



LANNY BASSHAM

# THE FOUR PERIODS OF A COMPETITOR'S YEAR

## PART 2 CONDITIONING AND COMPETITION

*IN PART ONE WE LOOKED AT THE FIRST TWO PERIODS OF THE COMPETITOR'S YEAR CALLED REFLECTION AND EVALUATION. IN THIS ISSUE WE CONTINUE WITH CONDITIONING AND COMPETITION.*

In team sports the Conditioning period is called training camp. If you ever played ball you might remember that time, when the coaches whipped you into shape just prior to the start of the season. The focus in the Conditioning period is on process refinement. For the sporting clays shooter it means adding to one's target library and increasing the percentage of hits on these targets. In many ways, the Conditioning period is never-ending. We hope that all of our hours of training lead us to better shooting. But there is value in creating a special kind of focus in your training during this time and that is what the Conditioning period is for.

Todd, our example from last time, has just wrapped up his holiday season. He's had his share

of hunting success, made it through the Yule Time holidays and is anxious to get back on the sporting clays course. Todd is going to begin his competition year in Okeechobee, Florida, at the Seminole Cup in February and for the next two months he has chosen to spend this time in the Conditioning period to prepare for a strong start to the season. There is stiff competition in Master class and if Todd has any hope of enough All-American points to make the team he needs to make a strong start on the field.

### CONDITIONING PHASE

Conditioning, in my way of using the term, means to repeat a process so well and so often as to make it occur subconsciously on

demand. The focus in the Conditioning period is on training and lots of it. Goals for this period include getting into competition-winning shape physically, increasing one's endurance and acquiring target mastery. Shooting hours are extended, number of targets attempted increased and work ethic tested. The last thing Todd wants is to go to Florida out of shape. The focus of this period is to break down so as to build up. First, break down your method of shooting target presentations into their elements. Take a good look at them. How close to mastery are you? Are you strong enough to get through a long competition without fatigue? What can you do to get in shape? What skills do you need to build up?

Todd has identified certain



training days for this period and has blocked them out in his calendar. He has ordered more ammo and has beefed up his physical training. His training sessions are 30 to 40 percent longer than in the competition period and there are more of them. He is beginning to feel the pain of training, but also sees a feeling of confidence building. He is careful to have quality training not just quantity. He maximizes the chances of hitting targets by carefully determining the best strategy for breaking them. He runs his mental program on all of his shots and reinforces after shooting every pair. Todd can feel his strength and endurance building. He knows this will pay off in the long season ahead.

Do you really need a Conditioning phase if you are only

interested in attending local competitions and do not have All-American goals? Probably not, because your competition may not be gearing up for the year any more than you are! But Todd's competition may be getting stronger if he just maintains his current level of preparation. Shooters that skip the Conditioning phase may pay a huge price in the season ahead. They may run out of steam in a four-day shoot. Mental energy drains faster when you are in poor physical shape. Sporting clays events are marathons, not sprints, and getting into shape is a requirement for shooters with the high goals that are on Todd's list.

Mental skills increase along with physical ones in the Conditioning phase. As you step up your training you increase the number of positive imprints on the

Self Image. I have had clients that have credited the Conditioning phase with giving them the confidence to win competitions. They feel that they deserve to win competitions because they have paid a price in preparation that their competition was unwilling to make. It becomes like them to work hard and the harder you work the luckier you get. It is no accident that most sports professionals have a Conditioning phase in their training year. Subconscious skills are built in the Conditioning phase and tested in the Competition phase.

Can you attend competitions while in the Conditioning phase? You can, and probably should. There is such a thing as 'training competitions' where we test out how we are doing. Learning and confirming are higher priorities



than scoring and punches. If we happen to do well that is a good thing, but not the primary reason for attending the competition in this phase.

## COMPETITION PHASE

So, when do we focus on scoring? That is the primary focus of the Competition phase. The major difference between the

Conditioning phase and the Competition phase is the frequency and focus of the training. In the Conditioning phase most of the targets are shot in station practice and in drills and the focus is on target mastery and endurance. In the Competition phase however, Todd will shoot his training targets as near as possible to competition form. In this period, the focus is on getting higher scores and

attending more competitions. The training days will be fewer, because competitions and the travel to them will take up a lot of time.

For Todd to shoot enough competitions to reach his goals he must be willing to travel. Travel days are not training days. In fact, travel days tend to drain the training effect. Todd remembers that some of his competitions require long hours in the air or

even longer drives in his truck. Travel complicates the process of staying consistent. When and what we eat varies and who knows if the bed in the motel is conducive to a good nights rest. If Todd is in good shape these things are merely irritants, but if he is worn out before the trip starts they may cost him targets. Veteran shooters know where the best hotels are after shooting this venue a few times. They know where the best food is found and the shortcuts to them. They may even have their RV parked at the course and steaks on the grill. You can't beat that for convenience and comfort.

Competitions are fun times. What are the target setters going to throw our way this year? What has Todd's competition been up to since he last saw them? Every year

new hot shots seem to show up, vying for the punches Todd is looking to get. But Todd is ready for them as he charts out his schedule of competitions on his calendar.

Competitions are also a time of evaluation and confirmation. There are things that just cannot be taught by an instructor or learned on a practice field. You have to get into the game to learn them. The environment of competition cannot be simulated. You cannot know for certain if that improved-move on rabbits that you have been working on is for real until you shoot some rabbits in competition. The important thing to remember is to stay with what you have practiced – at least through an entire competition. Remember, nothing works 100% of the time for anyone so do not fall into the trap of

dumping what you have worked on at the first lost target.

## DON'T OVER-TRY

Todd is well on his way to All-American, winning several Master class events and HOA at a tournament. Now he needs a really big win to add to the points and to build his confidence. Competitions like the US Open and the NSCA Nationals provide this kind of an experience but winning them is tough. All of the best shooters in the USA will likely be there and Todd's system will be tested to the limit. One of the critical mental errors to avoid at this kind of tournament is the temptation to over-try. Todd needs to trust his training and just run his system. Trying too hard will result in lost

targets and loss of focus.

Shooting well in big events requires discipline to stay positive and just take things one step at a time. You must find the correct amount of mental effort to give your shots. Too much or too little and your performance drops. In these competitions you will find out just how well you have prepared for them. The bigger the event the better you can evaluate how well your training plan is working. Before you know it, your year is concluded and you will be at the evaluation period once again.

Todd's year may not look like yours at all in 2007, but I feel certain that many of the same issues are relevant to you. Taking time to organize your training into these four periods can bring great rewards. Take time to Reflect, to

Evaluate, to Condition before you compete and you should greatly improve your chances of reaching your shooting goals. ■

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**He is a member of the Olympic Shooting Hall of Fame, ranks third among all shooters in total international medal count for the USA and one of the most respected mental trainers in the world. His book 'With Winning in Mind' and his Mental Management® concepts are used and endorsed by Olympian and World Champion shooters.**

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