

In Korea *Part 2 of 3*

In the last segment about the trip Guy Krueger and I took to Korea, I described all of the observations made about me as a shooter. In this part, I tell you about Mr. Park's mental approach and about the Korean's training regimens.

Mental Lessons with Mr. Park

Our evening spent with Mr. Park of Win&Win Archery was an education in how to think while shooting. We began by shooting for Mr. Park, outside the W&W factory, at 30 meters. Mr. Park asked us a few questions, such “What do you think about while shooting?” It was a kind of trick question. We said stuff like “I’m working on my shoulder, so I’m thinking about that, etc.” There is nothing wrong with focusing on something that you are trying to fix, but when tournament time comes around Mr. Park gave us the correct mental perspective.

Mr. Park's philosophy is based around three pillars, if you will, *One Action Shooting*, *Use Bone*, and *Concentration*. I'll explain each component separately, though they are all the same, in a way.

By *One Action Shooting*, Mr. Park means that you should have one thought through the entire shot sequence. For Mr. Park, focusing on the elbow is the best thing. Think only about elbow motion the entire shot. If I think about my elbow and my bow hand at the same time, I violate this principle.

Use Bone is as opposed to “use muscle.” Mr. Park explained that it is very confusing to your mind to think about squeezing the muscles that attach to your bones. Instead, he advocates focusing on moving the bones themselves. In this case, we are talking about scapula and elbow rotation.

Mr. Park feels that the American focus on “back tension” is bogus. This reinforces use of the muscles. In Korea, everyone is taught to focus mentally on bone, with 60-70% of the national team thinking elbow specifically, and the remainder thinking scapula.

Mr. Park got off on a tangent, too, about how the scapula is the root of your arm. In fact, the muscles that are attached to your scapula run all the way to your legs, your neck, everything. If you think about your scapula, the rest of your body follows. However, Mr. Park stated that Guy and I both have excellent scapular rotation, so he advocates focusing on our elbows as a less confusing focal point for our minds.

Concentration, as defined by Mr. Park, is composed of two things—#1) Feeling in the form of one action shooting and focusing on bone. You get this feeling through massive repetition of the shot in practice. #2) The target. Yes, he tells us to think about the target, which is directly opposed to the philosophy of “don't aim.” Part 1 without Part 2 will not work, and vice versa. (When we shoot blank bale we eliminate the need to focus on Part 2) Concentration requires execution of perfect feeling (which translates to perfect technique) while focusing your mind on the target. However, don't focus on shooting tens, focus on your groups in the target.

The idea is to keep all your arrows right next to one another other; score is irrelevant. This applies when aiming off, too. Mr. Park said that Kim, Soo-Young would never move her sight after her practice ends, as doing so removed her from her sense of grouping on the target. If she shot her first scoring arrow (Yes, just one arrow, I

“The point is that the archers respect their coaches, and it is easy to see why.”

clarified that.) to the left of the ten, she would aim to the right of the ten for the rest of the distance. Think about it, how many times have you started moving your sight in competition, but you wind up having no idea where the arrows are going to go because you lose that connection with your concentration. Focus on groups at the target, and you will always keep both components of concentration active.

Mr. Park stated that it takes massive amounts of practice, perhaps as much as 800 arrows per day, plus intense technique development, to progress from 1300 to 1350. He feels that the secret to going from 1350 to 1400 lies in developing that perfect combination of feeling and grouping. The top Koreans only shoot about 200 arrows a day, says Mr. Park, as they already have the proper technique. For them to progress, they have to master the details of what we have already mentioned. This confuses me, however, as I would think that it would take just as much practice to perfect your combination of feeling and grouping as it does to work on either component by itself as you build from 1300 to 1350. Perhaps they are just getting lazy? Or perhaps the heavy loads the high school kids shoot are somewhat counterproductive.

This lead naturally to what Mr. Park thought about training regimens.

