

Shooting Clinic, Alaska Biathlon – Anchorage

2 May 2009

Instructor: Richard Barlow

Session 7: Biathlon Focus Practice and Proficiency; Shooting Exercises

A. Commentary

1. As is typical in a group of varied experience, not everyone recalls the details of each topic discussed or accomplishes all steps of the shooting process or performs all aspects of exercises on the range correctly each time without completing many repetitions; if you are having difficulty with certain aspects of a range procedure or don't quite understand what is expected to accomplish an exercise, ask Richard, or fellow athletes, or others experienced in the sport who are present at the clinics. Also, since most topics and procedures have been covered in more than one session, it may be useful for you to review notes from other sessions that explain a topic or how to accomplish a procedure correctly.

2. Spend time practicing away from the range:

- Dry firing through the six steps for a well-aimed/well-executed shot: getting into position, natural point of aim, breathing control, trigger control, follow through, call the shot;

- Repetitions of each individual step;

- Position holding for 60 sec or more;

- Repetitions of totally focused "in the zone" thinking through all steps of preparation for and completing a well-aimed shot, including getting into position and preparing the rifle to fire; expand this exercise to include range approach, movement to the firing point, movement onto the mat, and departure from the firing point (it may help to do this imagination exercise with eyes closed);

- Because biathlon is such a mental sport, it's also necessary to practice achieving 100% focus, not allowing surrounding activities or extraneous thoughts distract you while accomplishing range procedures;

- These exercises should be your greatest volume of practice and are essential for all aspects of the shooting sequence and race strategy to become second nature.

3. Another thought process that can help you focus on specific training needs is considering what level of proficiency you want to achieve in biathlon. Most of the junior biathletes involved in the NSAA biathlon program have the potential to reach higher levels in the sport. What level you actually reach depends upon your desire, which in turn will determine the amount of time

and effort you are willing to devote to training, and mastering the technical details of the shooting process in particular. Take a moment to consider both your short-term and long-term goals in biathlon, and an approximate timetable you feel is realistic for accomplishing these goals (write out a schedule).

4. Consider your current level of proficiency in biathlon:

- What is your current prone shooting percentage (% targets hit)? 50-60% ? higher ? lower ? percentage in the standing position? How much extra distance skied on the penalty loop and time it takes to ski the laps added to total race time do these numbers represent?

- Where do you expect these numbers to be next month, in six months, in twelve months?

- What steps can you take to accomplish these performance goals? (hint: mastering the basic shot steps, dryfiring, thinking through the procedures, zone focusing);

- How can you gain consistency in each step of the sequence which results in a well aimed shot?

- Your shooting will improve if you understand and master the shooting fundamentals and apply them each time you shoot; most importantly, regardless of your physiological state as you enter the range at the end of a race lap, if you apply the fundamentals during each shooting bout you will shoot better and your race time will reflect this;

5. Range considerations:

- If you are having a problem consistently stopping your sight on each target in the vertical plane (elevation) after setting your position and achieving natural point of aim, you probably are not cutting off your breath at the same point each time, so practice exhaling to a natural and comfortable endpoint, not struggling to expel every bit of air (aim too high) or cutting off after exhaling only e.g. $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{2}{3}$ of the air (aim too low); also, there may be too much reflection of the diaphragm movement through the breastbone and ribs up to the rifle – try bending one leg slightly which will lift these bones off the ground a little further;

- If you are having a problem with the horizontal aspect (windage) of aiming, assuming you have established a good natural point of aim, pay special attention to your trigger control;

- To get some additional steadiness in the standing position, try setting your natural point of aim slightly to the right (right handed shooter) of the target you will be shooting and then pivot left onto the target before firing; this tends to “tighten” the position for a brief period;

- Also, when shooting in the standing position under windy conditions it may help to approach the target into the wind;

- While you are training at range openings, where there is no physiological or mental stress of competition, is the time to analyze your performance to determine what aspects of shooting and range procedure you need to work on to accomplish your goals; perfecting the basics for a well aimed shot now will pay off in upcoming time trials and the next competition season.

B. Range Exercises

1. "Ball and Dummy"

- One member of a pair is the shooter, the other is the rifle loader;
- With the shooter looking away from the rifle, the loader inserts a magazine containing a live round or no round and closes the bolt;
- Alternatively, with the shooter looking away from the rifle and tilting the receiver opening towards the loader, the loader inserts a bullet into the shooter's rifle chamber, or simulates inserting a bullet so the chamber remains empty, and closes the bolt (any inserted magazine should be empty);
- Since the shooter's rifle may contain a live round in the chamber and has the bolt closed, the rifle should be treated as though loaded with a live round and handled with standard safe operating procedures (with the exception of the open bolt rule);
- The shooter should go through the basic sequence of steps for a well aimed shot in the same manner whether the rifle is going to fire or not; this exercise especially tests your mental focus and trigger control;
- The loader should watch the shooter closely throughout the shooting sequence to detect any extraneous movements, or lack of good breathing control, trigger control or follow through;
- After the shooter has completed several shot sequences, shooter and loader trade places.

2. Blank target

- The shooter is presented with a paper target strip that has been reversed so there are no targets to use as aiming points;
- This exercise will test your prone position, natural point of aim, breathing control and trigger control, all of which at this point you should be able to accomplish automatically and consistently;
- Shoot three shots: with your position, breathing control, and trigger control good, your natural point of aim primarily will determine your group;
- For your next sequence of three shots, shift your position/natural point of aim so the group will be separated from the previous group.