

Don Rabska



# What Time Are You In?

## Special Feature

*You guessed it, this article is not about world time zones, it is about shooting archery. The “time” you are “in” is one of the most important, but least talked about, aspects of shooting. What this article might help you discover is the time you are most often shooting in.*

*Are you shooting in the past, the present (now), or the future?*

### **The Future is Now**

If your answer to the above question is now, you are absolutely right; give yourself a pat on the back. When shooting, the time you are in should be the present or now, not in the past, thinking about the good or rough arrows you have shot, or in the future anticipating an outcome. Your mind should be only in the present time. If you are thinking about the last arrow you shot, you are not working on the arrow in your bow. The same is true if you are anticipating future events.

If you are thinking that you have five 10s in the target and you only need one more to have a 60, and that is your thought while you are trying to shoot that last arrow for a perfect end, the likelihood of you actually shooting a 60 is pretty slim. The reason is, your mind is not in the same place that it was for the first five shots. You are now playing in the future and that is a dangerous place to be.

Let's examine why we want to shoot in present time. If you speak with any experienced sports psy-

chologist, they will tell you that all top performance is achieved subconsciously. This is also the state of being “in the Zone” as most of us fondly call it. If you have ever experienced being in the Zone, then you also know that it was pretty close to impossible to miss the center of the target. Your shooting was the best it ever was and shooting seemed effortless. So, if you have been fortunate enough to experience the Zone, how do you get back there? That is certainly a big question on the minds of many and of course the harder you try to get in the elusive “Zone,” the farther you are from it.

The Zone is not really a conscious state, but somewhere between conscious and subconscious. It is not actually so much of a thinking state as it is a total awareness state. If you are consciously thinking, then you are probably thinking in the past or future, not in the present.

Here is a little experiment to try (full participation, please). Pinch the skin under one arm at the triceps. Pinch hard enough that you feel a little discomfort (Okay, pain, but the doctor always says “discomfort,” as if it makes it hurt less?). While you are continuing to pinch yourself, ask yourself the following question, is this past, . . . present, . . . or future? I believe the unanimous answer is going to be “present.” You are experiencing this sensation in present time. Sensation is also known as “feeling.” Therefore, feeling has to be in present time. You do

***“If you are working only in present time, then there is no reaction other than letting the bow shoot the arrow.”***

not have physical feeling or sensation of things in the past or future, but only now in what is also known as "real time."

The "Now" or "Zone" goes by many names, others are "being in the moment" or "being in the present." The importance of being in the present is that your focus must be on what you are doing at the moment you are doing it. You can't be thinking about the cold beer or soda you are going to have after the competition or the big juicy steak you are going to eat. Well, your mind can be thinking about those things, but don't expect to shoot well. Your mind must be on what you are doing, or better, on what you are feeling at the very moment you are in the process of "doing." You should have total awareness of your feeling. If you can do that and block out everything else, then you are "in the Now" and heading into the Zone!

One of the most important lessons I have ever received took about 10 seconds and was from Dr. Dan Landers, world-renowned sports psychologist. One day after com-

pleting a seminar we were conducting for the U.S. Archery Team many years ago, he said to me, "Don, I am going to give you the most important secret in achieving top sports performance! As I eagerly anticipated the next words out of his mouth he said, "That secret is . . . stay in the present when you are shooting." And as he turned to walk away he looked back and added, "By the way, I didn't say it was easy." He was so right! It is not easy; it takes lots of practice to learn to stay in present time when doing anything. The problem is, we are all trained throughout life to be a type of anticipation machine. We are constantly thinking of the future or thinking about the past, but rarely are we totally involved in the now.

