



# Kicking The **BEAR**

Eye dominance issues have a tendency to rear their heads on specific presentations. The trick is figuring out which ones trigger problems for you.

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**M**any years ago, I routinely struggled with straight away/up/incoming targets. That is, until Kevin Sterk (NSCA Level III Instructor and Chief Shooting Instructor for Griffin and Howe) watched me shoot a couple of these targets and told me I was missing them due to my eye dominance. At the time I was a Master-Class shooter and already an NSCA Level III instructor, so I was skeptical of his diagnosis. But, as all shooters should be, I was open to learning something new.

Kevin then introduced me to a new way of looking at eye dominance. Historically, eye dominance has been assigned by using a test that gives a binary answer of either right-eye dominant or left-eye dominant. The results

of this test were then used to decide which shoulder a shooter should shoot his gun off of, and that was the end of the discussion.

But eye dominance is not as simple as right or left. Through the research of people like Dr. Richard Colo, OD, we now know that our brain assigns an eye dominance position based on input from both eyes, and he explains, "Eye dominance is never as simple as left or right, but is a cyclopic position located somewhere between the right and left eye." Now, this statement is way above my pay grade, but I now see evidence of what it means in my students every day.

Simply put, if a person's eye dominance position is located somewhere between his right pupil and the bridge of his nose, then he is broadly categorized as right-eye dominant. The converse is true if his eye dominance position is located on the other side of his face. What is important to understand about this is that only a rare few people have an eye dominance position that exactly aligns with the pupil of the eye.

So, what does this mean to a shooter? It means that most of us will have an offset between our unique eye dominance position and the eye we are using to look

down the barrels. This offset can be large or small, as can its impact on the shooter. And this offset is like a sleeping bear. It will sleep peacefully in its den until the shooter decides to go in and kick it.

by a highly trained and experienced instructor. Then, he will be able to draw on his years of experience to help you identify presentations that will most likely kick the bear

**"Most of us will have an offset between our eye dominance position and the eye we are using to look down the barrels."**

Then the shooter's score card takes a mauling, and he will wonder what just happened.

So, what can we as shooters do to minimize the effects of eye dominance on our scorecards? The best answer is to get a detailed eye test performed

for you and provide you some corrective action steps to help keep the bear in his cave. Until you can make this happen, there are several steps that can be taken by every shooter to help minimize the impacts of eye dominance.

▼ Eye dominance isn't as simple as left or right. Rather, your dominance is located on a spectrum between the right and left eye.



**KEEP THE BEAR IN HIS DEN**

First, you should always minimize your barrel awareness on targets that cause problems for you. Dr. Colo states, "The level

suggestion is to ensure your eyes engage with the target before your muzzles begin to move. This allows our focus to go directly to the leading edge of the target. If you start your muzzles moving prior to your eyes engaging the

the problem target from a low-gun ready position. This will keep the muzzles as far away from the eyes as possible for as long as possible. It's only when you become aware of both the barrels and target that your

eye dominance may become a problem for you. And since we all know that when shooting from a low gun ready position, we should always release the shot at the exact instant the comb touches our face, this will absolutely minimize the time the barrels and the bird are spent together.

Another option is to shoot a problem target with a cut-off technique (see the article titled "Cut It Off" in the October 2017 issue of CTN). By using a cut-off approach to the target, the barrels and the target will not travel together in the same plane for any appreciable time, thus minimizing our barrel awareness. Just another way to keep the bear in his den.



▲ Some presentations will trigger eye dominance problems for you. Learn what approach helps minimize the problems on those presentations so you'll know how to handle them.

of conscious relationship between the bird and barrel determines the significance of the eye dominance point." What this means is that the more aware you are of the bird/barrel relationship, the more likely you are to experience a miss due to your eye dominance.

Minimizing your barrel awareness can be accomplished in several different ways. First, you should increase your intense focus on the leading edge of the target. This will decrease your awareness of the barrels and allow the subconscious to execute the shot for you. This is excellent advice for every target.

A second universal

target, your eyes will want to go to the muzzles, and we all know this will really piss off the bear. So, remember, on every target: eyes first!

Another way to keep the bear in his den is to minimize the amount of time your barrels and the target spend in close proximity to each other. The more time you spend with your barrels connected to the target, the more likely the conscious mind will try to take over. The more your conscious mind gets involved, the more likely your eyes are to look at the lead. And as soon as you look at the lead, the bear has you.

One of the most effective ways to minimize time spent with the target is to attempt



▼ Minimizing barrel awareness helps with dominance issues.

A third option available to us is to alter your focal, hold or break point for targets that you think might be a problem for you due to eye dominance. For example, if you are a right-handed, right-eye-dominant shooter and you have no problems with right-to-left targets but occasionally struggle with left-to-right targets, you may want to force your focal point closer to the launch point for those left-to-right targets. This will help ensure the right eye has a chance to grab the target early and minimize the risk of the left eye deciding to muddy the water.

## CORRECTING THE PROBLEM

Going back to the problem I was having with targets that had minimal horizontal movement, Kevin determined that my eye dominance point was aligned with the inside corner of my right eye. The knock-down effect of this was two-fold.

First, when I mounted my gun, I wanted to align my barrels with the inside corner of my right eye rather than with my right pupil. This caused me to roll my head. Second, for these types of targets, I had been taught

to minimize my draw length, which means I usually pre-mounted my gun. This made me very “barrel aware” for these targets, which served to increase the probability that my eye dominance would cause me a problem. The effect of this was that the harder I tried to perfect

my comb touches my face. For quartering in/out targets, I always shoot them with a cut-off move. For crossing targets, I simply trust my subconscious mind to apply the correct lead. Problems solved!

So, what we have learned about eye dominance issues?



▲ When you're reading a target, note if it's a presentation that tends to give you trouble. Then implement a plan that helps minimize barrel awareness and keeps the bird/barrel relationship intact.

▼ Touching off the shot at the moment the stock comes to your cheek will help your shooting by keeping your focus off the muzzle.



my bird/barrel relationship, the worse I made the problem.

So, my problem is a perfect example of an eye dominance issue that, while it's always there, only comes roaring out of its den when kicked. The majority of eye dominance issues that shooters experience manifest themselves in exactly the same way. They are triggered by only certain presentations and only become a problem for us when we become aware of our barrels.

So, what corrective actions have I taken? Now, for targets that travel straight away/up/in, I always shoot them from a low gun position and release my shot the instant

First, almost everyone has this sleeping bear in their game. Second, it only comes roaring out of its den when kicked by a combination of a specific presentation coupled with barrel awareness. And finally, an evaluation by an expert in this topic is always your best option for sorting out your eye dominance demons.

As I write this article, it's springtime in Alaska. Time for the bears to start coming out of their dens. But if I don't go kicking any of them, we should be able to get along just fine.

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