

FINISH STRONG!
By Rick Stonebraker

How many people either play chess or have a rudimentary idea of how chess is played? For the ardent fan that studies chess, there are three segments to the game: the beginning, the middle game and the end game. Each of these areas is carefully scrutinized for maximum success. Running a race is the same thing, although it does matter how you plan the whole race, the most important is how you finish.

For some odd reason, no matter how far I run or how fast I run, when it comes to the end of my workout, I step it up a gear and finish strong – sprinting to the end. For some odd reason, it feels good to burst across the finish. I never walk across the finish line – no matter what!

Archery also can be broken down into three areas but I only want to talk about the finish game because that is all anyone will ever remember and the most important. So, say it doesn't really matter how you start out, as long as you finish well. That may work well for some OR matches but it won't really wash in the whole scheme of things.

Let's say a typical archer starts shooting a match. He or she is doing okay for a while then all of a sudden breaks down or is having a bad time. They fiddle for a few minutes or a few ends and then gets frustrated and decides this is not their day. The expression they use is time honored and I have heard it more times than I care to: "Oh well, I will just have a good time and shoot some arrows!"

"Sound familiar?"

What happened here? They lost confidence and finished the rest of the tournament just shooting arrows. Nothing wrong with that if you are a recreational type shooter but for a person who is serious, this is a devastating mistake because they have lost focus for the day and is not learning.

I have had similar experiences at this myself where I figured "it just wasn't my day" and nothing was going to change it. I accepted the fact that I was not going to win, nor place nor have a good score. It was going to be a day where I was 'just going to shoot arrows' the rest of the day BUT the difference here is that I was going to figure out what went wrong and fix it as quickly as possible. This leads me back to an important area of practice where things aren't going well and people say, "Well if it isn't going well, than quit" as you are not going to find the solution and why practice bad shots?

This is true but I envision this happening in a tournament and I would have to find the solution and quick so I plow through all the bad arrows, searching for the answer. So, during the tournament, I search for what is going wrong: either equipment or me. If the equipment, then I do a quick check of everything. If I determine it is me, then I go back to basics and work from there.

What I am leading up to is a strong finish, even on a bad day. When I figure out what went wrong and I start shooting well again, then I work on a strong finish, regardless of not being able to win, nor place, nor shooting a good score. I finish strong, as if the match depended on it. Then compare my 30 meters to everyone else and figure I did okay.

I have observed many archers in a tournament that was doing so-so and I told them to figure it out or I helped them figure it out or they figured it out and I said, “Now let’s finish strong!” In fact, if they were on my target or I was close enough, I would draw a line across their score sheet and say, “Let’s see how strong you can shoot from here on out.” If you can do that, then you had a successful tournament. Look for the good stuff, and don’t dwell on the bad. It will eat you up all the time.

I shot Vegas one year when they used the real small target face. I practiced hard and had a goal to make it to the final round. They used the shoot-down round back then and that was my goal. I reached that goal and was satisfied – I should have re-evaluated that goal once I got there but I achieved what I set out to do. In the final round, the arrow “slipped” and I shot a non-score. It didn’t bother me in the least because I already achieved my goal but when I got back to my home indoor range, several people wanted to know what happened to that shot. Never caring about all my good shots, just that bad shot.

The whole theme here is to finish and finish strong. No matter what went on during the first part of the round. You must finish strong and you must practice a strong finish at every opportunity, even in practice. One way to do that is to shoot more arrows than you would in a normal end. At a tournament, you normally shoot six arrows outdoors and three arrows indoors. I try to shoot a minimum of eight arrows in an end. Usually I shoot alone so that is not a problem. The point is: by shooting more than I need, I am building up endurance and strength. The last thing I want to happen is to get tired on the fifth or sixth arrow. That is not finishing strong at all.

