know what we want to do. Then you shoot. Next is performance analysis. This is my opinion. Most top shooters do it in some way, but not necessarily just like this. It could take me an hour to talk about this, but I'll reduce it to a few brief theorems. When you get through shooting you should first of all write down everything you did wrong that you have a solution for. Don't write anything down wrong you don't have a solution for, because you'll reinforce it. I don't want to read through my diary and find problems. I want to read it and find solutions. For example, "My first ten shots kneeling were flaky today, because I didn't have my sling tight enough - so I tightened my sling and ran my next ten shots." I used to have trouble shooting my first shot for record in a match. So I worked in training on my first shot, on how to get going on my first shot. Don't write, "I can't" about any problem you are having. That's negativity. We don't want any of that.

Second, you want to write down those things you did well. The last thing you write in your diary is what you did good. Write a lot on what you did good. Think about how it feels to shoot good. What made you shoot good. Write it down. What made you shoot good when you were really cookin'. Then go back and reread this. If you only write one thing in your diary, write what you did good. So when you get up to shoot the next time, you just might feel the same way. I think your probability of feeling the same way will increase. That's what it's all about. You want that good shooting feeling. Not that "I'm in trouble, I'm lost" feeling. A diary will help you do it. If you want to stick your scores in there, fine.

The third thing a diary is for is to record observations. Anything that you see that you think might improve your chances of shooting better here tomorrow, or shooting here next year, write it down. You guys ought to have fifty pages written on Phoenix if this is your first time out here. If there is any range in the world you need to learn fast on, it is this one. You are going to be here again. I've written more about Black Canyon in my diaries than any other range I've been on. I know this is where I have to make the U.S. teams. I read it every year before I come out here.

Now shooters will tell you this, but they don't do it. It's work. So before you take off to go get a cool drink, write in your diary. If you wait two days, you've lost it. Then you've lost that training day, and you have to go back and repeat it. We want to maximize our training days to get the most out of that time spent with the rifle. I don't want it to take me five years to make a world team, if I can do it in two or next year. Your mind can only do two things - either learn or relearn. Make sure you are learning more than you are relearning. Your diary can help you do this.

Also in your diary, you can put down what you learn from other shooters. Talk to other shooters who are doing something better than you are doing. Whatever they do better than you - read wind better, think better, shoot better standing, etc. - talk to them about it. It doesn't have to be Writer or Margaret or people like this. It can be your peers. It can be other juniors who shoot better than you do. Talk to anybody you can get to sit still long enough for you to ask a question, then shut up and listen. Then write it down, learn from it, pick their brain until you learn from them. Don't worry about upsetting them. I'll tell you when you're bugging me. As long as I'm sitting there answering questions, I don't have anything

else that is more important for me to do than answer your questions. So ask, I'll tell you everything I know that time will allow. Most of you are doing this here and that's great. If I have to leave, or I'm super tired, or I'm sick, I'll tell you. I'll tell you something about good shooters like Wig and Writer and Margaret and myself. You're not going to disturb our concentration. You're not going to hurt our shooting. We're not going to let you. Now, with other juniors you should perhaps choose time after the match rather than before or during it. You should be considerate of your competitor. To sum up then, be aggressive in your search for knowledge.

You can learn from others. You can also learn from yourself. This is the fourth thing that a diary is for. Write down how you feel. Take a look at it in its true terms. The more analytical you are about yourself, the faster your development in trying to beat yourself. You have to know your enemy. Most people don't know themselves too well. They try to avoid getting too intimate with themselves. You think, "Oh, I know me." But you get in a match and you get scared, and you have to know why and where these fears come from. You can't do this unless you think about it, write it down and learn from how you feel. This year is very similar to 1974 for me. I won a lot of matches coming into Phoenix that year and I won big in Phoenix. This year the pattern has been the same. I read my diary to see how I felt. I was scared coming into Phoenix in 1974 the night before the first day of smallbore. I had some self-doubt. I caught myself thinking, "You've been winning all year but you just might blow it here." I was feeling the same way this year. Reading my diary made me feel this is probably normal for me. Maybe I need to feel apprehensive to shoot well. Last year I didn't feel apprehensive and I didn't shoot well. I shot consistent, but I didn't really shoot good. So what would seem to be bad, may be good for you. If you write down your feelings, maybe you can see some correlation in the future.

Now I want to talk about physical training. All over the world when I go to shoot, one of the first questions I'm asked is what I do to physically train. Now Wig and Foster have a completely different view on this. This is my view. Number one - the best exercise for shooting is shooting. Not running, gymnastics, weight lifting, nor any other form of exercise. Is Wig physically training for shooting? Yes, because he's shooting.

