

TARGET PANIC

In the vast array of articles I have read and the information collected in years of shooting with beginners and pro's, it seems that the term "target panic" is the ultimate catch-all for all kinds of shooting problems. If one was to listen carefully to each shooter's definition of the term you will learn one thing, this definition is very unique in each shooter's eye and it is customized to his own shooting form problem.

To be totally non-medical my definition of "target panic" would be simple, brain seizure at the "anticipation" of release. Finger shooters will generally define the disease as a failure to release or freeze-up at or close to the point of release. Although I'm personally not acquainted with this type of situation, it fits into the overall definition and proposed therapy. Release shooters have a far larger array of symptoms which are attributed to the feared "target panic". Hammering the release trigger mechanism, yanking the bow, uncontrollable spasms, premature releases and all other sorts of uncontrolled actions are the final stages of this dreaded affliction, which can, in its extreme, force good shooters to actually quit.

Many drastic remedies have been tried for this problem. Most fail and some even make the problem more exaggerated and cause further frustration. Many of the stories I have heard actually start out with "I had it so bad I had to give up archery for a couple of years. Most of these accounts, although different in detail, consist of two or three simple problems. Which by no means implies that the problems are easy to overcome, but shows that they are easy to identify.

The word "panic" itself is misleading. The problem of separating the aiming function and the release is not necessarily a panic. Sometimes it is the freeze, the uncontrollable jerk or the just plain badly executed shot. My personal brand of target panic fits into the same general problem description, failure to execute the aim and release function with total control. Many years of trying to deal with my own problem has given me an understanding of the problem and many of the methods I use and have tried have been helpful to others.

My specific problem is a 6 o'clock freeze. The pin anchoring solid below the target has been my problem for years. The way I have evolved my shooting skills has always had this brand of "target panic" as the prime consideration. Practice drills and practice in general along with some set-up considerations are tuned for this problem. Also the realization that although I shoot well in 3D type competitions I will never get rich and famous shooting bullseyes. Shooting without fatigue while trying to maintain total mental confidence and control allows me to draw and "hold" as I slowly, confidently push the pin into the target, hesitate and trigger the release is my compromise to the iron man solid pin hold that some top shooters enjoy. The following methods I use to fight my brand of target panic will help any shooter if he realizes what the base problem is and uses his therapy to improve his performance or as a minimum benefit, control the uncontrollable.

Equipment considerations to combat your version of target panic are mostly draw weight related. The cumulative exertion of repeated shots deteriorate your resistance to uncontrolled flinching and most types of release problems. Today's efficient bows together with the competitive organizations limits on draw weights make most reductions beneficial to overall performance. A therapy technique that some also use is to practice with various releases and bow set-ups. Having something different in your hands sometimes increases concentration and separation of the basic aim and shoot process.

Practice drills that work the best for me to separate the aim and shoot process involve some strange exercises. These types of drills are done sparingly with absolute concentration.

Aiming drills are done with aiming only at full draw. When you first do this you won't believe the uncontrollable urge to fire or release when the proper sight picture is achieved. Start with drawing and aiming at 5 to 10 targets. Use more time than you need and try to hold. Think about releasing, feel the trigger, but don't shoot. After the mental sight picture is achieved let down. Try to maintain total control of all you do. That is the purpose of the drill "control".

Aim at different objects with arrow strung at a proper backstop in case you accidentally release the arrow. Releasing drills vary from the above method, except you must wait until the aiming drill give you total control of the aiming process. Solid aiming technique must be achieved before that finger on the trigger is ordered to press and pull thru the shot. Do it absolutely perfectly. If this attempt is not positive, try to inject the "blind shooter drill". Use another person to observe for safety and draw the bow to anchor. Feel your anchor, feel your release, visualize your sight picture perfectly centered and in control. Now pull thru the shot and release, try to feel every reaction of your body. Do this until you feel total control of the shot. Another release drill I use is to draw, aim and shoot at a distance of 10'. Positive control is maintained while aiming at an existing arrow hole. Some shooters I know also use a variation of release types to enhance concentration with much success. Personally with my pushing up into the target and timing my release, any change in release forces me to concentrate all the more. Any exercise you may develop to enhance your aim and release technique is acceptable if it works. Remember that the change you develop to enhance your awareness of the shooting process is a tool to make your tournament or hunting practice more effective. The end result of that practice is what you are striving for, total physical and mental control of "each shot".

Now you must conform your practice to your skills and limitations with one thing in mind, don't make the shot unless you are in total control of the entire process. Be physically prepared to make every shot and limit your practice to the number of shots you can make physically perfect. Shot after shot after shot fatigue may not be apparent, but it does affect your performance. Mental concentration is harder to define, but is easy to evaluate. When 100% of your mental energy is not feeling the aim and release your performance will suffer and the dreaded "target panic" may strike.

Your form of the disease may be controlled within limits as mine now is, but it isn't easy and it requires constant maintenance procedures. Some of mine may help and you may develop yours, but whatever "cure" works, it may salvage your favorite sport from the frustration of the uncontrolled brain seizure called "target panic".

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