

## The Evolution of the Challenge Move

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Gil: Okay, so tonight we're gonna talk to Dean Troutte about how he changed his preload in between pairs. Seems to work for him. I thought it would be an interesting topic for us to talk about. And if any of you guys do any of the things a little differently, add your two cents.

Bob Shannon and I were emailing the last couple of days about weight displacement. He saw an article that we wrote in Clay Target Nation where I said you have to have about a 90/10 weight displacement. And he felt like it was more like 80/20. So, we were talking about it and I thought it'd be a good idea for him to talk about it.

If he doesn't get on, we'll talk about it and I'll ask whoever's on to give me some feedback on your weight displacement percentage. For me, it's 90 percent on the front foot, 10 percent on the back foot. Anything I do with my back foot is really mainly for balance.

And then Vicki's gonna talk to Phil Lehman who had his last cataract taken off his eye and went out to shoot. Vicki will chronicle her journey with the cataract operation and Phil's going to chronicle his. We'll listen to them and see what's going on.

Then I'm gonna read a comment that Jimmy Light made and read Jack Flesher's response to it. I thought it was a pretty good response. Then I'll throw it open for anybody else that finds themselves in the middle of a round just losing their routine.

I'm going to take up the rest of the time talking about the evolution of the challenge move; what I've done with it, and how it seems to help. I'll talk about the things the brain does prior to your calling "pull" that you don't even know it does. This is why "if you're thinking, you're

stinking,” and why if you’re trying to think your way through something, it never works. Because you’re taking the subconscious brain out of the get-ready mode.

## When A Small Change in Your Preload Routine is Night and Day Difference

Gil: So, with that said, Deano, tell us what you did on your routine.

Dean: I had a brain click. I had just gotten back from the Oregon State shoot. On the prelim on Friday, I had what I consider a not-so-good round. [Chuckles] I think I shot a 67 or something like that. And I’ve been shooting better than that. So, I knew there was something in my process that I was doing differently.

I’ve been playing the game a lot. And I have a process when I first step into the cage, and get downrange. I think from playing the game so much, in between my pairs I was spending sometimes 10 seconds preloading the next pair.

And what I realized is that my preload had become part of my conscious brain and all my preload and stuff was taking place back in the cage. So, I was spending 5-10 seconds back in the cage and then expecting to break pairs downrange.

And so instead of being so deliberate, what I’m doing now is taking maybe a second or two to preload the movie and then calling the pair. So, I have a really short period of time in between my pairs. It’s just been a huge night and day difference, staying downrange.

Gil: So, to make sure I understand, you are consciously trying to go through everything in the shot between the pairs.

Dean: Yes, absolutely. I think it came as part of playing the game, and the games so deliberate. And it just crept into what should be a quick, almost unconscious preload. It became this big, long-drawn-out thing going through my brain. And of course, my brain’s back in the cage, not downrange with the bird.

So, there was just this big disconnect between my preload and shooting my pairs. Last year and this year I’ve been shooting 70s, with some 60s. On day one of the main I got to station five and it clicked what was going on. And I’ve been shooting 80 percent since.

Gil: Wow. It was just like a light switch.

Dean: It was. Just quick. "Oh my god. Why am I taking so long back here in the cage doing this? I'm not supposed to be back here. I'm supposed to be down there."

Yeah, so all I do now is just a quick movie. If I broke the pair before, that's what I load for my next pair. If I miss something, then I load what it's supposed to look like. And then shoot it.

Gil: My preload is just the last 10 to 15 percent of the move.

Dean: Yeah, that's all mine is now, too. I was preloading the whole damn thing. And now the two birds breaking is what I'm preloading: what it looks like when that bird breaks, what it looks like, what the picture's like, what the movie's like when that bird breaks. It's a quick process.

Like I said, I get one, maybe two seconds in between pairs, enough time to load my shells, quickly load that movie and there's no time for it to come back to the cage. Everything stays downrange.

Gil: You might want to try something that I did, which I'm gonna talk about a little later on. But I'll say it now just in case I don't get to it.

I found that, okay, I'm in the cage. I've loaded my gun. First bird: "I'm gonna challenge and break it right there." Second bird: "I'm gonna stroll-catch it right there." When I say that, I go back to the first breakpoint. And I try to relax and I put my eyes in the breakpoint. And I think of absolutely nothing.

My eyes don't move; they have to be perfectly still. My body's perfectly still. And I just stay there until I feel my body relax. And then as I start closing the gun, my eyes go to the first trap. I let my brain set the gun, I start the gun moving, I call "pull." And it appears that it allows for me to come from the same thoughtless mind and the same relaxed body every single time.

So, regardless of any emotion that I have after I break the pair, I load the gun. I remember what it looked like, and then I put my eyes in the first breakpoint. I keep them stone still [pauses for about three seconds] for about that long. Then as I start closing the gun, my eyes go to the trap. I let my brain set the gun. I challenge the first bird. My gun's already moving, I say "pull," and let it rip.

