

Brian J. Luke

# Traditional Archery

## My Second Second Chance (con't)

*If you read the article in the last issue, you learned how I, a right-hander, switched to left-handed shooting (and why) and how I am now trying to shoot right-handed again, but with my draw hand flipped over, palm out. Yes, I am saying that I shot my left-handed bow as a normal left hand person would do and then used that same bow, arrow, and sight settings to shoot right-handed, palm out and not change the sight at all to group in the same spot. As I stated in that previous article, this was just before the Christmas of 2005, I kept playing with this at home until I felt I was coordinated enough to go out in public and give this a try in an actual indoor shooting range.*

Each day I would spend about a half hour or so practicing this new style. If the weather was too bad to shoot outdoors, as it often is this time of year in Ohio, I would just practice drawing the bow. One of the things I was most impressed with is that my bow arm collapse from my right-handed shooting form did not find its way into this shooting style. Most dramatic changes to my normal shooting form would trick that nasty habit for a while, but usually after less than three weeks the collapse would come back, especially when I settled down to concentrate on aiming.

There were times when I decided to shoot both left-handed and right-handed just for the benefit of strengthening myself and not concerning myself with my right hand shooting and the nasty trained reflex. The interesting thing

that I noticed is the collapse was still there, I just did not care about it because I knew I did not collapse shooting left-handed. With that mental outlook my right-hand shooting improved in spite of the reflex bow arm collapse. With improved grouping came encouragement and the desire to beat this thing once and for all, but as soon as I entertained the thought of improving or possibly competing right-handed the groups would open up again, terribly. This told me that I not only have a trained reflex problem, but some target panic issues shooting right-handed as well. It became apparent to me that my right hand shooting trouble was a combination of the trained reflex collapse and my own mental anxiety, and the mental anxiety was more detrimental to my grouping than the physical collapse.

After about six weeks of playing with this at home I decided to go try this out in the local indoor archery range. I felt I could keep most of my arrows in the scoring zone on a three spot Vegas target and I was now ready to take the heat of trying something so weird. The improvement at home mostly came as a result of learning to get the tension out of my drawing hand along with settling on a comfortable and repeatable anchor. It was February the second; I know this as a certainty because I documented the event by dating and keeping my practice target. I did not keep score because I usually do not; I feel just as much can be learned by observing the grouping

in the target. By counting the holes I know I shot at least 90 arrows. Keep in mind that I have been shooting a long bow with no bow sight for the last fourteen years. I just recently got interested in shooting the recurve with a sight again. This will become very obvious when you look at the picture dated February the third (the next day), but this time shooting the same bow normally left-handed.



*This is the first time I shot palm out, right-handed in public; about six weeks after I had first tried it. I did not keep score, I was more interested in viewing the grouping. The next day I shot the same bow normally (left handed). The surprising thing to me is that the target from the first day didn't look much worse, if any, from my left hand shooting I have been doing the last nine years or so. I did not expect my palm out shooting to progress as fast as it did.*

The amazing thing to me is that I made a dramatic form change just six weeks ago, I only spent about a half hour of so a day working on it and you can tell very little difference between the two different targets-one day shooting right-handed, palm out and the next day shooting the same equipment left-handed as the bow was designed to do.

I went to the range on an average three days a week for about two hours a day. My grouping improved both shooting left-handed and right-handed, palm out. I would shoot one style one day and the other style the next. I felt it would mess with my head too much to practice both in one day. The funny thing was that I was now improving more rapidly shooting normally left-handed than I had been before I started messing with shooting right-handed, palm out. I really felt one style was helping the other. My bow arm was still strong with no evidence

of tension loss shooting right-handed. I had never experienced a strong bow arm this long shooting right-handed before, but I was not holding my breath.

My groups improved to the example of my target face of February sixteenth in both my left hand shooting and right hand palm out shooting. This was at the time I normally practiced a lot to prepare for the NAA Indoor Nationals.

The Indoor Nationals were held the first weekend of March and I decided to shoot both styles. This was probably not a good idea. I decided to shoot right-handed, palm out in the Traditional recurve division in the morning and left-handed in the afternoon in the Olympic recurve division. At this tournament you could not use aluminum arrows and a bow sight or stabilizer in the Traditional Recurve division. I had to shoot the right-handed, palm out style with wood arrows and no bow sight, using a point of aim marker instead.

I am sorry to report that my right handed, palm out shooting was nowhere near what I was able to do in practice. Perhaps it was just the fact I was trying to use it with the point of aim method and not like I shot (with a sight) in practice. Perhaps I was just putting too much pressure on myself exposing this new style of shooting the first time in National competition. It could also be that I was experiencing some target panic issues even though my bow arm remained strong. This was something I had never been able to do right-handed, so I really was not too disappointed.

My normal left hand shooting was, well . . . just plain funny. That is the only way I can look at it because I can't come up with a reasonable explanation. Just look at the picture of the white background FITA target, the one with the marked holes. It was as if I did not figure out what I was supposed to do until my third shot. I always start bottom left, top center, and then bottom right.

