

Lanny Bassham

Mental Skills

Dealing with Distractions

Part 1 of 2

Consistency occurs when an archer performs both technically and mentally within their practiced plan. If this plan is a good one and if the shooter is skilled the arrows go in the center. Today we are going to look at three things that tend to distract us and pull us out of our mental game and what we might do about them—extreme weather, score, and people.

Most distractions occur because they are the extremes of things that occur normally. The weather, for example, is always there but does not become a possible distraction until it is severe. Ever try to shoot in extreme temperatures? It makes little difference which end of the thermometer you shoot in: severe cold or blazing heat. How about extreme wind? It not only displaces arrows, but it can blow archers and their mental games around as well. Weather can distract you if you are not prepared for it. So, how do you keep weather distractions to a minimum? I feel that most severe weather related distractions are solved by proper preparation. Make certain that you are dressed properly for cold weather shooting and have trained in your cold weather outfit. Summertime in my part of the country requires

shorts and sun screen and plenty of water. Dehydration is a big deal and most venues keep the water jugs full for the shooters. Make certain you make use of them. Packing your own water is not a bad idea just in case.

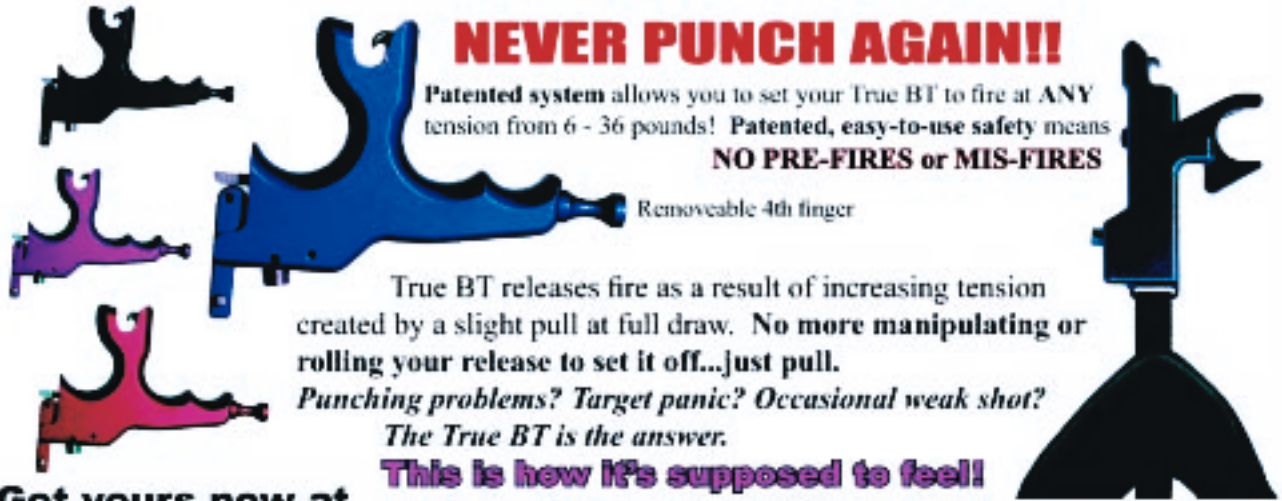
Extreme weather creates special mental distractions as well. The most common ones are “the pulling of focus” and “giving up the ship.” Extreme temperatures may cause your focus to be pulled away from your planned system of thinking. You are still thinking about your frostbitten fingers as you nock an arrow. Perhaps you should have brought those gloves. Shooters who are not used to shooting in heat get distracted by sweat drops on their glasses. Even if you have planned for these issues, you must be careful to run the same mental program that you run when the weather is moderate. Change something and you always get different results.