As I have said in past articles, your focus needs be on two things, while turning those two things into one thing. Since the conscious mind cannot think of two things at one time, you need to meld those two things into one experi-

*Continued on the Next Page*

***"The sight and target will suck your mind away from you and your body awareness. That, my friends, is a major trap to be avoided at all costs."***

**DOINKer**<sup>®</sup>  
Mad. Genius.

**BT2** 2 3/4" Chubby Target Stabilizer

**IB2** Hurley Bar V Bar Angled

**AOSM** Adjustable Offset Stabilizer Mount

**BCE28** 28" Carbon Elite Graphite Stabilizer

**QF30** 30" Quadra Flex Stabilizer

**BA30** 30" Alum. Keep Stabilizer

**BC24** 24" Alum. Keep Stabilizer

**QFF** Quadra Flex Graphite Stabilizer

**QFC** Quadra Flex Carbon Graphite Stabilizer

Leven Industries - 9025 Eton Ave. - Danoga Park, CA  
T-818 700-2899 F-818 700 2897 www.doinker.com

ence. That is, look at what you want to hit and, with your kinesthetic sense, feel the motion of the set-up, draw, loading, anchor, transfer and “holding” or control phase (B.E.S.T. system) until the shot goes off, while keeping that connection with the target. The shot does not stop the moment the clicker snaps; it is just the middle of the shot at that point. (One of the problems I see in many shooters is they seem to stop the shot at the clicker. It is like a door closes on the shot at that moment. The door to the target must remain open until the arrow hits the target. Another hindrance to good shooting is by trying to “help” the bow shoot the arrow. When anticipating the shot (playing in the future) and waiting for the clicker to snap, at the very moment it does click, the archer tries to help the bow get the arrow to the target. That instant reaction to the anticipation of the shot will rarely get the arrow in the center of the target.) If you are working only in present time, then there is no reaction other than letting the bow shoot the arrow. There is stillness except for the natural reaction of the body when the draw fingers relax to let the bowstring push them out of the way while the bow hand falls forward toward the target. No “extra” effort, only a natural reaction created by the event.

In the Korean system of shooting, much of the teaching is on feeling the “center of the body,” feeling the scapula positions, feeling the head over the center of the body and feeling the overall awareness of the body to perform the shot. They will also speak about the feeling of “expansion.” Therefore, if your focus is totally absorbed in the feeling or awareness of your sensation of the shot, then how can you be in any time but the present? There is no room for thinking of the past or future because you are totally involved in the now.

Eye focus plays a big part here, too. If you are intently focusing on the target, then you are not focusing on your feeling or awareness. The same is true for focusing on your sight. If you are “aiming” hard, you are hard at work on the wrong focus. The sight and target will suck your mind away from you and your body awareness. That, my friends, is a major trap to be avoided at all costs. The mind, the subconscious mind that is, has to be in control of aiming. It should be anyway, it is the professional at that game. The conscious mind is a complete rookie at the aiming process.

Try the following exercise the next time you are practicing (and in competition). Rather than looking intently at the target or sight, relax your face and your eyes, almost like you are letting your eyelids droop just a bit. Totally relax your focus so that you are looking about half way between you and the target. If you do this and practice it, the target will appear to come closer to you . . . yep, it looks bigger! While relaxing in this way, focus only on what you are feeling through the shot, no “thinking” allowed, just quiet the mind and concentrate on the actual sensation of shooting, not thinking about it.

Focus on what feels “right.” You know when it doesn’t feel right and those are the times you should let down and start again so it does feel right. If you are in the process of shooting an arrow and your mind says, “Hey, my bow hand feels off” or your fingers creep on the string or any other part of your shot does not feel right, then don’t shoot. If you do, you are gambling! If you ever wondered how the

gaming industry could afford to keep building big hotels and casinos in Las Vegas; it’s because they can afford it. Why? Because gamblers rarely win!

### **Getting Your Feeling Back**

Often when we go to tournaments our feeling changes from how it felt in practice. This is because in practice we do not often have a big dose of adrenaline to deal with. One of the physical affects of an adrenaline boost is to heighten our awareness. However, which way do we handle this acute awareness? If we let it “out” then we notice many more things than we are usually aware of. We notice the birds singing, a baby crying, people talking behind us, people laughing, cars on the road, the sound of bow strings and just about any other stimulus that is around to perceive. If we are dealing with all these stimuli at once, then there is no room left in our head to focus on our shot. This is one of the reasons that many archers score less well in tournaments than they do in practice. There are other reasons as well, but this is certainly one of major causes. Now, when we are in this situation, it is very hard to focus on our shooting due to our minds jumping from one thing to another. This is where people laughing behind you might be a bother, or traffic on the street, or any other excuse the mind might look for as a reason for poor shooting.

