

The Mental Edge

By Jim See

I think everyone reading this can acknowledge that at a particular time during their shooting career they suffered from stage or match anxiety. Some of you may still suffer from it; I know on occasion I can still get a little wrapped up in my head over a stage. Our performance is largely a result of our thought process and ability to keep a clear mind during our shooting.

A single poor stage performance can have a disastrous effect on the rest of our match if we allow it to affect us. One aspect of recovery from a “bad stage” is our ability to overcome the mental effects that result from a poor performance, and this is what I would like to address in this article.

I often hear guys on the range complain about a particularly bad stage they had just shot or had shot earlier that day; it dwells with them for a while as they allow frustration to seat itself in their subconscious. Many times you will hear a fellow shooter tell them to “just forget about it and move on”. Good advice? May-be, but how do we learn from a mistake if we forget about it? If in fact we are having an elevation/dope issue or a mechanical issue why would we want to forget about it? That is a correctable problem that needs immediate attention.

I think the better way to approach a bad stage finish is to immediately think about it. Yes contrary to what is widely thought, I walk off the line of a bad stage vent my frustration and then immediately go through a process of dissecting what went wrong, where did it start, and why was I unable to recover. This requires relaxed reflective thought, that will allow you to piece together the problem with; you, your equipment, your position, your dope, or your mental state of mind. Once you find the problem area you can address the issue and correct it before you let the avalanche gain any more momentum.

The answer could be as easy as admitting; “I rushed that barricade stage and never built a solid position.” Or “I think I’m running some bad dope and need to come up .1 on everything over 600, up .2 on everything over 800, and up .3 on everything over 1000.” Or “crap, I never dialed off my wind from the last stage.” Once you dissect the event, become aware of the problem, and address the problem with a solution, you have then overcome the insecurity of the failure and built confidence in resolving the issue and making a strong charge into a top finish.

Everyone is going to have a bad stage in a match, the difference between the winner and the loser is how they cope with a mid-match stage disaster. Do yourself a favor next time you’re in that situation and create an environment to learn from your mistakes, for if you forget the past you are bound to repeat it.

Keep them on the steel.