With that embarrassing day behind me now I still remained interested in the right-handed, palm out shooting, however I decided that I would only shoot my left-hand style in preparation for the NAA Outdoor Nationals in Colorado. I shot the Outdoor with both the traditional longbow and the traditional recurve. I did not shoot badly; but I was not able to shoot as well as I felt I could, but that is pretty much a normal thing for me in competition. The really strange thing to me is that I still felt my practice for the indoor by shooting left-handed one day and right-handed, palm out the next day showed much greater improvement in a much less time for both

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shooting styles than it did only practicing one style in preparation for the Outdoor.

Now that the Outdoor Nationals are over, my archery interest turns to practicing for hunting and the most exciting discovery about the palm out shooting style is yet to unfold.

I normally hunt with a longbow, but my recent interest in the recurve again inspired me to purchase a great little hunting bow on eBay. It is a left hand Wing Slim Line called the Red Wing Pro. Since I am right eye dominant, I must close my non-aiming eye while shooting left-handed. The problem I have is that I do not hunt with a bow sight and I feel it is a must to keep both eyes open for instinctive shooting. To shoot instinctively, I must shoot right-handed to have both eyes open.

I decided to shoot that left-handed Red Wing Pro instinctively right-handed, palm out. The only thing I changed is the anchor that I was using to shoot targets with a sight. I found a place just under my cheek bone to locate my anchor with the little finger firmly up against it while I drew the string all the way back until it stopped on the bone beneath my eyebrow. The anchor felt very natural and was even easier to adjust to from the under the chin anchor. I gained two inches of draw length from my under the chin style and I was almost immediately on, shooting that style instinctive. My bow arm was great, my release was fast and crisp and anything I aimed at under fifty yards was in serious danger of



*My target from the Indoor Nationals shooting the recurve normally left handed. The only thing I can do is laugh! Just check out the bottom right spot. It seemed as if I did not realize what I was there to do until the third shot. My head always seems to get in the way, but that is just one of the challenges that make this sport fun!*



*I had noticed by shooting both styles, right-hand palm out one day, and normal left-hand shooting the other that it seemed one style was helping the other. I was seeing more progress in my normal left hand style now, than before I started messing with the palm out method. I had not seen grouping like this since my days as a teen shooting a recurve target bow. The target pictured is from shooting normally left-handed; I had another target that I had shot shortly after this one with very similar grouping shooting my palm out style right-handed. Sorry, no photo for that one; the dog must have eaten it!*

being impaled. I have not enjoyed shooting that much in years. Instinctive shooting was always a nice break from target shooting, but my collapsing bow arm made even that frustrating to the point that I did not shoot instinctive very much anymore.

I really feel that now I have a second second chance. I can stump shoot once again in the carefree manner it was intended to be. This was the only thing switching to left-handed shooting could not do for me; But now I can shoot right-handed, palm out with a left-handed bow with both eyes open and can enjoy archery like I have not been able to do in years; decades rather.

An explanation for all of this I cannot provide, just observations and speculations. The observations I have documented here for you and you can draw whatever conclusions you wish.

The joy and excitement this new style has provided me was just something I needed to share in hope that someone else may find themselves in a similar situation and this is an option to try. I wish I had years behind me with this style of shooting to be more convincing, but it is late October at the time of this writing and I still have not had a bow arm collapse shooting right-handed, palm

out ten months after I first tried it.

Time will tell if that collapsing bow arm will ever haunt me again. My speculations about all of this are as follows and please remember this is just my very unprofessional opinion.

My trained reflex was a result of having no shooting instruction when I first started in archery. The shooting instruction I eventually got caused the anxiety that turned the trained reflex into full-blown target panic. I was my own worse enemy and I had proved to myself the twitch of the bow arm was not nearly as detrimental to the shot as my anxiety to overcome the reflex.

Shooting right-handed, palm out somehow confused my reflex by using different muscles with a totally different feel. Perhaps shooting on the other side of the bow from I would normally do right-handed had something to do with it. My mind did not trigger a collapse with the arrow on the right side of the bow as I had trained myself to shoot left-handed? This I am not completely sure of, but I believe it was a combination of learning new muscle memory on top of changing the sight picture my

mind was use to seeing when shooting right-handed normally.

All I know for sure is that this form change to shooting right-handed, palm out was many times easier that it was for me to switch from shooting right-handed to shoot left-handed. I would also like to add that my first assumption (about palm out shooting not working with a longbow that was not center shot) proved to be false. As it turned out, once I learned to get the tension out of my drawing hand resulting in a smooth release the arrows would fly online to the target. It must be that the center shot recurve is just more forgiving.

I hope none of you get to the point I did and have to result to such drastic form changes, but for the person who is about to give up the sport because it is just not fun anymore, what do you have to lose?



**Brian Luke** is a husband and a father of three young adults. He has worked as a tool and die maker since 1979 and has played with the bow and arrow nearly all his life. Brian has developed a deep respect and admiration for the accomplishments of the early target archers of the NAA. This admiration began in 1992 as a result of reading Robert Elmer's book "Archery" (circa 1926). From that time on Brian's quest has been to experience all that he had read about in Elmer's book from the making of his own wooden bows, arrows, and linen strings to competing in the traditional rounds of the NAA. Since then Brian has won six out of the seven Indoor Nationals and five out of the eight Outdoor Nationals he has attended, all shooting in the Traditional Longbow division of the NAA.

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