Okay! The wind is howling and your sight is bouncing into the next state. Don't *Give Up the Ship!* Giving Up the Ship is a mental error which triggers technical ones. Weak and inexperienced shooters think that the conditions are so bad anyway that it doesn't matter whether they perform correctly on a shot. “We



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will probably miss anyway!" Your courage as a shooter is being tested. Stay tough! Stay with your system. Top shooters know that horrid conditions test the will of shooters and normally gives veterans an advantage. Scores may fall today and yours may fall a bit as well. Remember everyone will lose some points. Stay with your ship! When you encounter extreme weather think, "This is great! I love to shoot in bad weather. It gives me an advantage because I will stay with my system when others are distracted and give up."

Another example of an extreme distraction can be score related.

Under typical weather conditions, you score between 80-90 percent of the available points on an average course. Today you score in the center on the first half of the event and as you enter the next end the score monster begins talking to you. If you have no plan to meet this type of distraction head-on you could lose a lot of points on the last half of the course. ruining your

day. I think it is almost impossible to avoid this potential distraction. Sooner or later this is going to happen to you even if you have good technical and mental form and are following a good training system.

My suggestion is to have a plan that you rehearse over and over to turn this potential distraction into a great score. Rehearse this very thing happening to you and when it does imagine that you calmly and decisively shoot the darned center out of the target. We tend to repeat what we rehearse. Do this and you will be ready for the great score when the time comes. This is called *contingency planning rehearsal* and you

can use it for many things. How about rehearsing that you beat your opponent in a shoot-off? Rehearse how you want to feel, see the arrows grouping in the center of the target and imprint the win in your Self Image. A good time to do this kind of rehearsal is while you are doing something else: exercising, sitting on an air-

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plane, or waiting for an appointment to start.

Now, let's look at one of the most interesting potential distractions: your competition. People are funny, weird, extreme, and some are down-right unbelievable. Just when you think you have seen it all, you go to a shoot and someone does something that is a potential distraction to you and your mental game. Let's look at a few common people distractions.

People Distraction Number One: The Uninvited Helper He is on your point and so far he has kept his mouth shut, but just after you shoot your first end you hear this: "Your draw length is too short." Now, you did not ask for help. In fact, you only met this guy today. He is not that good of a shot, but he is good at one thing. He's loud. Now don't get me wrong, I think one of the best things about our sport is that people are quick to help one another. The only thing that we ask is to please wait until we ask. The key to dispatching this kind of distraction is to understand that this is a social game and it needs people to grow, all kinds of people. We must be able to focus when we are on the line, blocking out the people, the noise, the stray thoughts, and the comments from our mind by running a smooth, simple mental program while executing a precise pre-shot routine. Your uninvited helper is helping you practice focusing.

"Distractions bounce off of prepared people. Distractions are deflected by the self-confident and melt at the feet of the mental manager."

People Distraction Number Two: The Score-teller

These guys come in two varieties—malicious and benign. The benign guy has just come from the leader board and passes you on the range. You are walking by and he says, "Boy, are you shooting great! If you finish strong you will win this thing!" Thanks a lot, Bubba! This guy means well and is just trying to congratulate you. The malicious score-teller, on the other hand, is not looking out for you. He is hoping that telling you where you are will unhitch your wagon because he is right behind you in the event. If you are an elite shooter, you had better get used to this and be ready for it.

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The best thing that you can say to either one of them is "Hey, Thanks." It will make the benign guy feel important and it will drive the malicious guy crazy. You cannot avoid the leader board and you never know when the score-teller is going to show up.

Distractions bounce off of prepared people. Distractions are deflected by the self-confident and melt at the feet of the mental manager. How are you doing with them? In the next issue we will look at more people distractions and how to handle them. See you then.

Lanny Bassham is an Olympic Coach and an Olympic Gold Medalist. He is a member of the Olympic Shooting Hall of Fame, ranks third among all shooters in total international medal count for the USA and is one of the most respected mental trainers in the world. His book **With Winning in Mind** and his **Mental Management**® concepts are used and endorsed by Olympian and World Champion shooters. You can reach him at 1.800.879.5079 or at www.mentalmanagement.com.



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