



You Never Have To **RECOVER** From A Good Start

Many shots are actually a recovery of something the shooter messed up in the setup phase. Here's how to start right so you never have to recover.

BY TODD BENDER

I have always thought the game of American skeet really had nothing to do with shooting and everything to do with setup. If your setup is good — you have good foot position, a good hold point, your eyes are in the right spot, a correct mindset and proper mental preparation — then the execution of the shot just falls in your lap. This is the core of my coaching, which was no different one particular November day a few years back.

That day, I was coaching a friend of mine, an F-18 pilot for the Navy. I learn a lot from my clients. At some point during the day, after instilling this concept of “setup” in the game, over and over, my friend looked at me and said, “All bad landings start with a bad approach.”

That comment stopped me dead in my tracks. I used to fly private planes with my dad when I was younger, and the statement is absolutely true. A

bad landing is the result of a number of mistakes that could have easily happened as far back as five miles on final approach. The finality of those mistakes, which can be a cumulative snowball effect, ends in being in the wrong place at the wrong time over the apron. The result is recognized as just a bad landing. But the beginnings of that bad landing reach further back than most realize.

That thought is echoed by another previous experience — driving past a church with a sign in front that read, “You never have to recover from a good start.” Thank you, God. No truer words have ever been spoken.

Think about it. Most shooters’ execution of a specific shot, and it’s a majority of their shots, by the way, are recoveries. It is very common for shooters to have poor setup — foot position, hold points, etc. Poor setup is the tip of the iceberg, and when that, at times, is associated with poor look points or eye placement, you have big problems. If you do

not visually acquire a target quickly enough, or a target beats you because of a poor hold point, every subsequent move you make is a recovery. Even if your initial physical starting points are good, if you are not mentally concentrated and focused visually, then your physical moves after the target leaves the window are recoveries. Most shots made by most shooters are recoveries from poor starts, and/or poor preparation.

Here is the biggest mistake made by many a shotgun shooter: Most shooters are concerned with what happens after they call “pull.” I need to get the right lead! I must break it in the right place! I gotta break that target!

My concern for my game is not about the actual pulling of the trigger — I could care less about the end of the shot and the ensuing result. Now, this has to do with some other mental processes, but this is because I know that the end result of the shot is totally depend-

ent on the beginning of the shot. I know that if my start is right, my gun starts in the right spot, I have the right hold point, my eyes are in the right spot, and I react to

after such a good start. If you have a great start on a target out of the window, there is no recovery necessary. You are already in control. When teaching, 90 percent of my

▼ Hold points and eye points are crucial for a good start. If you don’t have them down, practice on specific stations until you get them right.



the target leaving the window, that by controlling the target in the first 15 feet of target flight out of the window, then I have nothing to recover from. My main concern is what happens at the start of the shot, which in turn dictates what happens at the end of the shot.

Consider what I just said. If you see and react to a target leaving the window and immediately match gun speed with target speed, and you have the right lead, how are you going to miss? It can be done — you can miss, I do — but you have to try real hard to screw it up

days are devoted to just this: seeing and reacting to the target in the first 15 feet of target flight, so that the resulting execution is desirable, with less effort.

Nevertheless, a majority of shooters are repeatedly recovering from a bad start on most of their shots. Want to know what the “big boys” are doing? One thing is for sure — generally they are not recovering from bad starts. In fact, that is the whole reason they rarely miss. They have great starts, so they rarely get into a position to miss. The average tournament target shooter’s whole game is

based on recovery.

Obviously, choosing a good system with fundamentally sound techniques is a requirement here, but even with that, having an inconsistent approach will lead to inconsistent performances. A few years ago, at a major championship, the shoot-off got down to me and a gentleman who was shooting very well. However, in the third round of 3, 4, 5 Doubles, I noticed him make a small change in his setup, and although I was paying attention to my game, I could not avoid seeing this change and took note of this fundamental alteration. After that moment, five more pairs to be precise, that shoot-off was over. He missed because he changed his approach based on the environment. The weight of the situation caused him to rush and hurry his setup. After he missed, all I had to do was break one pair at station 4 to win the World Championship, and guess what I did differently? Absolutely nothing. I stayed true to my routine and my approach, because it’s what got me to that point. No matter what, I stick to my routine, come hell or high water.

There is a bonus to focusing 100 percent of your energy on the immediate task at hand. Running a consistent routine focuses a shooter on the execution of that routine, the process, and releases you from concern over outcome and associated pressures and anxiety. There’s no time to worry about winning or losing — only time and energy to focus on the process.

So, is the average guy

screwed? Have you no chance against the heavy hitters? Absolutely not. The only thing that separates great shooters from the average guy is consistency of execution. Pay attention to what works for you. Have an understanding of the mechanics of the game, and then apply what works and what you know is fundamentally correct. Then keep applying those key points that are integral to your success. Pay attention to your setup points. Do it with the same intensity that a pilot does in his pre-flight checklist. Don’t deviate from that path. If you focus on your execution, the process of what makes you successful, the outcome you desire will follow.



▲ When you have a routine down and it’s working, don’t let stress or pressure convince you to change it. Not broke? Don’t fix it!

For many years, I have suspected that 70 percent of targets are missed before they are ever called for. I think this is a conservative estimate. It has already been determined whether or not you will hit

a target, based on your setup. Another client and friend of mine told me recently that before we started working together, 95 percent of his work came after he called “pull.” Now, 95 percent of his work

you will never reach your potential, even with perfect physical execution. Consistency of thought is the key to consistency of execution. Many technical errors are caused by mental mistakes,

▼ You must be able to see and react to the target within the first 15 feet of its flight. If you can’t, adjust your hold points accordingly.



and conversely, although not equally, some technical errors actually cause mental errors. This means that to be ultimately successful, one should be clean, both mentally and physically in their game. If you don’t have a sound mental game, you are behind the curve, and you need to start developing one. And don’t think for a second that the top guys in every sport don’t have control of both of these most important aspects of competition. For them, recovery can be a necessary but rare action, because you never have to recover from a good start. **CTN**

► For information about Todd Bender Performance Systems and for Todd’s 2017 clinic schedule, go to toddbender-intl.com. For Todd’s newest videos on skeet shooting, contact Sunrise Productions at shotgunjournal.com.