

Shooting Clinic, Alaska Biathlon – Anchorage

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Session 11: Discussion Topics, Range Items

A. Discussion Topics

1. Foundations and Basic Shooting Steps

- In thinking about the most effective method for progressing to higher levels of ability and achievement in biathlon, a logical analogy comes to mind, that of erecting a building. After the site is prepared, the foundation, which will support the structure and its specific functions, is constructed. Especially in Alaska, where the ground on which a structure is to be built often is unstable, it is essential for the foundation to be well-based and solid or it will not support the remainder of the building to allow proper functioning.

Site preparation could be compared to becoming familiar with biathlon, getting safety instruction, obtaining a rifle, and attending a shooting clinic, but in order to advance beyond a basic level in the sport it is essential for you to build a solid foundation of actions that allow you to achieve superior shooting results (superior biathlon results, of course, also require a solid foundation in the skiing aspect of the sport). A solid shooting foundation, like a building foundation, requires a series of steps to be accomplished in a specific order and correctly. If the building foundation is not up to code, the building may crack and fall apart; likewise, if your shooting foundation (6 basic steps for a well-aimed shot) is not solid and correct, during a race you may find yourself placing behind where you could be because of spending too much time on the penalty loop. Unlike a building foundation, which is constructed once, you will achieve a solid shooting foundation constructed of basic steps that are automatic and flawless by practicing the sequence many times. After your foundation is solid, further practice and refinement will produce the speed that is desired for solid performances in competition.

2. Performance on the range

- if you were shooting at the 50% level in a pursuit race (hitting 10 of 20 targets) before practicing the procedures discussed in these clinic sessions, you probably spent at least 5 minutes on the penalty loop ($30 \text{ sec/lap} \times 10 = 300 \text{ sec} = 5 \text{ min}$) in addition to your ski time on the course and range time. In that time you skied an extra 1500 m or 1.5 k ($150 \text{ m/lap} \times 10$); in a 10 k race, that is 13% farther than the racer who shot clean!

- In addition, you may be more sluggish on course due to the additional distance skied, and possibly somewhat discouraged due to thinking about those six competitors who passed you while you were going around, and around, and around...

- Your attitude should be: **no penalty laps**, instead of: it's ok to do some (which can affect your skiing attitude and the entire race); however, if you do get penalties, you need to keep your 'in the zone' focus so this momentary slip does not negatively affect your performance during the remainder of the race.

- The most positive response to missed targets is to resolve to do what it takes to accomplish clean shooting, and to believe that this is possible.

- Mental preparation is an important part of training to improve your shooting accuracy, especially focus on hitting the target, and eliminating distractions such as general noise, activity of spectators and officials, and actions of the shooter in the next lane.

3. Dryfiring

- Dryfiring is an excellent exercise to 'troubleshoot' for flaws in position, trigger control, etc.; since you aren't firing (no end result on a target that you would want to check), it often is easier to analyze the range and shooting procedures, and experiment with slight adjustments (e.g., head position, breathing control, butt plate adjustment) that can be tried on the next visit to the range.

- Because you can go through a procedure repeatedly in a short time (10-15 min/day), you are able to use your practice time more efficiently than at the range where other distractions, plus the activity that accompanies actual shooting, may interfere with your detailed awareness of subtle aspects of each step of the range and shooting procedure.

- Dryfiring allows you to concentrate on aspects of your position etc. that may need some adjustment, rather than focus on just shooting and hitting targets.

- Simulated shots taken during dryfiring practice should follow the same 6-step procedure that you use at the range for live fire; don't rush through the process so fast that you neglect the details for a well-aimed shot just because you aren't shooting live ammunition.

- When dryfiring, or at the range, follow the 6-step procedure for a well-aimed shot for each shot regardless of how much dryfire practice or shooting is anticipated.

B. Range

1. Adjust zero on your sight for the day's conditions from your no-wind zero mark,

2. Fire five shots without intermediate scoping, then check to see if there are any shots away from the others: what could have caused this?

a. are there some aspects of your position that need adjustment? for example, are you putting the butt plate in the same position in your shoulder each time?

- it's harder to control the vertical aspect of your sight picture consistently--easier for your sight picture to wander higher or lower--if this varies because you are forcing it up to counteract a butt plate too high on shoulder or down for a butt plate too low,

- is your sling tension the same for each shot? (as you shift slightly for the next target, perhaps not quite consistent so introduces some variation in sling tension left or right; or has the shooting cuff slipped down)?

b. if your position was all right, perhaps not the natural point of aim? were you forcing the rifle onto the target rather than settling into position?

c. was your breathing control (vertical hold) the same for each shot? did you push out the same amount of air with the same force each time, rather than just exhaling and then trying to stop at the same point (usually this is not very consistent)? did you have a definite stop at the same point (at the natural end of your exhale, where there is a natural pause during which the rifle will fire without as much breathing movement if your trigger squeeze is completed then)?

d. was your trigger control adequate, plus was the final trigger squeeze with eyes open, or could you have been closing them so you didn't see the final sight picture where you may have pulled the rifle well off center and not corrected before it fired? the combination of uneven trigger control and not seeing if you are on target can result in a shot outside the group.

e. did you hold slightly for an adequate follow through? if it isn't quite accomplished before the bullet leaves the barrel, can affect where the shot will go (i.e., if you start preparing for the next shot too quickly).