The Korean Training Regimen

I asked Mr. Park what is the best way to spread around my practice. He said that the best method he has found is to cycle your practice. If I were shooting a maximum of 500 arrows a day, I would take a break day on Sunday, shoot medium (300) on Monday, max (500) on Tuesday, medium (300) on Wednesday, minimum (150) on Thursday, max (500) again on Friday, and medium (300) on Sunday. None of the Korean teams we trained with appeared to follow this method, though, as they all trained everyday. At least 350 arrows each day for the high schoolers. Fewer for the University level shooters, but still they shoot from 2-6 PM and 7:30-10 PM. The Koreans make better use of their practice time, too. The high school students jogged back and forth to the target. The university teams at Kyung Hee Univ. (Yun- Mi, Jin's team) and the National Physical Education University (where the current men's Junior World Champion trains) walked to the target, but they also shot 8 or 10 arrows per end. My impression is that Americans sit around too much at practice. The coach and Kyung Hee said the archers were shooting about 400 arrows per day, and

that's in only 6.5 hours of shooting.

The Korean Development System

According to Mr. Park, kids begin shooting in elementary school, at the age of 9 or 10. They learn perfect bone alignment, correct scapula motion, perfect anchor, perfect release and perfect follow through before they get to touch a bow. First, the kids simply mimic correct motion, bare handed. After that is correct they move on to a Theraband. After perfect form is executed on the Theraband they move to drawing a bow, without an arrow. Finally, they do the whole thing with an arrow, but they don't shoot it. The entire process lasts from three to six months, before they ever release their first shot. However, the payoff is that, according to Mr. Park, they will almost all break 300 at 30 meters (36 arrows) the first time they score. These are 10 year old kids we are talking about.

The kids continue shooting in Junior high schools, where the schools again have ranges. I'm not sure about what goes on at this grade level, but I do know that the best of the junior high shooters are invited to attend one of several physical education high schools, like Kyunsee High School where Guy and I spent most of the week.

At the high school level the kids shoot more than any other group of shooters in Korea. Their heavy days approach 800 arrows, if their coach is not exaggerating. They shoot warm up and a FITA round in the AM, another FITA round in the PM and 2.5 more hours after dinner, under lights. The men at the school shot from a low of 1250 to a high of 1341 for the captain. The women shot all high 1200s to 1365 for the captain. Mr. Park said that high school shooters practice the most for two reasons. First, ascending from 1300 to 1350 is an issue of perfecting technique, which requires a ton of repetition. Second, they all aspire to shoot again at the next level, either in university teams or company teams. In order to do that they must shoot minimum of 1330 for a corporate team, a bit lower than that for a university team. (The thing with the university teams is they are all based around physical education universities, which are tough to get into. Other schools don't have ranges.) If they do not qualify for either of these options, then they will no longer be able to shoot, as there are no public ranges in Korea.

These high school kids do some weight lifting in the off season, but focus only on shooting during the competition season. In fact, they were not even running at this time of the year. They also shoot less immediately

***“If they do not qualify
for either of these
options, then they will
no longer be able to
shoot, as there are no
public ranges in
Korea.”***

before tournaments, only 400 arrows per day, says Mr. Lim, the coach.

When tournaments are coming up the students have no class at all, only shooting. At other times they may have some class in the morning (I even met two of the English teachers at the high school), but I don't think class lasts more than an hour or two. It appears to me that they continue shooting the notorious 9-12:30, 1-6 and 7:30-10 schedule most of the year. All their fingers were leather, except for the kid whose calluses have cracked and are now bloody. I gave them a roll of Vet-Wrap (Coban) as a humanitarian gesture. They don't have that in Korea.

Mr. Lim, and his assistant coach, were at the field all day, everyday, with the shooters. Mr. Lim was a member of a World Championship team in the 80s, and is an accomplished archer himself as are all the top coaches in Korea. Coaching is now their full time career. The point is that the archers respect their coaches, and it is easy to see why.

Yun, Mi Jin attended this high school, and she won both Gold Medals at the Olympics her senior year there, so the madness obviously has paid off. (They now have pictures of her everywhere, the school is like a shrine to Yun, Mi Jin.)

All the archers we shot with shoot outdoors year round. (Yes, even in the snow). They do this by shooting out of small buildings with the windows open. Small heaters make it warm enough to shoot, then they put on a coat to pull their arrows. One of the elementary schools we visited simply had a scaffolding with plastic wrapped around (and squares cut out of the plastic for shooting) to keep out the cold wind.

