

The Rear Arm

Previously we have covered the front arm and the follow through. In this session the rear arm shall be covered.

To start with we will look briefly at what happens during the shot to the rear arm. The arm will hold the string with 3 fingers (dealing with most normal FITA style shooters) or a release aid. This will extend by about 10-15cm so that a slight tension is on the string. This is so the front hand can be settled on to the grip and elbows etc. can be set. Then as the front arm is raised the rear is raised synchronously. Once the plane of shooting is a little above the target the draw begins. The elbow moves in 2 different planes which will be discussed later but from the archers perspective it moves backwards. The draw should be as smooth and continuous as possible with tension appearing on the back rather than the arms. At release the archer should not consciously change anything, it is just a reaction, so the draw should once again be as smooth and continuous as possible.

There are several components that make up a good rear arm. These are relaxed fingers, back tension, little or no arm tension and the removal of frontal lobes. The last part may sound slightly extreme but if anything can be blamed for an inconsistent loose it's the archer's brain. If you think about your loose you will kill it (the author sticks up his hand here). How many of you know someone who is a good shot and has on occasion done incredible scores only to have complete crap the next time they shoot, or some one who falls apart really easily under pressure, the reason for this is that they think about their release hand and more especially they try and control the release. I will cover some techniques later which will help, but the main thing is to focus on something else, I've not found anything else that works.

Relaxed fingers – it doesn't really matter how you hold the string so long as your fingers are relaxed. Various authors say you should do different things, Rick McKinney says you should have a deep grip, so do the Koreans, Some other coaches say that a tip hook is great for a fast loose. I won't go into any arguments either way because I shoot half way between a deep hook and a tip hook (what a cop out eh?). All I will say is that the grip should be as relaxed as possible and that you should feel comfortable with whatever style you choose. I would recommend picking a point in the shot cycle that you can use to check the finger position (not full draw!) to ensure that it is correct. This is important for several reasons but primarily it is psychological check. From this point on in the shot you should be able to forget about the fingers and focus on something more beneficial.

Things to watch out for on the finger side are other sports, especially things like climbing, windsurfing or weights, because you can kill the muscles in the fingers and not realise. I spent several archery sessions wondering why I couldn't get through the clicker, and kept on slipping on the string until I figured out that it was the other sports I was doing. I am not saying don't do them – just beware that it can have an effect up to 3-4 days after the event. I basically planned around climbing after a shoot and made sure that I was other wise occupied before hand. If you do them as part of cross training for archery then use the opportunity to build more power into the fingers, speak to a physio to find out what moves/exercises will help with the warm down etc...

Back tension – Ah the magic word for all archers. If you have it then wow you must be a god and shoot like a demonic Zen monk with optical implants (was that not what we were supposed to do all the time Chris?). Let you into a secret – so long as your body is in the right position and your arms are relaxed, then you've already got back tension (talking to you Ian). If you spend all the time trying to create tension on your back then that is what will be there – tension, not powerful, flexible muscles which can move the arrow through the clicker at a moments notice. So what is this mystical position I'm talking about?

Basically when you are at full draw the forces of the bow should be resting on your bone structure and nothing else. Obviously things like your body get in the way of having a perfect 'no tension' position, but your goal should be to get as close as possible to this bones taking the strain position. I will deal with this on each plane (vertical & horizontal) at a time. The horizontal: well normally everyone says that you should be able to look down the archers forearm (rear) straight along the arrow and see a straight line (hence the term 'in line'). This is actually pretty much were you want to be. Most archers struggle to get to this position for a variety of reasons. The most common is that their whole upper body and shoulders are quite open and not closed off to the target. Stand in front of a mirror (as if your

reflection in the mirror is the target) and raise your front arm (as described in the front arm session). Now raise your back arm and see if you can get the rear forearm to line up. If it does then the chances are that when you are at full draw you are 'in line'. If you don't then have a look at your front shoulder. Does it line up straight to your head (or what ever your pretending to aim at) from your head, or does it appear to come in from an angle? If you are not in line I would suspect the latter. To get your self more in line slowly rotate your shoulders till you are. Be careful not to over rotate as you could end up hitting your front shoulder with the string. What has happened is that your back can only go as far as the shoulder blade will let it and to get further round you must move the whole back round more so that you can get into a better line.

Quite often you see archers with their elbow higher than the arrow.