So, you might want to try that. Because it appears to me that it gets rid of any body tension in my shoulders. I center myself more up in the upper chest. And it's the thinking about nothing that really clears my mind because I already know what I'm going to do. There's no doubt that I'm getting ready to do exactly what I just did. But coming from the same neutral body position and the same neutral visual position every time seems to help me a lot. So, give that a try and let me know what works.

## Weight Displacement and Footwear

Gil: Dean, when you're shooting, what weight displacement do you use? 90/10? 85/15?

Dean: Oh yeah, probably 85 or 90 front foot forward. Definitely on my front foot. I don't know if I could give it an exact number, but it's a lot.

Gil: Vicki, who else is out there?

Vicki: Let's see, Rick Carter, Doug, Phil, Grant O'Neal...

Gil: Rick Carter, what weight displacement do you use when you're shooting?

Rick: Let me see... I would probably put it at probably 80 percent on the front foot, 20 on the back. But more recently, shooting a lot of AFS and FITASC, I've tried to be a little bit more centered so I could have a little more swing.

That's just me and my personal body type. I think everybody's different. You know, I'm built different from Dean and our center of gravity is not the same. So, I may be able to go, you know, 60 percent on the front foot, or 70. Or sometimes when I'm shooting below my feet. I've got about 85, 90 percent on my front foot. I hope that makes sense.

Gil: Yeah, it does. And it's the same thing on shooting high towers. I'll typically have more weight on my front foot, just like on low birds.

Dean: I'm almost centered on high towers. I love towers. Towers are my favorite now. Anything coming from above and behind me, I'm all over it and I'm centered. My feet are together, my hands are together. I'm just a stick.

[Laughter]

Gil: Okay. Anybody else want to share their weight displacement? [Pause] Oh, all right.

Dean: Where are the trap shooters at?

[Laughter]

Gil: Well, I'll tell you what I was gonna tell Bob tonight. I haven't spent this much time with my weight on my front foot in a long time without a gun in the hand. And I just feel like when I'm shooting my best, the more weight that I shift to my right foot (or Rick's left foot), the more weight I shift to that foot.

If I'm shooting a left-to-right bird (or for Rick, a right-to-left), I have a tendency to shift my weight mid-swing instead of rotating on my front foot. So, I try to finish with most of my weight on my front foot so that there's a rotation and I don't lean to the right as a right-handed shooter.

I don't know whether you've ever experienced that or not. But it just feels better for me. I guess what we're finding out is it's different for different people. Like you said, Rick, different people have different body types, different balance points.

So, that's good. Thank you very much for sharing that.

Dean: Another thing that I've done is started shooting in sandals. And I feel the ground better. I feel like I can marry myself to the ground better since I've changed to wearing sandals.

Gil: Well, I wish I could wear sandals. I can't find sandals that fit me like my HOKAs do. I've got plantar fasciitis and I had to stop wearing sandals because of that.

Dean: Yeah, I do too. I wear some socks that are real tight in the arch.

Rick: Gil, one question from me. I love HOKAs too. I wear them to work and I love them. But I have to ask you this: I thought about shooting in HOKAs, but you know they have that rocker sole where it's got a high heel and a high toe. Do you ever find yourself off-balance shooting in those?

Gil: Not at all. I put them on at the National Championship two years ago. And I wore the same pair of HOKAs every day until the top started separating from the bottom, then I went and got another pair.

And Rick, I don't feel the least bit out of balance and I really don't feel the shape of the sole is in the way at all. I was afraid I would in the beginning because I was used to using those flat sandals. But I haven't seen it yet.

Now, I've been doing a pretty good bit of shooting with the challenge move and the stroll and experimenting with it. And if I have noticed, it certainly hadn't bothered me, let me put it that way. I would be very curious to see what you found.

Rick: I've been scared to shoot in them because I can feel that roll off and I'm just worried that it's going to pitch me forward. So, I'm going to shoot in them and I'll let you know and I'll touch back on this.

Gil: Yeah, for sure. I want to know. Send me an email or something when you try them. You know, in the beginning when I was wearing them, I can feel that. But it feels normal now.

Vicki's been wearing HOKAs also. Vicki, do you experience any rocking back and forth, front to back, when you're wearing your HOKAs?

Vicki: No, not really. There were a couple of times when we were at our last clinic, and we were in the mountains or hills. I had some issues there, but here I don't really feel it. When I first started wearing them, they felt weird. But I wear them every day so they don't feel weird anymore.

I don't really remember thinking that I was rocking, except when we were on the side of a hill at Granite Falls. But I held on to the stand, just because I felt really like I was about to fall over. But being in Texas here, I mean, it's flat. So, I haven't felt that

Gil: Yeah, and if you have plantar fasciitis, HOKAs will make it go away. You put them on and it's gone. I'll tell you that.

Dean: That's excellent.

Gil: Yeah. Oh, it's absolutely incredible.

Phil: I have a question on the weight issue.

Gil: Yes, sir.

