

ASK BILL

This month's question hits very close to home for me and, I believe, will for several other shooters as well. It is **THE** problem I am struggling with and have yet to master. Below is the Q & A. Also, this time, I am including feedback from the shooter after trying the suggestions. Enjoy.

Question

Bill, my brief history with archery is simply this, I spent about ten years bowhunting and in the last two years I have dedicated time, energy and money in target archery. I did a lot of research and I feel I really understand the physics and mechanics of proper equipment and shooting form. In competitions, local 3-D, target indoor and outdoor, I have done well. Yet, like you mentioned in your article, I am having trouble with the mental aspect of archery.

Not very often, but too often in my mind, I have a tendency to CHOKE. You know what I mean, the last shot on a 300 round, boom, 4. Just recently I was in a shoot out in a 600 round. Another archer and I scored 584. My previous 11 shots were 10s, I was shooting alright. One shot. I can do this. Right? Doink! I shot an 8. Why do I choke like this? How can I rid myself of doubt in these pressure situations? It isn't just the pressure, it is like there is some uncontrollable defect that makes me not trust myself or that I simply don't deserve it. I don't know. I would be curious and thankful for your opinion on this matter.

Answer

Thanks for the e-mail. I knew I would be in lots of good company if everyone would be as honest as you are about your shooting. I know exactly what you are talking about and that is what I am researching and trying to solve. I am tired of shooting 4 inside out Xs and a 4. I have thoughts on the matter and I believe I am getting closer to the solution but I am not there yet. If today's shooting is any indication of what is to come I am really close to a solution.

What I believe to be the main problem is what you mentioned. We don't trust our form and execution and then we have doubts. I really believe the doubts are there all the time but we don't let them bother us much until we really need things to work. The more we need to count on things to work correctly the more doubts we have. Once the doubts are there we incorrectly believe we can shoot well if we very, very carefully watch over and try to control every piece of the shot. It is made worse by the fact that we really understand the entire shot process as you mentioned. And since we understand it, we should be able to control it and abort the shot at any time a defect is detected so we are very careful about how we make the shot happen and if things don't go right we can take control and fix it or stop it, right?

Over the weekend I talked to someone who may have me headed in the right direction. I have not proved it yet but it seemed to be helping today so I will share it with you. You can try it for yourself and let me know how it works for you. Here we go.

Think about other activities you have done or do now. Things like golf or tennis or basketball or throwing boomerangs or skipping rocks across the water. For me it is basketball; shooting free-throws to be more specific. When I was in high school I made 101 in a row one day so I can relate to how free-throws are shot and made. When I shot free-throws I **did not** try to carefully control and analyze every phase of the motion it took to shoot the free-throw. I had done it enough that I just looked at the basket and *shot the ball*. There were no hesitations or slow downs or freeze up like we sometimes do when shooting arrows. The best shots were always the ones that were the most fluid and relaxed.

So today, I tried this out when shooting archery. I started with no target and just practiced relaxing and thinking of the feel and motion needed for a shot to happen and then just tried to do it as smoothly as possible. I am talking about after the sight is in the white and from the time I decided to shoot until the release went off. I just told myself to relax and then in one smooth motion did what was necessary to get the release to go off. Once I got the smooth shots happening I put up a target at 10 yards and tried to duplicate that feel.

The entire shot was like this: from loading the arrow until the decision is made to shoot I was very careful to get everything just right; foot position, hand position in the bow, breathing, anchor, sight alignment, etc. Then, when the decision is made to shoot I just trusted everything to be correct and just relaxed and *made it happen with no chance of turning back*. It took a while to get used to that new feel but in a while I was shooting nothing but inside out Xs on the ones when I did not hesitate. The hesitations became easier to recognize and I started letting those down. In fact, the only ones I let down were the hesitations. The others were gone with no chance to correct but they didn't need corrections. They were good shots just as they were trusted to be.

I moved from 10 yards to 15 and then to 20 as I became confident at each distance. When I finished up at 20 yards, all shots that were relaxed and shot with no hesitation were inside out Xs. I really believe if I continue this way of shooting I will become more and more trusting of my form and execution and have fewer doubts. I believe I will also become more aware of the hesitations and if I really pay attention I will be able to let those down. It is a totally different feel than I have ever shot with before. There is way less physical effort and mental strain when shooting this way. It really is only an exercise in trusting your set-up from when you load the arrow until the decision is made to shoot.

So, to summarize, take whatever activity you have experience with like swinging a tennis racket or golf club or skipping rocks and re-live that feel of *just doing it from start to finish with no hesitation*. Then try to duplicate that feel when shooting an arrow. The shots will be much more fluid and will be made with more confidence once you get the hang of it.

Let me know how it works.

Response after trying suggestions

Bill, I want to thank you for replying to my e-mail. Your advice was extremely helpful. I practiced as you recommended. I found myself recognizing the doubt in my mind, but instead of trying to CONTROL it, I just accepted that it was there, and concentrated on the shot. Well, my scores have been improving, and so is my confidence. I recently competed in a local 3-D shoot, and another archer and I had the same score. We had a shoot out. I became a little more nervous but I remembered that it was alright to be nervous. I just focused on the shot, trusting my form, and did what I know I can do. Well, I out shot my opponent and took first place. I am happy I won, but I am so relieved to know that I am learning not to CHOKe. I have you to thank for that.

Bill's Comments

This method is not the only way to approach this problem but it is one that works for some people. Since we are not all the same the same methods may not work for everyone. If you haven't found a fix for this problem yet, give this a try. It may help you. If not, ask again; don't give up. We want you to stay in archery.