PRESQUE ISLE INVITATIONAL

My very first experience of not finishing strong came at the Presque Isle Invitational in Erie, Pa back in the 70’s. I had been shooting good in practice leading up to the tournament but things went a little south during the round and I felt like I was not doing as well as I had planned so I figured, oh well. I finished that round with out concentrating very much, I just shot arrows. When the tournament was over, I looked at the final results and saw that I was fifth and only 7 points out of a trophy. Boy did that tick me off because through my apathy, I had lost many points – more than enough to place and possibly win. That was a turning point and I vowed never to quit again.

Use the crane and the bird graphic

That experience held true for many years and started to pay off.

1973 PA. STATE TARGET C-SHIP

One of my first experiences of finishing strong came in 1973 at the Pennsylvania state target c-ship in Valley Forge. It was over a hundred degrees on the battlefield and most of the targets were dancing in the heat. At fifty meters, I had my sight set at about 60 yards. When I got to 30 meters, I gave it a couple extra meters and shot my first arrow low in the six ring. Okay, I set the sight and proceeded to shoot a 346. The world record at the time was 347. I did not get the record but I shot a strong finish to get close.

1974 WORLD FIELD C-SHIP

In 1974, I was on the US world team and we were competing in Zagreb, Yugoslavia for the field championship. I had set an un-official world record on the unmarked hunter round and was feeling pretty good. The second and final day was the marked field round. I had my share of bad arrows but was doing okay until target number 14. I set my sight for 40 yards instead of 40 meters. Back then, a four-yard difference with aluminum arrows and a Dacron string was enough to drop you off the target. Which is exactly what happened. The arrow dropped to the bottom of the target and scored a zero, less than a half inch under the three ring.

I was upset, very upset but thankfully it was the only target that had stands for spectators so I hid my emotions, set my sight for 40 meters and shot three in the middle. That target finished that half of the round and I knew it would be a close match so I made a vow that if I lost the world championship, it would not be on the rest of the round. I knuckled down and proceeded to shoot a perfect half round. When I went to turn in my score, I found out I had come in second place.....by one point! I did not lose by one point but rather I won second place because I am positive no one else put on a burst like that to shoot 56 straight fives! I had a strong finish because I had practiced that in many tournaments. BTW, I was actually tied for second place. Fourth and fifth place were also tied.....one point behind, which means five people palced within two points, so any let down....any at all and I was out of the running.....had it not been for finishing strong!

1983 NATIONAL FESTIVAL TRIALS

The National Festival trials in 1983 in North Carolina. I was sicker than a dog. I had one foot in the grave and another on a banana peel. If it weren't for the Wooten's taking care of me, I wouldn't have made it. I was in seventh place going into 30 meters. They only take six for each region for the festival. Larry Perez was in sixth place and I was trying to catch him but I had a dozen points to make up. Although I seldom watch nor advocate watching someone else and their score, I was doing it. Each end I would chop a point off the deficit. With three arrows to go, I had the dozen down to two and he shot first. He shot a 29 and I was finished!

I stepped to the line and said my favorite saying, "If I lost, it will not be because of these final three arrows!" I calmly shot a 30 when it didn't even matter..... or did it matter? Of course, it always matters, maybe not today but some other day. ET walked up to me and asked how I did. I told him I couldn't catch Larry. He looked at my score and said I made the team. I said impossible but Sam Toma, who was ahead of me by 20 points had

taken a bit of a nosedive and I beat him.....by one point! Did that 30 matter? You bet it did. I had another strong finish.

1986 NATIONAL FESTIVAL TRIALS

In 1986, the Festival trials were held in Florida. The weather was bad and the wind was unbelievable. Again, only six are chosen from each region. I was in ninth place going into 30 meters. The wind was horrible and the bows were shifting left and right and it was a matter of poke and hope. I remember the score as if it were yesterday: 27, 28, ...27, 28,... 27, 28,... 28, 27,... 28, 27,... 27, 28. I shot six sets of 55's for a 330. Not great, not bad but it was consistent and it was the best I could do.