Phil: Okay. So, when you're talking about 90 percent of weight on their front foot, I have a hard time visualizing it because I'm not a skeet shooter. But Todd Bender frequently shoots at our club. He is actually a member and has his clinics. And, you know, in my opinion, that style is very awkward – all that weight, leaning forward. And I see all those skeet shooters doing it, but with 90 percent of the weight, don't you tend to lose your balance?

Gil: Never. I mean, it's not like I've got my back foot off the ground, and I'm balanced on my front foot. My body mass is just centered over my front foot, and the back foot is on the ground.

Dean: The only time I've ever had a problem with getting off-balance is a fast-diving bird down below. I have to make a little adjustment backwards for that. Take a little bit of that weight off the front foot, because it'll carry over. That's the only time. Otherwise, it's just putting your weight over your front foot.

Phil: Yeah.

Gil: I just feel my body move forward and center over my front foot so that I have one pivot point. And that way, I'm always rotating, left to right or right to left around one pivot point and I never lean.

So, the more weight I put on my back foot, the more tendency on a left-to-right target I'll have to lean and shift my pivot point. And when you do that, the gun stops and you miss behind every time.

Interesting conversation. I just always took it for granted – weight on the front foot, gun in the front hand, get the gun in front of the target, you know. And match the speed. So, interesting. I look forward to talking to Bob about it a little more after he listens to this.

## Shooting After Cataract Surgery: Comparing Experiences

Gil: Vicki, you're, what, six months out of cataract surgeries?

Vicki: A year. I had the first cataract surgery last July 1, and then on the 16th I had the second one. But Phil, how have you done with yours? You just had yours done. How well can you see? Like an eagle?

Phil: That's right, like an eagle. I can read the patent numbers on the clay targets.

But yeah, extremely well. My last surgery was June 25th. I had one on the 11th and one on the 25th. I had my final follow-up appointment on July 21st, and I was 20/20 in both eyes. It was pretty amazing to me.

I didn't shoot at all during that period of time. I actually could have. And as it turns out, going into it, I said "Oh my god, how am I going to go all that period of time without doing any shooting?" But once I had the surgery, I certainly wanted it to go very well with no issues. And that's exactly how it went. I had zero issues with either eye, and was quite fortunate.

My wife had met this doctor at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas for an eye issue of hers. And actually, two members of the Dallas Gun Club had to have cataract surgery from this individual. I called and I was able to get an appointment with him. I actually got to the point where insurance would pay for the surgery, and I was thinking about having it done anyway.

So, we finally got to that point, and I was able to see him. He got me in, and as it turns out, I'm one of his last patients. He's backing out of the surgery role. He is a professor at UT Southwestern and it's my understanding he's kind of a renowned eye surgeon. Wayne Bowman is his name.

I had what they call the Toric lens, which helps correct moderate astigmatism in both eyes. I have had no issues.

And frankly, the day after my final appointment, I was out on a five-stand. It was a difficult five-stand. I kind of shot a mediocre first round. The second round, I was really smoking targets. I've been shooting well. I was talking to Gil earlier, and I remember some of the conversations from other OSP shooters in the forums that had some problems adjusting to leads or sight pictures. I think I've had a little bit of that.

I haven't done a great deal of shooting since this end of surgery. I guess we're less than a month out now, but I've shot about a flat. I just went straight to my 12-gauge and I have had no problems. And I've been extremely pleased with the outcomes. So, if there's anything I can share, I certainly will.

Gil: I'll share one of the things that we learned with Larry Peck, who had his cataract surgery and right after that had some physical problems. He went to the range as soon as the doctor cleared him. He called me from the range and said "My sight pictures aren't back. I can see better. But my sight pictures aren't clear enough."

I said, "Be patient. The brain's got to work through what it has to ignore." And he had some physical problems and couldn't shoot for six to seven weeks. Then he went back for the first time and called me when he was through.

"It's a miracle," he said. "All my sight pictures are back." And what that told me was you don't have to go through the shooting circuits for your brain to learn what it needs to ignore. But in the seven weeks that he couldn't shoot, just moving around the house and doing what he did every day, the brain began to ignore what it was ignoring before that it couldn't see. It's just the normal around the house movements that he went through allowed the brain to start ignoring the things that were in his way again.

And it didn't just fix his everyday pictures. I mean, he bought a new pickup truck with those big side mirrors. He can see so well in this periphery, he almost got sick driving it home. [Laughter] I mean, and you know what he was going through now because you're seeing things in your periphery that you used to not see.

Phil: Yeah, exactly.

Gil: And the brain's got to figure out what it needs to not see. The unique thing we've learned about the brain the more we study it, is it's got to be confused before it can get rid of the confusion. So, it's not going to take you long. There'll be some that will be a little difficult, but they're still in there.

And it's not that you can't see it. It's just there are other things in the way that you see in your periphery that you didn't see when the brain was cataloging those circuits and before the surgery. It'll come back.

Vicki, you went and shot the other day.



Vicki: Yes.

Gil: Other than getting winded pretty quick, you could see, right?