Are there other exercises that are good? I took a graduate course in exercise in Career Course last summer. I'm thoroughly convinced that the cardiovascular system and the respiratory system can be improved through aerobic exercise. You'll be able to hold longer, train harder, and be more physically fit for this competition if you engage in an active running or swimming program.

I'm a runner. I don't run hard. I used to run hard, but this can be overdone. If you'll run a mile and a half a day, not hard but just jog along, in six weeks your cardiovascular system will start showing real signs of improvement. There is really no need to run ten miles a day. When you run daily, your resting heart rate will come down. That sounds good for a shooter, right? I heard a lecture by Dr. Kenneth Cooper who wrote Aerobics. I wasn't paying too much attention when he said if you run you'll live longer, you won't have heart disease, etc. All I wanted was to make the Olympics, so this didn't impress me then. But then he said, "it lowers your resting heart beat." I sat up. This is what I wanted. And this is when I began to run. My heart beat then was 72 which is the average for the

American male. It's 80 for women. So I thought if I could get it down to 60, I could shoot between heartbeats kneeling. I got it down to 60 and my kneeling scores came up. So then I thought I'll keep running and get it down to twelve, so I'll have three seconds to fire a shot. So I got it down to 55. It came down fairly quickly. The only problem is the same amount of blood is going through your veins at 55 beats a minute, as at 100 beats a minute. So the stroke volume - that is the amount of blood the heart takes in per beat is increased because it takes more blood in and pushes it out harder. When I got down to 55 I only had a pulse beat about every 1.10 seconds, but when I had the beat it was a hum-dinger. So you don't want to go below about 60 beats per minute or you start having problems with stroke volume. I don't think long-distance runners can make it as shooters because they wouldn't be able to hold eight ring prone.

You need to spend less than 30 minutes a day on running to get the optimum benefit. There are also some differences for women that you ought to be aware of. Get one of Dr. Cooper's books on aerobics and read it for a fuller understanding of all I've been saying. It will tell you how to begin running or swimming and how often you should do it. Don't start with a mile and a half. Train, don't strain. You don't have to hurt to improve your cardiovascular system. You will gradually improve. Walk and run the whole mile and a half. Eventually you'll be able to run the full distance without pain.

Now when you improve and you decide you can sprint the last 200 yards, there is one important thing to remember. What makes the blood come back to the heart after you've run full out? Muscular contractions. So be sure you walk out until you cool down. Otherwise your heart reaches for blood and there's no blood, so your ventricle has to expand to suck the blood in from your limbs. That's why heart attacks occur so often on the weekends. Out of condition people play or work hard, taxing the heart and then suddenly stop. The heart panics and they have a heart attack. If you engage in aerobic exercise regularly, you'll feel tremendous. You'll be happier. When you're out here in Phoenix and everybody is saying how tired they are, you'll be feeling great. A quick rule is that if you don't double your resting heartbeat for at least twelve minutes, you aren't doing any good. So swimming and cycling can also be beneficial but it takes more. Now you may want to have special training for special places. If you all are thinking about going to Benito Juarez in Mexico City, you may need a more active training program. You should be on a running program before going. Don't run while you are there because it will wax you (ask Gloria Parmentier).

Most top shooters I know don't spend a lot of time on things like lifting weights, exercises, etc. The Europeans do, but we're beating them. Time is your biggest asset. It's the way you spend your time that is important. If a guy has ten hours a week to train and he spends four hours a week running five miles a day, he's a fool. Shooting is the most important thing.

The time when you're learning the most is when your mind is on shooting or when you're shooting. You're not learning anything when you're loading or breathing or standing up there aiming and reaiming. You can maximize your training if you'll be aggressive with your time. Don't take thirty minutes to set up your gear. Get ready to go. Put the gun in your shoulder and shoot. Kick your shell out, load again and check your wind. Then shoot. Don't sit there inbetween resting. Why do you need to rest? You've only shot one shot. Shooters get into a habit of wasting