Dave was shooting better than me at the time but couldn't hold on to a lead and dropped below me somewhere during 30 meters, I don't know where. Mike also fell apart and I passed him as well. Another Mike shot one off the target because of the wind and that moved me to the sixth position and I made the team. Another strong finish. Not my fault someone screwed up but I worked hard to put myself in that position in case something like that happened.

1985 Baton Rouge Trails

1989 TEXAS STATE INDOOR C-SHIP

We held our Texas State Indoor in Houston in 1989 and a hotshot from Michigan was living down here at the time so he was eligible to compete for the title. Obviously we don't like out-of-towners winning our tournament but it was legal. He was shooting lights out and I was staying as close as possible. He shot the final round Sunday morning and I shot later in the day so I knew what I needed to win and he sat there and watched the whole thing. He had totaled 1157 and I would need a 584 to win. I opened with a 289 and would need a personal best 295 to top his score. I opened with a 27, which left me with nine more ends and the luxury of only being able to drop 2 more points. I can still see that sly grin on his face as he figured it was over and he won.

To this day, I can't tell you what happened but I do remember I went into a zone and it was comfortable. I calmly went up there and shot arrow after arrow in the target. On the fourth end, I had a 29, which got me down to one more non-ten with 18 arrows to go. That grin of his got bigger than Julie Roberts. I then shot 30-30-30-30-29-30 for a 295-584-and 1158 to win by a point. Was that a strong finish or what? Especially with interested people watching me shoot every shot. But I practice strong finishers.

1991 INDOOR WORLD TRIALS

The very first world indoor trials were held at the Oly training center in Colorado Springs. During the fourth and final round, it was a simple matter of mathematics; if I won my final match, I was on the team. We shot five ends of three arrows. First end I was one behind. Second end I was 2 behind. Third end I shot a 30 and drew even. Fourth end I gained a point. The fifth and final end, I had to match his score or shoot better and I would make the team. We both started out with 9's. Then he quickly shot two tens and sat down. I do not remember anything about the second arrow other than it was a perfect

shot and was a solid ten. One more ten and I was going to Finland for the world championship. The heart was racing; I had to wait a few seconds for it to slow down to around a hundred beats or so. I had been practicing this shot in practice a hundred times. I will elaborate on this in a moment.

This shot I remember to this day: I drew the bow, placed the sight in the center and drew smoothly and with everyone in the arena watching, I dropped that arrow in the center of the target. Greatest shot I ever had!

PRACTICE

If I may go askew for a minute and chat about practice. You cannot emulate tournament conditions better than actual competition but you can trick yourself if you have the right fortitude. In practice, every end, I stop before my last arrow, shuffle my feet, and totally take myself out of the rhythm because many times in an Olympic round, that very scenario will happen and you have to prepare yourself for it. So, I get out of my comfort zone, acknowledge the virtual crowd and prepare to shoot an arrow that is for the world record, or the world championship or an Olympic moment.

TOURNAMENT

Then when I am in a tournament, I go to where I am comfortable and draw from that. That is what happened at the 1991 world indoor trials. My mind went back to where I practiced that same scenario hundreds of times. Talk to Jay barrs. When he was preparing for the 1988 Olympics, his mind was in Korea. It did help that he competed at the world championship in that very same arena so he knew what to visualize. Anyway, he spent many hours and days and months in the Arizona heat getting ready for Seoul by pretending he was in Seoul. When the moment arrived at the Olympics, and he needed a comfort zone, he journeyed back to his place of comfort in Arizona.

1991 WORLD INDOOR C-SHIP

Okay, so many of these experiences talk about finishing strong and coming from behind. Well, it worked well for many years and in special circumstances but it backfired at the Indoor World Championship in Oulu, Finland. I was doing okay but got behind and tried to play 'catch-up' and it wasn't working. I found out real quickly that I was in a different league of shooters and this was a case of, "If you can't keep up, you can't catch up!" I shot okay but never gained any ground once I lost it because of the caliber of shooters at the world championship. Something to keep in mind. I still finished strong but it was a day late and a dollar short.

