

## Discussion on Dedicated Practice

Well, I have been doing a lot of thinking this past few weeks trying to put some information together for a newsletter. I have been taking my level 4 as you may well be aware and during one of those classes I heard something very interesting. The comment was something along the lines of this. Gymnastic athletes spend 3 hours a day 5 to 6 days a week in the gym working out and training. But the shocking reality is that the many wantabe gymnasts only spend about 30 minutes of dedicated practice. The athletes that rose to the top of the program are the ones that spent over half of that 3 hours in dedicated practice. Working on skills and routines with a focus that did not include everyone else.

After that moment in class I started to look at the people I was encountering in my work with Archery. Everyday, without fail I hear, I want, I will do, but really when it actually comes down to the brass tacks of doing the job and getting the practice in many of our athletes are seriously lacking. The "If I wish hard enough it will happen", policy is in effect.

Let us take an example to clarify what I mean: I go to a tournament and see a couple of newer shooters that I may have seen once before at a smaller event. During practice things for one of the shooters, Sam, goes south, hitting wood and missing the butt. This occurs a couple more times and scoring begins. Soon there are frustrated words uttered and an air of "I don't know why I am shooting so bad" comes over Sam. I speak to one of my fellow coaches regarding Sam, my comments are that I felt the shooter has pretty good form considering the length of time they have been shooting. I would like to however suggest a better tab to help with consistency. Now at this point the coach I was talking to said something I really have to admire. He said. "I really don't know, I see Sam shooting and offer suggestions but most time the shooting is not what is really happening. Sam really likes to be the center of attention and the shooting today is only reflecting the lack of practice."

So why does Sam go to practice? To be social, to engage in conversation and mostly because Sam's parents do archery too. These are not bad reasons to participate in Archery, or any other sport for that matter. If this is the case then Sam should not be disappointed about the performance that was produced at that tournament.

What is dedicated practice? Let's take a look at the meaning of the word Dedicated. "Wholeheartedly devoted or committed to a goal, cause or job." We all know that Archers are a social creature. They like to visit and lend a helping hand to others, very often we see that they like to coach other shooters as well. Often a good shooter will be practicing and other shooters will ask for advice or support. I am not saying don't have fun. It is important to keep fun in the activity. What I am saying is the actual time spent concentrating on your own shooting can be detracted from by the not staying on task. About now some of you are saying well shooting is the task, what task is she talking about?

Let us take a look at the definition again. "Devoted or committed to a goal," . Okay, I have spoken about goals before, this is the overall goal that you have stated in writing for yourself. Some single score, placing or ranking that you want to achieve, or the "Big Picture".

But what about your practice? It would therefore not be to far off the mark to consider that if practice is how you are going to get to the goal, than the practice itself has to have a goal.

For instance, the first 4 practices out for the outdoor season your goal is to shoot 30 arrows at close distance. The arrows will be shot in groups of 6 and we will measure the diameter of the closest group of 5 out of 6 arrows. The next practice #5 we will attempt to improve our group by ?. Millimeters, centimeters, depending on the average group size from the first 4 practices.

Whatever goal you choose for your practice write it down before you start, and when you are finished go back to your journal and assess the practice. Did you measure the groups? Did you record the number of arrows shot? What was the result of the practice? I would also recommend writing down any discoveries that you may have come across.

*Susan Lemke*