Vicki: Oh, yeah. And I was going to say, last year when we went to Nationals, and I had only had the gun in my hand three times, that was what was so frustrating to me. I could see so much in the picture that the target just would get lost somewhere in there because there was so much going on. So, it was just my lack of doing the three-bullet drill that I started much later.

But now, with seeing and going through it, I will tell you all what I'm going through now.

We were in Iowa teaching, and I got a blurry spot on my left eye. So as soon as we got back, I called the doctor. Well, I couldn't get in for two weeks. And so, he said, "Well, everything looks good." And I said, "There's this hole that I can't see."

He looked at it with his naked eye and could not see that. "There's a problem," he said. "Let's go to the retina machine." So, he did a retina test, came back and he said, "We're gonna go do it again." I went, "Okay, great. This sounds like a problem."

Anyway, he came back and told me I had a macular hole. Now, I had never heard of that ever before. Macular degeneration, yes. Macular hole was new to me. So, I went to the retina doctor there. "Yes, you do have a hole," he said. "It could clear up, but probably not, and you'd need to have surgery."

So, we had to wait until July 1st to schedule it. That was in early May. But we had eight weekends booked. And if I had the surgery, I can't get on the airplane for at least three weeks. "Can it wait a month?" I asked. And he said "Yes, but not more than two or three months." So, then we scheduled it for July 1st.

I went in on June 27 for the pre-op, and they did the retina test. Then they came back and did it again. And then the doctor finally came in. I know it was only 10 minutes, but it seemed like an hour. He said, "We have some decisions to make," which really didn't make me feel good.

"The hole has closed by one half from when you were here six weeks ago," he said. "Do you want to go ahead and have the surgery? Or do you want to wait three weeks?"

"Let's see... cut my eye open, put a bubble in it, make me have my head down for three days and eat mush? Or wait three weeks and perhaps it'll be okay?" So, we waited three more weeks.

He did the retina test, came in and told me the macular has grown back together. "But I still have this hole," I said. "I can see a circle." And he said, "That's just the gel that's in your eye. It'll take some time. Come back in five weeks."

So, this has just been an amazing journey. I didn't dare shoot, not knowing what the heck this hole would do. I haven't been demonstrating shots. I haven't been doing anything with the gun.

I had the opportunity to go shoot last week. And I know what you're feeling like, Phil. It's just like, (gasps) "there it is!" It's just there. And all I could see was the target. I guess I'm used to seeing all the other stuff around. But it was so clear. Just to be able to see that target.

The eye still is not completely healed. It hurts every once a while, so I stopped doing anything basically. But it's just a miracle. I mean, I'm shocked that it's coming along so well. And hopefully, it will finish. [Chuckles]

Phil: The clarity is amazing. My eye test is sitting here in my den looking past the cul-de-sac and the street sign. I mean, it used to be blurry and now it's totally crisp.

And you know, sometimes I'm still looking for the rings on the targets, or the smiley face on the rabbit. But the clarity... these colors are brighter. And there's some excessive brightness, so I probably need more tint than most shooters. That's another advantage; you go from prescription lenses (which are pretty expensive) to plain old lenses, three for 169 bucks or something like that. It was kind of amazing.

Anyway, I've done well and I would certainly advise anybody in this area to consider UT Southwestern. I know, again, several other shooters who have been there. This particular guy is actually from Missouri, and he's done a little bit of shooting. He knew what I was talking about.

And so, I was very pleased. And I'm glad you're getting better, Vicki.

Vicki: I wasn't looking forward to surgery and all that other stuff. But I was gonna say another big thing for me. I don't go out of the house or out of the office without sunglasses on because it is so bright that it just hurts. So yeah, the brightness and the vividness of everything has been really interesting.

Dean: I remember Max commenting that the contrast was the biggest difference he saw when he got his.

Vicki: Right

Gil: You can officially say that you're going to be old on your next birthday because you're talking on the Coaching Hour about your illnesses. My wife is going to be 70 years young next 12th of December. If y'all are looking for suck-ups then you need to circle that date on your calendar and be sure and email her a happy birthday. At least take the heat off me, okay?

[Laughter]

## The Evolution of the Challenge Move

Gil: I'm kind of anxious to get into this next topic. I'm gonna skip Jack Flesher's answer to Jimmy Light's question about losing his routine in the middle of a round. And we'll pick that up next month.

I'm going to be talking about the evolution of the challenge move. I've been doing it a lot. And I'm finding that I have two different challenge moves. Let me explain why I named them what I've named them.

I was having a lesson with Doss the other day. And we were shooting birds, some of them real shallow angles that we were challenging. And some of them were really deep angles, deep quartering birds, lots of speed that took lots of lead.

We were using two different challenge moves. On the narrow angle birds, if he wanted to challenge anything real fast, I told him to use a three-inch move or a small challenge move. On the bigger birds that take a lot of lead that have a lot of speed and have distance on them, I told him to use a six-inch challenge move before he called "pull."

Now, I could have just as easily told him to use a small move and a big move. These moves sometimes will be two, two and a half, three and a half inches for the three-inch move. And the same deviation for the six-inch move. I just use that for my own programming in my brain. And it seems to take out a little of the doubt out about when you call "pull."

