

Ask Bill

Question:

Is the best way to shoot a back tension release with back tension only and no conscious finger movement or rotation of the release?

Comments:

I have known the answer to this question for 12 or 13 years but recently have been asking myself this question more and more. Why? Because, in an effort to become a better archer and teacher of archery, I like to ask successful archers and successful coaches how they do things and one of those things is shooting a backtension release. Below are some of the answers I have received from various people over the last 3 years and I thought some of you might be interested in them.

About 3 years ago there were some archers at the range where I was shooting who were asking for help with their shooting. I knew how to teach them what I was doing but I didn't have confidence that how I shot a bow was the best thing to teach others so I attended a shooting clinic primarily for the purpose of becoming a better archery coach or teacher. The instructor at that clinic emphasized back tension shooting which reinforced what I believed to be the best way to shoot.

Later that year I attended the NFAA Shooters School and Coaching Clinic. Again, the primary purpose for attending was for the coaching aspect. At that school, Bernie Pellerite taught us the "back tension only" method which further reinforced what I believed to be the best way to shoot a release.

I also talked with MJ Rogers, who had been with the NAA and is now with the NFAA and does quite a bit of coaching in California. MJ told me it needs to be both. Both back tension and finger squeeze of the release. He said to do them at the same time.

I talked to Dave Barnsdale at the 2005 Indoor Nationals shortly after he won Las Vegas for the second time. Dave had just spent a year learning to shoot a back tension release and he said he was shooting it with hand rotation only. He also said he trusts Randy Rutledge and Randy told Dave you have to rotate the release.

Larry Wise, who used to beat me most of the time many years ago and recently wrote "Core Archery", teaches the back tension only method in his book and when he coaches. Larry is a pretty high tech kind of guy and even has data from probes connected to different muscles in his back that measured muscle activity during shot execution. This data proves what the best combination of muscles is to use for proper back tension. You can read about it in his book, "Core Archery".

I spent a day with Terry Wunderle about a year and a half ago and Terry uses different terminology than anyone else I have talked to and none of it includes any reference of any kind to finger motion or squeezing of the release or release rotation.

Recently, I found an interesting thread on this topic on the internet and thought you might be interested in what I found. Here is what Nathan Brooks and Eric Griggs had to say:

Eric Griggs, 2004

I would say that virtually everyone at the top who is using a pure bt release is shooting it with travel. And...if you are shooting it with travel you can not fire the release off back tension alone. You have to maintain back tension and that's important, but moving your hand and fingers is what makes that thing fire.

Nathan Brooks, July 2006

The Larry Wise idea/method of pure back tension is by far the best feeling shot that can be executed. Some days I am right on cue with his methods. Other days, I fight every shot. If I try to shoot the Larry Wise way (pure backtension) every day, it will catch up with me at some point and I either begin to anticipate the shots or I will have some misfires/bad execution. If I set the release slow (with a lot of travel), day in and day out I can manage the shots better.

Eric Griggs, July 2006

I'll have to disagree with you guys that say hand/finger movement is a no no. Setting up for true backtension is good for some, but most people in any sort of pressure situation will have a hard time not getting tentative with their pull if there isn't some sort of movement. That finger movement and rotation of the release keeps you active in your shot. I don't see pulling on the release to make it fire as cheating. If that's the case then Chance Beauboef, Nathan Brooks, Tommy Gomez, Braden Gellenthien, myself and many others have cheated a ton of \$\$\$ out of everyone in the last few years. There is no doubt that the feeling of true back tension with the release set light is great, but in the real practical world of competition I think that most and I repeat most would be better served shooting their triggerless bt release with at least some travel or movement. Just my opinion.

So there are some ideas from a lot of very successful people. Some are successful coaches. Others are successful shooters from the past or some of the top shooters today. And I doubt that any of them are going to change their mind on the correct way to shoot a back tension release. So, what really is the answer to the question I have been asking myself?

Answer:

In my opinion, the correct answer will depend on the archer's strengths and weaknesses. All who shoot a bow have strengths and weaknesses. Our success just may depend on how good we are at knowing or learning what our strengths are and using them while, at the same time, recognizing what our weaknesses are and getting rid of them or correcting them.

If an archer's weakness is snap shooting as his sight nears the center of the bulls eye (punching), then going to a backtension release and using only backtension to activate the release will get some new muscles involved that are not already in the habit of punching. Doing this may speed up the process of learning to let the sight float while waiting for the release to fire.

On the other hand, if an archer is freezing up with his sight in the center of the spot and hesitating with shot execution, then the movement of a slow rotating release may be a way for that archer to know if he is freezing up and, hopefully, keep him from freezing up during shot execution.

Good luck with sorting out all of your strengths and weaknesses and be sure to not let your strong points get away from you.