

## Self Evaluation

*Some of this article has been compiled from work with Anne Muscat, M.P.E., M.A. Canadian Registered Mental Trainer who works with Sport BC for the Canada Winter Games.*

Ask yourself these couple of questions. Have I ever gone to a competition and before registering gone to see who was already there in my division? Have I ever changed my category to shoot in upon seeing that there were shooters in my category that I thought I could not win against? Have I ever left an event because I knew that I would not be able to win on that day? Have I ever started a shooting event and after a couple of rounds or 1/2 way through decided to give up and go home.

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, I would like to thank you for being honest with yourself. I have to tell you that you are not the only one. And at some point all of us have had or will have these doubts about our shooting ability. This is a doubt that for some people stems from their emotional need for satisfaction. Other shooters have an emotional need to be better than they are at that point in time. They spend so much time analyzing every shot and using self-talk that distracts them from the job and they fail almost before they start. It is also common for emotionally vulnerable athletes to have their self-esteem very closely intertwined with sport performance. If performance is not going well and frustration sets in this leads to an even lesser performance, and enter a circle of anger, frustration and poor performance. An **attitude adjustment** is necessary. Changing your attitude towards mistakes and unexpected events leading to poor performance is required. What we view as an obstacle could be viewed as a challenge (not a threat). Sport could be viewed as excellence, not perfection. In other words there are usually only 3 medals. Not everyone can win.

### **Recognition of the variety of situations that trigger our frustrations is important:**

- Inconsistency in performance
- Failure to meet unrealistic expectations
- Beliefs – no evidence in his/her mind
- Opponents beat you no matter what you do!
- Performance is overly connected to self esteem
- Emotional immaturity
- Perfectionism
- Microwave Metaphor – “want to have it now”
- Feeling out of control
- Losing a competition
- Unrealistic pressure from parents and media

### **Mental strategies are listed below for coping and emotional refocusing**

\* **Positive physical responses.** Athletes must hold their head and shoulders high after a temporary setback. The "no problem, I'll get the next one" attitude will help an athlete refocus quickly during down-time.

\* **Relaxation techniques.** Many athletes experience a high anxiety state during competition. Focusing on slowing ones breathing to trigger a relaxation response during down-time allows the athlete to refocus and redirect emotional energy. Another strategy would be to squeeze the legs, bend your knees, wiggle your toes or shrug your shoulders to release tension from the body.

\* **Develop visual and verbal cues.** Develop a visual and verbal cue to aid refocusing during down-time. An archer might stare at the one part away from the target while repeating a pre-determined

relaxation or psych-up word. It is best here to use cues that are self-reliant and independent of other people (coaches, parents, fans).

\* **Mentally rehearse the correct physical movements.** Mentally practicing proper skills or strategy can be done during sport down-time. Research indicates that athletes are most likely to engage in some form of visualization prior to the start of each new shot or shift (Loehr, 1994).

\* **Watch the pros.** Videotape and take note of what the professionals do after a mistake or disappointment during the crucial down-time periods in sport. Viewing the down-time routine of an accomplished athlete will provide an example that may be modeled.

\* **Practice, Practice, Practice!** Use all of the above techniques and practice them as one would practice skipping rope, or trying to spine an arrow in the palm of your hand.