Six inches may seem like a really big move to you. It did to me in the beginning. But now, once my gun is still and I release it, it's very comforting for me to know, "Okay, let it go. Now call 'pull.'" And it just seems to become easier and easier to sync up with the bird.

So, it's just something I wanted to add for you all to think about and ask questions about.

The other thing I referred to when I was talking to Dean is a quiet eye in the breakpoint with no thought whatsoever. It is absolutely quiet. I'm still. And as I mentioned to Dean, this has a very calming effect, not only on my mind and my vision, but my body also.

It's easier for me to feel my deep breathing. Because I just look at the first breakpoint with both eyes open and I do not move my eyes to stay there until I feel everything relaxed. Then I start to close the gun, my eyes go to the trap, and I release the gun and call "pull." It has made a tremendous difference in the clarity of what I see. And the consistency of that clarity.

Do any of you do anything like that? Rick, do you have a quiet eye moment before you address your targets?

Rick: Absolutely do. And it's just a great thing when you experience it. If I find my eyes are slightly moving left to right, or too far out into the horizon, where I want it to be and I need to pull my eyes back a little bit. Absolutely have a quiet eye moment. And when it happens, then I go.

Gil: Yeah. Are you thinking about anything? Or does your mind go blank?

Rick: Mind goes blank. Personally, I don't think about the lead or anything. Any cue words stop once I'm ready to go. It's just automatic.

Gil: Yeah, and it happens with the rhythm.

Rick: Oh, yeah. Happens with the rhythm. If I get out of rhythm, I stop and start over.

Gil: Well, anybody have a question?

Grant: I wanted to ask Rick if, in his mind, he is envisioning the sight picture as he goes to quiet eye, or is it just completely blank?

Rick: The answer is completely blank. Again, that's just me. I'm not seeing the sight picture. As my eyes become still, it's just blank. And it's "pull, go." And then everything is automatic.

Gil: Okay. But let me let me further clarify that, Grant. You should already have visualized the sight picture by the time you go to your quiet eye.

And I found in trying to visualize the shot coming together when I was trying to do quiet eye, it just didn't work. I already know before I load the gun, "I'm gonna challenge that one right there with a six-inch move and I'm going to stroll-catch that one right there." So, when I use those priming words, I want to give them to my brain to command. It knows what's going to happen. And at that point in time, I don't have to think about the shot. My brain already knows what to do.

What I've got to do with the quiet eye is make my eyes be really still and let my body get a neutral position. And my eyes are still thinking about nothing until I feel it. I begin to close the gun. My eyes are on the trap. I shut the gun, I release the gun, call "pull," break that one there and break that one there. And I review them instantly. Empty the gun, challenge there, stroll-catch there. Load the gun, quiet eye. And my quiet eye is always in the breakpoint on the first bird.

The breakthrough for me came when I became like Rick. I don't want to think about nothing. I felt like when I first started trying to do this, my eyes were never still. I had to think to make my eyes be still. And once my eyes are settled by that time, my body is at a neutral position. And I close the gun, address the target, release the gun, call "pull" and break the pair.

So, the visual process occurs before the quiet eye. You've already given the clear command, using the priming words of how you want to shoot the first bird and how you're going to see and shoot the second bird. That's already done. That's a given. The brain's ready.

The long-term memory has manufactured the circuit and given it to the working memory. We're all ready. Now what we've got to do is prepare our mind and our body. So that we call "pull" from the same mental and physiological state each time. That make sense?

Grant: Yeah, it makes perfect sense. Yep, I got it.

Gil: And the reason is that I'm gonna trust myself in the breakpoint. Okay, so let me explain why that's so important to all of you.

## Small Muscle and Big Muscle Moves

Gil: In studying with Leif French, he's been enlightening me on the fact that your brain is preparing certain muscle groups to move when you call "pull." Okay? And in the instance of a challenge move, it's preparing the smallest muscles (that he calls "twitch muscles") to start beginning to get the movement going before you're consciously aware of the movement.

And he said these things occur below your consciousness. You're not aware of it. But it's been proven that, once the cue to begin, action, your brain is already getting certain muscle groups warmed up. And they're already moving. This allows for your first move to be so smooth, whether you're challenging the bird, or you're shooting FITASC and the gun's still.

Because you've programmed it, your brain knows exactly what muscle groups it's going to have to move, but it ensures that it's the small muscle, big muscle move, because of these twitch muscles that occur below your consciousness.

When you are thinking, the brain doesn't know when you're going to say "pull." It can't anticipate you saying "pull." That's why, Rick, when you start thinking, you're stinking. You eliminate the vital subconscious twitch movements that allow for your takeoff with the gun to be smooth. It allows for your eyes to see the target clearly.

I was discussing this when we were in Granite Falls. There was a fella down here about eight feet from me sitting at a table with a bottle of water in front of him. And I was explaining this to him and he was really interested in it. I saw his hand move, and I focused on the white cap on that bottle of water. And his hand approached that bottle of water, his thumb and his index finger went out, picked it up and brought it back.

