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HAVE YOU TRIED:

Doubles SKEET

Skeet doubles is an exciting and humbling game that will challenge your skills.

BY MIKE PETERSON



PHOTOS BY LAL THRELKELD

▲ Stations 1, 2 and 3 are shot with the high house first. Stations 5, 6 and 7 are shot with the low house first. Station 4 alternates depending on which way you're moving around the field.

The NSSA rule book defines a Regular Double as “A regular target thrown from each skeet house simultaneously.” A seemingly short innocuous statement, yet it means so much to a shooter. For some it causes a shudder, others a nervous excitement. A few will express their love for doubles, and for a small contingent of skeet purists, it brings out an exclamation of “It isn’t even real skeet!” The game of doubles causes almost as many reactions as there are shooters, because it is so different from a regular round of skeet. Seriously, the rounds don’t even have the same number of targets every time, and the goal isn’t to get a 25?

Let’s break down a doubles event to look at the characteristics that make it special. A doubles event is always shot for a minimum of 50 targets or 25 pairs; more often it’s 100 targets. As always, the round starts on station 1 and proceeds around the field. A single pair will be shot at each station; however, after everyone has completed their pair from station 7, the squad reverses direction

and heads back around the field, eventually ending on station 2. This is where one of the oddities in doubles comes into play.

Only 24 birds have been shot, so you keep the extra shell and get another box, leaving you with 26 shells — enough for 13 pairs. You will go through the same steps as the previous round, but instead of ending on station 2, the last pair will be shot from station 1. This completes the 25 pairs, and if you are shooting a 100-target event, you will repeat the same sequence of events for the next 25 pairs.

That’s a macro view of a doubles event; let’s break it down further and look at individual stations. Stations 1, 2 and 3 will always be shot with the high house first. Similarly, stations 5, 6 and 7 will always be shot with the low house first. This goes with the rule of shooting the closest bird first. Station 4 is the oddball, as it is placed equidistant from both high and low houses. For station 4, when proceeding counterclockwise around the field (commonly referred to as “going”), you will be shooting



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the high house first. When traveling clockwise around the field, or “coming back,” you will be shooting the low house first. Station 8 is not used during a regulation doubles round, nor should doubles ever be thrown from station 8 due to safety considerations.

There are a lot of differences between regular skeet and skeet doubles, but the end goal is still the same — break every target that’s in the air.

I’ve asked many shooters, both beginning and experienced, “What is the most important target of the pair?” That question isn’t fair to ask without further clarification, but I ask it anyway to see different points of view. On the scoreboard, both targets are equally important, but most shooters’ perception is that the first target is more important. I agree with that sentiment, but for different reasons than others.

The reason I think the first target is more important is because the only target I care about is the one I am about to shoot! I can’t shoot the second target on the pair without going after the

first target, so the first target should have all of my attention until I pull the trigger. After I have executed my plan on the first target, I want my brain to start thinking about the next target I’m going to shoot, which coincidentally is the second target on the pair. I can’t stress it enough — one target at a time!

While we still have “one target at a time” in our head, we also can’t forget about the second target. When setting up how to break the first one, you have to think about where you want to pick up the second target. How you pick up the second target is critical. This is where the “eye shift” becomes crucial. I used to have a fairly slow recovery time from the first target to the second, mainly because I didn’t use the eye shift to my advantage. I got away with it because I had good reflexes, but my scores were inconsistent. Over the last few years I have worked very hard to force my eyes to go from the first target to the second target, instead of just letting the target come into my vision. I have a somewhat bird-dog mentality that I want to go hunt that target down. This, for me, is the single most important thing I have to remember when I shoot a doubles event.

Much of the way I have set up my doubles game is centered on the eye shift. The way I determined where to break my first target was by knowing how long it was going to take me to get to the second target and being able to time the first target so that when I pulled the trigger

and followed through to the second, it was a smooth transition into a sustained-lead situation on the second target. This is the sweet spot. If I shoot the first bird too early, I tend to stop the swing and end up in a “dead gun” situation with no gun speed trying to shoot a declining lead. If I shoot too late, I am chasing the second target and then have to execute a pass-through shot. Remember that the most effective way to break skeet targets is with sustained lead. If you can

first target, that’s already 50 targets out of a 100-target event. Next are the baseline or corner targets, those being on stations 1, 2, 6 and 7. Again, these are pairs we see every time we shoot a round of skeet. Hitting all of those targets, plus all of your first targets, puts you at a total of 76 targets. That’s more than three-fourths of the targets and you still haven’t hit a single pair from the three middle stations. By maximizing your high percentage shots you are affecting a larger



▲ Practice shooting the first target in the sweet spot — the spot where you give yourself a smooth transition between the first target breakpoint and a good sustained-lead situation on the second target.

match target speed to gun speed on both the first and the second target, you will be well set for improving your doubles scores. Practice shooting the first target in the sweet spot to the point where it is your breakpoint for those targets in singles. It doesn’t make much sense to have to shoot the same bird two different ways.

Another big part of doubles is not giving up “easy” targets. When I say easy, I really mean your high percentage shots, like your first shot on every pair. This is basically a single that you shoot every round, and if you hit every

number of targets throughout the round.

Doubles is one of my favorite events at a tournament, but it can be humbling at times. I think the challenge is what draws people; it is certainly what keeps me interested. Although it might be challenging, it is also fairly simple. Remember to take one target at a time and have fun! **CTN**

▶ Mike Peterson is the 2015 HOA World Champion and World Doubles Champion.