We have already described what happens at the collegiate team level. There are about 12 university teams in Korea. Archers at Mi-Jin's school, Kyung Hee University (as opposed to Kyungkee High School) run 40 min. in the morning, then spend the rest of the AM in class. They arrive at the range for practice at 2, and shoot till 6. After dinner they shoot under lights (out of their building) from 7:30 till 10. The team and Kyung Hee is new, consisting of only three archers. Yun, Mi-Jin; Lee, Kyung-Jung, and Cho, Eun-Na. Ms. Lee holds the 30 M world record at 360. Guy and I spent an evening with them. I managed to lose an 18 arrow match to Yun, 168-169. I looked through some of her FITA scores, and her good days were 1390. Look out for the Korean women to hit a 1400 soon.

The university teams were more laid back than the high school, but they still work hard. They must maintain their level in order to go for a corporate team after graduation. I expect that some of them will coach down the road, too.

Company team archers shoot less than any other level. Mr. Park says that practice is less important than improving concentration (see the definition of concentration from earlier) at the 1350+ level. Consequently, some company archers may only shoot 200 arrows per day. However, there are others who shoot a ton for simple job security. If they have a slump then they go back to a desk job. Most of the Koreans that we see at the Games are company team members. (Yun, Mi Jin is an exception, as she came right out of high school with Mr. Lim)

So, Korea has a path for their archers to follow that has led to the development of about 100 men who can break 1300, and who knows how many women. Now we can understand how they have accomplished this.

I asked Mr. Park about the recent news of several top Korean Men (Hong, Sung Chil, Kim, Chung Tae, Oh, Kyo Moon and Jang, Yong Ho) being banned from the Korean national team for walking out of a pre World Championship training camp. Mr. Park said that the reports of the archers biting snakes and cleaning sewers are false, but that they were made to carry a wood boat up a mountain, one month before Beijing. These men felt that this was dangerous, and quit. Kim, Chung Tae, received a one year suspension, everyone else a five year suspension.

Mr. Park stated that the theory behind these army training tactics was to develop mental toughness, so that the archers could carry through in difficult matches, though he believes that the toughness necessary to do this is different than the kind being developed in these exercises.

I believe that there is a two fold Achilles heal to the Korean program, a fault that has permitted numerous U.S. gold medals. First, the Korean's financial security runs on archery, and there is a ton of pressure from the people at home to perform. (Ms. Yun made US\$185,000 for her two golds.) Consequently they have everything to lose at the Games. Americans will win neither fame nor fortune at the Olympics, so we have nothing to lose. We have a much better mental state at the Games, we are laid

“The Korean’s financial security runs on archery, and there is a ton of pressure from the people at home to perform. (Ms. Yun made US\$185,000 for her two golds.)”

back, they are up tight.

Second, I believe that the kind of toughness that the KAA has been trying to build in their archers via carrying boats up mountains has been developed for real in Americans via the fact that we have had to make archery happen around our educations and our jobs. We have developed mental toughness over years of stress from those factors. The Koreans may shoot a ton, but that is all they have to do. (Not that shooting all day is easy.) Perhaps they have not been up against enough challenge outside of archery to develop the toughness that they need.

These two problems don’t apply to their women, though, as they are used to winning and that sheds much of the pressure. There is no real competition for them. There are, however, other men who can beat their men, and those Olympic loses are remembered every time they set foot on the range.

The Koreans hold all the world records and win all the World Championships, but their men have not repeated that dominance at the Olympics. Perhaps my comments

shed some light onto why that is.

Chris Shull is a member of the U.S. Archery Team. He currently lives and trains at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, CA, having recently graduated from college.



Here is Chris (far right) with his Pan American Team mates. Photo Courtesy of the NAA.



Ruth Rowe's Book

Fundamentals of Recurve Target Archery

Ruth Rowe—Olympian, archery champion, and coach—brings you the most complete volume available on fundamental shooting technique. Her book provides proper recurve technique for novices and a review and problem solver for all archers. How to learn (or *teach*) in stages—lessons that make learning *properly* easier!
145 pages with 200 illustrations—Everything you need!

\$14.95 plus \$4.00 s/h within the United States.
International orders must inquire regarding shipping and handling.

Archery Focus magazine

PMB 395, 664-A Freeman Lane, Grass Valley, CA 95949-9630, phone 800.671.1140 fax 530.477.8384