At that moment, I saw the twitch move. Because he didn't think "move my thumb and forefinger out and I'll bring it down in on the bottle." That happened and it was part of the command "pick up the bottle."

So, as you're training these moves, have you ever worked on a new move? And you've got it? And man, you broke it six or eight or 10 times in a row and then all of a sudden something different happens and you couldn't break it for another four or five shots? I know that's

happened to me a lot. And it's happened to a lot of students with me and I could never figure out what was going on. But I think I figured it out.

Once the brain understood exactly how you wanted the circuit fired, then it began to mess with the twitch muscles and getting everything ready to make it go smoother. And when it was messing with those twitch muscles, they weren't in the right sequence. Therefore, you missed some targets.

But all of a sudden, out of the clear blue, it figured out which ones to move. And as long as you were in your routine, it knew exactly when to activate those twitch muscle to make the smallest of muscles in the body become the first to move, which makes everything go so much smoother. That's what happens when you're in the zone. But when you're in the zone, you're just viewing what you're doing from outside your body when you're in the zone.

Is that a good way to describe that, Rick?

Rick: Yeah, I was sitting here listening to that description. And I thought, "Yeah, that's how I'd say it. That's exactly right."

Gil: I never thought about the smaller muscles that we don't think about moving. But through repetition, they're trained to move unconsciously. But we don't think about them.

That's the difference in having a good outing, and having a zone experience. When you're really deep in the zone, it's like almost the whole move becomes a twitch move, because you're not consciously involved with it at all. It just happens.

And when you're in that zone, because the brain's anticipating so far ahead of where you are, and it's in control, because you've given it control, everything seems to be obvious. And everything seems to be happening in slow motion. To your brain, it is happening in slow motion, because it's beginning movements before you ever call "pull" to make your first move when you do call "pull," so smooth and so synchronous with the target. It's just easy.

I didn't realize all of the movements that my muscles are making that I'm not aware of prior to calling "pull." I didn't realize it. And Dr. French said, "Oh, yeah, Gil, you'd be shocked if you knew how many small muscles were already in motion, before you call 'pull.' It's what makes you able to be smooth." It's everything. But as Rick Carter says, if you're thinking you're stinking.

Two things: if you're trying to think your way through the shot, you don't have access to the little twitch moves. That's why when you're trying to think your way through the shot, your body's involved and you're sluggish and you're just not smooth. Okay? Conversely, when you're not thinking your way through the shot, and you're trusting your eyes and your routine, everything is smooth.

Now, this even emphasizes to me more how important it is that your routine be the same sync and the same speed each and every time. Because if your routine is the same - same rhythm,

same length of time, same cue to begin, then your brain knows when you start closing the gun to get set, the brain knows within a 10th of a second when you're going to call "pull," which allows it to be more precise with the small subconscious twitch muscles that it's going to move to get ready to make it a small muscle, big muscle move.

I never realized it. I never could understand why some days I could just be as smooth as silk and other days, regardless of how hard I tried, I couldn't do it. The thing that blew me away, though, was that all of these muscles flex and bend and expand below your consciousness. You don't feel them. You feel the result. But you're not aware of them.

It's just like when that guy reached over to pick up that bottle of water. For some reason my eyes saw his hand move. And I focused on the white top. He was looking at me talking, and his hand approached the bottle, his thumb and four fingers spread out. Then it grabbed the top of the bottle and it took it to him to his other hand and he undid it and had a drink of water.

I was stunned because I was focused on the top of the bottle, in his periphery I saw his two fingers go out and then come back in. He didn't even want to think about that move, and man, oh, man. But he didn't miss it. And he didn't knock the bottle over.

So, there's a lot more going on than we realize. And that's why it's so important that you use the priming words, whatever your words are. I don't care what they are. It's so important that you use the priming words, because at that point in time, Grant, when I say "I'm going to challenge it right there, and I'm going to stroll-catch it right there," I already know the setup. My brain already knows exactly what's getting ready to happen.

And so I go to my quiet eye, guns loaded, and I don't have to look at the gun again. Gun's loaded, my eyes are still. And when I first started doing this, I realized it was good.

## Quiet Eye, Quiet Body

Gil: The other thing that I didn't realize is how active my eyes were. And if my eyes are active, so is my brain. So, when I implemented the quiet eye and made my eyes be still, focused on nothing and thinking about absolutely nothing, everything got quiet.

And oh, was everything smooth. I was overwhelmed with how smooth everything happened. It was effortless. It was as if I was standing behind myself and 15 feet above myself, just watching everything that was happening.

That's why it's so, so important that your routines have the same rhythm and the same cue to begin every single time. It's not so much what's in your routine as much as it is it happens in the same sequence every time. That way the brain can anticipate ahead and know exactly when you're going to call "pull." That way the brain can do its job that you don't realize it's doing more efficiently. It allows for you to be more precise and shoot more smoothly.

That make sense?

