

Lorretta Sinclair

The Art of Staying Focused When Things Go Terribly Wrong

Special Feature

A friend once remarked that watching archery was “as much fun as shopping for a baby stroller.” Okay, color me weird, but I liked shopping for baby strollers, and I like watching archery. I find it to be intense, exciting, and full of life lessons.

As an observer, not an archer, I have watched the grace and skill of archery as well as the anxiety, stress, and sometimes poor sportsmanship of competition. I have learned much as an archery mom, a coach, and an observer.

I have watched young archers come off the shooting line in tears from sheer frustration from things not going well in a competition. I have witnessed a highly ranked JOAD archer drop kick his quiver across the shooting line when he lost an Olympic Round match, and I have been surprised as a world renowned archer kicked a post and uttered words we won't repeat here, when he shot through the clicker and scored a 6.

I have also seen grace under fire. I have observed an archer with jet lag shoot the wrong target and calmly remark, “Well at least they were all 10s.” And observed hard fought Olympic Rounds and knew that the ‘loser’ was disappointed but impressed by the handshakes at the end of the matches. In Las Vegas at the World Archery Festival, I watched a young

recurve archer as he maintained the art of staying focused when things went terribly wrong and learned yet another lesson from archery.

On day one, by end seven, this young recurve archer had shot 21 out of 21 yellows. On end eight, he seemed to struggle having to let down two times. On his third let down, the arrow slipped from his hand and landed in another competitor's target. As I watched the young man, I knew that this could be disaster or triumph, and only he would tell the tale. There was a brief look of ‘what was that’ that crossed his face, and then he finished the end with two nines. As he walked back to the sitting area and approached his coach, he asked, “Where'd the first one go?” and when the answer was, “It's a miss. It's in the other kid's target,” the reply of “Oh well, the next two were good shots” was the answer I hope to hear from my young archers.

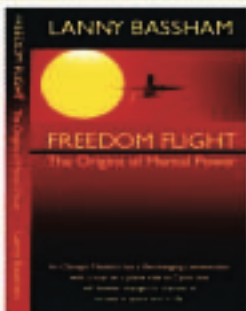
It was an attitude we should all strive for when things go wrong and we can't undo them. As the archers went down to score their arrows, I again watched, thinking that this young man could still lose his focus after the zero settled into his thoughts. I was impressed as he returned to the shooting line, giving no hint that he had just given up his chance to finish in first place that day. His posture, his smile, gave no clue to what had just happened. With six remaining arrows,

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he stood up to the pressure of his mistake and shot, two 9s, and four 10s. Grace under fire from a kid.

There have been many books and articles written on how to handle competition pressure, how to focus, how to deal with problems that could throw you off your game. Many seasoned competitors find it difficult to put into practice the wise words that they read. Many never master an important part of competition. Watching archery may be boring to some, and it may be difficult and stressful if you are an archery parent. It can also be full of lessons in life as well as archery, sometimes learned at the hands of a kid who shows that the art of staying focused can be achieved.

Lorretta Sinclair is the mother of *Dakota, Clarke, and Barrett Sinclair*; *President of Clarke Sinclair Memorial Archery Scholarship* (www.clarkesinclair.org) and *collegiate division publicist* (www.collegiatearchery.org).

