

Using **KARATE** On **TARGETS**

On true pairs, take a lesson from martial arts — you must defeat the toughest opponent first.

BY CLAYTON M. RUE, NSCA LEVEL III INSTRUCTOR

In the days of my youth, I spent several years pursuing a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. As I advanced through the ranks, one of the tests I had to pass was defeating multiple opponents. A standard tactic used in this situation is to identify the opponent that represents the most significant risk to yourself and defeat him first. This same tactic can be successfully employed against a pair of targets on a sporting clays course.

Sporting clays is a game of pairs. On almost every station we are required to shoot at two different targets. Each brace of targets can come at you in the form of a report, following or true pair. When presented with a pair of targets thrown on report, or as a following pair, we don't have to decide which target to shoot first — the target setter has done this for us. However, when we are faced with a pair of targets launched simultaneously, we must choose which target to shoot first. And in this case, the target setter is much more successful at making us miss if we make the wrong decision.



When presented with a pair of targets, you need to develop a shot plan that gives you the highest chance of success on both targets in the pair. Your decisions should be guided by a standard set of rules that usually helps you make the correct choice. For example, when the pair includes one difficult target and one easy target, your hit percentages will go up if you apply all your focus to the difficult target first. Then you can clean up the easy target with the second shot. Make sense? Applying this type of logic, let's run through a list of rules that should be a good starting point for most pairs.

As already stated, when one target is much more difficult than the other, shoot the difficult target first. Typically, specialty targets like rabbits and battues are more challenging than standard targets. Dispatching them first is a good idea. Specialty

presentations, such as chandelles, are also best shot first when paired with a simpler presentation.

When you can see one target much better than the other, shoot the hard-to-see target first. Give your eyes their best chance at seeing both targets clearly. A target in the sky is much easier to see than a target in the trees. Your eyes will always focus best on the first target in a pair.

When one target is on edge and the other target shows some face, shoot the edge-on target first. Targets that show some dome (or belly) are easier to see and easier to break.

When you have an outgoing target in the pair, shoot it first, especially if the outgoing target is dead straight-away. A straight-away target can be killed very quickly, giving you plenty of time for the second target. A straight-away target can also be



▲ When one target is above the other, shoot the lower target first.

tricky to hit with the second shot if a lot of muzzle movement is required between the two targets.

When you have an incoming target in the pair, shoot the other target first. Incoming targets usually take a long time to develop. Use that time effectively to focus on and dispatch the other target.

When one target is above the other, shoot the lower target first. The obvious benefit is that you can always see the higher target after shooting the lower target. Not so obvious, but just as critical, is that when you

move your barrels from the break point of the first target down to the insertion point for the second target, there is the inherent risk of spoiling the line on the second target. As a target setter, this is one of the default traps I always set for shooters.

When one target is much faster than the other, shoot the fast target first. This allows you to take advantage of the optimum kill zones for both targets.

When one or both targets are curling, shoot the target with the most curl first. Curling targets start out as relatively easy targets. Early in their flight path, they are under power and have a clean line. The longer they are in the air, the more dynamic they become. Not only do they begin to turn, but they also start to drop. And curling-away targets almost always go edge-on. Therefore, a curling-away target is always my candidate to shoot first.

When one target is larger than the other, shoot the smaller target first. The smaller target is usually more difficult to see and traveling at a higher rate of speed.

When one target trails the other, shoot the trailing

target first. This allows you to break both targets with one continuous swing. Simply shoot the rear target first, then accelerate through the front target. If you shoot the leading target first, you will unnecessarily introduce both speed and direction changes into your muzzles.

When the break point of the first target leaves your barrels grossly out of position to attempt the second target, you should swap the order you are shooting them in. This is one of the most common ways target setters cause misses. Don't let them get away with it.

When one target is unpredictable, such as a bouncing rabbit, shoot it first. Nothing is more frustrating than breaking your first target, then going to your second insertion point and not being able to find the second target.

These are all good rules. But as a target setter, I intentionally try to set pairs that force the shooter to decide between two rules. For example, if there is an outgoing target in the pair, the shooter's first instinct is to take it first. If, however, I pair it with a crossing target that curls away, then our standard set of rules says we should shoot the curling-away target first. In this case, I look to a third rule for a tie-breaker. I would compare shooting the pair both ways in my mind. If I take the outgoing target first, when I shoot the crosser it will be edge-on, curling away and dropping. If I take the curling-away target first, it is a simple crosser early in its flight path, and the going-away target will

still be a straight-away shot. For this pair, I would judge the curling crosser to be the more difficult second target and therefore shoot it first.

Learning how to layer rules and apply a tie-breaking rule is a skill that every shooter needs to develop. I can't tell you how common it is to see shooters attempting targets in the wrong order and missing one, or even both, because of this. A good target setter will tempt you into poor decisions regularly if you do not take the time to read both targets as a pair, both ways, and apply your best logic.

► Evaluate each presentation as a pair, not as two targets. Visualize shooting the targets in both orders and make a choice.



The adoption of a set of shooting rules has another huge benefit that manifests itself in the mental part of the game. By routinely dispatching the more difficult target in the pair first, your mind knows that you have the harder target out of the way. You should now have greater confidence in your ability to break the second target. Just don't become complacent on the second target. You must respect it

and give it your full attention every time, or risk shaking your head as you walk out of the shooting stand.

I'm sure you can think of a bunch more standard rules for breaking pairs of targets.

pair look very challenging to you, you may opt to shoot at the easier target first, giving you the option of using your second shot on the same target should you miss. If you are trying to build score, two



◀ Of course, there's an exception to every rule. You have to learn to layer and apply the rules and know when to break them and go for the easy target first.

higher-percentage attempts is better than one.

When taking on multiple opponents, I have not always been successful. I have taken some pretty impressive beatings, both in the ring and on sporting clays courses. But I have learned a couple of things from these beatings. First, I don't want to crawl in the ring again — ever. Second, when I am shooting a true pair of targets, I must evaluate them as such. They are more than just two targets. You are fighting against a team and must have a plan to defeat both. And remember, the guy in front of you might not be right — even if he just broke both targets. **CTN**

▼ Your odds of success go up if you focus on the more difficult target of the true pair first, if you're able.