time because this is the way they've always shot. They shoot slow. "I'm a slow shooter. I shoot better when I shoot slow." Well, you may shoot better when you shoot slow, but this other guy who shoots fast is getting three times the number of rounds in the amount of time he spends training than you are. How long is it going to take him to bypass you? Now, I'm not saying that you should rush your shooting. Don't rush the act of shooting. Take all the time you want to shoot the shot. But after you've shot the shot, try to get in the habit of rejecting the shell, putting in another shell and getting back into position with a minimum amount of time. If you need to take a rest as you go along, that's fine. But do it because you need the rest, not out of habit. Most college shooters I've worked with shoot extremely slow. Why? Because they are given a minute and a half to shoot a shot, so they take it. That's not a good reason to shoot that slow. If you have a good reason for it, and you shoot well that way, do it. Dave Kimes is the world's slowest shooter. But he shoots good that way. I'm not going to walk up to Dave and say speed up. But if it doesn't make any difference to you whether you shoot slow or shoot fast, shoot fast. You'll get more shots down range in your training time, you'll learn faster and you'll get more shots downrange in your wind condition. Now Margaret is a slower shooter. But if you ask her if she'd rather be able to shoot forty shots in fifteen minutes than forty shots in an hour, she'd say forty shots in fifteen minutes. Be aggressive about the time you're wasting in-between shots. Also, you lose concentration and give yourself the opportunity to talk yourself out of a shot. The longer you wait between shots the more chance you have for extraneous thoughts to come in.

The next thing I want to talk about in supplemental training is air rifle. The jury is still out on this, but the evidence is getting stronger for what I'm fixin' to say. Let me illustrate it by an example. If I were in charge of the development of ten shooters, all of equal ability, desire, dedication and time, with the goal being to make the best 50 meter free rifle shooters out of these guys that I could, and I put five on free rifle alone and the other five with sixty percent of their time on free rifle, thirty-five percent of their time on air rifle and five percent of their time with gallery scope, I'll bet that at the end of the year the guys who shot both air rifle and free rifle will be stomping the guys who shot just free rifle. In my opinion, what's killing us in college is that all you shoot is free rifle. By two-thirds way into the season, you're so sick of free rifle you're bored in your training. Shoot air rifle, shoot standard rifle. Most of you all do this. That's why you are winning in collegiate matches. Air rifle is a fantastic form of training. The only disadvantage I see to shooting air rifle is that when you change guns, you have to get used to another trigger unless you shoot the same brand of rifles in both events.

What does air rifle do for you? I can duplicate ninety percent of everything I do mentally while shooting my free rifle with my air rifle. I can duplicate about thirty to forty percent of what I do technically. Air rifle allows you to see what's happening at the moment of ignition. It does improve your follow through.

I'm an advocate of shooting a lot of events. I shoot skeet, running boar, rapid fire pistol and all six rifle events. I want to warn you about this though, I'm not dropping smallbore to go shoot skeet. I'm not dropping smallbore and just shooting air rifle. First, I always shoot smallbore. You've got to shoot your primary gun, the gun you want to make the team on. Continue to shoot smallbore,

but phase in a little bit of air rifle. Air rifle has a lot of advantages - it's cheap and you can shoot at home. It will improve your shooting if you'll include air rifle in your training. I started shooting air rifle when I couldn't get to the range, which forced me to take a look at air rifle and what it was doing for me. I shot better in 1974 than I'd ever shot and I feel air rifle played an important part in my performance.

I want to wind this up now with one thought - if you do something and you think it's helping you, it will help you. If you do something and you don't think it's helping you, it won't. So no matter what people tell you here, try it with an open mind, try it thinking it will help and it will. If in the back of your mind you're skeptical, it won't help. If you can't get aggressive and excited about something, then you're retarding your development.

You people are engaged in the most exciting, precision, fantastic sport going. There is nothing compared to what you go through when you're trying to weed your way through the wind at Phoenix, in the middle of a heavy-pressure tryout at a 1120, asking yourself why you are here. You realize you're thinking - this is neat, this is a challenge. It takes everything you're got, all the time. It's all on you. It's an individual sport. Everytime you shoot good, all the people that shoot rifle know what you had to do to get that score. Whether they come up and tell you or not, they know what you did. If there is any group of people who appreciate another athlete's performance, it is rifle shooters. I can really see this now that I've shot other guns. It's hard. You know what you have to put into it. The girls are walking around with calluses on their knuckles from shooting standard rifle, dressed in anything but attractive attire. But you must feel it's worth it.

To me shooting is a character building experience because you can't be a good shooter without achieving mental discipline, without having pride in your accomplishment and without working hard. If we could teach every citizen in this country to develop these three traits, we wouldn't have any problem with crime, with gross national products, with welfare, or any of these things.

Just a little mental discipline and self-control, a little dedication and pride, and the ability to work hard - that's what shooting is all about. So if you go through it and bust your fanny all through high school, college and in years to come, I guarantee it will pay off in other areas. Okay, let's have your questions.

Mr. Alves: Use of air rifle in other positions besides standing for practice - do you recommend it?

LB: I don't recommend that. Air rifles are hard to cock. I think you should train for prone and kneeling with the rifle you shoot prone and kneeling, which is smallbore. I really have not done this, and I don't know anyone who has.