***“If your focus is totally absorbed in the feeling or awareness of your sensation of the shot, then how can you be in any time but the present? There is no room for thinking of the past or future because you are totally involved in the now.”***

The next time you are in this situation, try getting in touch with your feelings, and I don't mean your emotions. Focus on your body and bring that heightened awareness to bear on you. Turn it into the inside so you are fully and totally aware of you. Bring your mind back inside you and not out in the trees with the birds. Here is the "how to" part. First, focus on your feet . . . how do they feel? Then progress to your legs then, very importantly, the stomach. Does it feel tense, raised a little rather than more relaxed? How do your shoulders feel? What about your hands and fingers? Start concentrating on you and how you feel and you will begin to be aware of you again and what you should feel like. Now work on focused breathing (diaphragmatic breathing). Doing this helps relax your mind and body while you are bringing your awareness back where it belongs. When you are in the Zone, you will notice that your self-awareness is very acute and nothing outside that world exists except you and the thing you are focusing on.

Along this same line of thought, have you ever wondered why people who are sick often shoot really well? One reason is, they don't care! They just want to lie down, get pampered by Mom or their spouse and go to sleep. The other reason, and what I believe is the biggest reason, is they have complete and full awareness of how they feel. They are

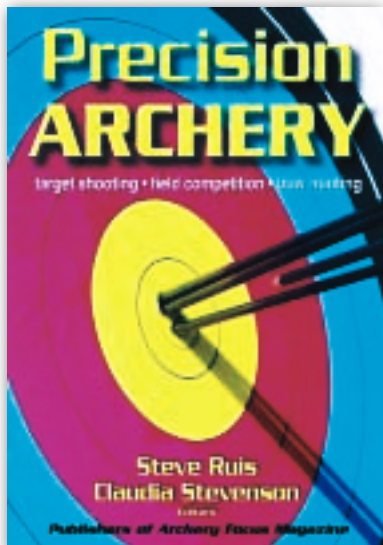
not focused on anything but how they are feeling at that very moment. Nothing else matters, they are simply thinking about themselves and the unpleasant feeling they are experiencing. Of course, not from an ego standpoint either, just perfectly clear awareness of the body with little thinking involved. It is too hard to think when we are sick, but we are sure aware of how we feel!

Sorry to be away so long . . . until next time—Good Shooting!

**Don Rabska** is an internationally renowned archery coach and a technical advisor for Easton Archery. He is the Chairman of the FITA Technical Committee and Executive Director of the Easton Sports Development Foundation. He is currently heading up a new Olympic Archery in Schools Program through the ESDF and developing B.E.S.T method teaching materials for that program including DVDs for both beginner and advanced archers and teaching guides.



## Everything You Need to Know to Become a Better Archer!



Written by your favorite **Archery Focus** authors—Rick McKinney, Don Rabska, Larry Wise, Ty Pelfrey, Dr. Lisa Franseen, Annette Musta, and others—**Precision Archery** covers every aspect of target archery. You'll find instruction on how to compete, how to perfect your form, and up-to-the minute advice on

- bow purchase, initial setup, and tuning
- fitness training to get and keep a competitive edge
- mental preparation and learning how to win
- how to adjust for wind, rain, and other adverse conditions
- the fine art of barebow
- how to work with a coach
- putting your shot together and taking it apart
- how to check out new equipment and work it into your shot

Nothing is left out, even the spirit of archery is addressed! If you are looking to take your game to the next level, this is the book for you!

216 pages • ISBN 0-7360-4634-8 • US \$19.95

Available at Better Pro Shops, Bookstores, and Amazon.com