Grant: Yep.

Gil: It's kind of out there, isn't it?

Grant: Well, I think for me what's important is you guys talked about is you know, when you go to quiet eyes, everything has to quiet down, you know.

And Gil, you talked about your body getting still, everything just sort of relaxing at that point. And at that point, you're turning everything over to the "do it" side of your brain.

Gil: I like that. "To the 'do it' side." And you're exactly right.

I mean, I experienced this. I experienced this not knowing it last year in San Antonio. And as I began to look back on what I did, when I shot my best, I stayed, I stopped, and I had a little slump. My weight's on my front foot and have a little slump. I'm relaxed and everything. I'm looking right in the first breakpoint.

And when I started to try to repeat it, my eyes were not still. I had to make my eyes be still. And when my eyes got still, my hands got soft. And once I knew that everything was quiet, the cue to begin for me is closing the gun. As I begin to close the gun, my eyes go to the first trap. My brain sets the gun, I release the gun, I call "pull," my nose is on that bird. And when it's stable, I send it.

I've always known that your routine had to have a rhythm. And I've even talked on the Coaching Hour about how you need to make it the same rhythm every time, because that way the brain knows when you're going to call "pull" and it knows when you're going to call it to action.

What I didn't realize was the incredible number of things that the brain is doing in getting these smaller-than-small circuits to begin to fire tenths of a second before you say "pull." Tenths of a second before you actually move. So, it's critical that your routines have the same sequence.

I've tried to do this without the quiet eye and it doesn't work nearly as well. Because physiologically I'm not the same. And visually I'm not the same. It's beginning to become very clear to me that when I stop and make my eyes be still and feel my chest be still and my body relax, I carry that relaxation. As I close the gun, the gun sets softly, I release the gun, I call "pull," my nose is on the bird, and everything just slows down.

And to go to what Dean talked about, when I kill the first pair, as I'm opening the gun, my eyes are in the first breakpoint and the second breakpoint. And I've already replayed it. I already know what it's gonna look like. It's already programmed. I load the gun, I do my quiet eye, quiet body. As I close the gun, my eyes go to the first trap, I call "pull," kill the bird, kill the pair. Immediately, as I'm ejecting the shells out of the gun, I'm going through what I just saw.

To me, the two biggest things are using the priming words frequently, and the quiet eye/quiet body. Those two things to me are absolutely huge. But if your routine is not the same rhythm



and the same sequence each time, the brain's gonna get pissed. Because it doesn't like to not know what's coming next.

And the priming words. I mean, I've used those so many times, not only in my own shooting, but in teaching. I've used them so much that all I have to do is say that word and my brain already knows what to do. And I don't get involved in lead.

I will get involved in lead if I have to shoot right at a target. If it's a target that's dying or stalling, I'm gonna have to tell myself to shoot right at it. But I'll do that when I say "I'm gonna challenge that one there" right at it. And "I'm gonna stroll-catch that one right there." The only time I'll get involved in lead is if I have to shoot right at the bird. Otherwise, my brain's gonna put some lead on it.

So, anyway, I wanted to share that with you because I'm going to try to do another Coaching Hour with Leif on this very subject and get it up in the Knowledge Vault, maybe next Monday or Tuesday, if I can corner him before we go to Pennsylvania. So y'all be looking for that. I'm sure I'll put a post up in the forum on that.

Gil: The other thing that I've been doing is shooting FITASC-style targets. And I find that because I'm so used to seeing the muzzle in the periphery on the sporting stuff with the soft pre-mount, I've started putting the muzzle above the line so that I can see the muzzle in my periphery. It allows me to keep control of the speed of that bird a lot better.

I didn't think it was going to work. But after I did it about a box and a half of shells, and I begin to understand what it looked like and I just pivot the mount around the chokes... wow, it has certainly helped me slow down big birds.

It certainly helped me better match the speed as the gun comes into my face and the muzzle comes down to the line. I would never have told you to do it that way 10 years ago, but I'm learning more and more how much the brain understands from seeing the muzzle in the periphery. And different people have different awareness, I've found out. I think a lot of that has to do with how comfortable you are with exactly what the picture is going to look like.

Vicki and I were talking the other day on a plane coming home - "I wonder how many shells we've seen." Well, we each see about 250,000 a year. And we've been doing it for 30 years. So that's just shy of 9 million birds. Broken with a shotgun. That doesn't count the doves and the quail and the pigeons and stuff in Argentina. That's just clay targets.

So, anyway, I wanted to share that with you. Any questions on what I've just talked about?

## The Three-Inch and Six-Inch Challenge Moves

Gil: The six-inch move and a three-inch move, as I said, you could do a short move and a long move. I just use those two measurements, because that's just what it looks like. It's what it feels like to me. But it seems to me that on the longer bird, the ones that allow really fast deep,

quartering birds, really fast, big crossing birds, having the gun move about six inches before you call "pull" sure does make everything slow down dramatically. And I mean, dramatically.

Anybody else got anything to add?

Phil: Gil, are you doing that from a soft mount or from a low gun?