DK: I had a free rifle stock inletted to air rifle just after I left MTU because I knew that being in school, I wouldn't be able to shoot smallbore at the range. I wanted to be able to shoot standing and kneeling in air rifle. I think Foster also has a free rifle stocked air rifle.

LB: Also, I meant to talk about dry-firing. There can't be anything more boring in this world than dry-firing. You almost have to be masochistic to do it. Yet, one of the single most important things that have ever happened to me in my

shooting had to do with dry-firing. When I was in college, I wasn't winning because of my kneeling. I was placing fairly well, but not winning. I didn't know where to go to get help, and the only thing I knew to do was dry-fire. I made a bet with myself by saying, "I bet you can't dry-fire one hour a day through the summer." I knew I couldn't dry-fire an hour bored. So I set up my TV, put on my coat and dry-fired to Dobbie Gillis and McHale's Navy, everyday at the same time. I didn't shoot a live round all summer. I couldn't tell that it had done anything for my kneeling on the surface then. I can remember the first card I shot when I got back to school that fall. It was good. My first match that year I shot a 395 kneeling on the first full course I'd ever fired. It didn't solve all my kneeling problems, but it moved me from the oblivion of 92 to a 99 average kneeling. Don't massacre yourself. I think about thirty minutes is the most you could do and keep your concentration. Air rifle is different because you're getting feedback. I tried writing down my calls once, but it didn't work because you have no positive feedback. Don't try to train mentally when you're dry-firing. It doesn't work. Feedback is necessary to mental training. All you're doing with dry-firing is trying to make your hold smaller. So when you get tired and your hold is getting worse, either take a rest or quit. It's no longer doing what you intended it to do for you.

Nothing that you do one time is ever going to be valuable to you. You have to do it four or five days, at least. When you make an equipment change, you should shoot a thousand shots - two cartons of ammo on that change to evaluate it. You haven't learned to shoot the new position in less than that. Make only one change at a time and evaluate it. When you get close to a big match, don't make changes. Close for me is a year. Sometimes you change guns or triggers and your scores come up, then it's good. Give position changes a long run. I've had guys come up and pick up my free rifle and say, "No wonder you shoot so good, your gun is set up perfect." So I tell him to shoot it. The first few shots are great, then he drops to his average like he usually shoots, and then he goes down. The gun doesn't fit him, he doesn't shoot well with it at all. Doing something new helps focus your concentration for a few days. It is after that that the real evaluation comes. Now you should keep abreast of advances in equipment. You should try new things - but give them awhile before forming an opinion.

The most dangerous thing you can do right now if you are shooting standard rifle is to shoot free rifle. Going from standard rifle to free rifle is like climbing from an automobile into the cockpit of an airplane. All the adjustments on the hook buttplate and the palm rest are a temptation to mess with. When you are ready to change, go to a top shooter and let him set up your free rifle till he has you looking good in your positions, mark it and shoot that way for several months in order to evaluate it correctly. All the adjusting makes it hard for you to concentrate on performance.

If somebody tells you to do something like get aggressive on your trigger, what will you start thinking about? Trigger. Now when you are shooting good, are you thinking about your trigger? No! Then how do you expect to shoot good if you are thinking about your trigger. You have to think about whatever it is you personally think about when you are shooting good. That's something else you can do with your diary. Write that down. You may find you're not thinking about anything, you're just letting it happen. If you think about trigger, you're thinking about the change. This happens on a bad shot in a match. You shoot a seven at six o'clock. So you say in your mind on the next shot, "Don't dip at six o'clock. Make sure you

don't dip at six o'clock." Boom. You've dipped at six o'clock. The last thing your mind heard was, "dip at six o'clock." You only need to tell your subconscious once to be aggressive on your trigger. Then forget it. Your mind is programmed. Go back to what you should be thinking about. I learned that two years ago, folks. I learned that shooting shotgun. I was listening to the shotgunners tell me what to do technically and realized I wasn't concentrating when I shot, but still thinking about the technical problem. Imagine shooting for fifteen years and not knowing that.

I want to say one more thing - have fun. When you're feeling pressure or it's hard or you don't want to shoot forty more shots kneeling, you need to remember you are doing it because you enjoy it. If you're not doing it because you like it, you're wasting your time, you ought to be doing something else. You're spending a lot of time and money, so you should be enjoying it. I don't want to be around you if you're not enjoying it. It's difficult a lot of times and tension builds and flares up, but in the end you have to love what you're doing. If you think about enjoying it, you probably will enjoy it a little more.

MA: Lanny, you have just outlined a program for these juniors that can make their next few years of training extremely profitable. We thank you.