1997 TEXAS STATE TARGET C-SHIP AOTY

Leading up to the Texas State C-ship, I was having a lack luster year/ I went to the State c-ship trying to figure out what was going awry. My goal was to work on my form and shoot well, and not think about scoring or winning. I had a mediocre 90 and 70. After the first day, I had most of it worked out but was behind by 27 and in seventh place. I shot well at 50 and moved to fifth. I was really cooking at 30 meters and had another strong finish shooting 30, 29, 29, and 30 over the last four ends. As it turned out, I was tied for third with Staten Holmes. He did win the bronze medal because of other criteria but Mr.

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Holmes and I tied over-all for Archer-of-the-Year, which takes in account of all three major state titles so I had another strong finish. Did that final 30 mean anything? Yep!

1999 NAA NATIONAL TARGET C-SHIP

Vic Wunderle shot an arrow after the whistle at 50 meters that cost him 12 points. The late arrow shot was an eight but a ten was deducted so he ended up with 18 for that end. Had he not shot the arrow at all, he would have had 20. Anyway, this didn't seem to rattle him one bit because he had a very strong finish on that FITA round by shooting a 559 at 30 meters.

2001 NAA NATIONAL FIELD C-SHIP/TRIALS

At the NAA field championship earlier this year, the NAA sponsored the top two recurve archers for the world field games in Akita, Japan. This was a dream of mine for quite awhile. I shot very well and was tied for second after the unmarked round. I was even with my competition and figured that was better than being behind. Then a few strange things happened that any field shooter can testify to as odd things can happen on FITA field. The first occurrence was shooting down at about a 40-degree angle. I hit the target on the first shot but the second arrow fell off the arrow rest, onto the shelf and into the rocks to the left of the target – big old goose egg.

Later on in the round, a puff of air got between my jacket and the string and myself caught the material and the arrow took a big left turn. It hit the bale but that is all. With about six targets left to try and catch the second place guy, a wind caused a hanging branch to swing into my path just as I shot and people behind us found that arrow later on. So, three big goose eggs accounted for 15 of the 18-point deficit. I still have five targets to shoot and I shot them as best as I could. In fact, the final target was a 25-meter shot downhill at a center about the size of a silver dollar. Again, I said it wasn't going to be because of the last target and shot a very tight 15 – all three in the X ring.

I knew it wasn't enough to move up to second and make the team but it did feel good to walk off the range shooting well. As it turned out, the final score showed me still in third place but the fourth place guy improved dramatically and was ONE POINT behind me. What is worse than NOT making the team is missing out on the alternate spot and then the alternate getting to go when one of the others can't. Strong finish? I think so.

2001 NFAA NATIONAL FIELD C-SHIP

A top previous elite archer shows up in Blue Springs, Mo and I knew right away it was going to be a battle to the very end. Time to turn it up a notch. After the first round, I was ahead by six points. After the second round, I lost five of that lead and had only a one-point lead going into the final round – the animal round. For those who have never shot an animal round, it is not 3 or 4 arrows but a single arrow each target that either kills or wounds the animal target. You can shoot a 2nd or 3rd arrow if the previous ones do not hit the mark but it highly uncommon for top shooters to shoot more than one arrow per target.

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So, it was a matter of who could shoot the most kills out of only 28 arrows. I wounded a goose and lost the lead for the first time in the tournament. Several animals later, he wounded a coyote and I got my one-point lead back. For the next 22 targets, we shot perfect. Two animals to go. I shot first and killed a duck and he wounded his so I got a 3-point lead with one animal to go. I killed the moose from 57 yards and won the national title. During the course of the day, we stayed within one point of each other for 27 of the 28 targets. Yes, I am getting a bit old and tired but I still know how to finish strong.

How do you finish strong – you have to practice at it.

Champions are made in practice!

Rick Stonebraker