The indoor season is upon us again and for some this will bring a sigh of relief; no more wet and windy weekends spent on the archery field. However, for others, this will be the beginning of five months of hibernation, counting down the days until next April and the start of the new outdoor season. Even the most optimistic among us can feel a little despondent over the thought of spending the next few months limited to shooting only one distance, and dread the inevitable cabin fever brought on by cramped sports halls, crowded shooting lines and poor lighting.

As indoor shooting takes up nearly half the year in the UK’s archery calendar it can be hard to keep up your enthusiasm, so how can you make the most of this often uninspiring season? I’ve been looking at some of the ways you can liven up the winter months and turn them to your advantage, so you’re refreshed and motivated when the outdoor season rolls around again next year.
Indoor shooting can sometimes feel restrictive, as the majority of rounds are shot at one distance; 18 metres/20 yards, and as the choice of rounds at this distance is limited it can leave many archers feeling uninspired and bored. As most of us can find the prospect of spending the next few months continuously shooting the same round incredibly frustrating, I’d recommend mixing things up a little.

Branch out and shoot a new round that you haven’t tried before. If you usually spend your time shooting a Portsmouth, try a World Archery 18m round shot on a three-spot 40cm face. The challenge of this round can be addictive – it requires far more accuracy than shooting at a 60cm face, and as it’s shot all around the world it gives you the chance to compare your scores on an international level. Competing with the world’s elite archers may even help to push your scores up too.

If you fancy a bit more of a challenge, and have access to a larger indoor venue, you could try a World Archery 25m round. Shooting at this distance indoors is actually rather enjoyable, and it’s harder than you’d think to achieve a perfect score on a 60cm face. You could even incorporate the 25 metre and 18 metre distances to create a World Archery Combined round to add a little more diversity to your shooting experience.

If World Archery rounds aren’t your thing, try a different Archery GB one instead; the Worcester is an imperial round shot at 20 yards, and it’s a little different from other indoor rounds as its shot on a 16-inch black and white face in ends of five arrows. The scoring zones go from five (in the centre of the target) to one (the outer scoring ring), and shooting a perfect Worcester round is possible, but remarkably difficult, which is the reason why this round has quite a following across the UK.

The Stafford round is six dozen arrows shot at an 80cm face at 30 metres – essentially this is the final distance from a World Archery 1440 round, doubled and shot indoors. Again, you need the indoor space to shoot this but, if you have it, it can be a welcome break from the usual rounds and it’s a lot harder than it initially sounds.

If none of these take your fancy there are several other winter rounds that you could try, such as a Bray, Vegas or even a Frostbite round, which each offer their own challenges and opportunities for improvement.

But if you really can’t bring yourself to shoot indoors, the field season runs well into November and starts much earlier in the year, with shoots hosted as early as January. So if you are looking for an excuse to continue shooting outdoors, field archery may fit the bill; it’s fun, diverse and gives you a fresh challenge over target archery. You don’t need access to woodland to try your hand at field, just a selection of target faces and an outdoor range big enough to shoot up to 60 metres. It’s easier than you think and very addictive and, if you don’t mind the cold, winter is the perfect time to give this discipline a go – you can think of it as adding another string to your bow.

**GET INVOLVED**

The reason many of us can get bored shooting indoors is the lack of competition; many clubs host regular outdoor competitions, whether for their own members or as an open shoot. Indoor competitions, however, are harder to come by, and you’ll often need to travel some distance to find one.

Even if you don’t usually shoot tournaments, I’d recommend that you make the effort this winter. As many clubs are restricted to practicing only one night a week, you may find the indoor season a little dull without the regular company of other archers. Attending indoor tournaments is a great way of meeting like-minded people and having fun doing your favourite sport. It’s also a perfect opportunity to get into the competitive side of archery, as you shoot at a relatively short distance, with no weather conditions to contend with, plus it’s very easy to keep track of your scores and see your improvement.

If you can’t attend a tournament there are several postal leagues you can enter, which allow you to compare your scores to those of other archers without the need to leave your practice range as you simply shoot a round at your club and send in your score – what could be easier?

**TRAIN SMART**

The indoor season is the best time to work on the areas you feel have let you down over the summer. We all have things we want to improve on, whether it’s our shooting form or equipment.

Now is the time to make the changes that will add vital points to your game next year; I am a big advocate of blank boss training to address various problems with your technique,
and you’ll find that closer indoor shooting distances will still allow you to shoot alongside your fellow club members while you work on your form.

Investing in some coaching sessions can also be a great way to gain greater technical knowledge, and hopefully improve your shooting along the way. If you already know what you need to work on, you can take some time out instead to perfect your equipment and make the changes you didn’t have the time to make during the busy outdoor season. As the indoor environment removes randomising weather patterns, and allows you to see and plot the improvements you are making, its the best time to break in new equipment or work on your form, so make those changes now and you should be up and running once you go back outdoors.

**TAKE A BREAK**

Finally, for those of us who take our outdoor shooting seriously the winter months are a good opportunity for a break. Constant weekends of tournaments and trying to stay on top of your game can take its toll on even the most seasoned of archers, and taking a short break can sometimes be the only way to keep your sanity. So if you find yourself with fewer tournaments and less opportunity to shoot, rather than worry about not shooting, simply enjoy the time off. That way, you’ll be refreshed and ready for the new season when spring comes around again.

So, love it or hate it, make this indoor season a good one and with a little planning you’ll be able to really make the most of it. Whether you’re looking for some new challenges, you want to make changes, or simply have a break, this indoor season is the perfect chance to do something new. Remember, time flies when you’re having fun and, failing that, it’s only five months until spring!