

## **January/February 2003 - Training for competition**

One of the most interesting things that I have noticed during the 17 years I have been involved with the Australian clay target team is how shooters have become more professional in their approach to major competitions.

I am forever having people ask how I train for shooting or saying that I am lucky because, as a shooter, I don't have to do any physical training. The latter statement is true. You don't have to do any physical training if you want to shoot; you only have to do it if you want to win.

These days, shooting on an international level is no different than any other sport. The competitors at the top are diversifying their training so that pulling the trigger on the range is just one component of their training scheme. This month I will give you an insight into my preparation towards a major event.

The first step towards achieving anything is to clearly identify your goals. For me, most years have three to four major events in which I would sincerely like to do well. Therefore, I always buy a large yearly planner, mark those events and base my training program around them. Every year there is a world or Olympic championship, a national title and a world cup event, so identifying the year's goals is relatively easy.

After setting my goals, my next step is to assess how much shooting I actually need to do. I never go too long without having at least a few practice rounds, so I am never really too far away from what I comfortably feel as 'technically correct'. If, for example, I had a world championship event in late August, I would start shooting seriously - three times a week, 150 targets a day - from the middle of May. I would also be looking to shoot in at least two club competitions a month to get some sort of realistic indication on how I am going score-wise.

About the same time I start preparing for a major event, I intensify my physical training. I have always done a fair amount of running as part of my preparation. Generally, I run four times per week: two sessions for 30 minutes and two for 20 minutes. I have set courses I run and I always keep a record of the times I am running to help gauge my fitness. By keeping a diary of your physical training, as well as your scores when shooting, you will always tend to push yourself harder.

I believe a weights or gym program is just as important to achieving better results as actually shooting. Many of the muscles you need to hold a firearm correctly for long periods are never needed in most people's daily lives. Biceps, triceps, upper back, and neck and shoulder muscles are generally used when competing. Any qualified gym instructor can easily devise a program to accommodate this.

If you find it hard to find the finances or time to join a gym, then a couple of reasonable size dumb-bells are a worthwhile investment. For most men two 7.5 to 10kg weights are perfect. For women, 5 to 7.5kg weights are ideal. I have a program that has me doing six

different weight exercises with three sets of 15 repetitions. Between each exercise I do 25 stomach and lower back sit-ups or lifts as well. In total it takes about 40 minutes to complete and I will do it three to four times a week in the 12 weeks before an important competition.

When using weights be careful not to lift too much, strain muscles or simply get too big. In shotgun shooting, where smoothness is the key, I have found that some of the overly muscle-bound shooters tend to be slightly robotic in their actions as compared to someone who is well toned, but not bulky.

One of the best examples I have seen of how less time on the range and more time in the gym has improved a shooter's performance is with our own Michael Diamond. It is a well-known fact that Michael does not spend 12 months of the year shooting clay targets, but he nearly spends that amount of time in the gym. Throughout the past six or eight years, Michael has become very strong and aerobically fit and his results have definitely improved because of this.

As I mentioned earlier, it is very important to keep a diary on all parts of your training program. It should be your goal to reach your desired fitness level about seven to ten days before your competition and to be very comfortable with your shooting skills and technique at about the same time.

The week before a match is not the time to be trying out anything new. It is so important in the last few days before a big competition to keep things as stress-free and as simple as possible. One of the best pieces of advice I was ever given was by American Olympic medallist Dan Carlisle. He told me that an Olympics is not won by what you do on the day; it is won by what you have done in the three months prior.

The hardest part about any training program is being able to set realistic goals, train to them and after the competition is over sit down and accurately assess where you have gone right or wrong. Sometimes some real soul searching and pride swallowing will be needed. It can be very easy to blame someone or make up easy excuses why things didn't go to plan. Often the hardest lesson in shooting is to take responsibility for your own actions. If you didn't achieve your goal then I would suggest that before you consider lowering the bar a little, try increasing your training program and see how you fare next time.

We may not all be in the sport to win Olympic medals, but we are all in it to improve. When we improve we enjoy it more.

Until next time, straight shooting.