



LANNY BASSHAM

THE FOUR PERIODS OF A COMPETITOR'S YEAR

PART 1 REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

TODD IS A MASTER CLASS SHOOTER AND HAS JUST RETURNED FROM THE NSCA NATIONALS. IN THIS ARTICLE, AND THE ONE THAT FOLLOWS, WE WILL LOOK AT TODD'S YEAR AND HOW TO DIVIDE IT INTO USEFUL PERIODS.

A competitor's year can be divided into four definable parts. These periods can repeat many times during the long sporting clays season. They are: Reflection, Evaluation, Conditioning and Competition. We are going to look at them beginning with Reflection and Evaluation in part one.

For the vast majority of our sporting clays clients, the NSCA Nationals defines the end of their year. A 'Reflection' period begins after every important event. It may be accompanied by a period of well needed rest. During this period the shooter looks back at the competition that they have just completed to gain insight in ways to improve in upcoming competitions. You might consider answering the following questions.

■ **What goals did I set for this event?** Goals can be defined in several ways. Perhaps one goal was to win a class or to advance up the leader board. We can set goals to advance our knowledge of target presentations or to gain better control over our emotions during the more difficult stations. One advantage of setting goals is that you now have a way to evaluate your level of preparation and execution. I believe that as much as 75% of success, or lack of success, is determined by your preparation for the event. By the way, one outstanding goal for the Nationals is to come and just enjoy the shoot. Todd has done well at the Nationals in prior years but has never placed in the top three in any event. He has entered four events,

the Kriehoff Kup, Compak, FITASC and Main Event and his goal this year was to finish in the top three in at least one of the events.

■ **How did you prepare for this event?** Todd reviewed his year looking at the thousands of targets hit in training at his local club and was satisfied that his preparation was adequate to reach his goal. His only concern was that he did not feel he had an opportunity to shoot in as many competitions as he would have liked prior to the Nationals.

■ **Who did you become and what did you accomplish at this year's Nationals?** How did you do? Did you reach your goals? Big events tend to magnify error and confirm



what you really know. Your score and place on the leader board may not be an accurate way to evaluate how much you have learned at the event, but it is the best way we have of comparing you against the field. Attainment is both becoming and accomplishment. Becoming is how we measure the internal, and accomplishment is how we measure the external. Now is a great time to list what you have learned. Only two things can happen in an event – you reach your goals or you learn new ways to reach them in the future.

Todd did well in accomplishing his goals, finishing second in the Compak and third in the Krieghoff Kup. He became a more consistent shooter at the Nationals this year, running more stands than he had in the past and remembering to reinforce after each pair.

■ **What surprised you?** This is a great question to ask in the 'Reflection' period. Todd was surprised to see so many mini targets thrown on edge. He had not trained on this target adequately. This would alter his strategy for training for next year. He placed a call to his instructor to schedule a lesson to work on this target. Todd learned new things about his mental game as well. He was not nearly as nervous this year as in the past. He is beginning to view himself as one of the shooters to beat. Looking at his performance this year, Todd is beginning to believe that winning an event at the Nationals is close at hand.

■ **What did you do well?** All things considered, Todd shot consistently well. His move to the targets was

fluid and his target strategy was one of his strengths. He was deliberate and confident when calling for his targets and did a good job of locking his eyes on the bird. He handled distraction well and was not influenced by outcome cues or the temptation to over-try on the shot.

■ **What do you need to improve?** Todd needs more experience against top shooters in the Main Event. At his local club he is top dog but when he shot the Main Event he shot with two All-Americans on his squad. He learned a lot by shooting with them but felt a bit intimidated by them at first. Later he realized that there was no reason why he could not compete favorably with them, winning his share of competitions in the future. He also noticed that he began to tire toward the end of

the competition, signaling that his physical fitness might need improving.

■ **Who did you meet and how did they affect you?** One of the great things about big events is that you have a chance to meet and to get to

CHANGES AND UPGRADES

It is likely that in the 'Reflection' period we will discover areas that need improving. These changes, or upgrades as I prefer to call them, could be near term changes such as advancing our target library or

Now identify what you want to accomplish during this period. Many of our clients hunt in the fall and sporting clays takes a well needed rest. The holidays take up much of our time during this period – this is a great time to take a break. It is also a good time to

the 'Evaluation' period. To better prepare for next year, he has scheduled a lesson with his technical coach and will learn to hit those problem targets. Todd sees himself needing some help in growing his self image to compete against the top guns so a visit to his mental



know people outside your local sphere of influence. Todd met a famous gunsmith and had a long talk with him on his philosophy of gun fit. He had a chance to visit the vendor booth of the retailer of the gun he uses and had his shotgun serviced. Todd began what would be a lasting friendship with one of the All-Americans that he shot with. It seems that they have quite a lot in common.

■ **How is your sport evolving?** Nothing stays the same. Pay attention to the evolution of your sport. Sporting clays target setters are getting sneakier. Shooters are getting better and scores are going up. More attention is being paid to the mental game and shooters are seeing greater need for quality instructors to advance them up the leader board. When you are getting better you have a chance to advance. If you stay the same, you fall behind.

■ **What are your goals for next year?** Todd is not going to be satisfied with just placing in the top three next year. With improvement he can win major events and rack up points in the race for All-American selection.

they may be more long term such as a new shotgun or a custom stock. At any rate, the shooter needs to evaluate carefully any change against what he was previously using to see if the upgrade is really warranted. This is done in the 'Evaluation' period.

The ideal time to run this period is early in the season. If we are going to make changes it is best to do it early and dangerous to do it close to a big event. Changes upset not only the technical but the mental state as well – so give yourself plenty of time to implement them.

If the 'Reflection' phase is a time to look back at what you have just accomplished, the 'Evaluation' period is a time to look forward and plan what you intend to do – especially as this period is normally very short. Plan generally for the next year and very specifically for the next few months. Get out your calendar and temporarily pencil in the competitions that you plan to attend next year. Schedule your competition and training days for the next three months, adding in sessions with your technical and mental coaches if needed.

advance your mental skills. Some of you are limited in how many days you can shoot in winter months because of severe cold, and all of us are limited when the storms close down our clubs. We cannot accurately predict these days, but they need to be addressed in planning out the calendar. You do not need to go to the club to train. You can do many useful things in a bedroom or basement in inclement weather but that is a subject for another time. The key here is that it is better to plan ahead and to change what you need to change as far in advance of an event as possible.

Todd has just finished his 'Reflection' about the Nationals and has made some notes about what he needs to change. His goals for next year include making a run at All-American. No equipment changes are expected, but he has noted that certain target presentations are problematic and he has set a goal to master them. He is taking several weeks off to hunt and enjoy family activities around the holidays, but he also plans to beef up his physical training and to shoot two competitions at this local club in

coach is planned this fall as well. The fall season can be a great time to advance your mental and technical skills. It is the best time to make major changes if you feel that they are warranted. Soon you will begin the 'Conditioning and Competition' periods of the year – and we will look at those next time. Happy Holidays. ■

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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. You can reach him at 1-800-879-5079 or at www.mentalmanagement.com

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