

— WHAT IS — GOOD TECHNIQUE ?

It's all very well striving to achieve it, but what do we actually mean when we say 'good technique'? Duncan Busby explores the physical, mental and historical components of a good shot

Though it may seem that shooting an arrow is a simple process; especially as a child when I'd imagine we all shot twigs from a homemade bow, it becomes a significantly more complex discipline the more crucial it is to hit the target. We've all hit the middle many times before, sometimes without even having to think about it, but your form and technique is one of the most important factors in achieving consistent success in archery. Many coaches talk about good shooting form, but what is it exactly? And how important is it to shoot with a textbook technique?

WHERE DID GOOD FORM COME FROM?

The invention and use of the bow appears to be one of those events that happened in many different places at roughly the same time, and although archery is believed to have originated tens of thousands of years ago, it's not until it reached Asia and the Middle East that a true discipline and technical standard was created.

Formal teachings began in China before 1,000BC as very early manuals in archery

form and technique. They were designed to ensure accuracy and consistency in warfare and competition, two highly-prized fields for demonstrating skill in archery. These teachings differed from the instinctive shooting style of the ancient hunters and those of children with toy bows; instead they relied on a strict and complex method of training the mind as well as the body.

Every culture from Asian, Arabic, European and American has its own method for teaching good shooting form, and though they differ slightly according to their traditional bow styles, each shares some similarities in the form they teach. Once ideas began to spread, techniques that had developed separately by different cultures began to be assimilated – in particular, ideas from Asia were adapted into Western teachings and today Eastern archery has an enormous influence on our form and technique.

WHAT IS GOOD FORM?

In the western world, shooting form first developed from the traditional longbow, now it seems strange that today's European

archers are following techniques first taught in the 14th century; especially if your bow looks nothing like that used by Robin Hood. But the basic principle remains the same; good shooting form is considered to be the most biomechanically correct way to shoot a bow. Archers are taught to make efficient use of their form by using the least amount of muscle strength, while maximising the use of their bone structure to support the forces of the bow – stability, strength and endurance are the key to good shooting form. This is true of 14th century archers as well as modern archers today; not only does good bone alignment and reduced muscle fatigue make your shot more repeatable and consistent, but it also helps to prevent injury; an important factor to consider when historically archers would shoot draw weights of up to 150lbs.

Whether you shoot a traditional longbow, a recurve or a state-of-the-art compound bow there are fundamental form and technique rules all archers are taught. If you remember back to your beginner's course you will have no doubt learnt to shoot using the



T-draw technique, that is, keeping your body upright, lifting the bow to shooting height and then drawing straight to your reference point. Although this is a simplified way of shooting, its foundations lie in keeping correct bone alignment and limiting the load put through the joints, which is essential for reducing the risk of injury and creating a consistent shooting style. Though there will obviously be specific variations based on the unique features of the bow you use and the discipline of archery you compete in, the T-draw method forms the basis of most archery techniques.

The process of shooting an arrow can be broken down into different stages, and the exact number of these will depend on the teaching you follow, but in its most simplified form this shot cycle focuses specifically on how you stand, draw, aim and then shoot your bow. Your individual form and specifically how you complete these stages should be unique to you, and the process adapted to your own needs. We are all different shapes and sizes with a variety of strengths and weaknesses; as a result, we cannot always use the same textbook method. This is more apparent in compound archery as such large variety exists in the equipment, and this is never so obvious as

on the tournament field when shooting alongside diverse forms and techniques.

IS GOOD FORM IMPORTANT?

Every coach and organisation will have their own ideas about what good shooting form is; most having been developed from previous successes. That is not to say that any are either right or wrong, but it doesn't mean that any

of these many methods will fit you perfectly.

Many coaches, particularly those that follow Asian archery teachings, focus solely on the Olympic style of shooting, and coaches like Ki Sik Lee have had enormous success teaching recurve archers to shoot in almost exactly the same style. But this strict and never-varying method is less likely to work with a compound archer; as a result, many compound archers at





the top of their game are in fact self-taught. And because of the lack of standardised compound teaching, these archers become unwitting coaches to their competitors, inspiring and influencing the archery world with their unique shooting style.

The main goal in any discipline should be to create repeatability; even if you do the wrong thing the same 72 times in a row you can still shoot a record score. So learn what you can from the many coaches and teachings out there before you create what should only be considered your own unique shooting form.

Psychology can also play an enormous role in your form, affecting it both negatively as well as positively. Japanese Kyudo archery in particular focuses on the mind and spirit of the archer, and their results are judged not only by whether they hit or miss, but how the process of shooting was carried out. This attitude influences recurve archery too, and good form and mental strength are considered to be the first and foremost means to success. Compound archery is the exception to this, as the unique features of the equipment allows a compound archer to release an arrow without using good form or even having a good mental game, and though this can result in target panic, many a tournament win has been credited to such

poor technique and psychology. This doesn't mean that a compound archer shouldn't work on the key elements of good shooting form, even though there are such a large number of varying techniques being used, there are still fundamental rules that should always be followed to create the most consistent and trouble-free form.

THE EVOLUTION OF GOOD FORM

The compound bow was first developed in the 1960s and was the first major change in archery for thousands of years. This development in equipment transformed form and technique teachings; the introduction of let-off, release aids and magnifying sights to name a few brought new attitudes and methods into what had been a very static and constant shooting form.

Techniques will go on to develop as long as equipment is evolving, and as the newest discipline compound archery will continue to progress the fastest as big developments are made. Form and technique differences are finally been recognised between the disciplines by some, and the importance of varying shooting form according to the archer and the bow can only help to encourage successful participation in the sport.

Safety changes have also had an influence

on our form; high draws are no longer allowed in tournaments due to the increasing power being delivered by modern bows, and as draw weights have increased in almost all disciplines since the last century, the importance of using correct form to draw the bow has never been greater. Historically, longevity wasn't particularly important, but as archery begins to turn professional, athletes are constantly looking for ways to preserve their bodies as they compete for longer periods and to a higher intensity.

Finally, the standardisation of archery governance has allowed further developments in form and technique, the founding of World Archery in 1932 (as the Federation Internationale De Tir L'Arc) and the subsequent creation of domestic governing bodies to manage and govern archery, has helped to create cohesive and unified coaching methods. Though these different organisations and individuals teach the same fundamental rules, the international training facilities and competitions today's archers attend help to promote different ideas about form and technique. The success of using such varying methods reinforces the importance of developing form; and it allows us to continually assess what good technique really is. ☺