Gil: Both. If it's a sporting clays shot, I'm typically gonna do it from a soft mount, because they're just not giving us much time to break the first bird in a pair now.

I've gone and looked at some tournament courses, and they're really pushing you on the first bird. So, I'll do that with a soft mount, but my head will be up off the gun, and my nose will be turned all the way around to get my nose on that bird. Okay?

If it's FITASC, if I'm shooting low gun, I'll do the FITASC mount but my muzzle, rather than being just under the line, my muzzle is going to be over the line, so that as I see that bird off that trap and I begin to move left and start my mount or move right and start my mount, that muzzle's in the periphery the whole time.

It's not big, but it's just there. And it allows me to match speed much better as the gun comes to my face and the bird and the gun begin to match up.

Before now, before learning what I've learned, I would have had the gun pointing at the line, which means the muzzles would have been below the line. And as I brought the gun up onto the line, that gun would then come into the picture.

I don't know whether it's because I'm getting older (because I am) or what, but that just seems to distract me now, when I bring the gun into the picture at the end and it hadn't been there all the time. I don't know whether that's a product of me having the gun in the picture longer and my brain being able to actually slow the bird down by matching the speed. I'm seeing a lot of things now that I've never seen before. But it has enabled me to achieve a consistency and a quiet mind. It's just been amazing. That's all I can tell you. It's just been absolutely amazing.

Did I answer your question?

Phil: Yeah. Okay, on the six-inch move you're talking about, how is that affecting your sustained lead? Or are you letting the bird close on you a little more? Just curious how that might affect it.

Gil: It actually makes it easier for you to sync up with the bird because you're not going fast.

I worked with Alex Sitz in Bozeman for a day on this move. And everybody wants to move too fast. I kept saying to him over and over again, "Alex, it's possible to go too fast. It's impossible to go too slow."

I want a longer move, but a much slower move. It allows for you to keep your hands really soft in the beginning of the move because you're moving so slow. And the big thing is it takes "when to move the gun" out of the working memory's workspace because the gun's already moving. So now all the brain has to do is make the lines converge.

Yeah, so if I was challenging a narrow angle quartering bird, I'd use a three-inch move, because you don't need much move on that bird. If you move too much on that bird, you're gonna blow right by it. So, for some people, it seems to alleviate any angst that they have. Once they release the gun as to when they should call "pull." Everything that I'm doing now is based on projecting to the brain, because it's all the same speed and the same sequence projecting ahead to the brain so the brain knows when I'm going to call "pull."

When it knows when I'm going to call "pull," it can make everything in my body a small muscle, big muscle move, which is ideal. If it doesn't know when I'm going to call "pull" for any reason, it's going to be a big muscle move, which is choppy and inconsistent.

You see what I'm saying? That's why Rick came up with the phrase "if you're thinking, you're stinking." If you're trying to think your way through the shot, you don't have access to the small muscle moves. It's all a big muscle move. That's not the way the body works, I'm learning. At 72 years old, I'm still learning. But it's an exciting journey.

So, did I answer your question?

Phil: Yeah, you did.

Gil: Okay. I want to make sure, because the more I study about this with Dr. French, the more "out there" I seem to get. But I'm beginning to learn what happens in a zone experience so much more clearly now.

When you're having a zone experience, your little muscles, your twitch muscles are driving your game. Because you've trained your big muscles. What you've got to do is get your twitch muscle involved so that you have all these small muscles moving in unison. And then when the big muscles start moving, it's like they've already been moving.

There's no more popping the clutch. There's no more "oh shit, get it out there." There's no more "oh, hurry." You release the gun, call "pull," here it comes, stable, send it. This is one of the most powerful things that I've ever stumbled on to.

Phil: I like "popping the clutch." That was a very good analogy.

Gil: I was giving a speech to about 1,000 people in San Antonio. They were student athletes, their parents and grandparents. And when I got up and got the microphone, I said "Okay, guys, look, I'm the closest thing to a walking, talking encyclopedia of shotgun shooting that you're ever going to see. So, you're going to need to ask questions."

And in the back row, an old man's hand went up in the air and I said "Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Ash These kids don't know what an encyclopedia is." [Laughter]

Yes, they don't. They don't know what a phone booth is, either. [Laughter] Yes, "pop the clutch" is a phrase not many people would understand.

Phil: Just us old guys, right?

Gil: Gosh, we've got through a lot of material tonight. If you have any deeper questions about the three and six-inch move, by all means, get it on the forum, and I'll answer them as best I can.

We'll try to get some video up. We've had a very unusual spring and summer. We've been inundated with rain and our fields have been six inches deep in water. It's just been horrible for filming. But hopefully when we get back from this next trip, me and Brian and Vicki are going to go out and we're going to start shooting some of these moves so we can get them up into the Knowledge Vault.

So, let me know if you're trying any of this. I want to know what the success ratio is. And if you're having trouble, pick up the phone and call me. Thank you, guys, for participating tonight. And we'll talk to you next month. Good night, everybody.

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